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## Let's Make a Deal

**Six myths about job and salary negotiations and how they may hinder your ability to bargain effectively.**

By Stephanie Eberle | February 1, 2013

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Yuki sat in my office at the Stanford University School of Medicine Career Center, as many graduate students have before, and detailed the two postdoc job offers she had received in spite of an ongoing recession. She had heard she should negotiate, but had no idea how to proceed. When asked what she wanted to get out of the agreement, she responded, "I'm not good at this. I mean, why would they want to hire me?"

Weeks earlier, one of her classmates, Ray (both Ray and Yuki are fictitious names to protect the identities of my students), was in the opposite predicament. He came to my office because all three of his job offers had been rescinded after he attempted to negotiate, which he had done because he felt he should. When asked how he approached the negotiations, he said, "I simply told them I needed more money because I graduated with a PhD from Stanford."

With recent legislation mandating equal pay for women, and reports that a woman makes, on average, 77–80 cents for every dollar a man earns, it is tempting to see these two scenarios as "gendered": to assume that Yuki may settle for less because she is not confident in the process, as women "tend to be," and that Ray's overconfidence cost him three jobs, a mistake commonly attributed to men. In fact, both faced the negotiation question with unhealthy assumptions about the process, which ultimately hurt their cases. Here are the most common job negotiation myths and what to do about them.

### Myth 1:

#### **You must negotiate**

There are two types of negotiations: distributive and integrative. Negotiating a painting's price with an art dealer, for example, is distributive. You may never see the dealer again, so focusing on the best bargain is more important than concerning yourself with maintaining a relationship.

Negotiations with future employers are integrative, which means you will (if all goes well) see them again; starting and maintaining a good relationship is therefore your most important concern.

The best approach is to enter the negotiation with a rationale that fits both parties. The Harvard Negotiation Project within Harvard Law School provides research and resources focused on the theory and practice of conflict resolution and negotiation. Researchers within the program recommend knowing the following before you begin:

- Best alternative to a negotiated agreement: What are your other options?
- Reservation price: What is the least you can accept?
- Zone of possible agreement: Where are you willing to settle?

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Through answering these questions, you may find the offer reasonable or even better than you had anticipated. It's also a good idea to know your own worth. Comparing standards in your field on sites like the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), Career Insider, Radford, Glassdoor, Salary.com, and *The Scientist's* own Salary Survey can help. It's important to remember that these rarely offer precise benchmarks of salary. However, comparisons of the information can offer a good sense of range. Additionally, in some fields, such as management consulting, negotiation is not even common. In effect, if you have found no solid reason for negotiating other than simply wanting a little more cash for extracurricular activities, it may be better for your professional relationship not to do so.

## Myth 2:

### **Negotiation is a disingenuous process**

While you do not have to negotiate if you don't want to or cannot make a solid case for doing so, your starting package is a baseline for all other future raises, promotions, and opportunities. So reason to negotiate does exist, but what if it just isn't you?

Make it about you—and them. The basis for myth 2 is a belief that negotiation is an attempt to take advantage of someone. The goal of any negotiation, whether professional or personal, should be reaching a "zone of tolerance," or an area where both of you feel a little comfort and a little discomfort. If you are focused entirely on what you want or entirely on what you think the prospective employer wants to hear, the process becomes less genuine. Develop a personal budget plan to determine the difference between what you want and need; listen to what the future employer wants and needs; and find a fit between these interests.

## Myth 3:

### **Negotiation really means asking for more money**

Even though many negotiation talks center on financial terms, approach job offers with a whole package in mind. For example, additional vacation time may be more important than a starting bonus, because of work/life balance or because vacation time is a more permanent benefit than a one-time, taxable bonus. Again, different fields have different standards. Within research and academic science, for example, space, equipment, and staff may be far more important, and easier, to negotiate than salary.

Besides those mentioned above, other common negotiable offerings may include: start date, start-up funding, professional development opportunities, job-title change, teaching load, part-time/working from home, relocation costs, parking/commuting costs, and early/delayed review times. Insurance and related benefits are typically standardized per organization and can therefore be more difficult to negotiate. Still, these are just standards, and many people make the mistake of simply not exploring the breadth of possibilities available.

Regardless of what you seek, know what you want ahead of time so that you are able to fully assess how well the entire offer fits with your interests.

## Myth 4:

### **There is a negotiation "type" and you either have it or don't**

Yuki believed that she was not the negotiating "type," seeing herself as unassertive or perhaps too genuine. Kenneth Thomas and Ralph Kilmann, creators of the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI), identify five negotiator styles, all of which can result in successful outcomes, depending on how, when, and why they are implemented:

1. Avoider: chooses not to negotiate at all
2. Accommodator: focuses primarily on understanding the other side's interests
3. Compromiser: intends to "split the difference"
4. Competitor: focuses on getting the best possible outcome for self
5. Collaborator: tries to find ways to understand and satisfy both sides

Most of us fall strongly into one or two of these categories. Luckily, the best type of negotiator is a combination of numbers 2 through 5. Early on, you may want to start as an accommodator, and/or as a competitor. In the middle, you may want to take a more collaborative stance and, in the end, move more fully toward compromise. The TKI measures which of these styles suits you best, but each has its strengths and weaknesses. Unlike Yuki, you should start your negotiations with a very distinct awareness of your strengths and weaknesses both as a negotiator and as a candidate, and give yourself the credit you deserve. As a result, you'll be better equipped to communicate your case with confidence.

