

Job offer etiquette - what you need to know

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It's a little known fact that the first 48 hours after receiving an offer of employment are the most critical. A delay in responding to a job offer during this time could be viewed by employers as unprofessional, making them question their decision to hire you and leaving a less than appealing lasting impression.



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While most job hunters prepare extensively for the interview, few are equipped to efficiently deal with the step that comes next: the offer of employment. Because the fact is, employers are eager to receive a candidate's response after extending the offer. Figures show eight out of 10 employers expect candidates to accept their offers. Leaving your future employer hanging could jeopardise your relationship with them before it's even got off the ground.

First understand the employment contract

The most common reason candidates don't respond timeously is because they don't understand the employment contract being offered or aren't happy with certain conditions and are unsure how to tackle this.

If this happens, immediately contact the recruitment agency that you're working through or the hiring employer's HR manager. Ask them to explain the confusing clauses or how best to address the issues you're unhappy with.

It's not unusual to have forgotten to discuss particular employment conditions during the interview, and then to uncover these at job offer stage. It's also not unusual for employers to already cater for these conditions, but not stipulate them in the employment contract. This is true of benefits like preferential rates, secondment opportunities, study assistance and flexi-hours. Raising your concerns up front might just answer all your questions without any unnecessary awkwardness.

Understand what you're signing up for

Sometimes employers offer packages with compulsory benefits like medical aid, a pension or provident fund, and death and disability cover, or packages with no benefits at all. The benefits included in your package have a direct impact on the amount of money you take home each month, and it's important that you understand from the outset both what you're signing up for and the impact of this on your salary.

For example, if your current job doesn't provide for any benefits but your new job does, the gross salary in your new post will need to be a lot higher to cover the deductions associated with these benefits to enable you to come out with at least the same money you're currently earning. Bear this in mind during your salary negotiations.

Be aware that there could also be other exceptions or conditions on your letter of appointment. Background checks and medical tests are often pre-requisites of employment offers, so don't be caught off-guard if they are.

Finally, many candidates aren't aware that employment offers can carry an expiry date. Failing to respond before the cut-off could well cost you your dream job. Ask upfront if the offer is subject to an expiry date or if there is an expected time-frame by which to respond.

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