



MAKING AN OFFER

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SIMPLE

You would think that the event of making a job offer to a prospective candidate would be an easy, logical one. In fact, you might be surprised to find that we even have to address the whole idea. Wrong! The fact is that the actual process of making an offer, once a final candidate has been identified, can be one of the strangest, riskiest parts of the hiring process. One would think it should be the simplest part of the transaction, but it can derail a smooth-running process very easily. Our sense is that at least 10% of job offers that should be made and accepted go south because the making of the offer gets botched, usually by hiring authorities. Very few hiring authorities will ever admit to messing up a perfectly good hire because they didn't give the necessary time and attention to the job offer.

Just recently, we dealt with a hiring authority who told us on a Friday that he would make an offer to our candidate the following Monday. We checked with the candidate, and the candidate was ready to take the job. By the following Wednesday, the candidate had gotten an email from the hiring authority saying that he had gotten distracted by an important project and just hadn't gotten around to getting the offer paperwork together. He stated that his intentions were to still hire the candidate and the candidate should hear from him in a day or so. Later on the next Friday afternoon, the hiring authority finally reached out to the candidate to make him an offer, only to find out that the candidate had accepted another job the day before. Our client even had the audacity to be mad at the candidate



for not, “understanding the pressure he was under.” Well, the candidate was under pressure as well. He actually accepted a position that wasn’t as good as the one our client was trying to offer, but the candidate needed to go to work and he felt he was being strung along by our client.

TIME FOR A COMMITMENT

The final step in the hiring process is making an offer. It can be traumatic for both candidate and employer. This is the time for people to make commitments. Up to this point, every interaction between candidate and employer is speculative. There is minimal risk on each person’s part. True, there has been a lot of effort on the part of both candidate and employer to interview each other, but there’s no commitment, therefore no risk, until an offer is made.

There is a final twinge of fear on the part of the employer and candidate when contemplating the possibility of an offer. Employers often become fearful that their offer will be rejected, that the candidate they’ve courted for weeks and exhaustively interviewed will refuse their offer. The candidate who has been pursuing an offer, but also evaluating the firm they are interviewing with, likewise becomes fearful. They fear that they won’t get an offer, and if they do, they’re anxious about what it might be. This step in the process is difficult for everyone.

The offer step in the hiring process should be a simple and natural progression of the interviewing process, but it gets confusing when people either lose sight of its importance or overreact to it. In fact, if the interviewing process is done correctly, the offer step should be easy.



A PRE-OFFER CONVERSATION IS A SELLING OPPORTUNITY

The most successful hiring authorities have a pre-offer conversation with a candidate. This can be a face-to-face meeting or a telephone conversation. The hiring authority explains to the candidate that he or she would like to discuss what an offer would look like and also any details about the job that haven't been discussed in the interviewing process.

If the hiring authority hasn't done it already throughout the interviewing process, this is the time that he or she should be selling the candidate on the job and the opportunity. This conversation is the candidate's opportunity to ask any questions he or she might have, but it also provides an opportunity to the hiring authority to find out the answers to any questions he or she may not have answered. It should be a friendly, calm, and open conversation.

In this conversation, the best hiring authorities get a good indication as to whether or not the candidate will accept the job. In fact, the best hiring authorities actually qualify the candidate in this conversation. They discuss every aspect of the job offer. They answer all the candidate's questions. Then, they simply ask the hard question of the candidate, "I'm ready to get together for a formal meeting to offer you the job. Can you see any reason that you wouldn't accept it?"

If for some reason the candidate hesitates or gives noncommittal answers like "Well, when I see the offer in writing, I'll know better," or "I'd have to think about it," or anything that isn't a positive like "I would accept it," then the best hiring authorities may rethink making the offer. If they get these kinds of answers, they simply ask a candidate what they're



thinking or what might stand in the way in order to find out why they are hesitant. It never hurts to be blunt and ask, “Why are you hesitating? I don’t want to make an offer unless I know it’s going to be accepted.”

