

## Q&A Column

Author: Mark Swartz, MBA, M.Ed.

**Email Subject Line: Dealing With The "Salary Expectation" Question.**

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**Headline : How To Describe Your Salary Expectations**

### Summary:

Lots of times when I'm on interviews, or even when answering job ads, I'm asked to talk about my salary expectations. I don't feel very comfortable doing this because I'm afraid of either locking myself in to a figure that's too low, or else getting screened out if I'm too high. Is it o.k. to use a range instead of a fixed number?

F. Arcana, Halifax, Nova Scotia

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**Dear Mark,**

Lots of times when I'm on interviews, or even when answering job ads, I'm asked to talk about my salary expectations. I don't feel very comfortable doing this because I'm afraid of either locking myself in to a figure that's too low, or else getting screened out if I'm too high. Is it o.k. to use a range instead of a fixed number?

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**Dear Salary Ranger,**

Talking about salary expectations can be dicey proposition. You want to get yourself the best compensation package possible, while making sure you don't:

- scare off employers by appearing too pricey
- put yourself in a bind by underselling yourself (which you'll likely regret later)
- appear to be either uncertain at one extreme, or cocky on the other

Here are some things you can do to prepare for this delicate part of the job hunt. First, try to find out what equivalent positions in similar companies are paying. Talking to recruiters who specialize in your field, networking with the appropriate trade association or consulting online salary databases like the one provided by Human Resources Development Canada's Labour Market Information site ([http://lmi-imt.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/standard.asp?ppid=43&lcode=E&prov=&gaid=&occ=&search\\_key=1&pre\\_sel\\_criteria=0](http://lmi-imt.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/standard.asp?ppid=43&lcode=E&prov=&gaid=&occ=&search_key=1&pre_sel_criteria=0)) are good starting points.

Knowledge really is power when it comes to compensation issues. The more you know about what an employer already pays its people, the better armed you are to stake your claim. Also, remember that salary is just one portion of the total compensation package. See if you can also learn about the types of benefits and perks—like vacation entitlements, pension plans and medical insurance—you might reasonably expect.

When you are first asked about what you're expecting to be paid, it may be wise to try and postpone getting pinned down until later in the interview process. That's because the more an employer becomes interested in you, the more inclined they may be to show some flexibility on things like pay and perks. You might respond initially with something non-committal, such as "It will depend on the exact nature of the role and the responsibilities involved."

If that doesn't fly and you're pressed for specifics, or if you're replying to a job ad that demands you state your expectations upfront, you might want to go with a reasonable range instead of an exact figure. For instance, if you were earning \$45,000 a year in your previous job, and you are hoping for a little boost, you might say that you're looking for "somewhere in the range of the high forties to low fifties."

Providing a range gives you room to manoeuvre later on, while reducing your chances of appearing rigid or of being overpriced. In the end you'll decide how low you're actually willing to go. But for now the name of the game is staying in the race.



*Mark Swartz, MBA, M.Ed., is a [speaker](#), [career coach](#) and [author](#). He can be reached via his website, [www.careeractivist.com](http://www.careeractivist.com). The above article may contain material not included in the edited version.*

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