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Negotiate Your Salary Without Dread

In one week, walk into a salary conversation with a number, the evidence behind it, and a prepared answer for every reply you might get.

7-day guide · 5 chapters · Self-Directed Learning Framework

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ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide was built with the Self-Directed Learning Framework (SDLF): every chapter gives you a short starting action, the one idea you actually need, a fully worked example, a checklist, and exercises using your own situation — no filler, no re-reading required.

Important: this is career negotiation, not financial advice. It doesn't tell you what number to accept or what you can afford — those depend on your own circumstances, and anything involving debt, tax or contracts deserves qualified advice. Employment law also differs by country; check what your local rules require employers to disclose.

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CHAPTER 1 OF 5 · DAY 1–2 · 30 MIN

Finding Your Number, and Why a Range Beats a Wish

> **Outcome:** "I have a target number and a walk-away number, both based on data rather than hope."

Micro-start (under 12 minutes)

Write down the number you'd be pleased with, before doing any research at all. Keep it. At the end of this chapter you'll compare it with what the market data says, and the gap between them is itself the lesson.

The minimum you need to know

You need three numbers, not one: a **target** (what you'll ask for, anchored near the top of the market range), a **floor** (what you'd accept without resentment), and a **walk-away** (below which you decline, or stay put). Three sources actually help: published salary surveys for your country and sector, job ads for comparable roles that state a range, and people doing the job — asked as a range question ("does a role like this usually land between X and Y?"), which people answer far more readily than a direct question about their own pay.

Worked example: a support lead in a mid-sized city

Three ads for comparable roles state 42–52k, 45–55k, and "up to 58k". A published sector survey puts the median at 47k. Two conversations with people in similar roles suggest 45–55k is normal at this company size. So: market range 45–55k; target 55k, defensible because this role includes team-lead responsibility; floor 48k; walk-away 45k. The number written down before any research was 50k. An hour of research moved the ask up by five thousand and replaced a feeling with three defensible figures — which is also what makes it possible to say the number out loud without flinching.

Checklist

- ☐ Pre-research number written down for comparison
- ☐ At least three real data points gathered (ads, survey, conversations)
- ☐ Data filtered to your country, sector and company size
- ☐ Target set near the top of the observed range, with a reason
- ☐ Floor set at a number you'd accept without resentment
- ☐ Walk-away set and written down before any conversation
- ☐ All three numbers written on one page you can see during the call

Exercises

1. Collect three comparable job ads that state a salary range.
2. Find one published survey figure for your role and location.
3. Write your target, floor and walk-away, each with the evidence beside it.

CHAPTER 2 OF 5 · DAY 3 · 30 MIN

Building the Evidence File

> **Outcome:** "I have three specific, quantified achievements ready to justify my number."

Micro-start (under 12 minutes)

Open a blank document and write down everything you've delivered in the last twelve to eighteen months — unfiltered, unquantified, in any order. You're collecting, not editing.

The minimum you need to know

A number without evidence is a wish; a number with evidence is a proposal. The strongest evidence carries a figure: money earned, money saved, time reduced, risk removed, people trained. Where no figure exists, a before-and-after description works — what was broken, what you changed, what it's like now. Three items is the right count: fewer looks thin, more sounds like pleading. Write them down in advance, because under pressure almost nobody remembers their own achievements.

Worked example: three sentences that justify the top of a range

(1) "First-reply time went from 31 hours to four within six weeks, with the same five people, after I re-triaged the queue by issue type." (2) "I onboarded and trained the last two hires; both were handling the full queue in three weeks instead of the usual six." (3) "I took over the out-of-hours rota nobody wanted and it hasn't had a gap in eleven months." Each is one sentence, specific, and verifiable. Together they take about twenty seconds to say and they are the entire justification for asking for the top of the researched range rather than the middle.

Checklist

- ☐ Unfiltered list written first, edited second
- ☐ Three items selected, no more
- ☐ Each item reduced to one sentence
- ☐ At least two items carry a real number
- ☐ Items chosen for relevance to this role, not personal pride
- ☐ Everything verifiable if questioned
- ☐ The three sentences practised aloud until they sound ordinary rather than boastful

Exercises

1. Write the unfiltered list of everything from the last 18 months.
2. Pick three and compress each into a single sentence with a number where possible.
3. Say all three out loud to someone and ask which sounded strongest.

CHAPTER 3 OF 5 · DAY 4 · 25 MIN

Who Says a Number First, and What to Say When They Ask

> **Outcome:** "I have a prepared answer to the salary-expectations question that doesn't undersell me."

Micro-start (under 12 minutes)

Say this sentence out loud five times: "Based on what I've seen for similar roles, I'm looking at the 50 to 55 range — does that fit your band?" Getting the words into your mouth before the meeting is most of the work.

The minimum you need to know

The advice that you must never name a number first is overstated. What matters is that any number you give is anchored to research and framed as a range whose bottom you would genuinely accept — never state a range whose floor you'd resent. If they ask first and you truly lack data, deflecting once is fine: "I'd rather understand the scope first — what range is budgeted for the role?" Deflecting twice reads as evasive. In many countries employers must publish or disclose a range on request, so asking for it is normal rather than aggressive.

