

1

Finding, Interviewing for, and Getting the Job

So, you want a job in the field of Information Security. Do you have what it takes? Do you know what *you* want out of a job? How do you find the best job for you and your career? Later in the book, we review critical IT Security related topics, but in this chapter, we discuss what you want out of a job and how to find it.

Finding the perfect balance between your potential employer's needs and your own can be somewhat challenging. We discuss how to employ several different methods for locating a job. We also discuss how to compare two or more salary offers so that you can make the best decision with the information available to you. If you are lucky enough to have multiple offers to consider, you will want to review the entire compensation package when comparing opportunities.

Qualifications

A significant number of employers consider a Computer Science or Engineering degree the ideal qualification. However, a surprising number of employers will consider relevant past experience as a substitution for a degree. Just a few short years ago, you couldn't find a university that had developed an appropriate Information Security and Assurance curriculum from which one could obtain a degree. As a result, individuals with diverse academic backgrounds and the interest and ability to grasp technical information have become strong contenders in the field of Information Security. In my experience over the past 12 years, I've been surprised to see English majors working as Network Security Engineers and business majors working in Technology Manufacturing who have demonstrated incredible prowess in analytical thinking and problem-solving skills.

With that said, you will never see a job posting for an IT Security professional requiring a degree in art, history, or English. Are folks with these types of degrees capable of doing the job? Absolutely! Countless, highly skilled security practitioners are overlooked simply because they do not have the proverbial Computer Science or Engineering degree. Employers are beginning to catch on and, as a result, they are considering alternative ways of gauging aptitude and analytical thinking

Chapter 1: Finding, Interviewing for, and Getting the Job

abilities. You may be asked to take a series of personality or aptitude tests (or both). If you're pursuing a government job or a contracting position with the government that requires high security clearance, you will most certainly be required to take such tests.

The most important traits required to succeed in the IT Security field are the desire and ability to learn new technologies, a good head on your shoulders, and, most important, a new way of thinking. For those of you not yet familiar with this new way of thinking, this book introduces it to you in both subtle and not-so-subtle ways. For example, your preeminent Computer Science (CS) or Engineering graduate probably did not learn the concepts of *least privilege*, *implicit deny/explicit permit*, and *defense in depth*. These core concepts are not included in a traditional CS or Engineering curriculum. Therefore, the erudite professional will assimilate these core values on the job and in training.

Pursuing a Degree

If you are just getting started on your undergraduate or graduate degree and you know that IT Security is the field for you, then one of the National Security Agency's (NSA) designated national Centers of Academic Excellence in Information Assurance Education (CAEIAE) may be worth considering. Out of the 3,500-plus higher-education institutions in the United States, only 75 (at last count) offer the Information Assurance curriculum adopted and evaluated by the NSA. These schools offer undergraduate and graduate-level programs in IA. For more information, Google "CAEIAE."

If you plan to pursue a job with the U.S. federal government, a degree from a regionally accredited college or university is almost certainly a requirement. The National Board of Education recognizes only six regional accrediting agencies. Regardless of whether you are pursuing a job with the federal government, having a degree from a regionally accredited college or university is the best investment for your money. Google "Regional Accreditation" and make sure that your school is accredited by one of the regional accrediting agencies, as shown in the following list:

- ☐ New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC)
- ☐ North Central Association of Schools and Colleges (NCA)
- ☐ Middle States Association of Schools and Colleges (MSA)
- ☐ Southern Association of Schools and Colleges (SACS)
- ☐ Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC)
- ☐ Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges (NWCCU)

If your school is not listed for your respective region, you may want to consider transferring to an accredited school. Keep in mind that most, if not all, regionally accredited schools recognize transfer credits only from other regionally accredited schools, providing yet another reason that you should stay away from unaccredited schools.

The Perfect Job

What is the perfect job? Have you put serious thought into what you want? We hope that you are considering more than just the salary. Later in this chapter, we discuss an in-depth method of comparing two or more offers so that you can make the best decision.

Chapter 1: Finding, Interviewing for, and Getting the Job

As with any successfully implemented IT project, you must start with requirements. Consider finding your next job to be a small-scale, high-priority project. Employ a methodical and analytical approach during your search and you will be surprised at the results.

Grab a piece of paper or use your favorite spreadsheet program to start your analysis. Although doing so may be hard, ignore the money for now. Let's talk about the intangibles. Putting a quantitative value on a number of these benefits can be difficult, but they can make a drastic difference in your health and happiness at work.

The Intangible Benefits

Each of the following benefits has a qualitative value. These types of benefits will increase your work and life balance and make the job something to look forward to each day. Look for as many of these types of benefits as possible and be sure to keep in mind the following as you assess the importance of each one.

If you are married with a family or are a single parent, your ideal benefits are drastically different from those of a single person with a cat and a parakeet at home. Even if you are currently single, your circumstances might change as you progress with the company.

