“Y ou’re hired!” Welcome words anytime, especially after a long job search. As the economy rebounds, many nonprofit organizations plan to add jobs, according to the 2015 Nonprofit Employment Practices Survey™ results produced by Nonprofit HR. And the news gets better: Salaries are on the rise, along with increased benefits for those jobs. Nonprofit organizations are even reporting growing competition for qualified candidates, according to Pamela Cook, ACFRE, founder of Pamela Cook Development Search (www.pamelacook.com), based in San Rafael, Calif. “Organizations often have to pay more to replace departing development staff because of strong competition for individuals with development expertise,” she says.

Another trend, which started decades ago, sees women benefiting from stronger salary-negotiating skills, as some finally break through the glass ceiling and lift others with them. Even so, studies show that women, in general, are still more reluctant than men to talk about money.

“A recruiter’s intuition can pick up on the candidate’s subtle hesitation or the smile that doesn’t reach the eyes,” explains Karen Halseth, co-founder of What Truly Matters (www.whattrulymatters.com), a Santa Rosa, Calif.-based consulting firm that helps integrate spirit and business.

“That’s important information that can determine whether a candidate will be a satisfied employee—or not. Those clues help recruiters determine if this is someone who isn’t asking for what she truly wants and is just making the situation work. If so, right from the first day on the job, there’s an undercurrent of energy of ‘I’m doing more than I thought I would at this salary’ or ‘I hadn’t expected to work this many hours.’ Very soon, this can affect job performance, and it becomes clear that she wasn’t happy from the beginning.”

For those seeking executive positions, the anguish of salary negotiations can be mitigated by executive search firms that handle all deliberations with prospective organizations. “A search firm sometimes acts as an intermediary for applicants as well as clients,” says Margaret Holman, founder of Holman Consulting in New York City (www.holmanconsulting.com). “That way, a lot more women, in particular, are getting better salaries, and they are staying longer on the job because they got what they wanted in the first place.”

However, what about the majority of applicants who have to steer solo through the maze of salary negotiations? Consider the following nine ways to ensure the paycheck and payback are as big as possible.

1. Ask for what you need. Who doesn’t remember covering over that little white box on the application demanding salary requirements? How much is “too much”? Will your answer risk elimination? Will your figure in the box end the possibility for negotiations later on? Holman allays these fears with a simple, honest approach: Offer a salary range. “This is the same advice I give to executive directors and others when they ask for a gift but don’t know if $75,000 or $100,000 is the right amount. Just give a range,” she says. “You can’t leave it blank—your application will go straight to the round file. Just fill the darn thing out. Often, they value qualifications over salary, figuring they can negotiate with the candidate.” (This advice also applies to employees who are remaining in their position but feel they deserve a higher salary.)

Others grapple with a problem unique to today’s work environment: What they deserve, based on years past, may
no longer be realistic in the current job market. In other words, qualified individuals in the unemployed workforce who once earned a sizable salary may find their value does not match today’s marketplace. Applicants need to look at the salary range in their area of the country—what others are pulling in with the same qualifications—so their salary requirements are not ridiculously high or low. Either extreme can backfire.

“Most people will put a lower amount on the application, thinking they won’t be considered for the position otherwise. But that isn’t true based on the way we interview and hire,” Halseth explains. “Recently, we were off $35,000 in the salary range with a candidate I was excited about. She was firm, and I knew we were about at our max. I was able to go up $5,000, and we created a huge bonus program—which I believe she’s going to achieve—to get her additional pay. I let her know we were perfect for her, and she was perfect for us. I also told her that I wasn’t there to play games, to see if I could get more for less. Every person I’ve worked with through the interview process has told me, ‘Thank you for your honesty and transparency.’ That’s what we mean by spirit in business.”

2. Be clear on what you want. When candidates do not know or cannot express what they want, negotiations founder, and the mood grows increasingly uncomfortable. You need to know what you need and voice it with certainty and clarity, Halseth advises. “I had one candidate say, ‘Oh, money. You like me. I like you. We’ll be able to find a middle ground.’ I told her I heard what she was saying, but that wasn’t enough—I needed a range. She couldn’t give me one. Instead, she could have said, ‘I’m open to negotiations because of what I’ve learned about your company after meeting you and what others say about your business. I feel positive and want to work here.’ She could have backed up her answer with passion, enthusiasm and facts.”

3. Be honest. “If a potential employer asks you your current salary, do not shade the truth. Be honest,” Cook says. “It’s too easy for salaries to be verified. Being caught in a clear untruth is usually the kiss of death in the evaluation process. Do not offer your salary requirements until you are asked, but once you are, be honest.”

