

WHAT TO DO BEFORE YOU ACCEPT A JOB

There's nothing better than getting offered the job you want. But no matter how psyched you are to have an offer, you should always give yourself some time to think it over - preferably a day. Spend this time figuring out if the offer truly is right for you. The following guidelines are precautionary, but they'll prevent problems from happening down the line.

Get the Offer in Writing

The written offer should spell out the important terms of the job and your obligations to the company. Even if you've already had some time to think over an offer and you've assured the company that you'll accept it, you should still ask to see the offer in writing. Make sure the job title, salary, and benefits match or improve upon what you had in mind when you said you'd accept it. If it doesn't measure up, promptly send it back and let the company know what's amiss.

You may want to find out when you will be paid, too; some companies pay every two weeks, while others pay twice a month. This will mean the difference between 24 annual paychecks and 26!

Know What You're Getting into

Be sure that you have a clear understanding of your job responsibilities. Again, you may be thinking "duh," but many people don't really know what is expected of them before they start working. We always think of the right questions to ask after the interview, so by all means ask them—before you make a serious commitment. Ask for a job description that spells out your responsibilities. This will help you understand the position and the expectations—and later on down the road, if you've exceeded the requirements for the position, it will give you some leverage with which to negotiate.

You should also try to get a sense of how the department you'll be working for fits into the company as a whole. Will you work with people from other departments? Is there room for advancement? What if you start in publicity but become interested in doing something business-related? Does there seem to be much flexibility?

If you're being offered a job to replace someone, you may want to ask what happened with the previous person. If the hiring manager doesn't answer your question or seems uneasy, there may be something the company isn't telling you. For instance, there may be interpersonal tension in the office that you should know about. Maybe the job description is misleading and led to the previous person's resignation. Are you walking into the same trap?

Know What You're after

Make sure you know what you're looking for in a job. After all, a job isn't like a date - you shouldn't just accept the offer and see what happens. Whether you see it as a way to pay the rent or consider it a fundamental step in a preordained career path, taking a job that you're unsure of is asking for trouble.

Know your skills, what you're good at, what you enjoy doing, and what you would rather never do again. Don't start believing the cunning phrases you used to spice up your cover letter, unless you really mean them. Be honest with yourself: Are you really multitask oriented? Just how keen is your eye for detail? Is this job something you can truly handle?

Make sure the description of the job appeals to you and serves your objectives - just those of the company. It may be better to temp and hold out for something better than end up in a situation you eventually regret.

Like the People

How was your rapport with your interviewers? Although every company is made up of individuals, each recruiter also serves as a representative. If any of your interviewers acted less than professional or left you feeling unnerved, you should think twice before accepting an offer—ask to meet with more people at the company before making your final decision.

You should also try to meet the people you'll be working with day to day. You may get along swell with your manager-to-be, but what if the people on your level are intensely competitive, boring, or unfriendly? Would you be able to succeed at your ideal job in a less-than-ideal company?

Get a sense not only of the individuals at the company but the office culture as a whole. Was there a buzz of energy when you walked in, or were you met with dead silence? Is it the type of environment you would be able to concentrate in? Was there personality to the office? If not, can you bear looking at white walls all day long?

Find out the Hours

Many people accept a job without knowing what kind of time commitment it will involve. Ask the employees you meet—your interviewer—how many hours a week are standard. Is overtime paid for or included in your salary? In many positions, you'll be expected to work a 48-hour week—and you should know that in advance. Otherwise, both you and the company lose when you quit after a month of training.

As for holidays, sometimes two weeks means ten days, sometimes it means fourteen. Be sure to clarify. More often than not, companies have set-in-stone policies about holiday and sick days. But if it's a start-up, you may feel comfortable asking for the 14 days you had at your last job, rather than the ten days the prospective employer is offering. Find out when you start earning holiday days. In most cases, you'll have to wait three months. If you have a wedding to go to the following month, be sure to negotiate before you accept the offer. Again, get the company's policy in writing.

The same goes for sick days. Sometimes companies allot ten days. In other companies it's more casual: You simply don't go to the office if you're absolutely too sick to work. Find out if you have personal days, too, or "floating holidays" - whether religious holidays count as personal days.

Find out the Benefits and Consider the Perks

Find out when benefits begin, and what is covered. Many plans don't cover dental or vision benefits. Other benefits to find out about include profit sharing, life insurance, health club benefits, relocation expenses, and tuition reimbursement.

Also, if you're evaluating more than one offer and feel pretty much the same about all of them, you may want to ask what the company offers in the way of additional perks. For instance, does the company pay for dinner if you work late, pay for car service home, or count overtime hours toward extra time off?

Can You See Yourself in This Picture?

Imagine what your new life will look like at this new job - commute in the morning, the neighbourhood you'll be working in, the clothes you'll have to wear. Are you excited about the job or are you simply resigning yourself to it for the time being? (Depending on your options and goals, the latter may be good enough.) In any case, you deserve to be excited about the package deal. Remember, you've already got the offer. The ball is in your court. Be gracious and polite while sizing up the opportunity, but don't walk on eggshells lest you get stuck in a rotten situation.

In evaluating job offers, take the time to make sure you're making the decision for reasons

you're comfortable with - and taking the job that you want. Keep in mind that by being up front with yourself and your potential employer, you're saving both of you time and money down the road. The more clarity you have about the situation you're getting into, the more likely you'll love what you're doing and stick to the position you've taken.