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2007

Fully Rewritten
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A Practical Manual for Job-Hunters
and Career-Changers

RICHARD NELSON BOLLES

CHAPTER 7

The Things
School Never Taught Us
About the Job-Hunt:

Salary Negotiation

Getting Paid What You're Worth

I remember once talking to a breathless college graduate, who was elated at having just landed her first job. "How much are they going to pay you?" I asked. She looked startled. "I don't know," she said, "I never asked. I just assume they will pay me a fair wage." Boy! did she get a rude awakening when she received her first paycheck. It was so miserably *low*, she couldn't believe her eyes. And thus did she learn, painfully, what you must learn too: *Before accepting a job, always ask about salary. Indeed, ask and negotiate.*

It's the *negotiate* that throws fear into our hearts. We feel ill-prepared to do this. But, it's not all that difficult. While whole books can be (and have been) written on this subject, there are basically just six secrets to keep in mind.

The First Secret of Salary Negotiation:

Never Discuss Salary Until the End of the Interviewing Process When They Have Definitely Said They Want You

"The end of the interviewing process" is difficult to define. It's the point at which the employer says, or thinks, "We've got to get this person!" That may be at the end of the first (and therefore the last) interview; or it may be at the end of a whole series of interviews, often with different people within the same company or organization. But assuming things are going favorably for you, whether after the first, or second, or third, or fourth interview, if you like them and they increasingly like you, a job offer will be made. Then, and only then, it is time to deal with the question that is inevitably on any employer's mind: *how much is this person going to cost me?* And the question that is on your mind: *how much does this job pay?*

If the employer raises the salary question earlier, in some form like "What kind of salary are you looking for?", you should have three responses at your fingertips.

Response #1: If the employer seems like a kindly man or woman, your best and most tactful reply might be: "Until you've decided you definitely want me, and I've decided I definitely could help you with your tasks here, I feel any discussion of salary is premature." That will work, in most cases.

Response #2: There are instances, however, where that doesn't work. You may be face-to-face with an employer who will not so easily be put off, and demands within the first two minutes that you're in the interview room to know what salary you are looking for. At this point, you use your second response: "I'll gladly come to that, but could you first help me to understand what this job involves?"



Response #3: That is a good response, in most cases. But what if it doesn't work? The employer with rising voice says, "Come, come, don't play games with me. I want to know what salary you're looking for." You have response #3 prepared for this very eventuality. It's an answer in terms of a range. For example, "I'm looking for a salary in the range of \$35,000 to \$45,000 a year."

If the employer still won't let it go until later, then consider what this means. Clearly, you are being interviewed by an employer who has no range in mind. Their beginning figure is their ending figure. No negotiation is possible.¹

This happens, when it happens, because many employers are making salary their major criterion for deciding who to hire, and who not to hire, out of—say—nineteen possible candidates.

It's an old game, played with new determination by many employers these days, called "among two equally qualified candidates, the one who is willing to work for the lower salary wins."

1. One job-hunter said his interviews always began with the salary question, and no matter what he answered, that ended the interview. Turned out, this job-hunter was doing all the interviewing over the phone. That was the problem. Once he went face-to-face, salary was no longer the first thing discussed in the interview.

If you run into this situation, and you want that job badly enough, you will have no choice but to capitulate. Ask what salary they have in mind, and make your decision. (Of course you should always say, "I need a little time, to think about this.")

However, all the foregoing is merely the *worst-case scenario*. Usually, things don't go this way. Not by a long shot. In most interviews, these days, the employer will be willing to save salary negotiation until they've finally decided they want you (and you've decided you want them). And at that point, salary will be negotiable.

