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## **It's the Sum that Matters: Weighing All Aspects of an Employment Offer**

After several months of looking for a new position, you've received a job offer with a prestigious law firm. Congratulations! The hardest part of your job search is behind you. But before you accept, you need to size up the offer to ensure it meets your personal, professional and financial needs.

Although salary is always a central consideration, it's important to evaluate other elements of the offer which are equally important from a job satisfaction standpoint. Your best opportunity to adjust any aspects of the offer is *before* you accept it. Here are some points to weigh before you say yes:

### **What is the culture like?**

The role of organizational culture in job satisfaction is often underestimated, but culture can be even more of a factor than compensation in how well you like your new position. Unfortunately, it can be difficult to assess a law firm's culture before accepting a job. If you can, talk to current and former employees to get their perspectives on what it's really like to work for the firm.

In addition, ask questions during the interview and negotiation stage about issues such as management style and philosophy, work/life balance and office environment that may yield insights into the employer's culture. Make sure you're comfortable with what you find out. To be satisfied and truly excel in your new position, the culture should be a match with your values and personality.

### **How will your lifestyle be affected?**

Elation over receiving a job offer, especially one that promises a higher salary, can cause you to overlook the realities of taking a new job, such as how your everyday life may have to change to accept the position. For example, if the new job requires 10-hour days and you now work eight-hour days, your routine – and possibly that of others, such as family members – might be disrupted. Even with a higher salary, is the increase enough to compensate for the lifestyle changes you'll have to make?

Consider also the location of the new job. Is it more or less convenient for you? The physical environment of a new office is another factor. If you're moving from a small firm where you had your own office and a window with a view, can you adjust to

working in a crowded cubicle under fluorescent lights? It's important not to minimize the lifestyle changes you may need to make to accept a new job. If you do, you could find yourself in the unfortunate position of loving your job but hating the sacrifices it requires, and this could ultimately lead to job dissatisfaction.

### **Can you grow in the position?**

Although the position you've been offered seems right for you now, does it present potential for career and salary growth? Will the employer pay for you to attend professional conferences and training seminars to keep your knowledge and skills up to date?

You'll also want to find out how the position you're considering might change and expand in the coming years. If it's the top administrative role at a law firm and the salary you've been offered is at the upper end of the pay range, how might you advance your career? Inquiring about the firm's long-term strategic plans can help you learn more about the position's future potential. For example, you might ask whether the firm plans to add more lawyers or expand its areas of specialty. Or, maybe additional offices are planned, or possibly a merger or acquisition? Although nothing is guaranteed, your efforts to understand the prospective employer's goals can help you determine how much upside a job may have in terms of future responsibilities and pay.

### **What about non-cash benefits?**

To judge how attractive an offer really is, consider the full range and value of noncash benefits and perks. These might include vacation, personal and sick days; life or disability insurance; tuition assistance; flexible work arrangements; fitness programs or athletic club memberships; on-site childcare; paid parking and outplacement assistance.

You might find that although the proposed salary is comparable to what you're currently making, the prospective employer will bear a larger portion of health insurance costs, boosting your take-home pay. Similarly, an extra two weeks of vacation or the option to occasionally telecommute may significantly enhance the value of the offer.

Taking the components and value of the total employment package into account can also help you reach a mutually satisfying agreement. For instance, if you opt out of the firm's health insurance plan in favor of staying in your spouse's plan, you may be able to negotiate a higher salary. Or, you may be able to persuade the employer to extend additional vacation time in lieu of an extra 5 percent in pay.

Evaluating a job offer requires you to weigh numerous elements, both monetary and nonmonetary, and everyone will bring different perspectives and needs to the process. By keeping the focus on your individual priorities – personal, professional and financial – you should be able to confidently sort through the tangible and intangible aspects of an offer and determine its ultimate value to you.

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