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SALARY NEGOTIATION

Get what you seek

A move into industry after a PhD may not bring immediate financial rewards, but it pays to know your strengths.

BY ERYN BROWN

Andy McLachlan had always intended for his PhD in chemistry to lead to a job in industry. His research at the University of Manchester, UK, had been funded by a pharmaceutical firm, and focused on using nuclear magnetic resonance spectroscopy to analyse the components in mixtures after chemical reactions.

But when he started his search, it took him a year to land the industry position he wanted. With a doctorate, he didn't want to do routine work, and felt deserving of a salary that was higher than the £30,000 (US\$39,000) or so that he would earn as a UK postdoc. But when the search turned up his ideal job — as a technical specialist at a scientific software company in Toronto, Canada — McLachlan took the salary offered, which was comparable to what he

would have earned as a postdoc.

“Of course, I'm worth millions in reality,” he jokes, “but it's important to understand your hand.” At the time, he says, securing the job, and recognizing the opportunities that it could lead to, mattered the most. He didn't feel comfortable negotiating a higher salary because the company knew that he needed the job. Several years later, McLachlan was able to push for a 30% higher salary with his current employer, UK-based Oxford Instruments, where he provides support for university and industry clients who use the company's nuclear magnetic resonance spectrometers.

Researchers who are transitioning from their degree or a postdoc into their first contract or permanent position outside academia are often unprepared when it comes to negotiating a compensation package. Many have spent years trying to satisfy the demands of a dissertation

committee, but have thought little about how to market themselves or their research experience to a potential employer in industry. Some dislike talking about money, or don't recognize where they have leverage.

Although there's no single best way to negotiate a wage packet, career advisers and experienced job seekers say that a few key principles can help junior researchers to secure the optimal package for a non-academic position. It's important for candidates to create, and stick to, a strategy, know the appropriate salary range, consider benefits beyond salary and remain confident about their value as an employee.

MAKE A STRATEGY

Three years ago, cell biologist Juan Gabriel Giarrizzo thought that he could walk into any company in his discipline and command a high salary, but he's learnt otherwise. Giarrizzo, who works for informatics consulting firm LabAnswer in Sugar Land, Texas, soon realized after several interviews with different employers that his starting salary would be akin to the pay he might have received as a postdoc. He put his unrealistic expectations aside and accepted a job.

But he also began thinking strategically about how he could increase his responsibilities, and his pay, in the future. He used LabAnswer's internal review process, which includes self-evaluations, to document the work he was doing, to set concrete goals and to demonstrate when he had accomplished those goals.

He learnt to articulate clearly how his work benefited clients, and how it affected LabAnswer's bottom line. And he carefully considered when and how he would ask for a pay rise. “Go in when you can show something tangible and sustainable that illustrates ‘This is what I've done, and my target salary is this,’” he says. The preparation has paid off for Giarrizzo, who, after two reviews, now earns a salary that he thinks matches his current level of experience and responsibilities.

Lauren Celano, co-founder and chief executive of Propel Careers in Cambridge, Massachusetts, encourages job candidates to be judicious. Candidates who have questions about pay should never just blurt them out during an interview, says Celano, who provides advice to people with PhDs seeking private-sector jobs. Instead, she says, they should e-mail or call the company's human-resources department to set up another time to talk. It's best, she adds, to prepare a few non-salary-related questions, so that the conversation isn't only about money. ▶

► Candidates should write down what is most important to them, including money and other benefits, and be prepared with counter-proposals if a request is rejected. It's also crucial to keep a level head during negotiations. She has seen job offers pulled when applicants are inflexible or angry.

Negotiators should always have a realistic, carefully conceived idea of what they want, or need, to earn. "You have to come through that door with a figure in mind," Giarrizzo says.

The problem, says business executive Joanne Kamens, who advises scientists on their career, is that many early-career scientists leap into the job-search process without first doing the legwork on potential pay. "Any information you can get helps," says Kamens, who is executive director of the non-profit plasmid bank Addgene in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Kamens says that jobseekers often fail to seek out surveys or other resources that track pay (see 'Know what you should earn'). They also shy away from networking and making contacts in their field who could share insights. "You have to know people well enough for them to tell you what they make," she advises. Make connections long before a specific job is in one's sights, she adds.

Understanding what a job is likely to pay is empowering for nervous or timid jobseekers who might not have the gumption to ask for what they deserve, adds Celano. "Some say, I'm a postdoc and I make \$45,000. I'd be happy with \$50,000," she says. "I tell them, OK, but you should know what's standard."

Another detail to keep in mind, Celano adds, is that compensation isn't only base pay. Some companies throw in bonuses or offer other perks such as stock incentives. For some, additional income is not as important as attending more conferences or getting the title that they want. "PhDs aren't used to the non-salary sorts of compensation," Celano says. "My first piece of advice is, always look at the whole package."

