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Salary Negotiation Playbook: Scripts That Land 10-20% More

Strong salary negotiation is rarely about charisma. It is about entering the conversation with evidence, refusing to volunteer the first number, using silence well, and negotiating the full compensation package instead of anchoring on base salary alone. This playbook gives you the preparation system and the live-conversation tactics for job offers, internal raises, promotions, and counter-offers. You will build a market-backed range from at least four sources, decide your target and walk-away points in advance, ask for more without sounding combative, handle the pause after your counter without negotiating against yourself, and confirm the final package in writing so nothing you won verbally disappears before the offer letter arrives.

1. Foundation

The first rule of compensation negotiation is simple: do not give the first number unless you absolutely have to. The employer usually knows the budget before you do, and the first person to name a number gives away information. If you anchor too low, you may lock yourself under the approved range. If you anchor too high without evidence, you may look unprepared. A better default response is, "I'd like to understand the role, scope, and total package first. What range is budgeted for this level?" That answer keeps the discussion open, shifts the burden back to the employer, and often gets you the real range faster than trying to sound decisive with incomplete data.

Preparation starts with market-rate research from multiple sources, not a single website. Use at least four. For technology roles, Levels.fyi is especially useful for level-matched compensation data. Glassdoor can help with broad company-specific salary bands. LinkedIn or Indeed job postings may reveal posted salary ranges in regulated states. The Bureau of Labor Statistics gives wide labor-market context, while recruiter conversations, professional associations, or function-specific salary guides such as Robert Half or Hays

can refine the picture. Your job is to reconcile those sources into a realistic band for your level, location, and scope. If one source says \$140,000 to \$160,000, another says \$150,000 to \$175,000, a posted range says \$145,000 to \$170,000, and a recruiter says strong candidates land near \$165,000, you now have evidence for an informed counter instead of a guess.

Silence is the most underrated negotiation tool. After you state your case and ask for a number or a higher package, stop talking. Most candidates panic in the pause and start discounting themselves: "But if that is too high, I could probably do less," or "I am flexible on the number." That self-negotiation destroys leverage. The other side often needs the silence to think, consult notes, or decide how much room they really have. If you make a counter-offer and then hold the pause for five to ten seconds, you give the employer room to respond instead of filling the space with concessions they did not ask for.

Salary is only one part of compensation. A lower base can sometimes be offset by sign-on cash, annual bonus targets, guaranteed first-year bonus minimums, equity, remote stipends, relocation support, title, severance terms, review-cycle acceleration, or extra vacation. Internal raise conversations follow the same principle: evidence first, number second, and total package awareness throughout. The strongest raise requests connect measurable business impact to a compensation adjustment, while the strongest external negotiations convert all moving pieces into annualized value so you can compare packages honestly. Verbal wins are not finished wins, either. The final safeguard is written follow-up that confirms the numbers, components, and next steps before you resign, relocate, or celebrate.

2. Step-by-Step System

1

Build your market range from at least four sources

Gather salary evidence from at least four credible sources and normalize it for level, geography, and scope. A strong mix might be Levels.fyi, Glassdoor, LinkedIn job postings with salary disclosure, and a recruiter or industry salary guide. For non-tech roles, BLS data, Robert Half, Hays, or professional-association surveys may be stronger than Levels. Ignore outliers that clearly mismatch your level. Then create three numbers: acceptable floor, realistic target, and optimistic stretch. This gives you a range anchored in data rather than emotion and helps you avoid both underpricing yourself and making a demand that is disconnected from the market you actually work in.

2

Decide your script before the first recruiter call

Write your opening responses in advance so you do not improvise under pressure. Your default script should avoid giving the first number: "I am focused on finding the right fit and would like to learn more about the scope before discussing exact compensation. What range has been approved for the role?" If the recruiter refuses to share and insists on your expectations, use a broad, evidence-based range near the upper half of your research, not your true minimum. Also decide your BATNA, or best alternative to a negotiated agreement. That could be staying in your current role, another active interview process, or simply continuing the search. Confidence is easier when you know what happens if this deal does not close.

3

Use the silence technique after every meaningful ask

When the employer makes an offer or asks what it would take to close, state your counter once, support it briefly with evidence, and stop. Example: "Based on the market data for this level, the scope we discussed, and the fact that I would be leading launch ownership, I would be comfortable at \$168,000 base. Is there room to move there?" Then be quiet. Count silently if you need to. The silence is not awkward; it is working. It forces the other side to respond to your ask rather than to the lower number you might blurt out next. This technique is equally useful in raise conversations with your manager. Ask, then wait.

4

Negotiate total compensation as a package, not as disconnected perks

If the employer says base salary is constrained, shift to package design. Ask about sign-on bonus, equity refresh, annual bonus target, early performance review, title, start date, relocation support, remote-work stipend, education budget, or extra PTO. Quantify each item in dollars or timing value so you can compare real outcomes. For example, a \$10,000 sign-on plus a six-month salary review may be stronger than a small base bump if the company truly cannot move much on base. Present counters as one coherent package rather than a random list. Employers respond better to a clear proposal than to a scattershot sequence of asks.