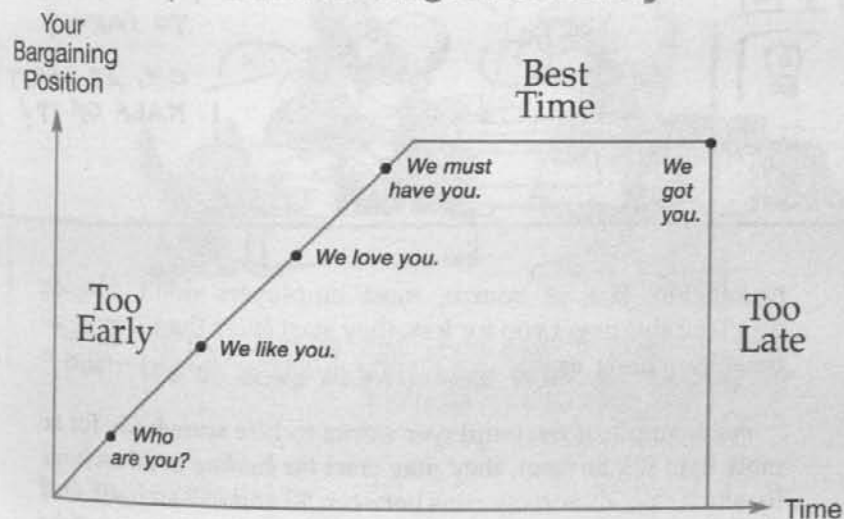
WHEN TO DISCUSS SALARY

Not until all of the following conditions have been fulfilled—

- Not until they've gotten to know you, at your best, so they can see how you stand out above the other applicants.
 - Not until you've gotten to know them, as completely as you can, so you can tell when they're being firm, or when they're flexible.
 - Not until you've found out exactly what the job entails.
 - Not until they've had a chance to find out how well you match the job-requirements.
 - Not until you're in the final interview at that place, for that job.
 - Not until you've decided, "I'd really like to work here."
 - Not until they've said, "We want you."
 - Not until they've said, "We've got to have you."
- should you get into salary discussion with any employer.

If you'd prefer this to be put in the form of a diagram, here it is:²

When to Negotiate Salary



Why is it to your advantage to delay salary discussion? Because, if you really *shine* during the hiring-interview, they may—at the end—mention a higher salary than they originally had in mind, when the interview started—and this is particularly the case when the interview has gone so well, that they're determined to obtain your services.

The Second Secret of Salary Negotiation:

The Purpose of Salary Negotiation Is to Uncover the Most That an Employer Is Willing to Pay to Get You

Salary negotiation would never happen if *every* employer in *every* hiring-interview were to mention, right from the start, the top figure they are willing to pay for that position. *Some* employers do, as I mentioned before. And that's the end of any salary



negotiation. But, of course, most employers don't. Hoping they'll be able to get you for less, they start *lower* than they're ultimately willing to go. This creates a *range*. And that range is what salary negotiation is all about.

For example, if the employer wants to hire somebody for no more than \$12 an hour, they may start the *bidding* at \$8 an hour. In which case, their *range* runs between \$8 and \$12 an hour. Or if they want to pay no more than \$20 an hour, they may start the bidding at \$16 an hour. In which case their range runs between \$16 and \$20 an hour.

So, why do you want to negotiate? Because, if a range is thus involved, you have every right to try to discover the highest salary that employer is willing to pay *within that range*.

The employer's goal, is to save money, if possible. Your goal is to bring home to your family, your partner, or your own household, the best salary that you can, for the work you will be doing. Nothing's wrong with the goals of either of you. But it does mean that, where the employer starts lower, salary negotiation is proper, and expected.

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"WHILE YOU'RE WAITING FOR YOUR SHIP TO COME IN, WHY DON'T YOU DO SOME MAINTENANCE WORK ON THE PIER?"

The Third Secret of Salary Negotiation:

During the Salary Discussion, Try Never to Be the First One to Mention a Salary Figure

Where salary negotiation has been kept *offstage* for much of the interview process, when it finally does come *onstage* you want the employer to be the first one to mention a *figure*, if you can.

Nobody knows why, but it has been observed over the years—where the goals are opposite, as in this case, you are trying to get the employer to pay the most that they can, and the employer is trying to pay the least that they can—in this back-and-forth negotiation, *whoever mentions a salary figure first, generally loses*. You can speculate from now until the cows come home, as to *why* this is; all we know is *that* it is.

