

CHANGING JOBS? GET THE HIGHEST SALARY!

by David J. Bowman

We Americans are changing jobs an average of ten times during our working lifetimes. Of course, we change for all kinds of reasons. But we don't always get into the highest possible salary range of the organizations we join. That's not going to happen to you, though. Follow these methods, and you'll dramatically increase your chances of being at the upper limits.

When changing organizations, the first rule to remember is never, never, never tell the interviewer or compensation negotiator how much you've been making! If you do, one of two things will happen, and they're both bad. You'll either overprice yourself and the interview/negotiation will be over, or you'll underprice yourself and you'll leave money on the table. That's dumb!

Instead, when the subject of money comes up – how much you're making, or how much you think you're worth – make it sound too complicated for a quick answer. Say, "well at Good Company, we enjoy(ed) a generous, but complicated financial package (key words are complicated package). It consisted of salary, incentives, bonuses, medical/dental/vision benefits, free parking (or transportation), paid continuing education, day care for the kids (and/or whatever other benefits you enjoyed). May I suggest that rather than spend a half-hour talking about the nuances of that package, we might discuss what problems you have, and how I can help you solve them." Usually, the interviewer/negotiator will not want to spend much time talking about "old news" (your former package), and will break down and tell you the salary range. Then, you must ask about the benefits/incentive/bonus package being offered.

This puts you in the negotiation driver's seat!

Remember that negotiation is like a pizza – there are many pieces/slices to it – and salary is only one. All the benefits in your current or former compensation package also are colored green (they're worth money), and if you only talk about salary, you'll be missing the rest of the pizza (the package).

Here's another problem with discussing only salary. If your current or former organization has low salaries and high benefits/incentives/bonuses, but the organization you're interviewing has high salaries and low benefits/bonuses/incentives – and you only discuss salary – you'll look under qualified. On the other hand, if the situation is reversed, you'll look over qualified.

The next key to compensation negotiation is a discussion of your past accomplishments. It's absolutely mandatory that you're articulate about them. Now, don't confuse accomplishments with duties and responsibilities. "Responsible for," is not the same as, "increased revenues by...," or, "decreased cost by...," or, "reduced hours by...," or "developed a system that..." Of course, you must know the quantified numbers involved to prove the extent and value of your accomplishments.

Next, try to "overlay" your accomplishments onto problems, issues, or situations that exist in the new organization. Hopefully, you will have done some homework about the company, and will have discovered some of this information. If not, probe the interviewer/negotiator about these, and then do your "overlays." Showing that you've previously solved some of the same problems existing in this new organization may just make their mouths water – which ups the ante for you!

Now, assuming you haven't told them what you are or were making, and you've done a great job with your "overlays," you'll now be playing the *ratchet-up* game. Well," you ask," what's that?"

Let's say you're going to a movie at the mall on a Saturday night. On the way to the theater, you pass a shoe store and you see a pair of shoes for which you've been looking for six months. "Look at that leather, look at those soles, look at the styling!" The problem is, there's no price tag on the shoes, so you don't know what they'll cost.

Well, you go to the film, and despite the fact that it's a shoot-'em-up with Pacino, Redford and Newman, you're paying no attention. You're thinking about those shoes, how they'll look on your feet, how everyone will envy you.

On the way to the car, you stop again and crave those shoes. But remember, you don't know what they cost. That night you dream about them and how they'll look and feel on your feet. The next morning, you race back to the store and pantingly ask the salesperson the cost.

I guarantee, the price will be substantially lower than you'd expected. Why? Because the shoes met your needs, but you didn't know their price. Thus, in your mind, their value was *ratcheted-up* far beyond the actual cost.

So it is with compensation negotiating. Never let the other side know what you were making, or what you think you're worth. Instead, increase your value by showing how you can solve their problems, or resolve their issues. This way, you'll be *ratcheting-up* to more money.

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