How to Evaluate a Job Offer

You've spent the last few months looking for a job. And now the moment you've been waiting for is here. It's your turn now. You have some offers to consider and you didn't think making a decision would be this difficult. But this is serious business. The job you take now may be yours for a long time to come. When you receive a job offer, it's important to take the time to carefully evaluate the offer so you are making an educated decision to accept, or to reject, the offer. The last thing you want to do is to make a hasty decision that you will regret later on.

Consider the entire compensation package - salary, benefits, perks, work environment - not just your paycheck. Weigh the pros and cons and take some time to mull over the offer. It is perfectly acceptable to ask the employer for some time to think it over. As you can see there are a number of factors to take into account and only some are negotiable. You can try to get a higher salary or more vacation time. However, health benefits are often standard packages. The corporate culture isn't going to change for you, and your boss and co-workers aren't going anywhere.

Each of us, of course, is different. And what carries a lot of weight for some of us is insignificant to the rest of us. A great example of this is a survey I conducted on the Career Planning site. I asked the question: "What gives you the most job satisfaction?" Given three answers to choose from, 20% chose "Respect from my boss," 17% said "The amount of money I make," and 62% said "I love what I do." As you can see, while the majority responding to the survey felt that loving what they do is the most important thing, there are those whose opinions differed.

Evaluating the Offer

Salary
Even if money isn't what gives you the most job satisfaction, no one can argue its importance. You need a certain amount of money to pay the bills, for example. Most of us also want to make sure we are being paid what we're worth and what is the going rate for jobs similar to ours. It's important to find out what others are making for related work in the same industry, and in the same geographic region. And don't forget, if other aspects of the job appeal to you, you can try to negotiate the offer.

Benefits and Perks
In addition to salary, review the benefits and perks offered. Sometimes, the benefit package can be as important as what you get in your paycheck. If you're not sure about the benefits that are offered, ask for additional information or clarification. Find out details on health and life insurance coverage, vacation, sick time, disability, and other benefit programs. Inquire about how much of the benefits costs are provided by the company, in full, and how much you are expected to contribute. If there are a variety of options available, request copies of the plan descriptions so you can compare benefit packages.
Corporate Culture
Defined by Merriam-Webster as "the set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterizes a company or corporation," corporate culture should be an important factor in your decision whether to accept a job offer. If you value your time away from the office, a company with a corporate culture that encourages late hours may not be for you. Is the potential employer's philosophy "win at all costs?" Is your philosophy "always play clean?" This company isn't for you. Are you an ardent proponent for animal rights? Through your research you learn that one of the company's subsidiaries does animal testing. Although this won't affect the day-to-day activities of your job, it may not be a situation in which you'll feel comfortable.

Commute Time, Hours and Travel
When you're considering a job offer, take into account the length of your commute. What may have seemed like an okay distance to travel for a job interview may begin to wear thin when you have to make that trip twice a day, five days a week, in rush hour traffic. Also, be sure that you are clear on the hours and schedule you need to work. Confirm what, if any, travel is involved. If the position requires 45 hours of work a week and you're used to working 35 hours, consider whether you will have difficulty committing to the schedule. If the nature of the job requires that you will need to be on the road three days a week, be sure that you can commit to that, as well.

Your Boss/Co-Workers
Generally an interview will involve a tour of the office. Try to notice if people seem friendly and happy. This may be difficult to ascertain, but it's worth a shot. This is where networking comes in handy. Start calling people on your list of contacts to see if anyone knows something about the company.

Each of these factors taken alone may not make or break your decision to accept or decline a job offer. When you put them all together, though, you will have the information you need to make an educated choice. And then it will be time to let the potential employer in on your decision.

Your Personal Circumstances
The bottom line in accepting a job offer, is that there really isn't one. Everyone has a different set of personal circumstances. What might be the perfect job for you could be an awful job for someone else. Take the time to review the pros and cons. Making a list is always helpful. Also, listen to your gut - if it's telling you not to take the job, there just might be something there. Keep in mind, that if this isn't the right job for you, it's not the end of the world. The next offer might just be that perfect match.

It's much easier to turn down an offer than it is to leave a job that you have already started. The employer would prefer that you decline, rather than having to start over the hiring process a couple of weeks down the road if you don't work out. So, do take the time to thoroughly evaluate the offer. Ask questions, if you have them. Take the time you need to make an educated, informed decision so you feel as sure as possible that you, and the company, have made an excellent match.

Accepting or Declining the Offer
Whether you choose to accept or reject a job offer, you must inform the employer who made that offer. This should be done formally, in writing, and if you wish by telephone as well. If your answer is "yes" it's obvious why you'll want to make a good impression with your future employer. But, why is it important to be polite to someone you don't plan to work for? Well, you don't know where your future will take you. You may at some point wind up with that employer as a superior, a colleague, a client, or even your next door neighbor. You certainly don't want to leave a bad impression.

**Job Offer Checklist**

When reviewing a job offer, it's important to consider the entire compensation package including job content, salary, benefits, hours, flexibility, pension plans, and work environment. Review this checklist to ensure that you have considered all the alternatives and weighed all the options prior to making a decision to accept the position.

- **Job Content**
- **Salary**
  - Base Salary
  - Commission
  - Bonuses
  - Projected Salary Increases
- **Benefits**
  - Vacation
  - Sick Time
  - Health Insurance
  - Life Insurance
  - 401(K)
  - Pension Plans
  - Stock Options
- **Hours and Travel**
- **Work Environment**
- **Flexibility and Company Culture**
- **Promotion and Growth Opportunities**
- **Pros and Cons**
  Make a list of the pros and cons of your current position (if you have one) and the job offer you are considering. Which one comes out ahead?
- **Your Personal Circumstances**
  What does your gut tell you? Does the job offer sound exciting? Or do you have a queasy sense that this might not be the right job for you? Listen to whatever it is telling you. Our instincts are usually right, even if we can't come up with a concrete, rational explanation for them.