

# Job Negotiation 101: What You Need to Know

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As nutrition and dietetics students, we receive extensive training and education to prepare us to become registered dietitians. Courses on micro and macronutrients, nutrition assessment, nutrition counseling prepare us for the dietetic internship, and allow us to build an important foundation for our career. When it comes to finally securing the job we've worked so hard to prepare for, it turns out that there's still a bit more to learn. Beyond searching for career opportunities and securing interviews, we must also know how to navigate the negotiation process.

In an effort to learn more about negotiation, I've interviewed Yan Gelman. Yan is a senior HR leader with a Wharton MBA and over 2 decades of teaching experience. He has taught college level Business Ethics, Organizational Behavior and Accounting classes. He also designs and teaches Negotiation and Job Search seminars for working professionals. Through the interview, we compiled a list of the most important things applicants should know.

## **1) Everything is negotiable.**

You don't need to settle for what they have initially offered you. Think of expanding the pie, as salary is not the only part of the compensation package. It's important to consider any bonus opportunities, the health and insurance benefits, any wellness components that might be offered, and more. Aside from simply looking at salary, the other perks and options can be valuable, adding to the overall opportunity and compensation package. Additional examples of things that might be included may be childcare, flexible hours, remote work, extra vacation time, the reimbursement of home office expenses, and more. While negotiating, think of what's valuable to you personally. For example, some may value childcare benefits, while others would prefer to negotiate something else.

## **2) Do your homework.**

Gather data, research and prepare before any negotiation, and before any interview. Reach out to your network and speak to people that you know may work for the company, comparing different sources to be more informed. In addition to offering valuable input and data about the company, sometimes, as a current employee, your contacts may be able to offer you an internal referral and this can be beneficial to you in the selection process. When looking at individual salary reports or national averages, remember that the cost of living adjustment will affect the salary that a person receives. A person in San Francisco or New York City may be

paid more than someone who lives in a rural area. It is important to keep this in mind as you establish what your realistic and desired salary range may be. And if you are considering a position in another part of the country, research the area so that you can be informed about how your salary requirements may change due to the cost of living in that region.

**3) Know your BATNA and Aspiration point.**

BATNA stands for the Best Alternative To a Negotiated Agreement, and it is ultimately the point at which you would walk away from the offer, or not accept the position. Often, this is the lowest salary you are willing to accept, but it could also be related to something else that is most important to you, like the ability to have vacation time or work-life balance, etc. When negotiating, you must know what you need and are willing to accept. The Aspiration Point is the target, or your goal, and it is often a specific salary that you are aiming for. Going along with this, you need to have a basis to justify what you want and adjust your aspirations, if necessary. Another important note is that you should try to keep your BATNA and Aspiration point to yourself as the negotiation process progresses in order to maintain your ability to negotiate. Also, understand that sometimes the best decision is to walk away from an offer and look for something else.

**4) Always know your worth.**

Remember they want you, not someone else, and this is the reason why you have been offered the position. They chose you for a reason, so remember not to sell yourself short during the negotiation process. Sometimes, people may be reluctant to negotiate because it is uncomfortable or because they worry that the employer will move on to the next applicant if too much is requested. However, the employer wanted you for a reason. In most cases, an employer expects there to be some level of negotiation, and this is just part of that process. It may feel awkward and uncomfortable, but it's a small price to pay for additional benefits. As long as you are respectful and reasonable with your requests, the employer will understand. Along with knowing your worth, remember that it doesn't always matter what salary another person is making, but it does matter that you are happy with the compensation that you have agreed upon with your employer.

**5) Always ask questions.**

Throughout the entire negotiating process, you should be inquisitive. Consider asking things like, "*Have you ever considered offering an employee \_\_\_\_\_?*" or "*Have you done \_\_\_\_\_ for other candidates?*" or "*Would you consider doing \_\_\_\_\_.*" Phrasing it in a question can open up the negotiation process, allowing the employer to consider other ways in which you may come to an agreement. It helps the employer think of other things that they may be able to offer you. Compensation does not only come in the form of a salary, as we have already

discussed. Home office expenses, for example, might be uncomfortable to negotiate, but this is another way to frame it that may be better received.