It’s hard to give a blanket strategy for all things that can come up at this point of the process. The best hiring authorities are prepared for just about anything and they always have the salvation of backup candidates. They always have several other people in the queue in case their #1 candidate falters.

DOING WHAT YOU SAY YOU’RE GOING TO DO *WHEN YOU SAY YOU’RE GOING TO DO IT*

The best hiring authorities realize that it’s very important for them to do what they say they’re going to do *when they say they’re going to do it* with a candidate as they get close to an offer stage.

Candidates as well as hiring authorities are now at an emotional peak as they approach a commitment. Everyone is very sensitive. They are concerned about doing the right thing for themselves. If a hiring authority gets sloppy at this stage of the hiring process, a quality candidate gets nervous and wonders if it might be a reflection on not just the hiring authority but the company as well. Along with the incident we mentioned above, we have experienced many other situations that caused our candidate to accept other offers or decline the offer our client gave them:

- A hiring authority told one candidate that he would have the HR department call to go over the company benefits. The hiring authority didn’t know that the *only*



person who could discuss benefits was on vacation for a week. The hiring authority put a call into the benefits person expecting to hear back from them. The candidate waited and waited and waited. She even called the hiring authority to explain that she hadn't received a call from the benefits administrator but still got nothing. Her attitude was, "If they take care of me this way before I am an employee, I can't imagine what they will do after I go to work." She turned the job down.

- Before listening to a final offer, another of our candidates asked to talk to two people who would be his peers. The hiring authority indicated that wouldn't be any problem, contacting one of the potential peers immediately and putting a call in to another one. Unfortunately, the first potential peer never got around to calling the candidate. The second one called the candidate, but about three minutes into the conversation asked the candidate if he could call him right back, explaining that he had an important call coming in. But the return call never happened. The candidate said, "I guess I'm just not that high a priority, so I'm moving on with another opportunity."
- A third candidate was told he would receive an offer letter from the corporate HR department the very next day. When it didn't come, our candidate called the hiring authority (who was traveling) to explain that he hadn't received the offer letter from the HR department.. When he didn't receive it the next day he called



the hiring authority again, leaving a voicemail, and this time even sent an email about the situation. He still heard nothing. Four days after he was supposed to get the original job offer, he finally received an offer letter from the corporate HR department. Unfortunately, the job offer described in the letter from the HR department was not at all what was discussed between the hiring authority and the candidate. By this time the candidate felt that he was being treated so poorly that he simply wrote the hiring authority an email explaining that he was removing himself from consideration.

The best hiring authorities know that the final steps in the job offer are crucial.

THE FORMAL OFFER

If the pre-offer conversation goes well, the best hiring authorities meet personally with candidates as soon as possible. They know that any candidate they want will also be wanted by others. Most importantly, the longer they put off this meeting following the pre-offer conversation, the more indecisive they appear.

We can't begin to list the number of opportunities to hire a good candidate that have been lost because the hiring authority approached the job offer as a formality, assumed the candidate was going to accept the job, and postponed the formal meeting when regular business got in the way. They assumed a done deal, prolonged the time to formally meet, made it appear that the meeting wasn't all that important, and lost the candidate. (We worked with one hiring authority who postponed the offer meeting for two weeks so she could go on vacation. Lots of love, huh?)



The best hiring authorities have a formal offer written for the candidate. When they meet to discuss the offer in detail, they assume the candidate is going to have lots of questions and have prepared answers to the questions that the candidate posed in the pre-offer phone call. The best hiring authorities allow as much time in this meeting as they need to and are patient with any questions or discussions the candidate may have. They realize how important this meeting is to both of them.

Discussing a formal offer over the phone isn't nearly as effective as meeting face-to-face. It simply doesn't provide the same emotional camaraderie and a "we care about you" feeling. If a company's HR department needs to issue the offer letter, the best hiring authorities will still meet with the candidate and discuss the offer in detail. The best hiring authorities *do not* let anyone in the company discuss the offer with the candidate except themselves. They leave nothing to chance.

