

SHOULD YOU NEGOTIATE SALARY OVER THE PHONE DURING A PHONE INTERVIEW?



A good phone interviewer will eventually ask you about your [salary history and expectations](#). **You must be prepared for these questions.** When I conduct phone interviews, I'm trying to discern whether compensation requirements might become a barrier to accepting my offer at the end of the process. **Hiring managers trust me to screen you out** if it looks like a waste of their time. If I waste the hiring manager's time too often, I lose credibility or get fired.

Common Phone Interview Negotiation Mistakes

Don't ask about salary or benefits during the phone screen. This is premature and will tell the interviewer you're primarily focused on these issues. You want the phone interviewer to believe you're most interested in a proper match. If the subject comes up at all, the phone interviewer will bring up. **Under no circumstances should you initiate a conversation about pay or benefits!** The appropriate time to bring this up is after you've received an offer.

Don't refuse to answer questions about your salary history or expectations. I don't care which negotiating seminar you've just come out of, or which book you just read. If you say, "I don't see how what I make now has a bearing on what I'm worth in the market," you're just going to irritate me. When candidates tell me this, I push back hard and tell them "It's fine if you don't want to give me that information, but please understand that I can't show your resume to my hiring manager until I have that information." The conversation will effectively end right there.

Don't lie! Never, never, ever lie! Even if you get away with it now, if the company ever discovers the lie, they can and will fire you. A lapse of integrity here can seriously cost you your career. Can you imagine losing your job because you lied on your application and having to explain that in future interviews? Don't do it. Your integrity must be without mark or blemish, or your career is dead.

"What's Your Compensation History?"

"*What's your current salary?*" or "*Tell me about your compensation history,*" are two questions that are sure to come up. You must be prepared to answer these questions while positioning yourself for the largest end-game offer.

If you think the job you're interviewing for might pay more than your current position, try to puff up your compensation as much as possible. Don't lie. Instead, be sure to recognize all parts of your compensation plan that add value. Be sure to include the value of stock options, bonuses, 401-K match, vehicle allowances, etc. Be sure to mention special perks or benefits you have that you suspect the new company doesn't offer.

Say something like, "My compensation is in the neighborhood of \$85,000 and includes a base salary, incentive package, and a great matching 401-K. I also receive three weeks of vacation time here, and I understand your company may only offer two weeks to start." A good interviewer will ask you to spell out the components, so be ready for that.

As an alternative strategy, if the interviewer doesn't ask you for all the facts, give him what he asks for and hold back something as leverage during the final negotiation. Pull out that extra week of vacation time in exchange for a slightly higher salary or signing bonus. Don't try to deceive anyone, but hold it back if you reasonably can. You don't want your recruiter to think that you're being shiftily in the endgame.

If you really want the job but are afraid that your current compensation will make you look overcompensated, dumb down your compensation a bit. Don't lie. Tell them just the base salary and leave out all the perks and bonuses unless pressed. Consultants who are paid a large premium for extensive travel often face this problem when they want to get off the road. Their high total cash compensation will scare interviewers. If this is you, assure your interviewer you're aware there's a pay difference, and you're willing to consider all the options.

"What's Your Pay Expectation?"

Do some research before your first phone interview negotiation. **Find out what you're worth.** You probably have some idea, but when you're asked "*What's your pay expectation?*" you can intelligently answer: "According to my research, a reasonable expectation is between about \$X and \$Y."

Be as vague as possible in the phone screen negotiation, and allow yourself lots of room for maneuver. Be realistic about your needs. You want to help the recruiter find middle ground between your minimum needs, the market, and any restriction the company may be facing (unknown to you).

If you're pressed for a specific answer, most recruiters will respect an answer like this: "I'm not comfortable giving you a specific number at this early stage because I don't really know enough about the job, the work environment, or what you'd be asking me to do yet. At this point, I think I can give you a range, but I'd hope to narrow that down as we get farther along in the process. Does the range I mentioned overlap well with what you were thinking?"

Finally, be realistic about your minimum expectation. Don't give a range if you're really unwilling to accept the bottom number under some circumstances.