Guess what? In the past couple months alone, I’ve been approached at least four times with inquiries about my interest in opportunities outside TheLadders.

Is it crazy for me to share that information with you, publicly, on the very editorial space my employer provides me? I don’t think so; at a certain point in your career, it’s a given that folks will know your name and likely think of you when jobs open up.

In each of these cases, I gave the caller a sympathetic ear and some useful names from my address book. (Even before I joined a company dedicated to the effort, I established a solid track record as a corporate matchmaker, and colleagues know they can come to me for good leads.)

But what happens when you’re ready to get serious about other opportunities? Where’s the line between networking and job hunting, and how should you handle an offer from another company if you’re considering using it to advance your position at your current employer?

In this package, reporter Kevin Fogarty tackles those questions and comes back with a solid list of negotiation tactics that will put you in the best position without burning bridges. Interest from a potential employer should always be a good thing, if only as an ego boost and opportunity to extend your network. Be careful to observe etiquette and think a couple steps ahead, and sometimes it can also enhance your bottom line.

Offer, Counteroffer
By Matthew Rothenberg, Editor-in-Chief, TheLadders.com
How to Leverage a Job Offer to Get a Raise

SALARY

AFTER TWO YEARS OF A DEEP RECESSION that put employees at a disadvantage in the job market, it can be hard to imagine employing the sort of career strategies and tactics that were common the decade before.

Few people talk about climbing the corporate ladder and holding out for more money; instead, common wisdom has focused more on lateral moves to secure companies, accepting smaller salaries and racing to snap up job offers before someone else does.

But even in a market that favors the employer, recruiters and compensation experts say human-resources departments are anxious to keep the employees they have and often willing to go the extra mile to obtain new top talent. One tactic, leveraging a larger salary offer from a competitor, remains an effective tool to promote your career and grow your income. And as the economy improves, so too should your willingness to employ this bargaining tactic.

Many businesses are already running lean and have retained many of the individuals they consider most necessary for success or survival, said Lisa Torres, a professor of sociology who studies employer-employee relationships at George Washington University in Washington, D.C.

“Key people – the ones that have the right skills or are involved in something that is key to a company or its future – still have a lot of leverage,” said Jay Edelman, president of Top 5 Data Services, a market-research company that helps large companies structure their compensation plans. “It’s not like a couple of years ago where a lot of industries were like finance, where it’s always been assumed you could walk across the street and get another job. But the weight hasn’t all shifted to employers.”

But leveraging a competitive offer can be a tricky and potentially risky affair, said several compensation experts and recruiters. You chance offending your current employer and risking your job; meanwhile, if the new employer views you as a mercenary, it may rescind the offer. A job seeker must know when to try it and when to back off; when she’s playing a legitimate hand and when she’s bluffing.

Try the new boss first

Approaching a current boss with what amounts to a threat that you’ll leave is never comfortable, and it exerts only limited leverage because you’re already on the payroll, Edelman said.

You can get more mileage from a competitive offer when you’re negotiating to take a new job, he said. With a new hire, the authority who approves salaries and benefits has already signed off on a specific salary number and on a range by which that number could change, depending on the candidate, Edelman said.

Keeping Your Hat in the Ring

Where do you draw the line between networking to share best practices and fishing for a better offer from a competitor?

By Kevin Fogarty

WHEN IS IT NETWORKING, and when is it cheating?

If you’re employed and not looking for a job, the most likely way to get a job offer from a competitor is by networking with peers at other companies and leaders in your industry.

It’s done at conferences, formal meetings, and casual lunches and gatherings. Most employers consider it good career development and a way for employees to stay connected to the latest processes in the industry. But where do you draw the line between networking to share best practices and fishing for a better offer from a competitor?

The line probably rests on your intentions, said Clark Christensen, a senior-level executive in Coca-Cola Financial Management. Clark is a dedicated networker who advanced from consulting, auditing and accounting...
How to Leverage a Job Offer to Get a Raise

“By the time you’re negotiating, they’ve already vetted you and they have the money, and it’s a lot more likely they’ll say, ‘If it takes another $25,000 to get this person, let’s just give it to them and get on with things,'” Edelman said. “They might give it to you as a signing bonus or other one-time thing, but that’s when they’re going to be most open to those kinds of considerations.”

The key in that case is to articulate the factors that will make you happy or unhappy in a new job and use the leverage you have to structure the job in a way that will help you succeed in it, said Victoria Pynchon, who works as a mediator at ADR Services, helping other lawyers negotiate their way out of sticky conflicts.

“Being in a job where you don’t feel respected is intolerable, no matter what they pay you,” Pynchon said. “Having good associates can mean the difference between succeeding at something and keeping much longer hours to just do it adequately.”

The major drawback to this approach is that job offers of any kind are rare right now, and having two good ones simultaneously is even more uncommon.

“Is there anyone out there facing that?” Pynchon asked.