- ❑ **Employee First:** In the past 12 years, we have interviewed with only one company that asserted its commitment to the employee's happiness and well-being as its number one core value. It is unfortunate that most organizations care only about the final product, service, or good. If employers simply understood that happy employees are productive employees, we might have some more exciting places to work. Ask your potential hiring manager about his or her commitment to the employee.
- ❑ **Employee-focused reputations:** Many companies achieve notable status for the employee-focused work environments they have fostered. Check out Google "Top Tech 50" for a list of top-rated technology companies and see whether your prospective new company is on the list. A great place to find a company is from the 100 Best Companies for working mothers. Check it out at www.workingmother.com. Both Forbes and Fortune maintain top companies lists also.
- ❑ **Work-life balance:** Many companies have evolved in their philosophies where work-life balance is concerned. Companies that used to drive their employees toward "burn-out" under the guise of increased productivity are abandoning those practices in favor of encouraging more balanced work habits from their employees. The end result? Increased productivity and employee loyalty under a more sustainable and fulfilling work environment.
- ❑ **Comp time:** How does the company compensate for overtime? Will you have to work late nights and weekends to implement new projects? How often? It is quite common for most large companies to implement technology changes very late in the evenings, on weekends, or both. Although the position you are applying for might not pay by the hour, many companies compensate for the additional work employees are putting in on evenings or weekends by granting "comp time" (additional time off). Try to understand where the employer stands with respect to compensation for overtime. Be aware that the position may offer comp time *or* a larger salary to compensate — and both, if you're lucky!

Chapter 1: Finding, Interviewing for, and Getting the Job

- ❑ **Telecommuting:** Telecommuting just might be one of the best benefits a company could offer because of the following advantages:
 - ❑ It reduces stress on the employee from the daily grind of commuting.
 - ❑ It reduces your auto insurance costs and general wear and tear on your vehicle.
 - ❑ It drastically reduces your fuel costs.
 - ❑ Employees can work free of workplace distractions and are generally happier as a result.

The telecommuting benefit can add up to thousands of dollars in annual savings; however, some employers are still adjusting to this new trend. Translation: They are stuck in the 1980s. Unfortunately, quite a few micro-managers survived the twentieth century and feel that they cannot effectively micro-manage you if you are sitting at home in your skivvies. Plenty of companies are huge proponents of this benefit, however, because it is a win-win scenario for both the employee and the company. The company no longer has to pay hundreds and hundreds of dollars per square foot for office space when you can do the exact same job in the comfort of your own home. In the past few years, the federal, state, and local governments have begun to recognize the benefits of telecommuting, such as reduced wear and tear on roadways and alleviation of traffic congestion. As a result, they have started offering tax incentives to companies that allow employees to work from home.

- ❑ **Flexible scheduling:** Have you taken on the role of a being a twenty-first century parent, student, or gamer? If so, this benefit is huge. Perhaps you have to take the kids to school on Monday and Wednesday, and pick up the little rascals on Tuesday and Thursday. Maybe you need an extra hour in the morning to study for certifications or classes. You may just want time for late-night instance runs with your World of Warcraft guild. If you can find an employer with flexible scheduling, you can have a much more fulfilling work and life balance.
- ❑ **Job-site benefits:** Although companies may seem to be offering more and more on-site incentives to their employees out of generosity, in reality, an employee who is offered on-site conveniences not only is a happy employee but also one with a diminished need to leave the office to take care of personal responsibilities. Make sure that you determine which on-site benefits are truly important to your work environment and which ones are “cool” but trivial benefits whose merits are, at most, bragging rights to your friends. Does the company have a gym or a small workout area? Does it hold on-site fitness classes? If the company does not offer an on-site gym, does it offer discounts at local gyms in your area? Does it reimburse you up to a certain amount (typically, 50 percent of the monthly fees)?
 - ❑ Do they have on-site health care services at little or no cost to the employee?
 - ❑ For families with kids, does the company offer company-sponsored (off-site is good; on-site is better) child care? Does it have a cafeteria that serves hot food? Is it edible? Is the food *free*? As much as we like our candy bars and Mountain Dew, vending machines do not count.
 - ❑ Does the company have an open refrigerator of *free* health drinks, which will load you up with vitamin C and other nutrients?
 - ❑ Does it have ping pong tables, air hockey, or other fun activities?

Chapter 1: Finding, Interviewing for, and Getting the Job

- ☐ Can you bring your kids to work? Every day? How about your dog?
- ☐ Does the company have ample *free* parking, or does the employee have to absorb a portion of the parking fees because of the company's location in a high-rent district? Perhaps the company offers reimbursement for mass transit.
- ☐ Is it an exciting place to work; is the place drab or fab? Is your office in the basement with gray, damp, musty walls or on an upper floor with a window and a great view?
- ☐ **Discounts and memberships:** My current company offers club membership to the big warehouse stores. It also offers 15 percent to 20 percent discounts at many of the retailers where we buy products. The savings can add up quickly.
- ☐ **Banking:** Does the company have an ATM or on-site bank? Does it offer membership to credit unions or other cost savings types of banks? These institutions can save you time, gas, and money.
- ☐ **Others:** There are many other unique and exciting benefits a company can offer. These companies will be proud to speak about their culture, so be sure to ask!