Inexperienced employer/interviewers often don't know this quirky rule. But experienced ones are very aware of it; that's why they will *always* toss the ball to you, with some innocent-

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sounding question, such as: "What kind of salary are you looking for?" Well, how kind of them to ask me what I want—you may be thinking. No, no, no. Kindness has nothing to do with it. They are hoping you will be the first to mention a figure, because they know this odd experiential truth: that whoever mentions a salary figure first, generally loses salary negotiation, at the last. Accordingly, if they ask you to name a figure, the counter-move on your part should be: "Well, you created this position, so you must have some figure in mind, and I'd be interested in knowing what that figure is."

The Fourth Secret of Salary Negotiation:

Before You Go to the Interview, Do Some Careful Research on Typical Salaries for Your Field and/or that Organization

As I said earlier, salary negotiation is possible *anytime* the employer does not open their discussion of salary by naming the top figure they have in mind, but starts instead with a lower figure.

Okay, so here is our \$64,000 question: how do you tell whether the figure the employer first offers you is only their *starting bid*, or is their *final final offer*? The answer is: by doing some research on the field *and* that organization, first.

Oh, come on! I can hear you say. Isn't this all more trouble than it's worth? No, not if you're determined.

If you're determined, this is one step you don't want to overlook. Trust me, salary research pays off *handsomely*.

Let's say it takes you from one to three days to run down this sort of information on the three or four organizations that interest you the most. And let us say that because you've done this research, when you finally go in for the hiring-interview you are able to ask for and obtain a salary that is \$4,000 a year higher in range, than you would otherwise have gotten. In just the next three years, you will be earning \$12,000 extra, because of your salary research. *Not bad pay, for one to three days' work!* And it can be even more. I know *many* job-hunters and career-changers to whom this has happened. Thus you can see that there is a financial penalty exacted from those who are too lazy, or in too much of a hurry, to go gather this information. In plainer language: *if you don't do this research, it'll cost ya!*

Okay then, how do you do this research? There are two ways to go: on the Internet, and off the Internet. Let's look at each, in turn:

SALARY RESEARCH ON THE INTERNET

If you have access to the Internet, and you want to research salaries for particular geographical regions, positions, occupations, or industries, here are some free sites that may give you just what you're looking for:

- The Bureau of Labor Statistics' survey of salaries in individual occupations, *The Occupational Outlook Handbook 2006–2007*.
www.bls.gov/oco

- The Bureau of Labor Statistics' survey of salaries in individual industries (it's a companion piece to *The Occupational Outlook Handbook 2006–2007*).

<http://stats.bls.gov/oco/cg/cgindex.htm>

- "High Earning Workers Who Don't Have a Bachelor's Degree," by Matthew Mariani, appearing first in the Fall 1999 issue of the *Occupational Outlook Quarterly*. For those who want to know how to earn a lot without having to go to college first.

<http://stats.bls.gov/pub/ooq/1999/fall/art02.pdf>

- The oldest of the salary-specific sites, and one of the largest and most complete lists of salary reviews on the Web; run by a genius (Mary Ellen Mort).

<http://jobstar.org/tool/salary/index.cfm>

- The most visited of all the salary-specific job-sites, with fifty online partners that use their "Salary Wizard," such as AOL and Yahoo.

www.salary.com

- When you need a salary expert, it makes sense to go to the Salary Expert. Lots of stuff on the subject here, including a free "Salary Report" for hundreds of job titles, varying by area, skill level, and experience. Also has one of the salary calculators mentioned earlier.

www.salaryexpert.com

Incidentally, if these free sites don't give you what you want, you can always pay for the info, and hopefully get more-up-to-

date surveys. Salary Source (www.salarysource.com) offers up-to-date salary information services starting at \$19.95.

If you "strike out" on all the above sites, then you're going to have to get a little more clever, and work a little harder, and pound the pavements, as I describe below.

SALARY RESEARCH OFF THE INTERNET

Off the Internet, how do you go about doing salary research? Well, there's a simple rule: generally speaking, abandon books, and go talk to people. Use books and libraries only as a *second*, or *last*, resort. (Their information is often just way too outdated.)

You can get much more complete and up-to-date information from people who are in the same job at another company or organization. Or, people at the nearby university or college who train such people, whatever that department may be. Teachers and professors will usually know what their graduates are making.

Now, exactly how do you go about getting this information, by talking to people? Let's look at some concrete examples:

First Example: Working at your first entry-level job, say at a fast-food place.