Some companies have well-intentioned policies decreeing that only the HR department can make a formal job offer. This situation is usually accompanied by, "Our legal department says . . ." Well, okay but there is little warm feeling expressed when a candidate gets a call from someone in corporate HR offering them a job. Let's face it; the legal department doesn't understand your pressing need to hire someone the same way that you do. In the candidate's mind, this kind of antiseptic "we'd really love to have you" approach may rank right up there with a doctor telling a patient he needs a proctologic exam!

So the best hiring authorities, if they are working with policies like these, are aware that a good candidate isn't going to feel good about them or the company unless they provide a counterbalance by personally going out of their way to explain the reason for the



policy and helping the candidate understand that they won't be working for an insensitive, legalistic organization. The best hiring authorities communicate to a candidate that they are going to work for a warm human being who wants the best for them.

HOW MUCH TIME SHOULD THE CANDIDATE HAVE TO DECIDE?

If everything has been done correctly, 75 percent of the time the candidate will execute an offer letter and set a start date during this meeting. However, if the candidate asks, "When do I need to let you know?" it is advisable to explain to the candidate that you need to hear from them within 24 hours about their decision. Maybe under extenuating circumstances you may offer a little more time, such as if the candidate is traveling and needs to discuss it with their spouse, but 99 percent of the time the best hiring authorities tell the candidate they need to know within one day.

You should already have a feel for what the candidate is going to do. The best hiring authorities know that a decisive candidate is going to be able to decide quickly. Anything beyond 24 hours usually indicates that the candidate is going to use the offer to leverage another one, and the best hiring authorities don't seem to tolerate much of this.

If the candidate insists on more than 24 hours, the best hiring authorities explain that they can't allow that, that they have other candidates they are going to pursue. They reiterate that they need to know within 24 hours. If a candidate cannot do that, the best hiring authorities explain to the candidate that they will therefore pursue the next candidate. End of story! The candidate is either in or out. It's that simple.



By the way, if the formal offer is written after this meeting, the employer should review it to be sure that it's consistent with what was discussed. Probably 15 percent of the time, when offer letters are sent out following a formal offer discussion (especially when they are written by the HR department in some distant city), they aren't in agreement with what was discussed in the offer meeting. It's a quick and easy way to lose an excellent candidate.

SET A START DATE

The best hiring authorities set a start date as soon as possible. They know that the further out the start date is from when the offer is accepted, the more adverse things that can happen.

Smart hiring authorities never assume anything in the offer meetings. If the candidate accepts the job and sets the start date, they simply prepare themselves for that. If for some reason, the candidate turns the job down or claims that they can't decide within the 24-hour time limit, the best hiring authorities are gracious and unemotional about it. Getting upset or angry with a candidate who turns the job down is unwise. You may try to recruit the candidate again somewhere down the line. It always pays to be nice.

OH, MY! A NO SHOW!

No matter what level of position, from the CEO on down, 15 percent of the time a candidate who has accepted an offer is going to call and renege. Sometimes they will do it with grace and style long before the start date. Unfortunately, they sometimes just don't show up, giving no notice at all. (We agree that's totally pathetic!)



The best hiring authorities know this kind of thing might happen. They don't ruminates over it or get all mad about it when it happens. They realize that, as Tihar de Chardin observes, we are all "spiritual beings acting human." We are all sinners and we all do stupid stuff. In this kind of situation, smart hiring authorities are prepared for it. They aren't going to like it when it happens, but they know it might.

One of the ways they prepare themselves for this possibility is to explain to their #2 and maybe #3 candidates, "We've offered the position to another candidate and it has been accepted. It was a very close decision and you were certainly an extremely good candidate. We did what we thought was best for our organization. The new hire is supposed to start on (date). We expect everything to go well, but if, for some reason, something happens that he or she does not start, I'd like to give you a call. If we might still be a consideration for you, we can pick up the conversation again, if we need to."

The best hiring authorities hope they won't need this contingency plan. But just in case, they've prepared themselves for it. The #2 and #3 candidates may not be available should this happen, but at least you may not have to start all over if it does. We can't tell you the number of phenomenally successful employees we've placed who got hired this way.