The Tangible Benefits

The following list of benefits have a quantitative value, meaning that you can place a dollar sign by each of these benefits when you include them in your analysis of the various job offers you have to consider.

- ☐ **Paid Time Off (PTO):** Synonymous with vacation, balance days (sometimes called "floating holidays"), and sick time clumped together. Many employers now prefer to give employees a block of personal time that can be used for any purpose. If you have children, sick days will be one of your more important benefits to consider. No, we aren't talking about time off for yourself; you will have to go to work when you are sick. You will have to save every possible sick day for the loving little tots who call you Mommy or Daddy. If you are contracting with your employer, you probably do not get any benefits other than an abnormally higher paycheck. If you are contracting, make certain that you calculate the cost of three to four weeks of PTO and health insurance before you quote an hourly rate to an employer.
- ☐ **Health insurance:** Make sure that you compare each of the major plans; specifically, you need to compare what is and what is not covered. One company may offer \$5,000 more in salary than another but also may require you to absorb that much or more in out-of-pocket health care costs. If you have a family or are expecting or planning for a new family member, reviewing the health insurance is critical. Is your current doctor in the company network? Will you have to find a new doctor? It can be a real drag when the whole family has to find a new primary care physician.

Understand the difference between a PPO (Preferred Provider Organization) and an HMO (Health Maintenance Organization). For PPOs, the out-of-pocket costs are extremely varied, which might be challenging if you are trying to predict how much to deduct from your check each month if you are using a Flexible Spending Plan. With a traditional PPO, you typically pay a \$10–\$20 copay and then a percentage of the cost of the "provider-negotiated" rate for the visit (which can range from 0–30 percent) up to a yearly maximum out-of-pocket expense. The benefit, however, is that you may see any doctor or specialist of your choosing without having to

Chapter 1: Finding, Interviewing for, and Getting the Job

make an appointment first with a primary-care physician for a referral. On the other hand, HMO plans typically cover 100 percent of your out-of-pocket costs at a lower monthly rate than do comparable PPO plans. The catch there is that you are typically prohibited from seeing any other doctor without a referral from your primary-care physician. If you forget to get a referral from your primary-care physician for a visit to the specialist, you may have to pay all the costs yourself.

It does not stop with medical insurance. Do not forget about dental and vision. Make sure that you compare the in-network and out-of-network coverage and determine whether your current doctor is in the network. Check out the various health insurance sites, and make sure that you can find your doctor or a new doctor in the area in which you intend to live.

The bottom line is that comparing the health insurance offered between one or more companies is not as easy as you think. Get the full details of the medical coverage and the monthly rates *before* you make your decision to accept an offer.

Life insurance is cheap. The only thing worth considering is the maximum coverage and the amount of hassle you must endure to attain the coverage you need to protect your family in case of a life-changing event. Typically, companies allow no more than six times the employee's salary as the target disbursement.

- ❑ **Long-term investment in the employee:** Unless you are working for the federal, state, or county government or the military, do not expect to retire after 20 years. The burden is on you to invest smartly with a 401(k), 403(b), Roth, or other investment account. Does the company offer a retirement package? Does it match your contributions? This match is *free* money and it would be downright foolish not to get every penny of that match. Make sure that you do the math properly when comparing offers.

As an example: We have never understood why some companies offer 100 percent matching on the first 2 percent of your salary, and 50 percent on the next 2 percent of your salary, and 25 percent on the next 2 percent of your salary up to a maximum of \$6,000 per year. In other words, if you make \$100,000 a year, the match is \$3,500 a year, or 3.5 percent, not 6 percent. My current employer offers a match of 75 percent of the first 6 percent, or more accurately stated, 4.5 percent.

- ❑ **Commuter reimbursements:** Does the company encourage and compensate for commuting to and from work via public transportation? This benefit can drastically reduce your costs for your car, gas, wear and tear, and insurance. These costs all add up quickly.
- ❑ **Tuition reimbursements:** Many companies offer tuition reimbursement of all or a percentage of your tuition costs for classes taken during your employment. Make sure that you read the fine print, however, because these reimbursements often only kick in for "approved" curricula at accredited institutions and rarely cover books and materials. You may also want to inquire about job-specific training classes and certifications sponsored by the company that wouldn't normally fall under the standard tuition reimbursement benefit. In both cases, companies often require a continuing employment commitment.
- ❑ **Regular bonus compensation vs. signing bonuses:** Although a signing bonus might be an attractive benefit because you'd have money in your pocket immediately, regular bonuses (quarterly or annual) will result in a higher total compensation package year by year. Although detailed conversations regarding compensation can occur later, try to find out whether the position to which you are applying carries the opportunity for a regular bonus. Later in the chapter, we discuss how signing bonuses can often be an effective tool during the negotiation process to compensate for an offer that is lower than your target salary range.

