

# leadership ladders:

STEPS TO A GREAT CAREER IN SOCIAL WORK

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## negotiating a higher salary

Congratulations! You've secured a job offer. Now you need to secure the salary that you want and deserve. For some people, negotiating a salary can be a frightening proposition; but it doesn't have to be. Think of salary negotiation as an opportunity to let your new employer know that you are talented and savvy. A good negotiation can also let the employer know how interested you are in joining, as well as making a commitment to, your new organization.

Salary negotiating is particularly important for social workers for a number of reasons. The first reason is that your initial professional salary influences subsequent wages. Social work earnings lag behind other professionals, primarily because it can take years to earn a competitive salary (NASW Center for Workforce Studies, 2010). A good first salary can help social workers "leapfrog" to better salaries more quickly. A second reason that supports salary negotiation for social workers is that the majority of social workers are women. Women are often reluctant to negotiate their salaries; this reluctance "costs women more than a half a million dollars over the course of their respective careers" (Dugan (n.d.); Fairbanks (2011).

We asked experienced social workers for their best salary negotiating advice. These tips can help you enter into a salary negotiation prepared to succeed.

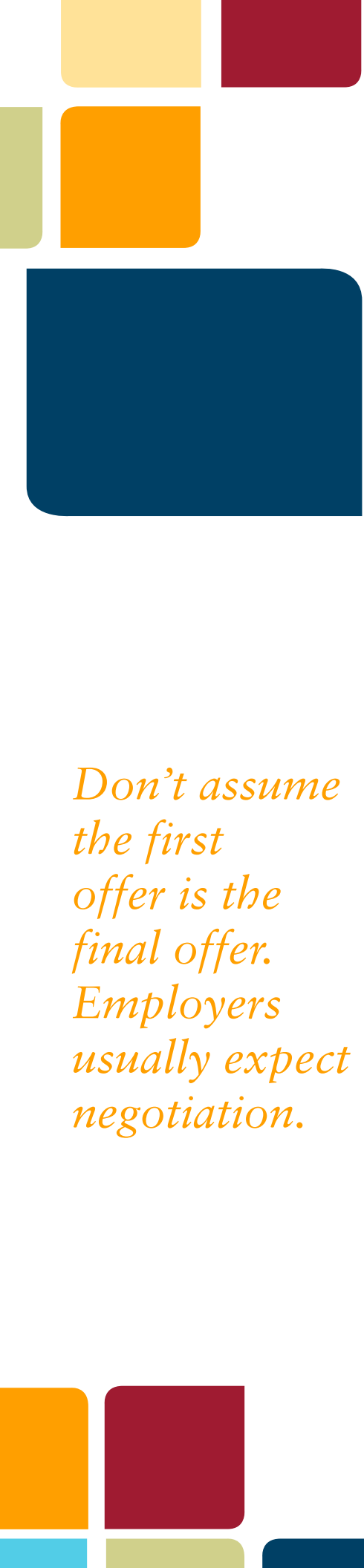
### » DO YOUR RESEARCH

It is your responsibility to understand the financial environment of the organization before your interview. Are you interviewing for a struggling local non-profit on a shoestring budget, a large, national organization, or a for-profit organization? Your salary expectations should be informed not only by the job you would be asked to perform, but also by the type of agency, their financial position, and their level of external funding.



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- › Research the organization's financial position. Use sites such as [www.guidestar.org](http://www.guidestar.org) to gather information about the organization's mission, programs, leaders, goals and accomplishments. You can also access financial documents that can give you a sense of the top salaries in the organization.
- › Use salary calculators such as [www.Glassdoor.com](http://www.Glassdoor.com), [www.Salary.com](http://www.Salary.com) and [www.PayScale.com](http://www.PayScale.com) to research comparable salaries for social workers in your geographic area and in roles, sectors, and specialty areas similar to the job you seek.

#### » EXPECT FAIR COMPENSATION

Organizations hire the people they need to accomplish their mission. Organizational leaders make decisions about the "worth" of a job or position and set salaries accordingly. As a professional social worker, you bring considerable value to the table.

- › Value your training, education and experience. Define the specific skill set you have that entitles you to a higher salary.
- › Make the case for the value of your work, not your needs.
- › Anticipate the questions that you will be asked and be prepared with thorough answers.
- › Use your credentials to demonstrate expertise in specialty areas.
- › Be confident.

#### » BE CLEAR ABOUT YOUR "BOTTOM LINE"

Before the interview, think about your financial goals and how this job helps you meet them. The work is important, but social workers may tend to focus on their "work" and not their "worth." The work may be initially satisfying, but the satisfaction will fade if you're unable to meet your financial obligations or goals.

- › Decide, in advance, on a minimum, acceptable salary.
- › Know the amount that you can live on

comfortably as well as the amount you need to feel valued as an employee.

- › Understand that this rate of compensation will drive future raises, cost of living increases, etc.
- › Be prepared to walk away if your minimum salary cannot be met. Do not sell yourself short.
- › Determine what other benefits you might be interested in, in lieu of a higher salary.

#### » ALWAYS NEGOTIATE

Don't assume the first offer is the final offer. Employers usually expect negotiation. They may actually offer a "low-ball" amount because they expect the prospective employee to reject that initial offer. Rejecting the initial offer should not be a negative exchange, but rather a starting point for the salary conversation.

- › Evaluate the first offer and negotiate as appropriate.
- › Inquire about the salary range and how the position is set to progress to the ceiling of that range. Start negotiating from the median of the range.
- › Always ask for more than you expect, to leave room for negotiation.
- › Practice negotiations with colleagues, mentors, or coaches to increase your skill and confidence in salary negotiation.
- › Invest in a salary negotiation seminar or workshop to boost your negotiating skills.
- › Realize when the employer has made their best, final offer. Further attempts to negotiate after this point can result in the job offer being rescinded.

#### » CONTEMPLATE THE ENTIRE OFFER

- › Consider the entire package, including benefits such as flexible time, health/dental benefits, paid leave, tuition reimbursement, fringe benefits, access to social work supervision and support for licensing and/or professional development.

- › Consider your expenses as part of the package, including how much you will be paying for health insurance, commuting costs, etc. These factors can affect how much money you take home in your paycheck.
- › Make sure each job you accept has the capacity to enhance your practice in skill, knowledge and/or responsibility and that the increase in duties or responsibility is proportionate to the salary increase.
- › Ask if bonus and merit opportunities exist within the organization.
- › Don't feel pressured. It is reasonable to take several days to decide if you are accepting an offer. Accepting a job is an important decision and should not be taken lightly.

## REFERENCES

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