



**NEW YORK
CITY BAR**

HOW TO EVALUATE A JOB OFFER

When you are in the midst of a job search, it can often seem like getting an offer is the hardest part. But once you receive an offer, how do you decide whether to accept it or not? The following are factors that should be taken into account when evaluating a job offer.

1. **Overall Considerations**. Generally speaking, an individual who currently is unemployed (or underemployed) will need to approach a job offer from a different perspective than an individual who is currently employed. If you are unemployed, you may be under greater pressure to accept a job offer, even if the offer is less than ideal. Regardless of your employment status, however, it still is important to evaluate carefully all aspects of an offered position before accepting it.
2. **Compensation**. The primary factor to consider when evaluating a job offer is the compensation package. You should find out if you will be eligible for bonuses in addition to salary, and if so, how the bonuses will be calculated. In addition, depending on the type of organization making the offer, you should find out whether any other forms of compensation are on the table (e.g., equity). If you are changing jobs, it is likely that you are looking at least to maintain your current level of compensation. However, if the position offered would provide better opportunities for advancement and/or compensation increases in the future, it may be worth taking a small pay cut in the short run in order to reap those benefits in the long run. Finally, you should be sure that the salary being offered is high enough to cover your basic expenses, taking into account taxes, benefit costs, and commuting costs (which may change with the new job).
3. **Company/Industry Stability**. Something very important to consider when evaluating a job offer is the stability of the organization making the offer, as well as the broader industry to which the organization belongs or to which the organization is tied. Do research to determine whether the organization might be particularly susceptible to market fluctuations, or whether the industry is in the middle of an overall downturn or upswing. If the organization is a law firm, you should try to determine if the firm's practice and client base is diverse enough to weather events such as losing a major client or changes in the economic climate. If the organization is a not-for-profit you should try to determine if the organization's funding sources are relatively stable. If the long-term forecast for the organization is not favorable, it may not be worth taking the position. If the job is in government, consider its fiscal situation – have there been layoffs and are there budget deficits.
4. **Job Responsibilities**. Before accepting a job offer you should make sure you understand exactly what will be required of you in the position. This is especially the case where the position being offered has just been created, and no one held it before you. Sometimes the description in the original job listing does not tell the whole story, in particular which job responsibilities are more important or time consuming than others. If there are aspects of the position that are less

desirable to you than others, you need to ask yourself whether you are willing to live with them and whether it is worth it to you to do so. Beyond your specific job responsibilities, make sure you have an understanding of what your typical schedule will be and whether the position requires significant travel. Finally, you should determine what the reporting structure in your new position will be. Find out if you will be reporting to more than one person, and try to get a sense of how much autonomy you will have in your day-to-day tasks and decisions. You should also find out whether you will have anyone reporting to you, and if so, the types of tasks you can delegate to them.

5. **Growth Potential**. We all hope that our next job will be the last one we ever have to get, but oftentimes this is not the case. When evaluating a job offer you need to consider whether there is a future for you at the organization, i.e., whether there are advancement and professional development opportunities available. Advancement may be easier at a large organization, whereas you may learn more at a small organization where each employee has more responsibilities. If you view the job offered as more of a “stepping stone,” you should not accept it unless you think it will put you in a better position vis-à-vis your long-term career goals. In addition, be sure to ask what sort of formal and informal training the organization offers. An organization that encourages you to develop your skills will be better for your overall career and professional development. If formal training is not offered in-house, you should inquire whether employees are encouraged to seek training outside the office, and if so, whether the cost of such training is reimbursed.
6. **Benefits**. Be sure to get the details of the benefit package the employer is offering. Regarding health and life insurance benefits, you should find out what portion of the premium the employer will pay, what is covered, and what your deductible(s) will be. Regarding retirement benefits, you should ask whether you must be employed for a certain period of time before you are eligible to participate, whether the employer makes matching or other contributions, and whether the benefits are subject to a vesting schedule.
7. **Culture**. Last but not least, you should consider the culture of your potential employer before accepting a job. Broadly speaking, you should make sure that you agree with and are excited about the mission statement and/or objectives of the organization that has offered you the job, as well as the methods the organization uses to achieve those objectives (e.g., some businesses are more or less “set in their ways,” whereas others thrive on an atmosphere of creativity and “thinking outside the box”). More specifically, you should feel like the organization is a place where you could be happy working, and employs people with whom you feel you could get along. Although you can (and should) ask questions about company culture, it is also important to pay attention to the overall office environment and coworker interactions during the interview process. While no workplace is perfect, be on the lookout for “red flags” indicating that the work environment may be a negative one (e.g., coworkers outwardly disrespecting each other).

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