

“Are some things negotiable when accepting a job offer? How do you go about negotiations without jeopardizing your job offer?”

Paige Skelton, Pharm.D.
PGY2 Cardiology Pharmacy Resident
Abbott Northwestern Hospital | Minneapolis Heart Institute
Minneapolis, MN

The dramatic changes in the health care landscape during the past few years make this an extremely valid and timely question. In today’s economic climate, not everything that may have once been “negotiable” is still up for discussion. That being said, all is not lost for the prospective employee. Once an offer is made, here are a few items that may indeed be negotiable.

Start dates are usually situation-specific and thus negotiable. Candidates should not underestimate the need for some time off after a particularly grueling residency, fellowship, or cross-country move. If candidates have the funds to postpone their start date for a few weeks to rejuvenate and get settled, they should at least ask for it. The first 6 months to 1 year in any new job are spent trying to establish an understanding of the current state of affairs: where the opportunities exist and where the new hire can best add value. New employees will be very busy proving their worth and establishing collegial relationships, which is not a small undertaking for those who are already burned out from their previous experiences.

Employers may have a so-called “probationary period” of at least 3 months from the start date, during which the new hire is not allowed paid time off. The negotiation process is the occasion for candidates to indicate whether time off will be needed for personal (family trips, weddings, etc.) or professional (meeting days, etc.) reasons during the probationary period. Even if these requested days are granted, they may still be unpaid, depending on the employer’s policy. These approved requests should be documented in writing before the prospective employee signs the official contract and/or offer letter. Candidates should ensure that these dates are approved by their future department head or boss, rather than relying solely on the human resources (HR) department to communicate the stipulations of the agreement.

Depending on the type of position and the candidate’s pursuits, there may also be negotiable funds to support educational advancement, professional travel, and research endeavors. Applicable items should be discussed during negotiations. Some employers will have certain criteria that need to be met by the new employee to qualify for said funds. For example, travel funds may be available only for those who are actively participating (presenting, committee work, etc.) at a professional meeting, instead of merely attending. If discussed ahead of time, expectations will be clear and will allow the new hire ample time to complete the necessary requirements.

Salaries may be negotiable based on years of experience as well as previous employer compensation if deviations fit within the employer’s budget. Entry-level position salaries and benefits, on the other hand, are typically set; however, it is important to pay attention to the details. Benefit information is usually available through the employer’s HR department and should be thoroughly reviewed before the candidate accepts an offer. Benefits can include health insurance (medical, dental, vision, prescriptions), retirement account(s), flexible spending accounts, life and disability insurance, and employee discount programs, to name some of the more common ones. Prospective employees should consider eligibility for themselves as well as their family (or future family) members, even if they are single without

dependents at the time of the offer. Some employers provide short-term disability (STD) insurance to cover a portion of the employee's income during illness, injury, pregnancy, and childbirth. STD insurance coverage is not something to overlook if the candidate is considering starting a family. The process for requesting vacation, holiday, and professional time off should also be well understood before accepting a position, giving the candidate an idea of the employer's scheduling flexibility, a common employee satisfier.

Potential employees may feel pressured to accept job offers without mentioning the above to avoid jeopardizing the offer. Negotiations should take place after a formal offer, at which point employers have already made their decision on candidate selection. Neglecting to address the details of the offer before accepting it can lead to future unhappiness (and increased turnover) in the workplace, negatively affecting both parties. Candidates should prioritize items of importance to them and make their priorities known. Employers should be candid and honest about which requests they can actually accommodate.

Deanna Horner, Pharm.D., BCPS
Clinical Pharmacy Manager
UnitedHealthcare, Medicare & Retirement
Pharmacy STARS
Lisle, IL