Chapter 1: Finding, Interviewing for, and Getting the Job

Job Search

You may be open to relocation to a new city or state. Perhaps you want to stay right where you are and simply find a new employer offering better benefits or opportunities for growth. There are many ways to find a job using some of the techniques discussed later in this section, but your overall success in securing your ideal job will always depend on the solid foundation you have created with your résumé.

The Résumé

The résumé, also known as the curriculum vitae (CV), *must* be no more than three pages long — even better is one to two pages. We say this first because if you learn nothing else from this section of the book, you must remember this cardinal rule:

Your résumé should be three pages or fewer regardless of years of experience or number of former jobs.

Now that we are clear on this rule of thumb, let us talk résumé content. What should be on your résumé? How much detail do you include? Should you list your education first or last? The answer to each of these questions changes as your career matures.

You have to stand out in a crowd to be noticed. The same applies to your résumé. Regardless of your accomplishments or what magical talents you can wield under stressful situations, your résumé has to catch the eye of the first line of defense for the employer: the recruiter. The recruiter, does not, in most cases, fully comprehend the many acronyms, technical jargon, and technologies in this field. Therefore, you have to give the recruiter a little something to get his or her attention.

You have approximately 30–60 seconds to grab the recruiter's attention! Tick tock!

Spice up your résumé with a bit of word processing magic. Add a subtle border here and there, or a little shadowing around your name and each of the section titles. Google “résumé writing” for more information on spicing up your résumé.

If you have many years of experience, focus on that by placing your professional experience near the top. On the other hand, if you are just finishing school, place your relevant education and any related internships near the top. The most important thing to emphasize in your résumé is your relevant experience. If you worked at the pizza parlor preparing the Americanized version of the Italian flat-bread dish for four years while you attended school (which does demonstrate a level of responsibility), it is not considered relevant professional experience. Put it at the bottom of your résumé as additional experience. The résumé should include, but not be limited to, the following:

- ☐ Name
- ☐ Objective
- ☐ Professional certifications
- ☐ Professional experience
- ☐ Education

Chapter 1: Finding, Interviewing for, and Getting the Job

The jury is out on whether to include a skill-set section. The primary reason that most recruiters ignore it is the “stretch” factor. Show of hands: How many of you have listed something in your skill-set section after being briefly introduced to that particular technology or product? If you raised your hand, then you should consider revising your skill-set section.

Question: Can you discuss, in-depth, everything you have listed on your résumé?

Take note: You should be willing and able to discuss anything listed on your résumé in detail. When one of the authors of this book conducts technical interviews, the first thing he does is toss the corporate “canned” list of questions into the trash. He formulates his technical questions straight from the candidate’s résumé. When he asks a question about a specific technology or product, regardless of whether he knows it, he looks for an immediate, thoughtful, and articulate response from the candidate. If there is delay or doubt in the tone of his or her response, a bit more digging on the topic will confirm his suspicion.

Company Recruiters

The traditional application process has multiple levels, starting with a recruiter from the company trying to fill the position. These folks look for keywords (Security, IPsec, CISSP, SANS, and so on) that they have as requirements for open positions. They are the company gatekeepers. They filter applicants who are potential matches to hiring managers, who, themselves, quickly scan résumés to find the top three to five candidates.

We always talk about making that great first impression. Newsflash: The first impression you should be most concerned about starts with the recruiter. The recruiter will take note of your phone conversations, your speech, your vocabulary, your writing, and anything else he or she can “observe” to gauge you. These observations are funneled back to the hiring manager if you get through the first line of defense. Keep this thought in mind before you sign e-mails with “Ciao, baby!”

The recruiter, in most cases, is responsible for scheduling interviews, providing benefits information, soliciting salary history from you, sending your additional questions to the hiring manager, and ultimately making the job offer both verbally (informally) and in writing (formally).

Professional Networking

If you are like one of the authors, you have moved around a few times. Not to worry; it is quite normal and accepted in the IT field. One of the best methods of finding a job is through previous contacts made at other jobs. Hence, it is imperative that you *not* burn any bridges on your way out the door. Make it a point to keep in touch with all your former co-workers. The IT community and specifically the IT Security community can be rather small.

If you have burned a bridge once or twice on the way out the door, you may want to think about a career change. We heard in a movie once that truck driving can be quite lucrative. The bonus plan includes all the interesting scenery while driving 500 miles a day, every day of the year.

If you hold a government security clearance or plan to get one in your next job, that is something else to keep in mind. The background investigation process requires that investigators talk with each of your former employers from the previous 10 years of your career.

