

MODULE 8

# Evaluating the Offer



As your returnship starts to wind down, it's a good time to remind yourself that by completing this program, you will have successfully done what you set out to do – restarted your career!

We are confident you have gained the recent experience needed to secure a full-time role, regardless of where it is. Whether you are offered ongoing employment at the company where you are doing your returnship or seeking a full-time role elsewhere, you'll need to be prepared to evaluate an offer.

This guide will discuss the different factors that go into an offer, things you should consider when evaluating that offer, and how to best tackle compensation negotiations.

*“Evaluate what you want – because what gets measured, gets produced.”*

– James A. Belasco



## Putting Things in Perspective

A strong compensation package – or lack thereof – can highly influence a person's attitude towards their work or daily life. So before we get into the business aspects that influence your offer, we wanted to address the obvious: talking salary is often tricky and more taxing than anyone likes to admit. In fact, many people avoid negotiation altogether because it tends to feel like a mental exercise with a designated winner and loser at the end. Some people overplay their hand and miss out on great opportunities. Or worse, some are afraid that if they negotiate at all, they'll lose the opportunity.

Trust us, we get it: your career break should not mean that you are offered less than your skills deserve. Remember that your salary is not a reflection of your worth as a person or even as a worker. Compensation is simply what the company believes the role itself is worth. Your next job is not your last job – it's a stepping stone. The returnship, and any subsequent opportunities for full-time employment, are all part of a larger picture.

## Factors that Influence Compensation

There are many factors that companies take into consideration as they create compensation packages. Keep in mind, there isn't a perfect formula to determine how companies craft offers.

- **Industry**  
Some industries pay more than others. For example, technology and finance tend to pay more than education or health care.
- **Size of company**  
Typically – but not always – the larger the company size, the higher their compensation.
- **Function**  
The more technical or specialized the role is, the more it will pay.
- **Scope of responsibilities**  
The more responsibilities and impact your job has, the higher the pay.
- **Level**  
A more senior position is likely to be paid more than a mid-level position.
- **Flexibility/availability**  
Jobs that require you to be on call or available beyond traditional business hours tend to pay more.
- **Company culture/pay policy**  
Some companies have a less generous pay policy because the prestige of working there is "enough to overcome that."



## Consider Beyond Dollars and Cents

Just as the company has different factors they consider before creating your offer package, you also have many important things to weigh beyond just what the job pays. Though it's certainly possible that a role may check all the boxes that you want, it is far more likely that there will be some degree of compromise. Consider what your "must haves" or non-negotiable factors are vs. the "nice-to-haves." In Module 6, we touched on criteria to determine whether or not a company is a good fit for you, including commute, culture, flexibility, and overall mission. With these factors in mind, consider how the role and company stack up against your needs.

### When evaluating the offer, ask yourself the following questions:

#### Role

- Is the work interesting? Does it challenge you?
- Will it compensate you well (now and/or in the future)? Including salary, bonuses, equity and benefits?
- Will you learn something new?
- Will you have fun?
- Will you have the level of autonomy you desire?

#### Company

- Is there potential for growth and advancement?
- Is the culture "good" (for you)?
- Does the company mission and values align with yours?
- Is the company growing?

If you can answer the questions you deem the most important in a way that excites you, you can feel confident that you've found your fit!

## What's Negotiable

While salary is the most common thing people think about regarding offer packages, remember that compensation includes many other benefits to be considered. In instances where you're not able to get the salary you're hoping for, you may be able to negotiate for additional benefits or perks. Think in terms of total package:

- **Compensation**

This includes bonus, equity, benefits, tuition reimbursement or other professional development.

- **Additional benefits**

From your networking and internal research, you may learn other possible benefits. Or you could get creative and consider asking your employer to consider your first day of





employment as the start of the returnship, not your full-time start date. This might allow you to become eligible for more PTO or a raise sooner.

- **Vacation time**

If the salary is a little lower than you expected, you might be able to negotiate for some additional vacation time.

- **Flexibility**

Now is the time to ask for what you want in terms of non-standard hours, work from home, etc.

Remember to come to the conversation with a clear point of view on what's negotiable to you. What tradeoffs are you willing to make? Would you be willing to commute an hour a day, if all other criteria are met? Would you take a salary 15% under what you originally wanted, for the perfect company that promises growth and allows you to work remotely as you please? It's not an exact science, but only you can gauge when a role is worth it for you.



## Preparing for the HR Conversation

Knowledge is power. Do your due diligence to get more information, formal and informal, about your specific company's compensation philosophy prior to entering negotiations. This can be used to create a deeper understanding of the organization, where you fit and opportunities for growth and advancement. Here are our essential preparation measures that will give you important context when evaluating the offer they present.

### 1. Research

Check out Salary.com, Payscale.com, Glassdoor, Know Your Worth, LinkedIn Salary, or Indeed Salary. As these sites are often dependent on anonymous users, they aren't perfect. Make sure not to take one site or source as gospel. However, if you see a common range on multiple sites, you can assume there is some truth there.

### 2. Consult Your Network

Consider who in the organization you can ask to share more about the company's compensation policies. A colleague who's been with the company a long time can tell you what kind of packages are typical for new hires and beyond – including 401k info, vacation time, when raises occur, etc.

Note: tread lightly here. Don't start these conversations asking anyone what their salary is, as that can alienate someone who may have been able to provide useful insight.

### 3. Know Your Rights

A growing number of state and local governments have enacted bans on asking a candidate's salary history. Keep yourself informed on laws about sick and vacation time, family leave, etc.