For example, if your salary at a previous job was low, deal with that issue head on. Explain that it was during the recent recession or that you started at that job early in your career. “If the job you’re coming from offered no raises for five years or salaries were below market,” Holman advises, “tell the recruiter that you loved where you were working, that you did a great job, but that you’re now worth a lot more.”

4. Stay flexible. Get creative about ways to meet your salary requirements, such as performance bonuses or scheduled increases. “Think about all the options, and perhaps negotiate a salary bump in six months,” Holman adds. “If you really want the job and you seem to fit well within the organization, be flexible.”

5. Consider more than money. Salary is always an important consideration, but, according to Cook, it is rarely No. 1. She finds candidates are most concerned about their potential fit and need to explore such questions as:
   - Am I excited about the mission?
   - Can I work effectively with my future supervisor?
   - Are the expectations for the job in line with reality?
   - Is there a culture of philanthropy? How involved are board members, volunteers and other staff?
   - Does the travel schedule fit my current lifestyle?
   - Will I be spending my time doing the kind of fund-raising in which I am most interested and skilled?

“If a candidate believes the job is potentially a good fit but the salary level is not possible,” Cook explains, “some organizations may be willing to negotiate areas such as flexible hours and telecommuting.”

And remember Halseth’s candidate whose salary needs were off by $35,000? During their discussions, Halseth learned that the candidate had always wanted to attend an international convention. As it happened, the client Halseth was recruiting for founded that convention, so she was able to economically include five days at the convention in the salary package offered to the candidate. “Sometimes, an additional week of vacation or other perks appropriate to your industry can also make the difference,” she adds.

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However, if after considering all those options you still feel you cannot work within the proposed salary, Cook advises taking a pass on that job. “Building a stable job history in development is important,” she says. “It’s better to wait for a job that fits your needs than to take one that you believe you will leave when a more highly compensated position comes along.”

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6. Do your homework. Cook cautions applicants to do their research on the organization and its past salaries before they apply. “One common mistake is to ask for more than the organization’s capacity,” she says. “You can check its 990 to see if the salaries for the previous incumbent or other senior staff are listed. Some organizations, particularly in higher education, may list their salaries on their websites.”

7. Practice. From candidates trying to break in with minimal experience to those who have had the same job for 10 years, the key to success is practicing for the interview and developing your salary-negotiation skills. “In fundraising, the questions today are different,” Holman says. “Interviewees need to know all sorts of stories, facts and figures, such as how involved they’ve been in an ask or other on-the-job metrics. Applicants at all levels need to practice so they can deliver convincing answers.”

8. Make a counteroffer. Do not be afraid to counteroffer. Studies show that half of all candidates accept the first offer they receive. Instead, be prepared with a counteroffer that includes realistic perks, benefits and dollar amounts. If you are negotiating with a reputable organization, this will not jeopardize your candidacy—and may get you the job and salary you want.

9. Get the offer in writing. Be sure to get the offer in writing before accepting it. Cook advises to carefully review benefits, salary, title, vacation, relocation, start date, retirement and any other possible terms of employment that you have discussed, and make sure that you and the employer are in agreement. “For most employers, it’s acceptable to ask for a few days to consider the written offer before accepting it,” she explains. “Provide a specific time when you will get back to the potential employer with your answer.”

Once the salary is settled and employees arrive on their first day, the real work is just beginning. Many organizations have an introductory or probationary period, often 90 days, to see if candidates were the right choice. However, that is just half the equation, according to Halseth. “Those 90 days aren’t just about whether the candidates work out for the company. They’re also about whether the company works for the candidates,” she explains. “The latter is often missing, with the prevailing attitude: ‘Go do your job so I don’t have to worry about that empty seat anymore.’ But progressive organizations understand they need to invest in new hires so they stay on the job and bring all their talent with them. They know there’s nothing more valuable than new eyes coming into an organization.”

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**Resources**

- [2015 AFP Compensation and Benefits Study](www.afpnet.org/2015SalarySurvey)
- [2015 AFP Compensation and Benefits Study mini-reports by position](www.afpnet.org/2015SalarySurveyOrder)
- **Five Minutes to a Higher Salary: Over 60 Brilliant Salary Negotiation Scripts for Getting More by Lewis C. Lin** (2015), paperback and Kindle, 276 pages
- **Salary Negotiation: 30+ Helpful Tips On How To Handle Questions About Salary by Pamela Voss** (2015), paperback and Kindle, 28 pages