VOLUME 03 · SALARY & NEGOTIATION

# Negotiate Like You've Done It Before

A born-global playbook for getting offers up — anchoring, counters, and what to do when the recruiter says 'this is final'.


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# 01 Introduction

> *The first offer is almost never the best offer. The room above it is the difference between accepting your worth and absorbing the cost of asking.*

Most candidates accept the first offer. They are exhausted, relieved, often broke, and afraid that any pushback will lose them the role. Recruiters know this. They also know that almost every offer has 5-15% of room above the opening number.

This guide is the playbook for closing that gap. It works at every seniority level, in every market that runs formal hiring (which is almost all of them, with regional twists noted at the back). The disciplines are universal; the cultural calibration around them is regional.

# 01 Why first offers come in low

It's structural, not personal.

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The recruiter is not trying to cheat you. Two structural pressures explain almost every below-band first offer.

**The internal salary band.** Every formal employer has bands by role and grade. The recruiter is given a range and asked to come in at the lower end. They are measured on cost per hire. Their bonus depends on staying inside the budget.

**The anchoring effect.** Whoever names the first number sets the reference point. If they open at $90K, you mentally negotiate against $90K. If they had opened at $100K, you'd mentally negotiate against $100K. The opening number costs them nothing to lower; the consequences fall on you.

This means the first offer is structurally below the band's midpoint. There is room. The question is how to access it without losing the offer.

# 02 Doing your homework before the conversation

Three sources of data, ranked by reliability.

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Before any negotiation, you need to know two numbers: the band's *likely* midpoint and your personal *walk-away* floor. Without these, you are negotiating in the dark.

Three data sources, ranked by reliability:

1. **People you know in the company or at peer firms.** The most accurate signal, but only available if you have access. One direct conversation beats ten data points from public sources.
2. **Salary transparency platforms.** Levels.fyi, Glassdoor, Comparably, Blind, Kununu (DACH), AmbitionBox (India), MyJobMag (West Africa). Self-reported, biased high, but useful for ranges.
3. **Public job postings.** Increasingly include salary bands by law (US several states, EU coming, parts of UK voluntarily). Use them.

Triangulate three sources before you commit to any number in your own head. Going into the conversation with a number that feels right but isn't supported by data leads to either lowballing yourself or overshooting and losing credibility.

# 03 The opening: who names the number first

In most markets, you're asked early. Don't panic.

Standard negotiation theory says: never name the first number. The opener loses. In practice, most recruiters ask for "salary expectations" during the first phone screen, and refusing to answer at all reads as evasive in many markets — particularly in tech in the US, in finance in London, and across most African markets.

The compromise: name a **range**, not a single number. The bottom should be slightly above the band's midpoint. The top should be ~25% above. This frames you as informed without anchoring against yourself.

Sample script (universal, works at any level):

> *"Based on the market data I've seen for [role] at firms of this size, I'd be looking at a range of $X to $Y, with the specifics depending on the full benefits package. I'm flexible if the rest of the package is strong."*

This script does three things. It demonstrates research. It anchors high-but-defensibly. It signals openness to non-cash compensation, which is where most of the actual movement happens at senior levels.

# 04 The respectful counter

Three components, eighty per cent close rate.

The offer arrives. You wanted more. Here is the script that — in my 15 years of coaching candidates through this — has the highest hit rate at junior and mid levels.

> *"Thank you so much for the offer — I'm genuinely excited about [specific thing about the role or team]. I've thought it through carefully, and based on the depth of the responsibilities you described and the market data I've seen, I'd like to ask whether there's room to bring the base up to $X. If that works, I'd accept the offer today. Either way, I'm grateful for the opportunity."*

Three things this script does:

1. **Gratitude before ask.** Defuses the recruiter's defensiveness. They don't feel personally pushed back against.
2. **Specific number, not "more".** A concrete number is much harder to ignore than "could you go higher?".
3. **Conditional acceptance.** "If that works, I'd accept today" gives the recruiter a clean win to take back to their manager.

