

Act of Desperation: Should You Accept the First Offer?

By Cheryl Ferguson

Whether you've just been laid off, feel stuck in a dead-end job, or the local economy is in the tank, it's often tempting to take the first job offer that comes along without fully evaluating all your available options. One way to feel less fearful and more confident about making the right decision is to create a "best opportunity" checklist, assigning points or "must have" and "nice to have" requirements for your next job and then weighing the job offer against this list.

Money Matters

If you're taking the first offer that comes along because you're in dire financial straits, chances are it's not more money you need, it's a better money management strategy. People who are more financially secure are less likely to feel pressured to take the first job offer that comes along; and financial experts suggest having at least six months salary in the bank to get you through any rough times.

What If Nothing Else is Out There?

If your fear about taking the first offer is: What if nothing better comes along? Take a look at your job search efforts to date. Have you done everything possible – contacted recruiters, searched for and posted your resume on job boards, and let business colleagues and friends know that you're looking for something new – to attract all potential opportunities?

One casualty of a layoff who hadn't looked for a new job since graduating couldn't imagine finding a job more perfect for him than the one he had been in. Once he started his search he was surprised and encouraged by the number of available positions – in his specialized field – right in his own backyard. Relieved that he wouldn't have to move because he just bought a house, he expanded his search to include companies in different industries. After interviewing with three local companies in less than a month he received an offer from a company in a different industry. He turned it down even though the offer was for slightly more money than he was making at his previous job. Why? All things being equal – the position, supervisor, compensation and company culture – his first choice was to remain in the same industry. He grew more confident about his decision as companies continued to call and schedule interviews with him, including his employer of choice who had decided he was too junior for one role, but perfect for a position that would be opening up in the near future.

What If Something Better Comes Along?

If your fear about taking the first offer is: What if *something* better comes along? Pause for a moment and refer to the “must have” and “nice to have” new opportunity checklist you made at the beginning of your job search and compare it to the offer you’re considering. What’s missing? What other information do you need to have in order to make an informed, intelligent decision?

Unless you walked away from the interview thinking, “Wow, I’d really like to work with these people at this company!” then you might be settling for something that you won’t be satisfied with in the long run – and you’ll find yourself having to start the interview process all over again sooner than you think.

Evaluate Opportunities on a Case by Case Basis

Even if your back is against the wall, or you just feel that it is, consider the impact accepting the first offer will have on your future. A Vice President of Marketing moved his family across the country to accept a new position only to be laid off six months later due to a reorganization. He had two opportunities presented and offers made to him within 60 days of the layoff. Both looked promising but were not perfect. One required relocation to an area of the country that his family wasn’t wild about and came with a more junior title. Upon further investigation, the other offer, a local opportunity with an international company, would be a huge step backwards in his career in terms of money, visibility and the opportunity to make an impact.

By exploring the opportunities thoroughly, he felt confident about his decision to turn down both offers.

An often overlooked benefit of rejecting an offer is that you discover what’s really important to you. When one of the companies came back to him with an offer in a different division, a title and compensation package commensurate with his experience plus the opportunity to turn a troubled product line around, relocation, which was required for this position, became less of an issue for him.

Whatever your fear is, if fear is the motivating factor in your decision to take the first job offer that comes along, chances are you won’t make the best decision for your future; desperation will make the decision for you.

Cheryl Ferguson is the host of The Recruiter’s Studio (www.therecruiersstudio.com), a career resources website featuring web cast interviews of people talking about what they do for a living. A recruiter with both staffing industry and corporate experience, she has placed candidates with unique backgrounds – a Rhodes Scholar, a Nuclear Medicine M.D. and an Anthropologist – as well as candidates with more mainstream experience – salespeople, scientists, marketing, legal and administrative staff – at start-ups, mid-sized and established companies. Copyright 2005.