

Read the CIO Whitepaper

Hybrid Cloud: Start Moving from Concept to Reality. Get It Today.



Liz Ryan Contributor

I write about bringing life to work and bringing work to life.

Opinions expressed by Forbes Contributors are their own.

LEADERSHIP 2/06/2016 @ 12:02PM | 134,957 views

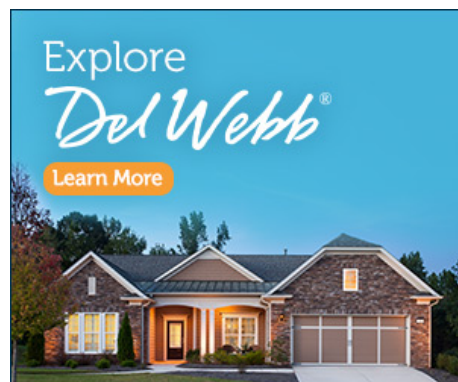
Polite Answers To Eight Shockingly Rude Salary Questions Recruiters Ask

Job-seekers are waking up to realize that they have more power and influence in the hiring process than they ever realized. They are stepping outside the scripts they've learned to use while navigating a job search, and tuning in to the fact that major aspects of the traditional hiring process we all know are hugely stacked in an employer's favor.

That's not right. It's not fair. It's not ethical and it's not good business, because good business relies on being smart.

Driving away the best candidates is not smart, and smart companies don't do it. Sadly, many people in the recruiting field have learned ugly, unprofessional and old-fashioned ways to work with candidates. Great recruiters everywhere are learning new scripts and ditching the old ones, but some recruiters are not up to that task just yet. They stick to their old script. They browbeat job-seekers about money, for instance.

They believe it is their right to ask a job-seeker — a perfect stranger — for their personal, private financial information. They think it's fine to demand a job-seeker's salary details, but why would they think so? The employer is not going to tell the job-seeker what the other employees in the department are being paid. They aren't going to tell the job candidate the sum of money that has been budgeted for this new hire, even though we all know that in the business world, everything has a budget number associated with it.



The recruiter wants to give the candidate's current and/or past salary details to the hiring manager, because that information is very useful. Once you know what a job-seeker is earning now, you can hire him or her with a small salary bump, even if your salary budget for the job opening is much bigger. Many if not most employers are used to assigning starting salaries by looking at the candidate's current compensation level and giving him or her a bump in pay to take the new job.

That's a bad process. If your budget for an open position is \$75K and you find a qualified person that you want to hire, you should pay him or her \$75K — not a lower number just because you suspect that he or she will happily take your job at the artificially-low salary level you propose. Your new hire may still be badly underpaid relative to his or her worth in the market, even with a pay increase.

Now you've hired a new person and are about to invest in training yet you have a gaping hole of vulnerability in the form of the new hire's below-market salary. Does that sound like smart business to you? Are you relying on the fact that your new hire doesn't know the market? How long will it be before he or she starts reading columns like this one? Do you want to rest your business on lies and other people's naivete?

We talk about transparency in business all the time. A great place to be transparent is in the compensation arena!

Recruiters who work for employers either as third-party partners or salaried staff members often browbeat job-seekers to get their salary details. That is an ugly, unprofessional thing to do and the hallmark of a lousy recruiter. You do not need to know what someone is earning in order to interview them and make them an offer. All you need to know is their salary target.

You need to learn that number and you also need to share the starting salary range with every candidate. It is unethical to do otherwise, but old habits die hard. Here are eight ways lousy recruiters bully job-seekers to get their private, confidential salary details.

If you are a recruiter, try the alternative scripts below to step into Recruiting with a Human Voice and get out of Bully Mode when you're working with candidates. If you are a job-seeker, use our suggested answers to these rude and unprofessional questions to set the conversation back on a human-to-human level.

Recruiter: *Thanks for taking my call. It's nice to meet you. I have a job opportunity to tell you about, but first — what's your current salary?*

Candidates, when you hear this rude opening, ask "What's the salary range? That's the best place for us to start talking about compensation." If the recruiter won't give you a range, that's a very bad sign. Every position has a budgeted starting salary range. Why stay on the phone if you know you're being lied to?

Recruiters, give up this rude question and say "I have a new job opportunity you might be interested in. It pays about \$90K – will that work for you?"

Recruiters tell me "If I give up the salary range to a candidate, I could waste time talking with someone who isn't remotely worth \$90K." That is your job, my angel. You will figure out very quickly if you're talking to someone who isn't worth the number your client has told you they will pay.

You'll know by interviewing them about the relevant subject matter. If you aren't interviewing your candidates but merely flinging their resumes into hiring managers' inboxes, there's your problem. It has nothing to do with salary information!

A person's past salary is not a good gauge of their worth. People are underpaid and overpaid in every company. If you let some other employer decide what candidates are worth and they in turn let some other employer make that determination and those guys do the same thing, then how stupid are we? We're all relying on strangers to do our jobs for us!

Recruiter: *No, I can't tell you the salary range. I don't have that information. Let's start with your current salary. What is that number?*

Candidates, don't fall for this middle-school bullying technique. Back up the truck and ask "What — you don't know the salary range for a position you're trying to fill? Here's what we can do — send me an email when you have that information." Get off the phone with someone who refuses to answer your reasonable questions (after all, they're taking up your time!) and nonetheless peppers you with their questions to answer.

