How to Negotiate a Tech Offer

A practical, data-led guide to negotiating tech offers in 2026. Benchmark the number, counter with evidence, handle equity and multiple offers, and close without burning goodwill.

Most offers move. They move for people who arrive with a number, a reason and a range – not for people who ask nicely. This guide walks through the sequence that works, the language to use, and how to value the parts of the package that aren't cash.

THE SIX-STEP SEQUENCE

01. Benchmark before you speak

Never negotiate against a feeling. Pin down the P25 -> P75 range for your exact role family, level, market and company stage, and check the data is recent – comp moves fast enough that an 18-month-old number is a different market. Write down three figures: the floor you'll accept, your target, and the ask you'll open with.

02. Let them name a number first

When asked for expectations early, reply with a range grounded in the market and hand the specifics back: 'For this scope in this market I'd expect X to Y; I'm happy to work with your band.' If you must go first, open at the top of your evidenced range – the first number sets the gravity of everything after it.

03. Counter once, with evidence

One clear counter beats three vague ones. State the number, the reason (market data plus the scope you'll own), and your enthusiasm for the role in the same breath. Put it in writing so the recruiter can forward it to the hiring manager and finance without having to re-argue it for you.

04. Negotiate the whole package

Base is the compounding number, so fight for it first. Then work the rest: sign-on to cover a forfeited bonus, an equity refresh at 12 months, a written level review, start date, remote days, leave. Bundle your asks – a recruiter can approve a package once, but resents a drip feed.

05. Handle competing offers honestly

Real leverage is another live offer, disclosed factually and without threat: 'I have an offer at X; you're my preference – can you close the gap?' Never invent one. Recruiters in the same market talk, and a bluff that gets called ends the conversation.

06. Get it in writing, then stop

Once the number is agreed, confirm every component in the written offer – base, bonus target, equity units, vesting, start date, review timing. Then accept warmly and stop negotiating. Your first performance review is the next conversation, not the day after signing.

SCRIPTS YOU CAN REUSE

When asked for salary expectations early

'I'd rather anchor on the role than my history. For this scope, level and market the benchmarks I'm seeing run X to Y, so that's the range I'm working with. What band do you have approved?'

The counter

'Thank you – I want to do this job, and I'd like to get the number right. Recent benchmarks for this role and level in this market centre around X, and the scope here sits at the top of that. If you can get base to X, I'm ready to sign today.'

When base is capped

'I understand the band is fixed. Given that, could we look at a sign-on of X to bridge the gap, plus a formal level review at six months? That gets me comfortable without breaking your structure.'

With a competing offer

'I'll be straight with you: I have a written offer at X. Your team is my first choice on the work and the people. If you can get within reach of that, my decision is easy.'

VALUING EQUITY

Ask for your total shares, the total outstanding shares, the latest valuation, the vesting schedule and the exercise window. Percentage ownership tells you far more than a share count. For public companies, value RSUs at the current price and discount for vesting risk. For private companies, assume the paper value is a scenario, not a salary – and make sure the cash alone is a number you'd accept.

COMMON MISTAKES TO AVOID

- Naming a number before you've benchmarked the role
- Negotiating over the phone with no written follow-up
- Asking for one thing, then another, then another
- Treating private-company options as guaranteed cash
- Apologising for negotiating – it's a normal part of hiring
- Re-opening the number after you've accepted

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Should I share my current salary?

No. In many markets it is unlawful for an employer to ask, and everywhere it anchors the conversation to your past rather than the role's market value. Redirect to expectations: 'Based on benchmarks for this role, level and market, I'm targeting X.'

Is it risky to negotiate a tech offer?

A single, well-evidenced counter almost never costs you an offer. Offers are withdrawn over conduct – ultimatums, moving goalposts, or negotiating after acceptance – not over one polite, benchmarked ask.

How much above the offer should I counter?

Anchor on data, not a percentage. If the offer sits at the 40th percentile for that role, level and market, counter at roughly the 65th–75th and show the range you're working from. That usually lands between 5% and 20% on base.

What if the base salary is capped?

Move to the levers that sit outside the band: sign-on bonus, equity refresh, a level review at six months, extra leave, learning budget, or a remote/travel allowance. Ask which lever has the most room before you choose one.

How do I value equity in an offer?

Treat public-company RSUs as near-cash with a vesting risk, and private-company options as a lottery ticket you paid for with cash salary. Ask for total shares, total outstanding shares (so you can compute your percentage), the latest 409A or preferred price, the vesting schedule and the exercise window.

Drop your offer into the EarnWell Offer Evaluator at https://earnwell.tech/offer-evaluator and see exactly where it lands on the live market curve, with a suggested counter range and talking points you can take into the call.