In my experience this script gets the requested number — or close to it — about 80% of the time at junior to mid level. The 20% that doesn't, usually gets a partial movement plus a non-monetary concession.

★ **IMPORTANT**

Send the counter in writing if the offer was verbal, and verbally if the offer was in writing. The medium switch slows the conversation just enough to give the recruiter time to consult internally without it feeling adversarial.

# 05 When the recruiter says "this is final"

The base may be final. The package isn't.

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Often the base salary is genuinely fixed by HR. The rest of the package rarely is. Things that often have movement:

- **Signing bonus.** One-time, doesn't compound, easier to approve.
- **Annual leave.** An extra week is worth ~2% of base.
- **Training budget.** $500-2,000+ annual L&D allowance compounds into career capital.
- **Remote / flex days.** Real money in transport and time.
- **Title.** Senior X vs X — sets the floor for your next role.
- **Performance review timing.** 6-month vs 12-month accelerates your first raise.
- **Equity / stock options.** Especially at startups and tech-adjacent firms.
- **Start date.** Earlier or later can be worth real money depending on your situation.

Sample script after "this is final":

> *"I understand the base is fixed. Could we look at the full package? I'd be open to staying at this base if there's flexibility on [signing bonus / training budget / remote days / title]. What's possible there?"*

The recruiter usually has more authority over these line items than over the base. They want to close the deal too.

# 06 Three things never to negotiate at junior level

Asks that lose more than they gain.

Some asks are worse than no ask. At junior to mid level, avoid:

### 1. Pension / retirement contributions

Usually statutory or set firm-wide. Negotiating them flags you as inexperienced and irritates HR.

### 2. Insurance / medical cover

Same — usually firm-wide. Don't ask.

### 3. Probation period

Don't try to remove or shorten it. Probation protects both sides; asking to remove it signals you're worried about your performance.

At senior and executive level the rules change — equity acceleration on termination, severance terms, gardening-leave provisions all become legitimate negotiation points. But that's a different document for a different reader.

# 08 Regional variants

Where the universal pattern shifts by market.

## US

### United States

Most aggressive market. 5-20% room above first offer is normal. Equity at startups is genuinely negotiable. Sign-on bonuses at FAANG are routinely 25-50% of base. State-level salary disclosure laws (CA, NY, CO, WA) help with anchoring.

## UK

### United Kingdom

2-10% room above first offer at most employers. Pension match negotiable in finance and consulting. Annual leave above statutory often available. Public sector very rigid.

## DE

### Germany

Salary bands are formal and rigid. Negotiation happens on Urlaub (leave), 13th-month bonus, company car, training budget. Direct asks for base raises often fail; package asks succeed.

## AFRICA

### African markets — formal sector

Banks and telcos have rigid bands; signing bonuses and accelerated review timing are the levers. Title has more weight than in mature markets — Senior X vs X compounds heavily.

## GULF

### GCC — UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar

Tax-free base inflates apparent offer. Negotiate housing allowance, education allowance for children, return-flight provision, end-of-service gratuity. Base itself often less flexible.

## JP

### Japan

Negotiation culturally uncomfortable for many candidates. Multinationals operating locally allow 5-10% movement; domestic firms much less. Annual review cycle and bonus structure matter more than headline.

# Ready to put this into practice?

Negotiation is the highest-paid skill you'll ever learn. Five minutes of preparation pays off for the rest of your career. Practise the conversation before you have it.

### AI Career Coach

Run a negotiation roleplay with the coach. Voice or text. Surfaces points you haven't considered before the real call.

myjobconcierge.com/ai-tools/career-coaching/

### Executive Coaching

For senior offers (Director and above): 1:1 with an organisational psychologist who has negotiated dozens of executive packages.

myjobconcierge.com/ai-tools/executive-coaching/

### Country Salary Benchmarks

Real market data per role per country, updated quarterly. The data anchor for your counter.

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### Career Guides Hub

Interview prep, CV tailoring, psychometrics — every part of the funnel before the offer arrives.

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