

Interviews, Salary Negotiations, and Other Scary Employment Issues

Questions for Your Interviewer/Potential Manager or to Research on Your Own

- Why is this position open? Through growth, promotion, or attrition?
- What is Documentation's role in the company? Is it part of Development, Customer Services, Marketing? Is it centralized or distributed? What is your view of how Documentation affects the bottom line?
- What will my relationship be with Programming, Quality Assurance, Support, Marketing, Sales, Training, and so on?
- Who is involved in the design of your products? A few groups such as Marketing and Programming, or do you use a multi-disciplinary team approach?
- How are your product development efforts managed? By a professional project manager?
- What opportunities for growth exist for people in the position I'm entering? Does the company have a formal program for internal movement and promotion?
- How much interaction will I have with clients and various levels of management?
- What is the average workload for this position? (40 hours? 45? 50? More?)
- What is the potential in this position for travel?
- What is my potential in this position for developing and influencing processes and standards?
- What position is responsible for documentation production and distribution?
- What is your overall design of information sets, including use of paper, online help, PDF, Internet, wireless, and so on?
- What information development and programming tools does the company use? What if I am proficient in a tool that you do not currently use?
- What is the structure of the company? Are you locally owned? Are you private or public?
- How large is this company, in terms of revenue, offices, clients, and employees?
- What do you see as the future of the company? What are its biggest challenges and opportunities?
- Where is this company in its own market? Is it a leader? In the middle of the pack? A new player?
- What has been your career path both here and before you joined the company?
- How does the company support professional development? Does it have a budget for it? Does it offer classes? Does it support involvement in STC or other professional-development groups?
- If professional staff opinions differ from management opinions, how does the company deal with that?
- What is the work atmosphere? Is it more casual or more serious? Do you value conformity or creativity more? Are you more entrepreneurial or corporate?
- Are there other people at this company with whom I can speak to get additional perspectives?

Interviewing Companies, continued

Questions for Human Resources *(if it's not already written down)*

- What is your standard benefits package? What are the waiting periods?
- What are the employee contributions for health/dental/prescription/preventive care/vision insurance, life insurance, short- and long-term disability?
- Do you offer a 401(k) or other defined contribution plan? Do you provide matching funds? What are the vesting periods?
- Do you offer flexible spending accounts for medical and childcare expenses?
- What do you offer for vacations, holidays, sick leave, jury duty, bereavement, and/or PTO?
- What sort of severance package do you offer?
- What sort of employment contracts will I be asked to sign, including nondisclosure, noncompete, and nonsolicitation? What consideration will I be given for signing them, especially the noncompete?
- Does this position qualify for overtime or compensatory time?
- Do you offer alternative work arrangements such as flextime, telecommuting, and part-time professional?
- What are the physical attributes of my potential workspace? Natural lighting? An office vs. shared cubes vs. individual cubes?
- Do you offer finder's fees for recruiting new employees?

Salary Negotiations

General Negotiation Tips

- Remember that negotiation seeks to fulfill your interest in a manner that is fair and honorable, and leaves all parties satisfied with the results
- Remember that you are the *seller*, not the buyer (compare with buying a used car)
- Understand the possibilities of variable pay, including signing bonuses, incentives, relocation reimbursements, severance packages and tin parachutes, stock options, employee stock purchase plans, profit sharing, bonuses, and 401(k) matches
- Understand the difference between your internal and your external equity
- Note that you probably can't earn more than your boss, so make sure you work for someone with a good earning potential, and whose talents and intelligence you respect
- Recognize that your pay is for your *job*, not for *you*—"excess" skills and abilities don't matter—but see if you can apply that "excess" by broadening your job
- If you can, write your own job description, and do it well
- When seeking new employment, *never* mention a salary figure first
- When offered a salary or raise, ask "How did you arrive at that?"
- Get promises in writing!

16 Tips for Increasing Your Pay

1. Be accepting of change—change creates opportunities
2. Correctly assess your own contributions—handle weakness and communicate strength
3. Be willing to work outside your job scope and to make sacrifices
4. Use your company to heighten your skills and abilities
5. Continuously learn
6. Be willing to take calculated risks
7. Understand what your company needs and values—and deliver it
8. Be positive
9. Increase your responsibility without sacrificing your quality or focus
10. Trade fixed pay for variable pay
11. Be action oriented—follow through on ideas and suggestions
12. Work hard and long
13. Ask for advice when you need it—seek out mentors
14. Understand the different industries and disciplines pay differently
15. Document and communicate your achievements, and know how and when to ask for a raise
16. Sadly, one of the best ways to improve your salary is to get a new job—your pay is usually the most fair when you get hired—but watch out for job hopping!

Four Attributes of a Good Negotiator

1. Don't get personal—stay focused on the facts
2. Don't be affected by high-pressure tactics
3. Be both persistent and adaptive—know what you want, but be open to opportunities you haven't considered
4. Have good posture and timing—know what to say, how to say it, and when to say it—and know when to shut up

Improving Your Career

Nine Career Boosters

1. Seek out experiences that are essential for promotions
2. Shamelessly self-promote—but openly acknowledge others' part in shared achievements
3. Work for a growing company
4. Enhance your functional skill set, especially through formal training and education
5. Find a mentor or two
6. Be accountable for results—follow through on ideas and suggestions
7. Create an internal network
8. Develop cross-functional skills—but don't go overboard
9. Communicate your interests—you probably won't get that peach position if no one knows you want it

References

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