**6) When applicable, consider using the “Phrase that Pays.”**

*“It’s a little less than I was expecting.”* You can say this regardless of what they offer you. You have to practice it though. Practice it on zoom or in front of a camera or mirror. Be sure to thank them for the offer first though. You may say, *“Thank you. Frankly, the offer is a little less than I thought it would be.”* Convey your mild disappointment, but also be sure to share your excitement for the role. This phrase may lead the employer to improve the offer, in an effort to avoid disappointing you.

**7) Find common ground.**

Connect with the employer and find something you can talk about, like a shared interest or commonality. It is easier to convince someone to do something for you if you connect with them and are on the same page. Try to connect with the employer throughout the process, before you reach the point where you need to negotiate or ask them for something.

**8) Suggest solutions.**

Offer ideas that are solutions, rather than simply pointing out problems. For example, you might say, *“While we are off by \$20K, could we bridge the gap by considering a sign on bonus, etc.?”* Maybe you’d be willing to accept the option to work from home, extra vacation days, tuition reimbursement, a special job title, or other benefit. Think about solutions that you can offer. This is about exchanging items of unequal value. For example, it costs your employer nothing to give you a better title, or allow you to work from home two days a week. For you, it might mean a better chance at a future promotion, prestige, or reduced commuting costs.

**9) Focus on what is important to you.**

People are motivated by different things. When negotiating, be sure to focus on the things that matter to you. Some people would love a private office area or need to have flexible hours to coincide with childcare. If a particular job title is not important to you, don’t waste time negotiating that. If you don’t care about receiving a sign on bonus but would like a higher base salary, focus on negotiating the salary. While everything is negotiable, you can’t expect to negotiate it all. Focus on and ask for the things that are important to you.

**10) Disclose information when necessary and beneficial.**

Don’t say something just for the sake of saying it, but if you think it is helpful, then consider disclosing it. For example, these could be stories about overcoming adversity. It may not be an advantage, but it could be something that they may look positively on. Or it could be sharing that you live three minutes away from the job.

This may allow you to say that if something came up, you could be at the office in five minutes to handle it. These can be positive details for a particular employer. Another example might be sharing, *“I’m not opposed to relocating,”* or *“I am not opposed to traveling, if necessary.”* These factors are not always something that would be required, but they may offer more value that can help in the negotiation process.

**11) Don’t apologize for negotiating.**

Avoid saying that you are sorry for asking for something during negotiations. And also avoid apologizing for asking for additional benefits. For example, don’t say, *“I’m sorry for asking for another thing, but I’d really like to have a paid parking permit.”* Instead, you might say, *“A parking permit, while seemingly inexpensive, would mean a great deal to me and my family.”* Don’t apologize for negotiating, or for asking for more.

**12) Know why you are asking for something.**

If you want a specific salary or other benefit, know why you want it and be able to justify it and prove your point. After research, you may be able to say the salary is within the market rate, and that based on what you have learned, this is what people are getting paid when working in similar positions. Understand that you are worth it, and be able to state that and explain it.

It is important to understand strategies for negotiation, as we are ultimately responsible for promoting ourselves and for establishing our worth. Whether a dietitian plans to work in private practice, clinical dietetics, community nutrition, education, or any other field of nutrition, negotiating compensation will be a component of the position. Roles and responsibilities will vary, and salary potential will differ depending on a number of variables, but the strength that comes from being prepared for negotiation is important for any nutrition professional, working in any industry.

For more information and career advancement tools, please visit our other articles on the Student Corner of the Michigan Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics website. The members only section of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Website also has great career resources for students and RD professionals.

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