Earlier in his career, before McLachlan joined Oxford Instruments, he accepted a better title at his then-employer instead of pushing for a pay rise or searching for a better-paid job because his priorities were to continue working at home in Manchester and to maintain control over his schedule. "Child number two was on the horizon, and stability was necessary," he says.

Kamens, who has a PhD in genetics, says that she has often bargained for extra holiday time instead of salary bumps.

Jobseekers with a PhD often need to unlearn some habits from academia, suggests Carole Chapin, a consultant with the start-up Adoc Metis in Strasbourg, France, which works on human-resources policies for research careers. Many may need to train themselves to focus on the bottom line: a hiring committee doesn't need the nuanced discussion of experimental results that a dissertation panel might want. "You'll be in competition with people who are focused on completion," Chapin says. "In interviews it's better to be assertive and say, 'Yes, I have these skills, I finished a PhD and I defended it.'"

Similarly, she says, PhDs and postdocs need to present themselves as professionals with relevant work experience, rather than as candidates who have just emerged from training. "Translate your research skills into a vocabulary that would be understandable for industry," Chapin says. "Talk about project management, communication and operational skills."

Giarrizzo touts his coding expertise, a skill that he argues many PhDs have. Victor de Graaff, who has a computer-science PhD and works as a freelance data scientist for ING Bank in Amsterdam, says that he always promotes his PhD experience when seeking a new assignment and negotiating terms. That he earned a doctorate shows that he's goal oriented and works well independently, he says. "You don't get the PhD if you don't work hard," he says. "If a company doesn't see the added value of the PhD, I don't want to work for them."

Honesty, says McLachlan, is another quality of science PhDs that helps in salary negotiations. In science, he says, "you're dealing in facts". By the same token, employers respect honesty. He negotiated a higher salary when he joined Oxford Industries by explaining in a letter why he deserved higher pay.

In many nations, including the United Kingdom and the United States, the topic of salary is usually off the table at the first interview. But, says Kamens, by the time the subject does come up, the company really wants the candidate — this, in turn, provides the potential employee with some leverage to bargain. Candidates may not get everything they want, but they also shouldn't avoid finding out what the employer is willing to pay. "It never hurts to ask," she says. "If someone offers you \$90,000, and you say, 'I want \$100,000,' they may give you \$94,000. Or they may say no, but they won't rescind the offer. And if they do, that would be weird. It's a lot of work to find a good person."

But negotiation doesn't always work. Although asking for a 10% bump over an initial offer is generally reasonable, Celano says that she has noticed a trend for companies to start with their best offer and delay salary-increase discussions until the candidate has started work. In that case, she encourages candidates to ask for a performance review in six months instead of in a year. This still allows for an increase in annual compensation if the new employee performs well.

In some nations, however, even that option isn't available. "In Japanese culture, we don't negotiate," says Toshiyuki Misu at the Global Career Design Center at Hiroshima University, who studies the careers of people with PhDs. "People just want to be hired, and they're afraid that, by negotiating, they won't get hired. They prefer to get employed first and not worry about the conditions," he says. Even in countries where negotiations are more accepted, some say that discussing salary is taboo. "With Brits, people don't talk about salaries; it's the height of bad manners," says McLachlan. De Graaff, who has spent some time in the United States, says that Americans seem much more comfortable talking about money than do his European colleagues.

But sometimes, negotiation while in a role doesn't lead anywhere, and that may mean it's time to leave. McLachlan's previous employer had started giving him less interesting work, and more of it, with no promise of a rise. "It was up to me to make myself fit into something that didn't seem to exist, or move on," he says. In the end, everything worked out just as it should have, McLachlan says. "I love my job. I get to travel, I get to meet lots of people," he says. "I'm solving problems, I'm doing cool stuff. It's not megabucks, but I'm really proud of it. If it went south tomorrow I wouldn't regret a thing." ■

Eryn Brown is a freelance writer in Los Angeles, California.

NEGOTIATING A PACKAGE

Know what you should earn

To negotiate the appropriate wage packet in industry, you need to know what others in your field earn. Networking helps, but salary information is also available online. Here are some options.

- Government and university resources. Some nations, such as Japan, publish salary information (go.nature.com/2spgole). Lauren Celano of Propel Careers in Cambridge, Massachusetts, recommends finding out whether your university publishes a salary book in which alumni report what they earn. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, publishes its salary surveys at go.nature.com/2rrkvsq.

- Professional societies. Look for salary surveys conducted by professional organizations such as the American Chemical Society (go.nature.com/2qh3n7h) and the Association of University Technology Managers (go.nature.com/2qjns4u).

- Career sites. Science publications, such as *Nature* (go.nature.com/2sjtvhz) and *New Scientist* (go.nature.com/2qmrve) publish salary surveys. And applicants in many countries can peruse job listings on career sites such as Glassdoor (www.glassdoor.com), or sign up with salary information sites such as PayScale (www.payscale.com) or Salary.com (www.salary.com). **E.B.**