## Utilizing HR

As the function of a well-run HR team is to be your advocate, you stand to achieve a better outcome if you view them as your ally rather than your adversary. They are invested in attracting and retaining great talent like you, so long as your requests are reasonable and professionally stated. Though HR facilitates negotiations and assists whenever possible, you can't expect them to grant your every wish. Just remember to keep conversations pleasant in tone.

- **Focus on the salary range**

It is almost always more productive to approach salary as a range than a specific number. If you're evaluating an offer at the company where you did your returnship, note that the returnship rate does not always reflect the market rate of the full-time position. To anchor your discussions, ask the vital question: "What is the range of salary for this role?" If there is a major disparity between your research and their response, refer to your research and allow for them to respond.

- **Avoid making it personal**

Focusing the conversation on your research and the salary range removes you from the equation. As stated above, there are several factors that contribute to the compensation package that is presented to you. Some of those factors are fixed. Others may be flexible. Regardless, mentioning, "I used to get paid more/less because xyz..." will not get you very far.

- **Talk flexibility when needed**

If your acceptance of an offer is contingent upon your employer allowing for a more flexible schedule, then you must bring it up prior to accepting the offer. For example, if working from home on Fridays is the only way you can reasonably do the job, don't wait – ask now. However, if a practice is already the standard for your office, specifically requesting it is unnecessary. If most of the team works from home on Fridays already and it's understood that that's an option, you don't have to go out of your way to ask for it. Assume you can enjoy the same leeway everyone else gets.

- **Don't negotiate past the close**

One way to derail an otherwise productive negotiation is to ask for more after the employer has already met or addressed your initial request. If you can, indicate what factors are especially important to you so they can help you as best they can during negotiations. When HR advises they can't move any further, recognize that it's likely the truth and time to stop pushing.

- **Be prepared for "No"**

Your "nice to haves" versus your "must haves" are important to keep in mind during negotiations. You are free to inquire about any of the items on your list, but bear in mind that requests can always be denied. Knowing which potential "no" you can live with and which is a real deal breaker ahead of time will help you know when to dig in and when to move on.



## Professionalism, Gratitude, and Enthusiasm

It sounds obvious, but it's important to display gratitude and enthusiasm at every stage of the negotiation process. Candidates' behavior during this phase is still being evaluated, even after an offer has been extended. In the excitement of the moment, be mindful not to check your professionalism at the door.

We've heard a few stories from HR insiders who say that no matter how strong a candidate someone is, if they were unprofessional during negotiation, it reflected poorly on them and worked against them in the long run. Note that you can still maintain professionalism while asking questions or explaining what you're looking for. Here are some suggestions of how handle these discussions positively and productively.

Instead of...	Try...	Why?
<b>Saying yes/no to an offer immediately</b>	"Thank you so much for this opportunity. I'm excited about it, and I'd like to take the next 24 hours to consider the specifics and discuss them with my family. Is it ok if I get back to you tomorrow?"	It is always perfectly reasonable to say that you need some time to think it over.
<b>Making a list of demands and saying your acceptance is contingent upon them being met</b>	"I want you to know how thrilled I am to be considered for this position. I have truly enjoyed my time here and I'm so excited to stay on. In evaluating the offer, there are just a few things I'd like to discuss that would enable me to accept."	Negotiating an offer should not feel like an ultimatum. Express excitement about the company and role while showing willingness to make tradeoffs.
<b>Accepting an offer and then going back asking for more</b>	"While I have done my research, I know that every employer and situation is unique. Would you say that this is the most competitive offer that I can reasonably expect at this time?"	Once the negotiating is over, it's a done deal. HR can do nothing more after a contract is signed – and worse, you'll seem unprofessional and indecisive.
<b>Waiting until your first day as a full-time employee to see if your role will change in any way</b>	"I am wondering how my role may change as I transition into a full-time position. Can we set up some time to discuss new expectations and any other anticipated changes?"	Bringing up concerns ahead of time will not only save you some anxiety, you will appear proactive and dependable.



## Looking at the Bigger Picture

We hope that the offer you are presented meets all of your hopes and expectations. After all, only you can answer the question, “Will I get out of bed every morning and be satisfied going to work with this offer?” Yet even if there are some trade-offs, remember that this is merely your first full-time offer after your break; this role can only serve to help you, further build your skills and experiences, and give you a starting point from which to build. Whether or not all of your “nice to haves” aren’t met, focusing on the next set of goals is the best way to move forward.

Ultimately, walking away from a good (but not perfect) offer may hurt your career and earnings in the long run. You can – and will – achieve the pay and perks you desire soon enough if you play your cards right. Ask when company-wide performance reviews are conducted so you know how and when you can discuss your progress. In between, regularly show your manager your work to demonstrate engagement. When the time is right, you may ask for a raise or other aspects you wanted, making the conversation performance-based.

If this doesn’t happen on a timeline you’re comfortable with, you’ll still have more options in the job market now that you’ve already returned to work. As the old saying goes: the best time to find a job is when you already have one. Returners know better than most that there is a real opportunity cost that accrues the longer you stay out of the workforce. Beyond just lost wages, [this article](#) further outlines the detrimental effect leaving the workforce can have on someone’s retirement savings and lost wage growth.

## Forward

We encourage you to use this guide to both consider your options practically as well as a toolbox for advocating for yourself. If you find yourself at the offer stage and unsure of how to proceed, or just want to practice, reach out to the [Path Forward Community](#).

So go for it! Do your homework. Play the long game. Be gracious. Enjoy what you’ve earned.



## Path Forward

Join Path Forward volunteers, alumni, and your fellow returners in our [online community](#) to find helpful advice, resources, networking, and more.