



Seven Tips for Successfully Negotiating a Job Offer

By Darina V. Petrovsky, PhD, RN

Negotiating a job offer can be stressful. Most of us are not comfortable with talking about money and advocating for ourselves once we receive a job offer. Learning how to negotiate is an important skill as we transition from being a student to our next position in academia or elsewhere.

In a recent Emerging Scholar and Professional Organization (ESPO) Professional Development Series Webinar from The Gerontological Society of America—held on September 6, 2019—we looked at what it takes to successfully negotiate a job offer. Keith A. Anderson, PhD, MSW, FGSA, and Hannah Wohlfert, MBA, gave us strategies and tips on how to negotiate a job offer in academia and in the private sector. It's archived for your easy access at www.geron.org/webinar. Here are seven tips I took away from the webinar.

Tip 1: Know your self-worth.

Spend some time early in the job search process listing your strengths. In academia, you may have been extremely productive during your doctoral or postdoctoral years by publishing consistently in peer-reviewed journals, forming interprofessional collaborations, and taking leadership roles in national professional organizations. In the private sector, look at your current and potential future titles. Think about what you bring to the table and keep those strengths in mind when you begin the negotiating process.

Tip 2: Meet with your advisory team to review the offer.

Whether you are in academia or the private sector, find a set of formal or informal mentors (or coaches) who are willing to review the terms of the job offer with you. Talking with individuals who have gone through the process themselves may provide additional insight into common and less common elements of an offer. For example, according to Dr. Anderson, less common elements of an offer in academia include paid travel to find housing and spousal hire.

Tip 3: Decide on the important elements of the job for you.

Prior to the actual negotiations, write down the elements of the job that are most important to you. Take this list with you to the negotiations. There will be elements of an offer that you will not be able to negotiate. Having a list of what matters to you most will allow you to have a plan and be flexible in case some of those elements are non-negotiable. Both Dr. Anderson and Ms. Wohlfert illustrated how time and money are the two most negotiable elements. Outside academia, those elements can include having more time off or having the flexibility to work from home. In academia, time elements may include course and service release or even a pre-tenure sabbatical. Prioritizing those elements and having the list of the elements that matter most to you as you negotiate makes you look prepared, organized, and determined.

Tip 4: Learn about the art of negotiating.

Among the resources that Ms. Wohlfert recommended were two books (*Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes Are High* by Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillan, and Al Switzler, and *Fierce Conversations: Achieving Success at Work and in Life One Conversation at a Time* by Susan Scott). Additionally, listen to podcasts and watch videos of actual negotiations. Rehearse in front of a mirror and your peers. Envision the room and the



circumstances (if negotiating in person). Being prepared for what verbal negotiations entail and what tools you need to make those conversations successful can position you to advocate for yourself in the best possible way.

Tip 5: Get all the details and communicate.

Once you receive your job offer in writing, spend the next few days to get all the details around the offer, including salary and benefits. Learn about all the available benefits that this institution or company offers. In addition, research comparable salaries in other institutions or companies. Whether communicating by email or phone, be clear and concise. Communicating by email allows you to carefully craft your statements, while communicating via phone is more personal and allows for instant feedback. Take good notes, repeat the terms discussed during the phone call (if negotiating during the phone call), and offer to send a written summary of your phone call.

Tip 6: Be flexible, yet determined.

Once you determine all the available benefits an institution or company offers, take a look at the list you created earlier of the important elements of the job and align your “asks” with what is available. Dr. Anderson recommended asking for 10 percent more than the offered base salary. Remember to negotiate for other sources of income (such as sign-on bonus, start-up funds, or research-related funding) once base salary is determined.

Tip 7: Be kind, courteous, and grateful.

In all your communications, remember to be kind. Even though you may not accept a particular job offer, you may collaborate or work with the individuals from that institution or company in the future. Send hand-written thank you notes and follow up with individuals.