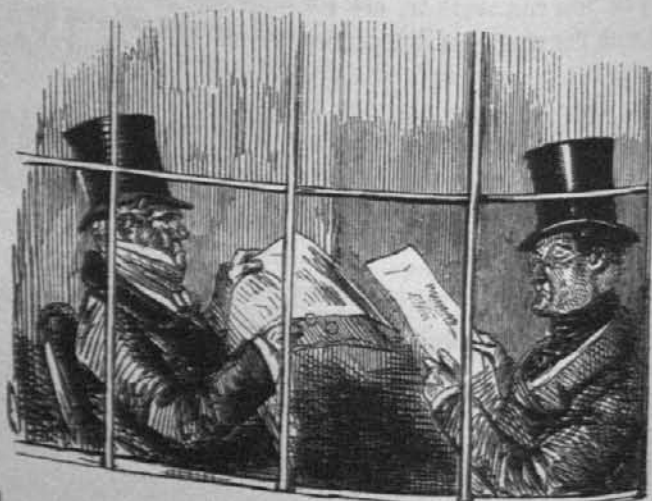
You may not need to do any salary research. They pay what they pay. You can walk in, ask for a job application, and interview with the manager. He or she will usually tell you the pay, outright. It's usually *inflexible*. But at least you'll find that it's easy to discover what the pay is. (Incidentally, filling out an application, or having an interview there, doesn't commit you to take the job—but you probably already know that. You can always decline an offer from any place. That's what makes this approach harmless.)

Second Example: Working at a place where you can't discover what the pay is, say at a construction company.

If that construction company where you would *hope* to get a job is difficult to research, go visit a *different* construction company in the same town—one that isn't of much interest to you—and ask what they make *there*. Or, if you don't know who to talk to there, fill out one of their applications, and talk to the hiring person about what kinds of jobs they have (or might have in the future), at which time prospective wages is a legitimate subject of discussion. Then, having done this research on a place you don't care about, go back to the place that *really* interests you, and apply. You still don't know *exactly* what they pay, but you do know what their competitor pays—which will usually be close.

Third Example: Working in a one-person office, say as a secretary.

Here you can often find useful salary information by perusing the *Help Wanted* ads in the local paper for a week or two. Most of the ads probably won't mention a salary figure, but a few *may*. Among those that do, note what the lowest salary offering is, and what the highest is, and see if the ad reveals some reasons for the difference. It's interesting how much you can learn about salaries, with this approach. I know, because I was a secretary myself, once upon a time (dinosaurs were still roaming the earth).



Another way to do salary research is to find a *Temporary Work Agency* that places secretaries, and let yourself be farmed out to various offices: the more, the merrier. It's relatively easy to do salary research when you're *inside* the place. (Study what that place pays *the agency*, not what the agency then pays you.) If it's an office where the other workers *like* you, you'll be able to ask questions about a lot of things, including salary. It's like *summer-time*, where the research is easy.

The Fifth Secret of Salary Negotiation:

Define a Range That the Employer Has in Mind, and Then Define an Interrelated Range for Yourself

