Negotiating a Job Offer: Tips and Blunders

Top 10 Negotiating Tips:

- **Listen Carefully:** Listening is quite different from hearing. Listen to what is being said, but more importantly, understand why it is being said. Some would say that the key to successful negotiation is to listen more and talk less.

- **Explore Constraints and Flexibilities:** Learning and understanding the cards that the employer holds is extremely helpful. The employer may have certain constraints which can not be violated, such as a particular salary level. However, there may be dimensions where the employer does have some flexibility, such as vacation or flexible hours. Similarly, examine and know your own constraints and flexibilities.

- **Negotiate the Package, Not a component:** The compensation package is more than just the annual salary. It includes such elements as job title, annual salary, education and training benefits, retirement plan, and so on. Including more components in the negotiation increases your chances of achieving a successful outcome.

- **Be Reasonable:** You are looking for a relationship that must be mutually beneficial. Recognize and acknowledge their constraints and desires, as you expect them to recognize yours.

- **Offer solutions:** It is your responsibility to offer solutions, which can be the basis for negotiations. Pointing out just the issues or problems signals a potential "problem employee." It is easier to point out problems than to solve them.

- **Avoid using absolutes:** Avoid using extreme positions that lead to a yes or no answer, unless of course you meant it. These take the form of, " I will not accept the positions unless _____ " or " Anything other than _____ is unacceptable." It is difficult, if not embarrassing, to reverse yourself later.

- **Provide Reasonable Rationale:** The employer would gain greater appreciation of why you are saying what you are saying. They may or may not be able to meet your expectations, but at least they would understand better your reasons.

- **Seek Win-Win Resolution:** Negotiation is nothing but give and take on both sides. Both sides must feel that while they might have given up parts of some things, they have gained on others.

- **Avoid Decisions On the Spot:** Avoid a Yes or No answer on the spot, unless you are absolutely confident of your answers. No matter how hurried you or the employer are, both can wait for the right final answer for a day or two. Sleep over your decision before announcing it.

- **Negotiate On the Phone:** It isn't always possible, but negotiations on the phone are much more impersonal and focused on rational issues. In-person negotiations are inevitably more personal and can confine you from being more open and rational.

Avoid These Negotiation Blunders:

- **The Ultimatum Approach**

  Presenting your counter-offer as the final offer isn't appropriate. Present your counter-offers and consider their offers without ultimatums. Decide on whether the offer on the table is acceptable, only after you have walked away and used some time to think. Negotiation is the art of exploring mutually beneficial possibilities, instead of issuing ultimatums.

- **Being Negative**

  Continually pointing out what is wrong with the offer on the table is not particularly pleasant for the other party. They are trying to find a solution, while you are constantly looking for what's wrong.

- **Talking Too Much**

  Some would say that the "winner" of any negotiation is the one who talks less. Be succinct and reasonable in presenting your views, and listen carefully. Don't ramble on and don't repeat yourself.

- **Falling in Love with One Element of Compensation**

  Focusing exclusively on one component of the compensation could be a kiss of death, particularly if the employer is severely constrained on that dimension.

- **Being Unreasonable**

  "I can receive elsewhere at least $10,000 more than what you are offering." If that is the case, why are you negotiating? Time to go to where you can find that kind of money!

Sources: James 'Stacey' Edwards of Virginia Union University, ODU Career Management Center