Chapter 1: Finding, Interviewing for, and Getting the Job

It is always a tough decision to leave a company that has treated you well, but our experiences have revealed the importance of the following:

Your decision-making process should consider what is best for you, your career growth, and your family, in the order of priority that suits you personally.

Headhunters

First and foremost, you should never pay for a headhunting service. Many agencies provide this service free of charge to the job seeker. When working with one of the free headhunting services, do not hesitate to tell them exactly what you want in a job, benefits, ideal manager, ideal work environment, and so on. Think of headhunters as corporate matchmakers. Sometimes they work for large IT placement firms and sometimes they work independently. In either case, they are providing a service that's free to you; the headhunter is paid by the hiring organization after a successful match is made. Use that knowledge to your advantage to find the perfect job with the perfect benefits.

Remember: You should never pay for a headhunting service!

On occasion, you run across a headhunter who is new to the business or does not fully appreciate (translation: comprehend) the skills required in the IT Security field. So, you may be referred to a few jobs that are unrelated to your job search. For example, the headhunter may send you a posting or two for a programming job or a network engineering job requiring Microsoft AD experience. It happens on occasion. Remember that sometimes you get what you pay for! Just thank the headhunter for his or her efforts, and share some key words that the headhunter can use in the search. If you are interested in an IDP/IDS job, provide relevant search terms along with a certification or two that may be related.

Now you may ask, "Where do I find a headhunter?" If your résumé is posted on any of the job boards, headhunters will almost certainly find you. Otherwise, point your browser of choice to Google and search for "IT security placement."

Tools

You have two primary ways to find a job using online tools:

- ❑ The first method is a more passive approach, meaning that you let the employer find you by registering and building a résumé on one or more of the big job boards (DICE, Monster, Hotjobs, Tech Expo USA, and so on.) This online résumé is your master copy, so make sure that you keep it updated.
- ❑ The second method is a more active approach, meaning that you are scrubbing the job boards every day looking for a reprieve from your current employer. This method requires a bit more effort.

The trend for most companies is to contract with the big job-posting companies. These companies provide internal and external job postings for a particular company's Web site. Fewer and fewer companies are allowing you to apply for or express interest in a position without first filling out their respective résumé builder. In the old days, you could apply for a job with the click of a button from most — if not all — of the big job boards.

Chapter 1: Finding, Interviewing for, and Getting the Job

Interviewing

The interview process has several stages. Generally, the larger the company, the more complex and time-consuming the process. Keep this in mind if you are intentionally trying to get job offers from multiple companies.

What Employers Want

Hundreds of surveys have been conducted to determine what employers are looking for in a potential candidate. Many attributes appear consistently in these surveys. What is the most critical attribute employers are looking for in an employee? It is not job knowledge, as many would suspect — instead, it is a *good attitude*. This finding falls in line with the popular management philosophy, “Hire for attitude; train for skills.” Employers want to know that you are emotionally balanced, eager to apply your skills, compatible within a team, and adaptable to change, without being difficult or negative. The common thread and foundation of these key attributes is a good attitude — never underestimate how powerful this can be!

Attributes cited high on the list of importance also include the following:

- ☐ Professional communication skills
- ☐ Sophisticated analytical and problem solving skills
- ☐ High degree of product/industry knowledge
- ☐ Hard-working and highly reliable

For those of you who are already in the workplace, you probably remember the usual “nontechnical interview questions” from your last interview. Several more of these questions appear at the end of the chapter. You should carefully consider a response to each one, because your new potential employer is bound to ask one or more of them. They may be along the following lines:

- ☐ Describe a problem you encountered in your current position and how you handled it.
- ☐ How do you keep yourself current professionally?
- ☐ How would you describe your work performance?
- ☐ What are your strengths and weaknesses?

Now you probably see why these are so popular: They tap into the important attributes the employer is seeking in the candidate. The more examples you can provide that demonstrate the important attributes listed previously, the better positioned you are to obtain an offer. Keep in mind that the individual with whom you are interviewing may have already seen several other candidates who already know these strategies. Assume that such is the case and practice in advance your ability to recall work performance based on the skill or skills you want to exhibit. Your job is to make sure that the interviewer gets the information he or she needs to make the right hiring decision where you are concerned!

Phone Interviews

Phone interviews, like taxes, are a necessary evil. More often than not, employers are conducting phone interviews because they are looking to narrow the candidate pool for the on-site phase of the interview process as well as to minimize travel costs for out-of-state candidates. These may be positive benefits for

Chapter 1: Finding, Interviewing for, and Getting the Job

employers, but the prospective candidate is placed at a disadvantage. You no longer have the benefit of eye contact, gestures, or nonverbal cues to help guide the tone, pace, and direction of the interview.