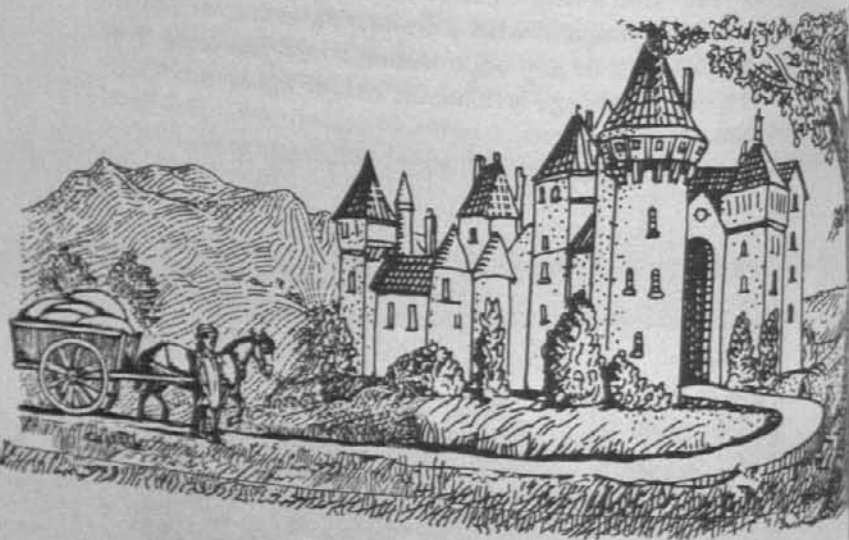
THE EMPLOYER'S RANGE

Before you finish your research, before you go into that organization for your final interview, you want more than just *one* figure. You want a *range*: what's the *least* the employer may be willing to offer you, and what's the *most* the employer may be willing to offer you. In any organization which has more than five employees, that range is relatively easy to figure out. It will be less than what the person *who would be above you* makes, and more than what the person *who would be below you* makes.

| If the Person Who Would Be Below You Makes | And the Person Who Would Be Above You Makes | The Range for Your Job Would Be |
|--|---|---------------------------------------|
| \$45,000 | \$55,000 | \$47,000–\$53,000 |
| \$30,000 | \$35,500 | \$31,500–\$33,500 |
| \$15,240 | \$18,000 | \$16,500–\$17,200 |

One teensy-tiny little problem: *how* do you find out the salary of those who would be above and below you? Well, first you have to find out their *names* or the names of their *positions*. If it is a small organization you are going after—one with twenty or fewer employees—finding this information out should be *duck soup*. Any employee who works there is likely to know the answer, and you can usually get in touch with one of those employees, or even an ex-employee, through your own personal contacts. Since up to two-thirds of all new jobs are created by companies that size, that's the size organization you are likely to be researching, anyway.

If you are going after a larger organization, then you fall back to our familiar life-preserver, namely, every contact you have (family, friend, relative, business, or church acquaintance) who might know the company, and therefore, the information you seek. In other words, you are looking for Someone Who Knows Someone who either is working, or has worked, at the particular place or places that interest you, and who therefore has or can get this information for you.

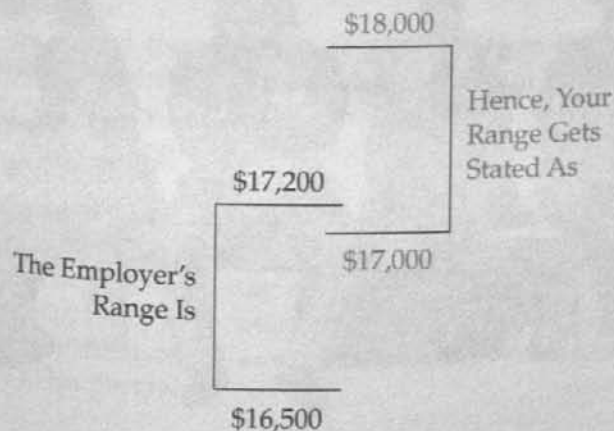


If you absolutely run into a blank wall on a particular organization (everyone who works there is pledged to secrecy, and they have shipped all their ex-employees to Siberia), then seek out information on their nearest *competitor* in the same geographic area. For example, let us say you were researching Bank X, and they were proving to be inscrutable about what they pay their managers. You would then try Bank Y as your research base, to see if the information were easier to come by, there. And if it were, you would then assume the two were similar in their pay scales, and that what you learned about Bank Y was applicable also to Bank X.

Also experts say that in researching salaries, you should take note of the fact that most governmental agencies have civil service positions matching those in private industry, and their job descriptions and pay ranges are available to the public. Go to the nearest city, county, regional, state, or federal civil service office, find the job description nearest what you are seeking in private industry, and then ask for the starting salary.

YOUR OWN RANGE

Once you've made a guess at what the employer's range might be, for the job you have in mind, you then define your own range *accordingly*. Let me give an example. Suppose you guess that the employer's range is one of those stated in the chart on page 121, \$16,500 to \$17,200. Accordingly, you now *invent* an "asking" range for yourself, where your *minimum* "hooks in" just below that employer's *maximum*.



And so, when the employer has stated a figure (probably around his or her *lowest*—i.e., \$16,500), you will be ready to respond something like: “I understand of course the constraints under which all organizations are operating, considering the present economy, but I believe my productivity is such that it would *justify* a salary”—and here you mention a range whose bottom hooks in just below the top of their range, and goes up from there, accordingly, as shown on the diagram above—“ in the range of \$17,000 to \$18,000.”

