

HOLD SALARY CARDS CLOSE TO THE VEST

Summary: Find out how you should respond to potential employers' salary inquiries.



Question: What should I do when I am asked what my salary expectations are when applying for a job? Is responding by saying they are "flexible" or "negotiable" appropriate, or is it seen by the employer/recruiter as evasive? Should I just simply "name my price" and hope that I haven't overpriced or underpriced myself?

—Joe, Chicago

Joe: "Negotiable" is indeed an appropriate response, although, yes, some employers may deem it evasive. When applying, particularly in writing, the initial information is used by employers to screen out candidates. At this early stage of the game, your salary truly is negotiable. You don't have enough information to make a thoughtful decision about your expectations.

Until you discover the details of the position with all of its opportunities and drawbacks, along with an understanding of the full benefits package, you really aren't in a position to name your price. So resist the temptation to blurt out any amount early on. Once you put it out there, it is hard to renegotiate. If you are out of the company's range on the high end, you may never get the interview that would allow you to make a convincing and compelling case for your candidacy. If you come in low, trying to negotiate up becomes an awkward, backpedaling routine.

Beyond indicating that your requirements are negotiable on applications, you can continue to keep the door open in the interview by meeting an interviewer's question with a follow-up question: "My salary expectations would be based on consideration of the full salary and benefits package. What is the compensation level for someone with my skills and experience?" Express your interest in the position up to this point and remain upbeat, diplomatic and sincere. Dance with flexibility and negotiate with confidence when the time comes.

Special Note: Handle your relationship with recruiters differently. A trusted recruiter needs detailed information, including salary expectations, to represent you.