

Accepting a Job Offer? Ask These 10 Questions First

Congratulations! You've been offered a new job. Time to pop the champagne, right?

Not quite. You're not on Easy Street yet. While the bulk of the heavy lifting of applying and interviewing is behind you, a few crucial steps remain before your first day on the job.

Two important phone calls will likely occur before the deal is sealed: The first, in which you'll be offered the job, and the second, when you either accept or decline the offer.

The Offer

When you're initially offered the job, don't automatically accept, even if you're thrilled to have received the offer. Remain composed, and make sure you ask the three following questions during the first call.

1. When do you need an answer by?

Always ask how many days you have to make your decision. You should be given at least a 24-hour buffer to think over an offer. This gives you time to think about follow-up negotiating questions. Also, by asking this question, you're signaling that you may want to discuss the offer, so they'll be expecting your negotiation to come.

2. Can I receive a copy of the offer and the benefits package?

In the flurry of excitement that accompanies a job offer, sometimes candidates forget what the actual offer is. Make sure you request a follow-up email with the job title, the annual salary, and a complete copy of the benefits package.

3. If I have questions about the benefits package, with whom should I speak?

If you receive an offer from your potential boss, s/he may not be able to help with questions about dental and vision plans, for example, so find out whom to direct your questions to (perhaps someone from the human resources department).

The Negotiation

Once you've thought over your follow-up questions, call the person who extended the offer (whether it's your potential boss or HR) and ask away. Prioritize your questions. If you're happy with the salary, there's no need to negotiate that point. If you're concerned about flextime, ask about that instead.

Keep in mind that this conversation needs to happen on the phone, not through email. Emails come off more demanding than you'd think. If an employer opens up an email and sees a list of questions, s/he may be put off. Also, the speed of their answers gives you an indication of where you have negotiating room, but you can't discern as easily that over email. That said, below is a list of questions to consider asking about your offer:

4. When is the start date?

Make sure you're on the same page concerning your start date. The employer may think you can start ASAP, but you may need to give two weeks' notice to your current employer or need more time to relocate.

5. Is the salary negotiable?

If you're unhappy about the salary, now is the time to negotiate. If the person you're speaking with hesitates when you ask if the salary is open for discussion, there's probably room to negotiate a higher salary. If the response is a quick, firm "no," you need to decide whether you want to settle for it. Now is also the time to ask about a signing bonus.

6. What are the core hours?

Make sure you know what daily schedule you're getting into. Is the typical workday 7 to 4 or 9 to 5? Figure out whether you'll be working 40, 45, or 50+ hour weeks.

7. Who will I be reporting to?

You should have already covered this in the interview, but make sure you know who your boss is. Supervisors can make or break a job, so you want to make sure you can get along with yours.

8. Can you confirm that I will have the opportunity to telecommute or work on a flextime schedule as we discussed in the interview?

The key phrase in this question is "as we discussed in the interview." Avoid springing it on your employer that you want to telecommute every Tuesday and Thursday or work four 10-hour days instead of five eight-hour days. However, if this is something you discussed in the interview, you should confirm that it stands as part of the offer.

9. Will the company help me with my moving expenses?

If you need to relocate for your job, this is a required question. The company may offer to pay for your movers, which can relieve the financial burden.

10. Can I have all this in writing?

After wheeling and dealing to get the perfect offer, ask to get a confirmation of everything you negotiated, even if it's just an email that sums up the modified offer. If you're happy with the offer agreed upon over the phone, accept it before relocating or quitting your current job.

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