It will help a lot if during this discussion, you are prepared to show in what ways you will *make money* or in what ways you will *save money* for that organization, such as will justify the higher salary you are seeking. Hopefully, this will succeed in getting you the salary you want.

Daniel Porot, the job-expert in Europe, suggests that if you and an employer really hit it off, and you’re *dying* to work there, but they cannot afford the salary you need, consider offering them part of your time. If you need, and believe you deserve, say \$25,000, but they can only afford \$15,000, you might consider offering them three days a week of your time for that \$15,000 ($15/25 = 3/5$). This leaves you free to take work elsewhere during those other two days. You will of course produce so much work during those three days per week, that they will be ecstatic that they got you for even those three days.



The Sixth Secret of Salary Negotiation:

Know How to Bring the Salary Negotiation to a Close; Don't Leave It "Just Hanging"

Your salary negotiation with this particular employer is not finished until you've addressed the issue of so-called *fringe benefits*. "Fringes" such as life insurance, health benefits or health plans, vacation or holiday plans, and retirement programs typically add anywhere from 15 to 28 percent to many workers' salaries. That is to say, if an employee receives \$3000 salary per month, the fringe benefits are worth another \$450 to \$840 per month.

If your job is at a *high level*, benefits may include but not be limited to: health, life, dental, disability, malpractice insurance; insurance for dependents; sick leave; vacation; personal leave/personal days; educational leave; educational cost reimbursement for coursework related to the job; maternity and/or parental leave; health leave to care for dependents; bonus system or profit sharing; stock options; expense accounts for entertaining clients; dues to professional associations; travel reimbursement; fee-sharing arrangements for clients that the employee generates; organizational memberships; parking; automobile allowance; relocation costs; sabbaticals; professional conference costs; time for community service; flextime work schedules; and fitness center memberships.

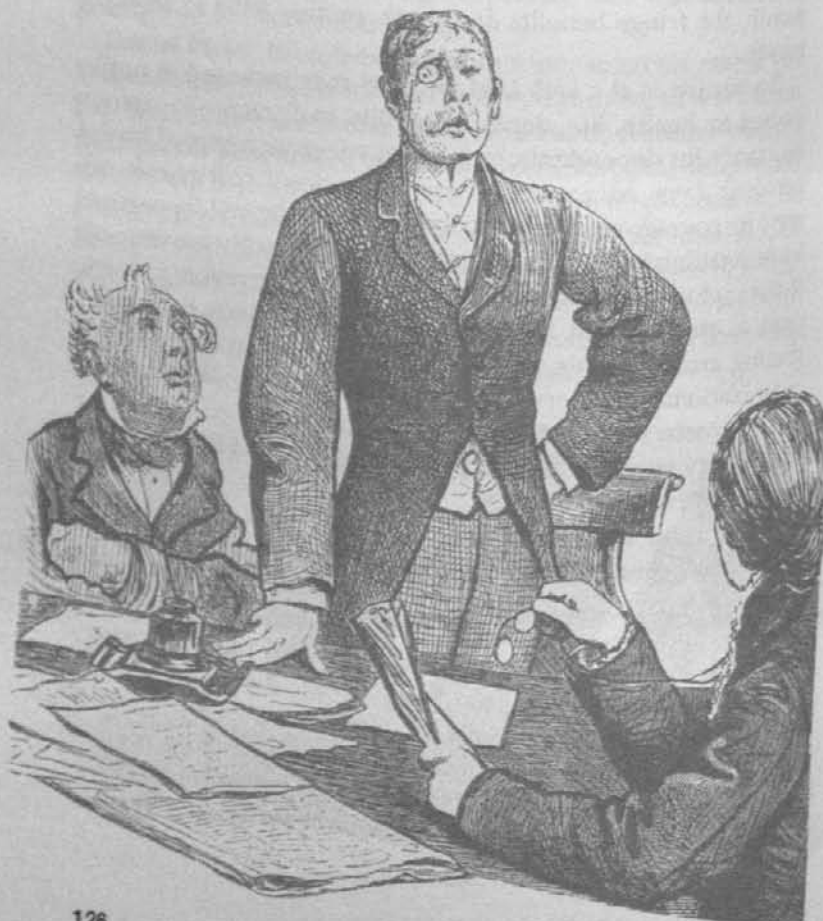
You should therefore, before you walk into the interview, know what benefits are particularly important to you, then at the end of salary negotiation remember to ask what benefits are offered—and negotiate if necessary for the benefits you particularly care about. Thinking this out ahead of time, of course, makes your negotiating easier, by far.