Approach your current company delicately

If you are going to use a third-party offer as leverage within your current company, start by considering how your employer will react. If you’re approaching your current employer with a competitive offer, the company’s performance and your treatment during the last 12 months should give you a clue to its response, Edelman said.

“Companies have been making a lot of changes in their compensation programs, not so much in salaries in most cases, but in smaller bonuses, higher thresholds to trigger a bonus, more limits on restricted stock options and other things,” Edelman said. “They’re putting in intelligent triggers so at certain levels you get this benefit not because you’re still here after a certain time but because the board decided they want certain kinds of performance (goals) and you’ve achieved those.”

“If you’ve been there more than a year and your compensation doesn’t show you’re on the positive side of that – more benefits, showing that the company really values you – you have to assume you’re not the highest value on the team,” Edelman said. “That doesn’t mean the company doesn’t value you; if you’re still there, it probably does. But your reception, if you go in with a competitive offer, may not be what you want.”

Prepare your demands

Before you ask a current employer or future employer to entertain a competitive offer, you should sit down and figure out what exactly you’re hoping to gain or change through negotiations.

What’s at the top of the list? “The answer to that, by the way, is never, ever, ever, ‘More money,’” Pynchon said. “More often it’s a change in the associates you work with, the kinds of projects you work on or your career path. When you make a list of things to negotiate about, don’t go in thinking about the money; list the other things first.”

See JOB OFFER Page 6
VP of Retail Operations Works Both Sides of Network

Elaine Clarke was generous about sharing leads, and her good networking deeds ultimately helped her to help herself.

By Patty Orsini

Elaine Clarke’s job search was a model of give-and-take networking. In the 10 months she spent searching for work, Clarke landed 10 successful job offers — but only two were for herself.

Clarke, a global operations executive from Salem, N.H., forwarded job leads to eight friends and colleagues in her professional network who successfully landed job offers.

The strategy to pass along job leads may feel unnatural to some, but the practice of helping first, asking second ingratiated Clarke with individuals in her network who returned the favor. They sent her leads on open positions, made introductions, and called in favors with former bosses and decision makers. It landed Clarke two leads that ultimately generated job offers and a bidding war for her services.

But the network only works when you use it correctly, Clarke warned.

“Contact every friend in your network once a month with some sort of information,” she said. “Send them a link to a Web site they might find interesting, or send them an article you just read about their company that they might be interested in. You need to stay top of mind without sounding desperate.”

It didn’t hurt that making connections through her professional network is what Clarke had been doing for the past two years.

Giving to get

After 20 years’ experience in production and sourcing operations at several retail companies, Clarke was considered an expert in organizational structure and process. In late 2006, she decided to leave her job as vice president for global operations in producing and sourcing at Mast Industries, the manufacturing arm of Limited Brands stores, to pursue consulting.

For two years she helped companies such as Land’s End to become more efficient in bringing their products to market.

She was successful enough that she was juggling multiple clients, and when one job ended, she could count on another beginning. She used LinkedIn to connect to peers and former colleagues. She used her peer network to close deals and keep clients in the pipeline, including a January 2007 meeting with a customer who ultimately wanted to hire Clarke full time. She had to decline the offer to continue freelancing.

In September 2008, she had just completed an assignment and was speaking to six different clients about work. “Three jobs were sure things; we were ready to get started, and three others were potential clients,” she recalled. “Then the bottom fell out of the industry. All six jobs went away: Some were canceled, some were put on hold. All I heard was that budgets were cut, no one wanted to spend any money.”

Clarke decided her best bet was to go back to work with an employer rather than depend on the capriciousness of the market. Of course, with retail in freefall, it wasn’t going to be easy.

“I started talking to anyone who would listen about the fact that I was looking for operations jobs,” she said. “I talked to recruiters, to hairdressers, to people in the swimming pool,” she said, laughing. “Networking is a natural thing for me. As a consultant, it was the only way to keep potential projects in the pipeline. I just stepped it up.”

She continued to use LinkedIn to build her network and added OpsLadder to make connections to recruiters. She was doing double duty: networking for her consulting business and looking to add full-time job leads to her pipeline. “It was evenings and weekends, it was a lot of e-mail and phone calls,” she said of her job search. “I had one friend tell me, ‘I’ve never seen anyone work so hard at finding a job,’ ” she recalled. “There were days when I had to completely stop and refresh my brain. A job search can become all-consuming.”

It took nearly 10 months of talking to recruiters and people in her network before she received solid job leads. In between, however, she was able to connect eight former colleagues with jobs that she had heard about in her search. She credits her network of professional colleagues with keeping her spirits up during a very difficult time in her industry.

Ultimately it was a connection she had made in 2007 — just as she began her consulting stint — that would ultimately land her an offer.
**Two offers, one dilemma**

In July 2009, it was her turn to get some good news. A colleague on LinkedIn told her about a position that sounded like it had everything she wanted, except for one thing: She would have to relocate to the Philadelphia area. “It wasn’t something I wanted to do, but it was something I could do,” she said. “I had to leave any barriers to getting a job. My daughter was off to college. My husband was willing to move. So I had to decide I was willing to do this. It was the only way I was going to find a job.”

