



Salary Inquiries

Tips for How to Handle Inquiries About Your Salary During the Job Search

Employers, looking for a way to streamline the screening and hiring process, may ask you to supply salary information as part of the application process. A recent review of the Sunday Hagerstown Herald-Mail classifieds turned up seven job leads requesting that the applicant provide their "salary history," five asking for "salary requirements," and one even asked for "current salary." How you respond to these requests may exclude you from the applicant pool . . . good news for employers who sometimes have hundreds of applications to review; bad news for you, the job seeker.

So, how should you respond? First, you need to do some homework. Do you know how much your skills and experience are worth in today's job market? Here are some ways you might find out:

- Check the classified ads in local newspapers and magazines. Look for
- jobs similar to yours and see whether any of those include salary ranges.
- Ask your company's human resources department for a salary range for your job or jobs similar to the one you are exploring.
- Go on the Internet and check any of the sites noted in the column to your right.

You know what you have earned or what you are currently earning and you have some idea about the industry standard... so how do you respond without "shooting yourself in the foot?"

Replying With a Written Response

When an employer asks you to submit salary information along with your résumé here are some recommendations:

- **Simply ignore the request.** This may make you somewhat uncomfortable, but for most employers, this oversight is not enough reason to keep a qualified candidate from being interviewed.
- **Hedge.** Close your cover letter with wording to this effect: *"I am confident that once we have had a chance to meet and discuss your needs and my qualifications, we will be able to agree on a compensation package acceptable to us both."*
- **Give a range.** *"Based on my experience and what I know about the current market, a salary in the high (mid/low) \$30s (\$40s, \$50s, etc.) would meet my requirements" or "In my previous position I was earning in the high (mid/low) \$30s (\$40s, \$50s, etc.). Since this is a career change for me (since I will be new to the company), I ask that my compensation be based on what I can do for you versus what I have done in the past."*
- **Give it to them straight.** *"In my previous or (current) position I was or (am) earning \$45,000. I am looking for a position that pays no less than that (which implies "don't interview me at all if you aren't paying that much.")"*

REMEMBER THIS . . .

Smart sellers (job seekers) never reveal their (minimum acceptable) price at the beginning of a negotiation because the buyer (employer) would hold them to it, no matter whatever else may develop!

During An Interview

Do not be the one to bring up the subject of salary! When, and if, the employer begins to talk salary, consider this three-step approach:

■ **Defer.** If it is early in the interview, and the employer asks how much you are looking to be paid, "**skirt the issue.**" Use the question to gather more information about the position. Try a response such as *"Let's put the salary issue aside for a minute and talk more about the job itself."* Ask about on-the-job training, the schedule, expectations from the employer, the team you will be working with, etc.

■ **Inquire.** The interview is going well and you get the feeling the employer may make you an offer. Then the dreaded question comes, *"What kind of salary are you looking for?"* Several approaches might work, keeping in mind that you want the employer to be the one to give a dollar amount ask *"What do you normally pay someone with my skills and experience?"*

■ **Reveal.** As a last alternative, provide the employer with a salary range that is acceptable to you. *"Based on what you have told me about this position, I think a range of ____ to ____ would be appropriate."* Be sure you are happy with the low end of the range, because you are indicating a willingness to accept it.

■ Keep in mind that "salary" refers only to the dollar amount you are paid hourly or annually. Do not overlook the value of the entire **compensation package** and keep in mind that nearly anything can be negotiated, including:

- The job description (at least some of the duties)
- The starting date
- Vacations and paid holidays
- Company-paid relocation assistance
- Expense accounts
- Educational assistance
- Professional memberships
- Stock options
- Bonus—including a starting or sign-on bonus
- Insurance (life, disability, accident, and family coverage)
- Company product discounts

Effective salary negotiation is worthy of a seminar by itself! There are plenty of resources to help you fine-tune your interviewing and salary negotiation skills. A good place to start is on the Internet at www.quintcareers.com (*Quintessential Careers: A Career and Job Hunting Resource Guide*).

Internet Resource Sites

Government Sites:

Bureau of Labor Statistics
<http://stats.bls.gov>

American Career Information Network
www.acinet.org

USA Jobs Federal Job Board
www.usajobs.gov
Search for job titles similar to yours and check the federal pay scale.

Commercial Sites:

Job Smart
www.jobsmart.org
Connect to more than 300 online salary surveys.

Home Fair
www.homefair.com
Includes a cost-of-living comparison.

Sperlings Best Places
www.bestplaces.net
Includes a cost-of-living comparison.

Salary.com
www.salary.com
Includes a salary wizard and other career resources.