

TALKING YOUR WAY OUT OF A TIGHT SALARY SPOT



Summary: Learn how to talk yourself out of a tight salary spot in the interview process with a potential employer and maximize your potential salary.

Question: I had a first-stage interview for a position that I am well-qualified for. The interviewer concluded with a description of the selection process and the competition for the position. She followed up by immediately asking me what my compensation expectations were in general. I stated that I would have to consider several other items before commenting, then said that I had been directing my attention to positions in a certain numerical range that I stated. Have I painted myself into a corner?

– Dan, location not provided

Dan: You have painted yourself into a corner but you can paint yourself out if given the chance. Conduct a little review before you put the finishing touches on your masterwork.

Ideally, you would have ended your response to the interviewer's compensation question with your beautifully worded initial response, "I would have to consider several other items before commenting." STOP. Let her respond, probably with a question back to you about what those other items might be. You then could have followed up by referring to the need to consider the full salary/benefits package. Finally, ask a question intended to encourage the interviewer to suggest a range that would fit the position and the potential assets you would bring to the organization.

The idea is to hold off on [revealing your salary expectations](#) until you have an offer, at which time you will be in a much more strategic position for negotiation. The second-best scenario is to gain a clue about the employer's salary offering so that you can suggest a salary within your range and at the top of theirs.

Fast forward – you have prematurely revealed your salary range. The worst-case scenario is that you have screened yourself out due to an unrealistically high stated figure. But on the other side of the continuum, you may have boxed yourself into a lower salary than you could have negotiated for.

Your goal at this point is to stay in the game. Write or call to reinforce your interest and the value you bring to the position. Once you win an offer, start the conversation anew with the same suggested strategy, reaffirming your interest, seeking details about the employer's expectations while negotiating for the highest possible amount that reflects its range and your best interests.