You also want to achieve some understanding about what their policy is about future raises. You can prepare the ground at the end of salary negotiation, by saying: "If I accomplish this job to your satisfaction, as I fully expect to—and more—when could I expect to be in line for a raise?"

Finally, you want to get *all of this* summarized, in writing. Always request a letter of agreement—or employment contract—that they give to you. If you can't get it in writing, now's a good time to start wondering *why*. The Road to Hell is paved with oral promises that went unwritten, and—later—unfulfilled.

Many executives unfortunately “forget” what they told you during the hiring-interview, or even deny they ever said such a thing.

Also, many executives leave the company for another position and place, and their successor or the top boss may disown any unwritten promises: “I don't know what caused them to say that to you, but they clearly exceeded their authority, and of course we can't be held to that.”



Conclusion: The Greatest Secret

All of this, of course, presumes that your interview, and salary negotiation, goes well. There are times, however, when it looks like it's going well, and then all of a sudden and without warning it comes totally unraveled. You're hired, told to report next Monday, and then get a phone call on Friday telling you that all hiring has been put, mysteriously, “on hold.” You're therefore back out “on the pavements.” Having seen this happen so many times, over the years, I remind you of the truth throughout this book: *successful job-hunters and career-changers always have alternatives.*

Alternative ideas of what they could do with their life.

Alternative ways of describing what they want to do right now.

Alternative ways of going about the job-hunt (not just the Internet, not just resumes, agencies, and ads).

Alternative job prospects.

Alternative “target” organizations that they go after.

Alternative ways of approaching employers.

And so on, and so forth.

What all this means for you, the seeker of secrets, is: be sure you are pursuing more than just one employer, right up until after you start your new job. That organization, that office, that group, that church, that factory, that government agency, that volunteer organization that you've targeted may be *the ideal place* where you would like to work. But no matter how appetizing this *first choice* looks to you, no matter how much it makes your mouth water at the thought of working there, *you are committing job-hunting suicide* if you don't have some alternative places in mind. Sure, maybe you'll get that dream-come-true. But—*big question*—what are your plans if you don't? You've got to have other plans **now**—not when that first target runs out of gas three months from now. You must go after more than one organization. I recommend five “targets,” at least.

TARGET SMALL ORGANIZATIONS

Were I myself looking for a job tomorrow, this is what I would do. After I had figured out, using pages 206 to 248, what my ideal job looked like, and after I had collected a list of those workplaces that have such jobs, in my chosen geographical area, I would then circle the names and addresses of those which are *small organizations* (personally I would restrict my *first draft* to those with twenty-five or fewer employees)—and then go after them, in the manner I have described in previous chapters. However, as the dot-com downturn of April 2000 and following taught us, small organizations can sometimes be fraught with danger (a nova-like birth, a sudden black hole death), I would look particularly for small organizations that are *established or growing*. And if “organizations with twenty-five or fewer employees” eventually didn’t turn up enough leads for me, then I would broaden my search to “organizations with fifty or fewer employees,” and finally—if that turned up nothing—to “organizations with 100 or fewer employees.” But I would start small. Very small.

Remember, job-hunting always involves luck, to some degree. But with a little bit of luck, and a lot of hard work, plus determination, these instructions about how to get hired should work for you, even as they have worked for so many hundreds of thousands before you.

Take heart from those who have gone before you, such as this determined job-hunter, who wrote me this heartfelt letter, with which I close:

“Before I read this book, I was depressed and lost in the futile job-hunt using Want Ads Only. I did not receive even one phone call from any ad I answered, over a total of four months. I felt that I was the most useless person on earth. I am female, with a two-and-a-half-year-old daughter, a former professor in China, with no working experience at all in the U.S. We came here seven months ago because my husband had a job offer here.