Recruiters, don't ask a candidate for his or her salary details. That's simple enough. Teach your employer clients that they don't need a candidate's salary history to interview and hire a person. Our clients do it every day and everybody feels satisfied and happy, because they have replaced fear with trust in the recruiting process.

The fear that so often creeps into and overwhelms hiring pipelines is a fear of being ripped off. If you have a budget and you find a great person to fill the job within your budget, what do you care what they were getting paid before? The fearful answer is "If I pay a new hire \$70K and I later learn or suspect that she was only earning \$40K before, I'm going to feel ripped off."

That's idiotic, my pumpkin. Your fear has gotten the better of you. If the candidate is a great hire and you were smart enough to see her talent and snag her, that's a victory! Would you be happier with a less-capable new hire who was already earning \$70K in his or her last job?

Recruiter: *If you were underpaid at your last job, it's not my client's job to make up that shortfall.*

This may be the least intelligent thing a businessperson has ever said, but ill-equipped-for-their-roles recruiters say it every day. It makes no sense. Any shortfall between a candidate's market value and his or her current salary is a business opportunity.

A smart employer can and will swoop in and grab an underpaid employee and be thrilled to do it. If a person is undervalued and underpaid at his or her current job and your client is smarter than he is cheap and fearful, of course it's his job as a responsible manager to grab that person and pay them the market rate thereby snagging a great

new employee for his company. Aren't we all as managers expected to spot opportunities and jump on them?

Recruiters, stop repeating this bit of inanity and candidates, if you hear this brainless aphorism on your job search, run away from the recruiter who said it!

Recruiter: *Why do you care so much about money? There's more to life than money, you know.*

Don't you love it when people you are meeting for the first time lecture you about your life values? If you hear this insulting nonsense from a recruiter, I don't blame you if you hang up the phone. People who respect you don't talk down to you.

Recruiters, don't tell people what their priorities should be or a thunderbolt is likely to hit you at any moment for that sin.

Recruiter: *I have to know your past salaries, because it tells me what you're worth in the marketplace.*

A person's past salaries only tell you what the person was willing to accept in their paycheck at an earlier job — that's all. People take below-market jobs all the time for very good reasons. Maybe your sweetheart was in med school and you weren't pursuing your career as avidly as you are now.

Maybe you were coming off a painful divorce and wanted a job that would let you spend a lot of time with your kids, at the expense of your own maximum earning power. It doesn't matter why you took a low-salary job. That low salary is not your worth, and any sharp recruiter will know that. Don't give up your salary background — doing so could even get you eliminated from hiring pipelines when somebody decides you couldn't possibly be 'good enough' for their job!

Recruiter: *I'm your advocate here. You're being foolish. You have to trust me. Do you have problems trusting people?*

Run as fast as you can away from anyone who tells you to trust them! Trust is earned by actions, which speak louder than words.

Recruiters, if you want to earn a candidate's trust, invest the time and energy to put his or her needs ahead of your own and above all, don't tell them who to trust.

Recruiter: *I can't tell my client, the Manager who could potentially interview you, that you refuse to give me your salary details. If you won't give me the information I need, I have to drop you out of the recruiting pipeline and you'll be sorry, because you'll miss out on a great job opportunity. Can't you just tell me your salary?*

"No I can't and I actually have to get off the phone, but have a great day!"

You don't need bullies in your corner, and people who make threats are bullies.

Recruiters, learn to educate your clients. Let them know that they're making your job unnecessarily difficult and losing out on great talent for their companies by insisting on prying into job candidates' private financial details. Where else in the world, in any setting, would one person feel they are entitled to know another person's income? Only when they're applying for a loan, and in that case the request for salary details makes sense!

It's a new day. We can be professional and polite and provide better service to our clients than we did in the bad, old, candidate-bullying days!

Recruiter: *If you get a job offer, can you tell us and prove your current salary then?*

Get off the phone with the poor recruiter who can't get past the fear of being hoodwinked by a candidate who is more clever than he or she is — that person cannot help you grow your flame.

Recruiters, turn around and face your real problem, which has nothing to do with candidates and their salary histories. Your real problem is that there are so many other recruiters who do what you do, you're afraid that if you stand up and tell your clients how their obsessive need for candidates' personal information is hurting them and you, they won't use your services anymore. It is 2016, and it is time for you to face that fear. That's the only way you will grow!

Like I say in [this video](#), when you begin to speak your truth some people will run away. Some will go away and come back when they realize that not every recruiter can do the brilliant work you do. Who will believe in you if you don't believe in yourself?



Liz Ryan is the CEO and founder of Human Workplace. Follow her on [Twitter](#). Read the rest of Liz's Forbes.com [columns here](#).

RECOMMENDED BY FORBES

[The Truth About Progressive Discipline](#)

[How Junk Science Set HR Back Fifty Years](#)

[Don't Hire A 'Change Agent' -- And Don't Be One](#)

[How To Take Charge Of Your Career In 2016](#)

[The Richest Person In Every State](#)

[The Truth About Wasting Time At Work](#)

[15 High-Paying Flexible Jobs](#)

This article is available online at: <http://onforb.es/1QjUpeV>

2016 Forbes.com LLC™ All Rights Reserved