

Earn a Higher Salary in Four Easy Steps

Excerpted and adapted from a 2007 *Forward* article by Sarah Peden, Assoc. AIA, LEED AP

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SUMMARY

The job search can become even more stressful when the issue of salary options comes up. This is not a time to sit back and relax, however. It is time to research, market yourself, and negotiate.

Negotiations involve not only salary amounts but also the possibilities of paid time off, travel expenses, or bonuses.

WHY NEGOTIATE?

You found the perfect job, nailed the interview, and finally a formal offer arrives with *your* name on it—the moment you have eagerly been waiting for! You open it up and skip past the part in which they tell you just how excited they are to have you join the team and go directly to the salary offer—and you're shocked. It's lower than what you dreamt of, lower than you hoped for, even lower than you think you deserve. At this point, you have two choices: accept the offer or negotiate for a better one. I hope you choose to negotiate. In fact, I think you should negotiate even if you are *happy* with the offer.

Negotiating the salary for your first job out of school is vitally important, as is it to negotiate each time you change jobs. Why, you ask? According to a study of graduates from a master's degree program at Carnegie Mellon, those who negotiated raised their salary by 7.4 percent on average—equal to an additional \$4,000 in the first year alone. If you don't negotiate your first salary, you stand to lose more than \$500,000 in earned income over the course of your lifetime. Studies also have shown that you can raise your lifetime earned income by nearly \$1 million if you negotiate each job offer throughout your career. While I understand that asking for more money can be uncomfortable, I think you can handle a little discomfort for half a million dollars.

HOW TO MAKE IT WORK

How do you negotiate successfully? Here are a few steps to help you start earning more.

Step 1: Understand that the company making the offer expects you to negotiate. Their offer is likely

to be on the low end of what they would consider paying you. Standard business practices dictate that they make an offer, you counteroffer, and they either accept your offer or there is another round of discussions.

Step 2: Know your worth. You cannot negotiate until you know what the starting point should be. Ask others what the range or average salary is in their offices. The AIA publishes a compensation report every three years, most recently in 2005. You can get this report from the Institute, and many AIA chapters also carry the report. Use this number as your base.

Step 3: Determine which unique skills and experiences make you worth more than the average employee. Are you a great designer? Do you have strong visual or verbal presentation skills? Do you know special computer programs? Be able to articulate these skills clearly and succinctly while discussing what extra value you will bring to your new office. Don't be afraid to brag a little bit—this is an appropriate forum.

Step 4: Take a deep breath and tell your prospective employer that while the prospect of working for them is exciting, you would like to discuss the salary portion of the offer. Check out CareerBuilder.com for some helpful articles on how to do this gracefully and keep it a win-win situation for all parties.

CRUNCHING THE NUMBERS

My favorite tip for a successful salary negotiation is to take the amount of the salary increase you want (say, \$3,000), divide it by 12, and round it up to the nearest clean number (\$50 or \$100). In our example you would be seeking \$300 more per month, for a total annual increase of \$3,600. When you discuss the salary increase with your prospective employer, say that you are looking for an additional \$300 a month instead of mentioning the larger-sounding \$3,000 a year. Your employer hears the relatively small sum of \$300, and you end up getting \$600 more than you originally were looking for.

Sometimes an employer cannot raise your salary, but other options are open for negotiation. Consider asking for more paid time off or for reimbursement of tuition or your fees for the Intern Development Program or the Architectural Registration Exam. If you are already in a job you enjoy, these tips also work when you are asking for a raise.

Remember: Focus your negotiations on what matters most to *you*, be it an increased salary, larger bonuses, or more time to sit on a tropical beach.

About the Contributor

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RESOURCES

More Best Practices

The following AIA Best Practices provide additional information related to this topic:

- 03.01.01 Tips for a Successful Job Interview
- 03.02.01 Mentoring Interns: A Firm Commitment
- 07.03.01 Definition of Architect Positions

For More Information on This Topic

See also “Recruiting and Hiring,” by Laurie Dreyer-Hadley and Kathleen C. Maurel, Assoc. AIA, *The Architect’s Handbook of Professional Practice*, 13th edition, Chapter 9, page 229.



See also the 14th edition of the *Handbook*, which can be ordered from the AIA Bookstore by calling 800-242-3837 (option 4) or by email at bookstore@aia.org.



Key Terms

- Practice
- Employment
- Personnel management
- Recruiting and hiring

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