

Negotiation is key, but how do I approach it? by Mindy Fried and Tressie McMillian Cottom

If you've been following the lively discussion on the SWS list serv (and/or other sources), you know about "W", the newly minted Ph.D. in Philosophy, who was offered a tenure-track job at Nazareth College in Rochester, New York, only to have it rescinded after trying to negotiate a number of items: an increase in her starting salary, a pre-tenure sabbatical during the last half of her tenure clock, no more than two class preps per year for the first three years, and a postponement of her start date so she could complete her post-doc. These "asks" were made over an email message, which she concluded by saying, "I know that some of these might be easier to grant than others. Let me know what you think." The reply from Nazareth, which also came via email, was the [following](#):

"It was determined that on the whole these provisions indicate an interest in teaching at a research university and not at a college, like ours, that is both teaching and student centered... Thus, the institution has decided to withdraw its offer of employment to you."

The University's withdrawal sent minor shockwaves through a community of prospective applicants. Particularly during these times of increased competition and shifting labor market conditions, questions about identity and career can be angst-inducing. This SWS list serv responded. What follows is a synthesis of a debate that many found substantive enough to be compiled, shared, and archived.

When you receive a job offer in the academic job market, how do you respond when there are areas you'd like to negotiate? In the discussion on the SWS list serv, a range of issues were raised, including that the candidate's experience was influenced by gender, prestige, and the hidden curriculum of job negotiations. The listserv members offered their experience, research and advice regarding the issue. The thread was so rich and animated that we decided to summarize the exchange and archive it for future reference. The primary take-aways from this discussion are: negotiating is important, there are gendered differences in how women and men are perceived when they negotiate, and women should approach the process with confidence and information even under those conditions.

Context: How Unusual is a Rescinded Job Offer?

Members commented that having an offer rescinded is rare but not unique. It is unusual to not have ANY discussion about the offer.

A former Nazareth College professor noted the importance of understanding of the culture of the offering institution. She comments that Nazareth College is very much influenced by its former affiliation with the Roman Catholic (RC) Church, saying, "The depths of that influence would not be communicated in job interviews and can't be discerned from reading PR materials". Nonetheless, she points out that a striking number of faculty, students and staff are of Roman Catholic background, "which expresses itself in gendered ways". For example, in the 1980s, the Dean of the College insisted on hiring white men who had RC educations. This history has

influenced current practice, as she points out, “They are now part of the brick and mortar of the institution. There is no way that a job candidate could ‘suss’ it out. What you see is not what you get. My sense is that W was jettisoned for being frank in her requests and that’s linked to gender. A man might have had a very different experience”.

Research on gender and negotiating

Members pointed out that women and men are often perceived differently when they negotiate, with women viewed as aggressive, and men viewed as displaying normative behavior. Interestingly there is research that demonstrates that women are good at negotiating on behalf of others.

Should You Negotiate?

The overwhelming consensus is “yes”! Moreover, the consensus is that negotiating is too important to career goals and quality of work/life to risk not negotiating. Here are some comments:

- Some institutions see negotiating as a sign that you don't want them, but...
- It's normal to negotiate for the terms you want, though it's best to do the initial negotiation over the phone, so you and they can read tone and there are no misunderstandings.
- Negotiating is important because starting salaries impact long-term earnings. Some members said that they hoped that this discussion wouldn't lead people to NOT negotiate.
- If a place rescinds a job offer because you are negotiating, you do not want to be employed there. This may be cold comfort if this is your only job offer, and given how tight finances are for most, but have faith that something better will come along. Persistence is the key to a good job placement.

Members offer advice on how to negotiate:

- Be prepared to have some back-up plan when negotiating (meaning there is a risk, but if your negotiating points are critical, then it's worth the risk).
- Clear communication is key to negotiating; some say it's okay to communicate by email and phone. Others say it's important to have phone and/or face-to-face contact. In-person contact allows the candidate to gauge the response from the “offerers” via non-verbal cues.
- One member suggested that the Chair negotiate on your behalf. She said: “It makes no sense to not give your requirements and/or "aspirational" goals (to the Chair) for support up front. Why hide a spouse who needs employment or a sabbatical coming up you don't want to lose? I always encourage people to tell me everything they need/want up front so I can make the best pitch I can”.

Other comments:

- Ask whether there is room for negotiating.
- Find out what colleagues got at hire. It may be perceived as unreasonable by colleagues if you get what you ask for if you are hired, especially if it's perceived as better than colleague's initial offer. It's important to maintain collegial relationships.
- A verbal offer is fine VERSUS
- Get a written offer. One member commented:

“An oral offer lacks protections and is standard in other industries. Academia has made it onerous for department heads to provide a written offer and negotiate afterwards, and that offers individuals less protection in much the same way that not having standard policies about maternity leaves or part time work offers less protection particularly if all request are treated as special and individual”.

Finally, one member comments: “The Dean was frankly confused by my requests for course load reductions and such, but as soon as we got to salary, he was perked up, 'Oh! That we can do!' And met my offer”.

Resources on how to negotiate:

Stop Negotiating Like a Girl: <http://theprofessorisin.com/2014/03/07/stop-negotiating-like-a-girl/>

How to Negotiate Your Tenure Track Offer: <http://theprofessorisin.com/2014/02/28/how-to-negotiate-your-tenure-track-offer/>