Because phone interviews can happen at a moment's notice, be prepared in advance! Prepare for the possibility of phone interviews in the same manner you would for an on-site interview. If you are contacted by a recruiter or hiring manager for a phone interview, it is perfectly acceptable — and expected — that you clear your workspace of any distractions before beginning. It is not advisable to ask for an alternative date or time for the phone interview; this is your chance to get your foot in the door before the next person the recruiter contacts. Do not squander this opportunity!

The first phone interview is often arranged by the recruiter and in most cases can be technical in nature. The technical phone interview is sometimes delegated to a senior member of the staff to evaluate your knowledge based on what you have listed on your résumé. These types of interviews typically last no fewer than 30 minutes and can sometimes go as long as two hours.

If you are lucky enough to know about the phone interview in advance, it is always best to get some idea from the recruiter or hiring manager of what will be discussed so that you know how to prepare. If you do not know the technology or product, do not pretend that you do. This is the quickest way to fail an interview. No one is expected to know everything during an interview; the most important and simplest lesson when interviewing is as follows:

When you do not know the answer, say, "I do not know."

Most interviewers respect the fact that you are willing to admit that and will move on to the next question.

Ask a question if you have one. You may want to ask about a typical work day, the job requirements, the technologies or products the company has deployed, and so on. Your questions should demonstrate a genuine interest in the company, products, or technologies. Keep in mind that this person is most likely going to be your peer if you get the job, so avoid personal preferences or discussing likes and dislikes for a particular technology or product.

While you are speaking with the interviewer, be aware of the following:

- ❑ **Your diction:** It is essential that you speak clearly and at the right volume and pace so that the interviewer can clearly understand your responses. Pay close attention to your verbal pauses such as "um" and "uh" so that you can minimize them as much as possible.
- ❑ **The length of your answers:** Without eye contact or nonverbal cues to guide you, rambling on and on during your response is an easy trap to fall into. If you practice your answers to sample interview questions in advance, you increase your chances of providing concise, accurate, and to-the-point responses.
- ❑ **The information being presented:** Nervousness or self-consciousness during a phone interview can take up valuable space in the "processing" department of your brain, which means that you run the risk of missing important information! Do your best to relax and listen; when it is your turn to speak, dazzle the person on the other end of the phone with the information he or she needs.
- ❑ **The prospect of an on-site interview:** Under the assumption that phone interviews are a precursor to (not a replacement for) on-site interviews, be sure to ask the interviewer about the possibility of meeting on-site for an interview.

Chapter 1: Finding, Interviewing for, and Getting the Job

On-Site Interviews

After you progress past the phone interviews, you'll be asked on-site for a face-to-face interview. You will need all your wits about you for this meeting. Preparation, dress, manners, and an ability to tactfully discuss salary requirements will assist you here.

Preparation

"The dog ate my homework!"

That excuse may have worked in elementary school once or twice, but now you are all grown up. So do your homework and do it before you go on-site for the interview. Ideally, you should have prepared some questions regarding the company, benefits of interest, the typical work day, the IT products the company uses, and possibly how it has implemented them. If you are able to ask the recruiter or hiring manager questions in advance of the interview, take the knowledge you gained from that interview and hit the Internet. Learn all you can about the company. You should already know the job-specific products, but it does not hurt to brush up on the basics.

Check the company Web site. Web sites always have "About Us" and "Press Releases" sections. Absorb all you can and write down a few questions about what you learned. Asking a question or two during an interview about a recent press release or company announcement says much about you. (That is, that you did your homework.)

You probably already know about the "Careers" page, but check it out again. This time, look at the jobs you may not be interested in. You can learn what most companies deploy in their networks simply by looking at the job listings. We think that companies put too much detail in their job postings. It gives the social engineers of the world too much information to form their attack. Perhaps that could be a topic of conversation during the interview . . . if it is appropriate!

Dress for Success

Now that you have succeeded in scheduling face time with the hiring manager, you should take the initiative to dress appropriately for the visit. The answer to this enigma is really quite simple. Ask the hiring manager or recruiter (during the phone interview) about appropriate attire. With the combination of the IT field and the new age of the twenty-first century, wearing a three-piece suit to an interview is not usually required or expected.

For others, dressing to the nines increases their self-confidence. If you fall into this category, then unzip that zoot suit garment bag and knock 'em dead. Whatever your selection, make sure that you are comfortable in your attire by the time you arrive for the interview so that you can focus on the interview questions and not your appearance. For those of you equating "comfortable" with your favorite seven-day-old shirt that can practically drag itself to the laundry room, that would be considered inappropriate!

Salary Discussion

Make it a point to avoid discussing quantitative salary numbers with anyone other than the hiring manager or the recruiter — and save that discussion for conversations following the interview, not during. If the recruiter or hiring manager insists that he or she needs to know your salary requirements, simply state that you expect to be compensated at fair market value for the skill set that you can offer in the area you are expected to work and reside. With luck, the person will accept this response for the time being, but unfortunately, most people will not. If he or she insists on having a number on the spot, say that you will

Chapter 1: Finding, Interviewing for, and Getting the Job

need some time to research a number based on the new job responsibilities and location. You also want to review the benefits package to fully understand the value offered by the company.