Worked example: the same question, arriving three different ways

Recruiter on a first call — "What are you expecting?" → give the researched range with its floor at your floor: 48 to 55. Hiring manager mid-process — "Where are you on salary?" → the same range, plus one evidence sentence from Chapter 2, because now the number needs justifying rather than just stating. An application form with a mandatory single-number field → enter your target, not your floor: the field can't hold your reasoning, and whatever goes in it is treated as your opening position for the rest of the process. In all three cases the underlying range is identical, and 48 is a number you would genuinely accept.

Checklist

- ☐ Range prepared with its floor at a number you'd accept
- ☐ Range said out loud until it sounds unremarkable
- ☐ One-line deflection prepared for a first-round ask
- ☐ Decision made in advance not to deflect twice
- ☐ Evidence sentence ready to attach when a manager asks
- ☐ Single-number form fields answered with the target, not the floor
- ☐ Local disclosure rules checked before assuming you can't ask for their range

Exercises

1. Write your exact range sentence and say it aloud ten times.
2. Write your one-line deflection for a first-round recruiter call.
3. Role-play all three scenarios with someone and note where your voice wavered.

CHAPTER 4 OF 5 · DAY 5–6 · 30 MIN

Rehearsing the Three Answers You'll Actually Get

> **Outcome:** "I have a prepared response to yes, to no, and to 'not right now'."

Micro-start (under 12 minutes)

Write three boxes on a page — yes, no, not now — and give yourself two minutes per box to write your response. Pressure comes from surprise, and there are only three ways this conversation can go.

The minimum you need to know

"Yes" needs the least and gets fumbled most: say thank you, repeat the number out loud to confirm it, and ask for it in writing — and do not immediately start negotiating something else on top. "No" is a question in disguise: ask what would need to be true for the number to work, which converts a refusal into a criterion. "Not right now" is the most common answer and the most dangerous, because it feels like progress; it only becomes progress if you attach a date and a measure to it before the conversation ends.

Worked example: converting a 'not right now'

Manager: "There's no budget until the new financial year." Response: "Understood. Can we agree now what the number becomes in April, and what I'd need to have delivered by then to get it? I'd rather work toward a specific target than guess." That does three things at once: it accepts the constraint without accepting the outcome, it puts a date on the calendar, and it captures the criteria while goodwill is still high. A "not now" without a date and a number attached is simply a no wearing a friendlier expression — and six months later nobody will remember it differently to how they prefer to.

Checklist

- ☐ All three responses written out in advance
- ☐ "Yes" response limited to thanks, confirmation and a request in writing
- ☐ "No" response phrased as a question about criteria
- ☐ "Not now" response always attaches both a date and a measure
- ☐ Each response short enough to say in one breath
- ☐ All three rehearsed aloud, not just read
- ☐ Decision made in advance about what you'll do if the answer stays no

Exercises

1. Write and rehearse all three responses aloud.
2. Have someone give you a random one of the three without warning, and respond.
3. Rewrite whichever response came out worst, then rehearse it five more times.

CHAPTER 5 OF 5 · DAY 7 · 25 MIN

Getting It in Writing, and What to Do With a No

> **Outcome:** "I know how to close the conversation, and what my real options are if the answer stays no."

Micro-start (under 12 minutes)

Draft your follow-up email now, before the meeting, with blanks where the numbers go. Writing it calm beats writing it twenty minutes afterwards with your pulse still up.

The minimum you need to know

Nothing agreed verbally exists until it's written down, and the person best placed to write it is you: a short, friendly summary the same day, stating the number, the effective date, and anything else agreed. If the answer is a firm no with no path attached, there are four real options — accept and stop asking for a defined period, negotiate non-salary items that carry actual value (days, title, training budget, flexibility), set a specific review date, or start looking. What doesn't work is accepting while staying resentful: it gets noticed, and it costs you the next increase too.

Worked example: the same-day follow-up email

"Thanks for the conversation earlier. To confirm what we agreed: salary moves to 52,000 effective 1 April, reviewed again at the usual November cycle, with the team-lead responsibilities formally added to my role description. If I've misremembered any of that, just tell me and I'll correct it." Short, unemotional, and it creates the record without demanding anything new. Had the answer been a flat no, the same email would state the no plainly, note the agreed review date, and list the two criteria discussed — so that the next conversation starts from a shared document rather than from two different memories of the same meeting.

Checklist

- ☐ Follow-up email drafted before the meeting, with blanks for numbers
- ☐ Email sent the same day, while details are exact
- ☐ Number, effective date and any non-salary items all stated
- ☐ Tone kept factual — a record, not a re-negotiation
- ☐ An invitation to correct it included, so it reads as collaborative
- ☐ If the answer was no: review date and criteria captured in the same email
- ☐ Your own decision about next steps made separately, after a night's sleep

Exercises

1. Draft your follow-up email with blanks, ready to send.
2. Write the alternative version for a 'no' outcome.
3. List your four options honestly, and mark which one you'd actually take.

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