“Then, on June 11th of last year, I saw your book in a local bookstore. Subsequently, I spent three weeks, ten hours a day except Sunday, reading every single word of your book and doing all of the flower petals in the Flower Exercise. After getting to know myself much better, I felt I was ready to try the job-hunt again. I used Parachute throughout as my guide, from the very beginning to the very end, namely, salary negotiation.

“In just two weeks I secured (you guessed it) two job offers, one of which I am taking, as it is an excellent job, with very good pay. It is (you guessed it again) a small company, with twenty or so employees. It is also a career-change: I was a professor of English; now I am to be a controller!

“I am so glad I believed your advice: there are jobs out there, and there are two types of employers out there, and truly there are!

“I hope you will be happy to hear my story.”

| The Job-Hunter's Alternatives In order of preference When looking for someone | The Employer's Alternatives In order of preference When looking for someone |
|---|--|
| 1. Resumes Using a resume to get invited in, for an interview | 1. Inside the Company "Hiring or promoting from within"—inside their company, either a present employee or a temp worker, or short-term contract worker, or volunteer, who is already working there |
| 2. Ads Answering an ad in a newspaper, or a posting on the Internet | 2. Colleagues Asking colleagues about employees, past or present, where those colleagues work |
| 3. Agencies Using an agency—private (<i>executive search firms, college placement offices, etc.</i>) or public, federal, state, or local employment agencies, to find a vacancy | 3. Referrals Asking colleagues about employees they might know of, at other workplaces |
| 4. Colleagues Asking friends about job vacancies where they work | 4. Drop-Ins with Proof In an interview, initiated by the job-hunter, asking for proof of what the job-hunter can do |
| 5. Referrals Asking friends about job vacancies they may know of, at other workplaces | 5. Contacts Using a friend or business colleague for a direct introduction to prospective employees |
| 6. Contacts Using a friend or business colleague for a direct introduction to employers (specifically, the person-who-has-the-power-to-hire-you-for-the-job-you-want) | 6. Agencies Using an agency—private (<i>executive search firms, college placement offices, etc.</i>) or public, federal, state, or local employment agencies, to list a vacancy |
| 7. Drop-Ins with Proof In an interview, initiated by the job-hunter, showing proof of what that job-hunter can do | 7. Ads Placing an ad in a newspaper, or posting it on the Internet |
| 8. Inside the Company Getting inside a company as a temp worker, short-term contract worker, volunteer, or whatever, and hoping you will eventually be "hired from within" because you are already working there | 8. Resumes Reading resumes, in order to decide who to invite in, for an interview |

"Two Different Worlds, We Live in Two Different Worlds . . ."

The job-hunt is a strange world. *Two* different worlds, in fact—that of the employer, and that of the job-hunter. To illustrate:

You want it to be a hiring game; but the employer regards it as an elimination game—until the very last phase.

You want the employer to at least acknowledge receipt of your resume; but the employer feels too inundated and understaffed to find time to do that.

You want your resume to be *all that gets weighed*; but the employer studies your whole job-hunting behavior to get clues as to what kind of employee you would be.

You want the employer to be taking initiative toward you; but the employer prefers that it be you who takes the initiative. For example, some employers have time to go looking for your resume on the Internet when they have a vacancy, but most don't. If you haven't posted your resume right on their site, where they can find it with a minimum expenditure of energy, you're dead.

You want the employer to tell you all about their organization *during* the upcoming hoped-for interview; but the employer wants you to do an impressive amount of research on them *before* you ever come in for an interview. They expect you to know what the organization does, what its product or services are, its history, its challenges (*or the whole industry's challenges*), etc.

Final Notes on How Employers Hunt for Job-Hunters

The way employers absolutely prefer that you approach them is through a mutual friend. This is called "through contacts" or "through networking." They want someone to vouch for you, before they decide to give you some of their precious time.

Next preferred method: they want to get some impression of you, most likely through your resume or (if you have one—artists do) your portfolio.

If you're going to work for someone else, as nine out of every ten job-hunters intend, then you need to pay large attention to this chapter, and how employers go hunting. You need to use contacts and networking. Because employers are the ones who, in this case, determine the rules of the game.