5

Make raise requests with evidence, not frustration

Internal negotiations are easiest when you can show expanded scope, measurable results, and market evidence at the same time. Bring a one-page summary of what you delivered, where your responsibilities grew, how your work affected revenue, cost, speed, retention, or quality, and where market compensation sits for your role. Then use direct language: "Over the past year I took on X, Y, and Z, delivered A and B outcomes, and I would like to discuss adjusting my compensation to reflect the current scope. Based on market data and results, I believe \$___ is appropriate." This is far stronger than asking for a raise because things feel expensive or because another employee seems overpaid.

6

Handle counter-offers carefully and confirm everything in writing

If an external employer's first offer is low, counter once or twice with purpose and then decide. If your current employer counters after you resign, compare more than money: trust, career path, timing of the promise, and why it took a resignation to create urgency. Counter-offers can fix pay and leave every structural issue untouched. Once you accept any package, send a short written recap summarizing base salary, bonus, equity, title, start date, review timing, and any special commitments. Ask for an updated written offer if anything changed from the original draft. Nothing is real until the document matches the conversation.

3. Key Worksheets & Checklists

Use these worksheets before the call and immediately after it. The goal is to show up with evidence, stay composed in the conversation, and leave with written clarity instead of a fuzzy memory of what was promised.

1. Negotiation Prep Worksheet

Role and level	Write the exact title, level, team scope, and location assumptions used in your market research.
Source 1	Record the range from Levels.fyi, Glassdoor, BLS, LinkedIn postings, recruiter input, or another relevant benchmark.
Source 2	Add a second independent range and note whether it is company-specific, market-wide, or recruiter-informed.
Source 3	Add a third source with any adjustments for geography or remote status.
Source 4	Add a fourth source so your target is not riding on one website's noise.
Floor / target / stretch	Write the minimum acceptable package, your true target, and the optimistic number you will anchor from if asked.
BATNA	Define what you will do if the negotiation fails: stay put, keep interviewing, or choose another offer.
Package priorities	Rank base, bonus, equity, title, flexibility, PTO, and review timing so you know what to trade.

2. Live Conversation Checklist

- Open by asking for the budgeted range instead of volunteering your desired number.
- Keep one short evidence sentence ready linking your target to market data and role scope.
- After making your ask, stay silent long enough for the employer to respond fully.
- Do not bargain against yourself by offering a lower number before the employer rejects the first one.
- If base is constrained, pivot to total compensation instead of accepting the gap immediately.
- For raise requests, bring results, expanded scope, and external market evidence in one packet.
- Ask when decisions are made and who approves exceptions so you know whether delay is real or tactical.
- Separate verbal enthusiasm from acceptance; you can be positive without saying yes on the spot.
- Send a written recap the same day if any component changed during the conversation.

3. Offer Follow-Up Tracker

Stage	What to Confirm	Written Evidence
Initial offer	Base salary, bonus target, equity, title, reporting line, and location assumptions.	Email or official offer letter
Counter sent	Your requested package and the evidence used to justify it.	Email recap or notes sent after the call
Revised package	Which items changed and which did not.	Updated draft or written recruiter confirmation
Acceptance	Start date, sign-on timing, review timing, and any one-off commitments.	Final signed offer letter
Post-acceptance	Any relocation, bonus clawback, or equity vesting details worth reviewing once more.	Stored PDF in your records folder

4. Common Mistakes

Giving the first number too early

Once you name a salary target without knowing the employer's range, you lose information and may cap the outcome below budget. Candidates often do this to seem cooperative. In reality, it is usually better to gather more context and ask the employer to reveal the range first. The more you know, the stronger your counter becomes.

Talking yourself down during the silence

Silence feels uncomfortable because most people use conversation to reduce tension. In negotiation, that instinct is expensive. If you ask for \$160,000 and then quickly add, "but I could probably make \$152,000 work," you just did the employer's job for them. Let the pause work. If they cannot move, make them say so.

Focusing only on base salary

Base matters, but total compensation decides real outcomes. Candidates who ignore sign-on cash, bonus mechanics, equity, title, review timing, and flexibility can leave substantial value on the table. A package with only a slightly higher base may still be worse overall than one with a better mix of cash, upside, and career leverage.

Trusting verbal promises without a revised document

Recruiters and managers can mean well and still forget details as the process moves. If a raise review is accelerated, a sign-on is added, or the title changes, make sure the written offer reflects it. Your future payroll department and equity system do not operate from phone-call vibes. They operate from the signed paperwork.

5. Next Steps

Before your next negotiation, rehearse three things out loud: your range summary from four sources, your deflection for salary-history or expectation questions, and your counter sentence followed by silence. Then prepare a one-page worksheet for the exact role or raise conversation in front of you. If the discussion is internal, attach measurable business results and scope growth. If it is external, map the full package into annualized value so you can compare offers honestly. After the call, send a calm written recap of what was discussed and what remains open. That follow-up does two jobs at once: it

keeps the process professional and it turns fuzzy verbal promises into something the other side must either confirm or correct.

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