

# First

## 10 MYTHS ABOUT NEGOTIATING YOUR FIRST SALARY

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You just got your first job offer. It's an exciting and stressful time. The prospect of [negotiating your salary](#) feels especially daunting — you don't want to ruffle any feathers. So you're thinking about skipping the negotiation altogether. But negotiating your salary is extremely important, especially in your first job. Your starting salary serves as an anchor throughout your career, with raises, bonuses, and even retirement savings influenced by that initial amount. Starting too low could be a costly mistake.

Based on our decades of experience with researching negotiation; teaching negotiation to undergraduate students, graduate students, and executives; and giving negotiation workshops to participants of all ages and all over the world, we would like to debunk many of the common myths that hold people back at the negotiation table.

### **Myth #1: This is my first job — I don't have experience, so I don't have any bargaining power.**

Many first-time job seekers fail to understand that the hiring process is also very stressful on the hiring side. Employers screen dozens — often hundreds — of résumés, spend countless hours choosing applicants to interview, devote a considerable amount of time to on-site interviews, and then select an applicant to hire. By this point employers are extremely invested in the chosen candidate. So even entry-level candidates have some bargaining power.

### **Myth #2: I don't have another offer, so I can't negotiate.**

Although having an alternative offer gives you more bargaining power, of course, you can negotiate even without one. Ask (rather than demand) whether the employer can increase the offer. If the answer is no, you can still gracefully accept.

### **Myth #3: The offer is more than what I was expecting, so there's no need to negotiate.**

If the offer is more than you expected, it probably means that you aren't well calibrated. Don't compound your mistake by not negotiating. You don't want to start a job getting paid less than others doing the same work.

### **Myth #4: I shouldn't negotiate if I'm a woman — people won't like me.**

This presumption often [holds women back from negotiating](#), and it isn't necessarily true. Of course, negotiating in an aggressive and overbearing manner is not advisable — that is true for both men and women. However, positive, cooperative, and problem-solving strategies are effective for getting a good deal and for building a positive relationship with your counterpart.

**Myth #5: The economy isn't great, so it's a bad time to negotiate.**

Despite the challenging economy during the past decade, good talent is still hard to find and valued by employers. Furthermore, most employers purposely leave some slack in the salary that they offer, anticipating a negotiation. Failing to do so leaves that extra money on the table. Plus, salary isn't the only negotiable item: Tuition reimbursement, work schedule, relocation reimbursement, and initial job assignment are some examples of additional negotiable items. Consider what matters most for your career and negotiate those issues.

**Myth #6: An online search will provide the salary data I need before the negotiation.**

While the internet is replete with great websites containing plenty of salary data, that information is often very general. You should also do some legwork using your educational and professional networks. Collect information about salaries from your educational institution and from friends and colleagues. Ask them, "What is a reasonable salary offer for this position?" rather than asking them how much they earn. And don't forget to factor in regional differences in salaries.

**Myth #7: Preparation doesn't really matter — it all boils down to how I present myself during the negotiation.**

What you do *prior* to the negotiation matters more than you think and dramatically affects your negotiation performance. Do your homework to find out what is reasonable to negotiate for, and practice the negotiation with a friend until you get it right. Also, get yourself in a confident mindset before negotiating: In our [research](#) we found that it helps to recall when you've been assertive in the past and to imagine that you are negotiating for a friend.

**Myth #8: Ask for what you want.**

No! Ask for *more* than you want. Negotiations involve some back-and-forth, not simply a yes or no. Leave yourself some wiggle room to "concede" to what you really want.

**Myth #9: If your new boss says yes immediately, go celebrate.**

Although getting an immediate yes is great for a marriage proposal, in a salary negotiation an immediate yes probably means you didn't ask for enough. [Research](#) indicates that setting a high but realistic target improves negotiation outcomes. Collect enough information ahead of time to know you aren't selling yourself short.

**Myth #10: Being told no means negotiating was a mistake.**

By negotiating, you've shown your employer that you are willing to be assertive and that you know how to negotiate — a valuable skill. You may also learn a few things during the negotiation that will be helpful for future negotiations. Use it as an opportunity to understand more about how salaries are determined and how decisions are made in your new organization.

Negotiation skills are crucial for your career success, so don't buy into these myths. If you do your homework and negotiate for what you want, you will reap significant benefits for years to come.