

## Wiggle Room: Why employers pay what they pay

Written by Julie Desmond  
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Is there any wiggle room in the salary? Can they go any higher on the pay? Will they bend at all on the dollar amount? Not surprisingly, people considering accepting a job offer commonly ask for “a little more.” Some people think they have to. They want to tell their friends and former colleagues about their negotiating prowess and to feel the power that seems to come with starting a new job on one’s own terms.

I’m here to tell you, no, there is no wiggle room. But that doesn’t mean you can’t negotiate. You just can’t negotiate on the pay. Here’s why.

Rewind back to before someone wrote a job offer with your name on it. Go back before your interviews. Before you applied. Before this position was posted on Career Builder or LinkedIn. Your position was just a gleam in some manager’s eye who said, this company needs someone who can (fill in your job title). Maybe someone left unexpectedly, or perhaps this is a newly created position. Either way, someone thought they needed you enough to spend time talking with others in the organization about bringing someone like you aboard.

As the idea to hire someone took hold, the question of pay range came up. If the company uses pay grades, the research was already completed and the pay range was established. If no pay grades exist, research was conducted before the job could be posted.

Where does the number come from? As of January 1, 2012, the minimum wage in MN is \$6.15 per hour for large companies (making \$625,000 or more) and \$5.25 for small organizations. So let’s start there. Remember, servers and others can be paid less than minimum wage, because they typically earn part of their income in tips. Be generous this holiday season!

Next, employers look at current wage information. Using common search engines, employers can look at what other companies are paying for similar positions. Location is always taken into consideration: you will be offered more money for the same job in New York than in Minneapolis, because the cost of living in New York is higher. Demand is another factor. If your skills are unique or hard to find, or if your position requires specific training, certifications or licensure, you will be paid accordingly.

Finally, employers look at equity within the company. They can’t pay a new cashier more than they pay his or her manager. They have to be fair and equitable across the team.

Fast forward to your job offer. When the team decided you were right for the job, a compensation analyst took a look at your story personally. He or she reviewed your education, work history and likely role in the company going forward. Do you bring unique value because you worked for a competitor or because you are a former Veteran? The number on your offer letter is not random. It is fair. Accept it.

And then move on to negotiate where you can: vacation days, work-related expenses, flexible schedules... these are areas where a manager might be able to wiggle. Good luck!

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