An alternative response might be to inquire about a salary range for the position, which might help you respond to the request more quickly. If the range is within your target but on the low side, you might mention that although the range is “very similar” to what you are looking for, you were “expecting a different range.” This is your opportunity to offer a range with your target number on the low side of the stated range. For example, if your target salary is \$80,000 per year and the recruiter offers a range of \$65,000–\$75,000, you might counter with \$80,000–\$85,000, keeping your target salary at the low end of the range.

Mind Your P’s and Q’s, Please

If you are not familiar with the basic P’s and Q’s, you can get a refresher from Mom or Dad. They reminded you on a daily basis for 18 years for a reason. Here are a few suggestions that you should use consistently before, during, and even after the interview:

- ☐ Say “Yes sir/No sir” and “Yes ma’am/No ma’am”: Shows respect and a good upbringing.
- ☐ Say “please” and “thank you”: These are obvious.
- ☐ Wait to sit until asked, and then sit only after the recruiter does, and say “thank you.”
- ☐ When sitting at a table, you should stand when someone enters or leaves the room or table. Guess who just scored brownie points? Be careful not to make the other people in the room look bad.
- ☐ Send a thank-you note (via e-mail) to the hiring manager and the recruiter. Let them know how much you appreciate the opportunity to interview with them, knowing how precious their time is. Mail the note the same day as the interview. Include the appointment time and something you talked about that will help them remember who you are.
- ☐ Finally, call Mom or Dad and say “thank you” for the 18 years’ worth of helpful reminders.

Most important, make sure that you have done the best “sell job” on your qualifications as possible. It would be smart to ask the interviewer if he or she has any questions or concerns about your background, which would give you the opportunity to address any objections before you leave. If you have fully expressed why you are interested in the job and what you have to offer, you have done all that you can!

Money Talks

At what point in the search do you talk money? How much do you ask for? How much can you get? How much are you worth? We have all pondered upon these mysteries a time or two in our careers. You should have a basic idea of your bare-minimum requirements. A basic number is required to keep the lights on, gas in the car, a roof over your head, and meet your long-term savings goals.

Important: This is your “target salary”; try not to accept a salary offer lower than that basic number. If the offer is not within your target salary range, consider negotiating a sign-on bonus. Alternatively, you could negotiate a semiannual review with the opportunity to get an increase based on your individual performance. Just make sure that whatever you successfully negotiate, you get in writing, preferably along with your offer letter!

Chapter 1: Finding, Interviewing for, and Getting the Job

You might be surprised how many folks “settle” on a number lower than this magic number for fear of a 10-minute negotiation. Remove all emotion and extraneous personal matters from the “money talks.” There is room on the table only for the skill set you offer and what the company is willing to pay you for it. Show no fear and play your best hand of poker ever. Do not be afraid to call the company’s bluff, because it is a hiring manager’s job to get the best skill set he or she can for the lowest annual salary. Knowing this tidbit of information is half the battle.

If you need help finding a target salary, check out SANS Salary Survey: www.sans.org/surveys/ **or check out** www.salary.com.

When you conduct a salary search, find the job description that closely matches what you can offer to an employer. Do not forget to include your years of experience. If you are transitioning from one job to another, consider whether it is a step up to a position of greater responsibility or a lateral move; if it is a lateral one, certainly aim, at minimum, to make your current salary. If it is a move “up,” consider what percentage a promotion would be with your current employer and use that as a benchmark for your new minimum salary with the new employer. When you have your basic, “must have,” minimum number, keep reading: The following sections offer more information on how to make an accurate assessment of one or more offers.

Cost of Living

Before you start getting excited about a higher salary and a new city, you should *fully* understand and appreciate the cost-of-living index for that target salary number in the city you plan to reside. You should know the cost-of-living index for the new job location and adjust accordingly. Moving from one city to another can be drastically more expensive. Check out the Cost of Living calculator under the “Personal” section at www.salary.com and click Relocation, or check out HomeFair at www.homefair.com for more information.

Uncle Sam always has his hand out. With a new pay raise comes the possibility for a new tax bracket. If you are so inclined to buy the most house you can afford, as one of the authors did, you may also find yourself in a situation you never thought possible.

One of the authors moved from Indiana to Northern Virginia in 2003 (internal job transfer). He knew the cost of living was higher, and he asked for an adjustment in his salary to compensate. His employer looked at him as though he were crazy. His wife was also transferring, so he didn’t really have a choice.

They are now the proud owners of a typical home in Northern Virginia, which, to their dismay, costs four times more than their home in Indiana. They could make the payments, so they were not too worried. Besides, they could benefit from the tax deduction on the mortgage interest, property taxes, and all those little tax deductions they like to call their kids. However, they overlooked something!