About the same time she heard about the Philadelphia job, a recruiter had contacted her from her profile on OpsLadder about a confidential job search. Clarke had no idea who the job was with or where it was located. She spoke to the recruiter, and then … nothing.

But Clarke was busy. Within six weeks, she had interviewed three different times with a total of 22 people for the challenging position near Philadelphia. She knew the company was going to make her an offer, and she was ready to accept it and make the move.

Then the recruiter from the confidential job search called again, with good news. The president of this company, the recruiter told her, remembered Clarke from that January 2007 interview. She was with a new company, a women’s clothing retailer, and wanted to set up an interview. Even better, the job was local. She would not have to move.

Clarke was torn. She remembered her interview with that executive, and said, “I would love to work for her. But I can’t walk away from a sure thing.” She told the recruiter she would speak to the company, but they would need to make it happen within four days.

They did. The next day she had a phone meeting with the HR people. A couple of days later, she was in their offices.

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**7 Steps to Leverage a Counteroffer for a Larger Salary**

Put yourself in the best position to leverage a counteroffer and win a salary negotiation — or retreat with dignity.

By Kevin Fogarty

**LEVERAGING A COMPETITIVE OFFER** can be a tricky and potentially risky affair. Follow these steps to put yourself in the best position to leverage a competitive offer for a better deal or successfully retreat, if necessary.

**Don’t bluff**

If you’re not prepared to take the counter-offer, don’t try to leverage it to obtain a raise. Be prepared for either party to refuse to negotiate or rescind the offer.

**Act before Day 1**

Your best bet to leverage a competitive offer is during negotiations with a potential new employer. They are already in the process of approving a salary and a range for you.

**Evaluate yourself**

If you’re asking a current employer to match an offer, know whether you’re overcompensated — in terms of salary, benefits and so on — and/or overperforming.

**Consider the reaction**

At a current employer, the company’s performance and your treatment during the past 12 months should predict how they will react. And when it comes to a potential new employer, consider your treatment during the negotiation process to get a feel for their response.

**State your demands**

It’s not about the money. List everything from working conditions to staff assignments that will make you happy in the new job.

**Take it off the table**

Be prepared to give up some of your demands, which will please the other party and improve your bargaining power. Know what you’re willing to give up and what won’t abandon.

**Know when to quit**

If you can’t afford to lose the offer or you’re not truly prepared to leave, be prepared to abandon the effort if the other party declines to negotiate.
and met with 11 people. Less than a week later, she received a job offer. “And I turned it down,” she said. Feeling obligated to the first job offer, “I told them, ‘I’m not doing this to negotiate, I appreciate that you made this happen so quickly, but you knew I had this other offer, and I’m going to take it.’

“They e-mailed me that night and offered a financial package with more potential for earnings,” she said. “I was so impressed. I had never seen a company move this quickly and aggressively. At the end of the day, the financial packages were equal. The job near Philadelphia was a bigger job with more risk. But the local job is a great job and would create less disruption in my life. I went for what was right for my family.”

Clarke started her job as VP of sourcing, quality assurance and product integrity for her new company in mid-September—in New Hampshire.

Network of emotional support

Clarke’s professional network not only made the connections that ultimately landed her two job offers and a bidding war that helped her negotiate a higher salary. She also credits her network with keeping her on track.

“I had, and still have, so many colleagues in the same situation,” she said. “We all supported one another. Coaching friends helped me. We were all reading about how retail was in trouble; we didn’t feel we were in a good situation. But there was never a time when everyone was feeling down; there was always at least one person who was feeling positive, and that person would lift everyone else up. It was good to have someone saying, ‘It’s going to be OK.’ ”

“Having friends to talk to about this every day, people who understood what was happening, was really important to me. At the time, I didn’t realize how important, but now that I have been able to step away from it, I see how helpful it was to keeping my spirits up.”

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Be prepared for a conversation that may not go your way, however, and don’t invest so much of your ego in the numbers that you end up declining the offer out of spite.

Finally, don’t forget that if you’re doing well in your current position, your security might be more valuable than an incremental increase in compensation. “It’s almost always the case that you can (perform) better in a current job than a new one, anyway, so most of the time it’s smarter not to take the other offer,” Pynchon said. “But it’s hard for overachievers to say ‘no’ to another $100,000.”

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The job near Philadelphia was a bigger job with more risk. But the local job is a great job, and would create less disruption in my life. I went for what was right for my family.

— Elaine Clarke

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Career Advice from TheLadders

- [Are You Paid What You’re Worth?](#)
- [5 Ways to Negotiate Salary Requirements](#)
- [Do You Have to Reveal Your Income?](#)
- [Your Guide to Negotiating Terms of Employment](#)