

When Offer Comes, Time To Move?

By Amy Lindgren

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A reader asks about tips for evaluating a job offer. What a welcome letter when the job news has been so bleak! It's great to be reminded that job searches do eventually turn into new jobs.

In this case, the offer is for a position in the Midwest, for a reader whose home is in Pennsylvania. Accepting will mean a relocation, and possibly a loss on a home sale. What should she consider?

We'll start with the relocation issue. Generally this doesn't come out of the blue, except in cases of mergers and buyouts when a current employer changes location. More commonly, a candidate knows when applying that the new work would be elsewhere. Hence, much of the plus/minus seesaw of the situation has already been mulled over.

Now there's an offer, however, and a real timetable and a better understanding of the job itself. When considering a relocation, candidates need to be aware that they are looking at two new environments: the workplace and the community. Financial questions also abound. Will the move pay off? If not, how long will it take to recover financially?

Assuming the family issues are resolved — school districts and housing, for example — much of this question hinges on the perceived viability of the company and the job itself. When there is no relocation to consider, you know you could always quit if you've made a mistake. Of course you can still do that from a new location but the stakes are so much higher if you are now stuck in a new community with no connections.

That risk is one reason many workers choose a slow transition. In these cases, they may leave one spouse behind with the kids while the re-employed spouse checks things out in the new job. Another variation, which has become almost standard in the current housing market, has been to rent out the old home and wait to buy a new home, leaving an escape hatch open.

But not everyone is inclined to be so toe-in-the-water when it comes to a relocation, especially as this approach may complicate other parts of your life. One good tip for making this decision: Take a close look at the community you'll be joining to learn if it's the kind of place you'd feel supported should you become unemployed. Do you have family or friends there already? Is the local economy relatively strong?

And of course, try to build something into the offer to reflect the risk you're taking. Relocation costs borne by the employer would be a starting point, as well as a severance package agreed to in advance should things not work out.

As far as the other aspects of an offer, here are some questions to put to yourself.

1. How do I feel about the offer itself? Is the pay what I need/want? Are the perks enticing? Do the hours and location make a reasonable fit with my lifestyle?

2. How do I feel about the job? Is this part of my career plan, or a detour? Will I have an opportunity to grow? Suppose I leave in a few years — will I be well-positioned for the next thing?

3. What about my co-workers and customers? Are these people I want to spend all day with?

4. Is the company relatively strong? What's their reputation for dealing with their workers when things get tough? Where are they positioned in their market niche? Does it feel like a company that is well-managed?

5. How about the industry? Is this a field I want to be part of? Do I want to go where it is heading?

6. What is my gut telling me? If you feel uneasy about the job but don't have concrete reasons, such as a low salary, try these tie-breaker questions:

If I take this job, what's the worst that could happen? The best? If the worst happened, could I survive it? If I missed the opportunity for the best-case scenario, how sorry would I be?

A final tie-breaker, especially suited for the current market: "If not this, what?" If you have no better options, and no reason to think better offers are coming around the corner, the one in front of you might start looking pretty good. As long as your answers to the above questions aren't dire, why not jump in?

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