## Myth 5:

### **Men are better at this than women**

When I ask audiences and clients to list separately the leadership traits of men and women, the lists are invariably similar. But, of the negotiation types above, men are given credit for being more competitive and women more accommodating. However, successful negotiation will not result from an extreme in either direction, suggesting that neither of these styles is an inherent strength or weakness. What we do know is that women do not ask for as much.

According to Linda Babcock and Sara Laschever, authors of *Women Don't Ask*, women may compromise too quickly, fearing that asserting their own interests will either ruin a relationship with future colleagues or seem overly aggressive. It is not that women are satisfied with less or that they don't value negotiating. Rather, there exists a fear of discrimination or rejection if they do so too aggressively. As a

result, I have found that women are more likely to negotiate on someone else's behalf (e.g., a family member), apologize, confuse assertiveness with aggression, feel like they have to act stereotypically masculine, and ruminate about the interaction long after it is over. Men, on the other hand, may stay focused on the most immediately relevant issues and present key points more concisely and confidently, and then move on without looking back.

This perspective leads men to negotiate more often. However, there is always the risk of seeming overconfident or too competitive, if you do not keep the other party's interests in mind. So your best bet is to take the time to self-reflect and think about how others may benefit from the individual skills you bring to the table, whether gender-related or not.

## Myth 6:

### **Employers want to give only the lowest offer**

Negotiation is not the same as competition. Posting a job, reviewing applications, interviewing candidates, and putting offers together all take a while. By the time you receive a job offer, the employer is committed to you and wants you to succeed.

Every job title is connected to a specified salary range, with professional skills and activities designated as suitable to the lower and higher ends of the range. Such activities may be a combination of content skills (technical skills specific to a particular job, such as performing PCR or working with mouse models) and transferable skills (those less obvious skills which may transfer into any job, such as facility at communication or ability to work on a team). Salaries are offered according to where the candidate's experience falls within this continuum.

If a salary offer is not what you expected, first thank the hiring manager for the offer of a position and then inquire about the salary range, whether it is negotiable, and how they came to that figure. An offer closer to the high end of the range is more difficult to negotiate because it moves you closer to the next level in the pay structure. When negotiating (or even interviewing in the first place), however, remind your potential employer of the less obvious transferable skills you possess in addition to the hard technical skills in the job description. These are the skills that may get lost in translation on your CV or when determining an initial offer. As a candidate, you should focus on the whole package when considering a job offer, not just one aspect. In turn, it behooves you to clarify what went into the job offer in the first place to ensure that all of your skills, interests, and abilities are reflected.

### **Final advice for negotiating with your future colleagues**

Yuki and Ray's negotiation stories are not the worst I have heard. Several years ago another one of my students received an offer at a well-known organization. She negotiated a start date 3 months later than the employer requested, additional salary and moving expense coverage, vacation time soon after starting, and that one of her colleagues move, giving my student the corner office. She did receive the offer of her dreams, but managed to alienate all of her colleagues before even starting the job. She left after just a year and a half.

Remember that these are your future colleagues. You will see them again, possibly every day. You don't want them to offer you the lowest salary possible, but don't assume they are doing so. Likewise, don't give them an excuse to make assumptions about you and your motives. Have your ideal offer in mind from the start, know your reservation price, and come into the process willing to negotiate the best possible agreement for everyone involved. Finally, ask for the offer in writing (not always possible, but highly advisable), and get a final written version once negotiation has been concluded.

**Stephanie Eberle is the director of curriculum development at the Stanford University School of Medicine Career Center.**

## FIND OUT MORE

Resources used in this article and my most-often-recommended reference materials for those considering whether or not to negotiate and how to do so:

- **Program on Negotiation**, Harvard Law School (Harvard Negotiation Project): [www.pon.harvard.edu](http://www.pon.harvard.edu)
- **Harvard Business Essentials: Negotiation**, Harvard Business School Press, 2003
- **Perfect Phrases for Negotiating Salary and Job Offers**, Matthew J. DeLuca and Nanette F. DeLuca, McGraw-Hill, 2006
- **Women Don't Ask: The High Cost of Avoiding Negotiation—and Positive Strategies for Change**, Linda Babcock and Sara Laschever, Bantam, 2007
- **Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In**, Roger Fisher, Bruce M. Patton, and William L. Ury, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2nd ed., 1992

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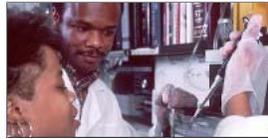
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