

## **Negotiating Can Be a Bit Like Poker Know When to Hold 'Em**

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Negotiating effectively with a prospective employer is a little like winning at poker. Both necessitate that you play your cards close to the vest, maintain a poker face, know when to hold and know when to fold. Just don't take the poker/negotiating comparison too far when you enter the career casino.

Unfortunately, many job seekers do just that. Questions asked on the [Salary and Negotiation message board](#) clearly indicate that job seekers view negotiating as an adversarial game of us versus them. The best approach is to be fully prepared with reasonable salary expectations based on demonstrable experience, ability, training and education that match the job's requirements. Your ultimate goal should be to reach mutually agreeable terms that set the stage for a positive working relationship.

Nevertheless, there are steps you can take to play your cards right:

### **Deal with the Dealer**

The dealer in poker is the player who gets to decide the rules of the hand being played. In salary negotiations, the prospective employer often inherits that role. In poker, the dealer may require the players to ante up one or more chips into the pot to play. In salary negotiations, the employer may require the job seeker to ante up his salary history or requirements. If you want to stay in consideration for the job, you may have to put these chips on the table.

### **Know Your Hand**

In poker, a hand's value depends on the cards in it. The highest hand is called a royal flush, and the lowest hand has no two cards of the same value. In salary negotiations, if you have unique skills or experience, highly valued training or highly specialized education, you may be up in the royal flush range. Or you may have very little to offer, except the willingness to learn and work hard. You need to know what's in your salary-negotiating hand and what it will likely be worth to the employer.

### **Bluff at Your Own Risk**

In poker, bluffing occurs when a player raises a bet on a weak hand, forcing out players with stronger hands. As in poker, bluffing is a dangerous tactic in salary negotiation. For instance, lying about previous salary in an attempt to bluff the prospective employer into a higher offer may get you tossed from the table.

### **Raise on a Strong Hand**

When playing poker, a player may either call by matching the amount already bet or raise by adding extra chips. The player also has the option to fold by throwing his hand face down. In

salary negotiations, the job seeker can call the job offer by accepting it, raise the bet by proposing a higher counteroffer or fold by opting not to further pursue the job prospect. How aggressively the job seeker plays at this point depends largely on how badly he needs or wants the job, whether he's currently employed and his qualifications. The job seeker who is currently employed has a much stronger hand to play than someone who's out of work.

### **Call Your Salary Range**

In poker, it's often a good strategy to at least stay in the game and call the last bet when you know you have a solid hand. If the other players lose confidence in the strength of the hand they're holding, they may fold and you'll come out the winner. In salary negotiations, holding your salary requirements within the range you've established, especially if you and the prospective employer know you're a good match for the job, can often be a successful strategy.

### **Fold in the Face of Reality**

Even the best poker players don't win every hand. In salary negotiations, if you know your skills, abilities, training, education or experience aren't an ideal match for the job or you're going after a job that 50 other equally qualified candidates are seeking, you may not have much room to negotiate salary, especially if you need a job. Simply accepting the offer on the table may be the best bet.