Because of the higher-than-normal tax deductions, they qualified for something called the Alternative Minimum Tax (AMT). Congress invented this beast of legislation in 1969 to keep the rich in check with their taxes. Well, in 1969 dollars, they were apparently considered “rich.” More to the point, they had to dip into their savings to pay the tax bill that year.

Chapter 1: Finding, Interviewing for, and Getting the Job

Comparing Locations

Scenario: You are married and have three kids and two job offers on the table, one in Northern Virginia (Company X) for \$100,000 and one in Indianapolis, Indiana, for \$92,000 (Company Y). You compare the offers and come up with the figures in the following table.

Company	X	Y	X – Y (Diff)
Income			
Salary (base)	\$100,000	\$92,000	\$8,000
401K Match	\$2,500	\$5,520	(\$3,020)
Gym	\$0	\$500	(\$500)
Transportation	\$0	\$600	(\$600)
Total Comp	\$102,500	\$98,620	\$3,880
Expenses			
Health	\$6,000	\$1,800	
Dental	\$600	\$300	
Vision	\$180	\$360	
Life Insurance	\$300	\$300	
Vision	\$60	\$60	
Total Expenses	\$7,140	\$2,820	\$4,320
Total Package	\$95,360	\$95,800	(\$440)

Do you (A) pack your bags for the Beltway, or do you (B) brush up on the latest cow-tipping techniques and the top 10 uses of corn?

The answer is (B). According to CNN, \$95,800 in Indianapolis, Indiana, is equal to \$136,592 in the D.C. metro area. According to our math, Company X needs to increase its offer by \$41,232 (\$136,592–\$95,360) to keep you in the D.C. metro area. Good luck with that challenge!

You should understand your expected tax liability before you jump at that new job opportunity. You may also want to check out <http://paycheckcity.com> to see what your paycheck would look like after all deductions, taxes, and so on are withheld from your base salary.

Chapter 1: Finding, Interviewing for, and Getting the Job

Relocating

If you are a homeowner and thinking of moving to a new city, you should check out www.zillow.com and www.realtor.com to get an idea of housing costs. Search for the same type of home you have now (number of bedrooms, bathrooms, square footage, lot size, and so on) and document a few numbers. Zillow will help you target a realistic price for the home based on several key factors: the tax-assessed value of the home and a list of comparables. So much for the realtor doing that work and collecting 6 percent from the seller. You can find the right number in about 30 seconds. They call it a Zestimate. Zillow is great for both buyers and sellers. Make sure that you set up your Zillow account and add any major changes to the house, which may increase the value. Throw in a picture and a “Make Me Move” price, and you are set. The “Make Me Move” prices that most people are asking are typically 17 percent higher than the Zestimates, according to a recent CNN “Money” article.

If you need to sell your home to move quickly, it is imperative that you price your home right the first time. If you price it too high, you risk having it sit on the market too long — a very bad thing. There is a little something called History on the Multiple Listing Service (MLS), to which all realtors have access. If you must continue to drop your price just to get a bite, you priced it too high. If you price it too low, buyers might wonder what is wrong with the house.

Make sure that you look at the property taxes on the listing. Also, Realtor.com has a built-in mortgage calculator that enables you to quickly calculate principal and interest payments. Check out www.bankrate.com to get the current mortgage interest rates. Also, check out www.homefair.com to see how much house you can afford. If you are not sure whether to buy or rent, Homefair also has a buy-versus-rent calculator to show the pros and cons of each.

Note to potential new homeowners: The principal and interest payment is only half the picture, or perhaps 66 to 75 percent of the picture. You are still missing escrows (also known as property taxes and insurance).

Accepting or Rejecting the Offer

In previous sections, we discussed the skills of successful negotiations. Assuming that you have not jumped prematurely at your first offer and have met your job and salary requirements, you are ready to accept the job offer. Make sure that you have an offer letter in hand that is accurate according to the terms you have established with the prospective employer, and respond as quickly as possible. At this point, you can consider that you officially “have the job.” You will be required to sign and fax your offer letter back to the hiring company with a proposed start date. Again, make these minute but important details a priority!

If you are currently employed and plan to leave the company for your new offer, start with a baseline of two weeks notice to your current employer. This is professional courtesy. Beyond that, extenuating circumstances may require you to adjust your official resignation date. Use your best judgment to make sure that you are satisfying the needs of your new employer, your own personal schedule, and the schedule of your current employer, in that order. But whatever you do, do *not* engage in any of these activities until you have that offer letter in hand!

Chapter 1: Finding, Interviewing for, and Getting the Job

Important: Offers sometimes have strings or contingencies attached. Very often, these contingencies must be satisfied before you can report to work or receive a paycheck. Don't be surprised if the fine print requires you to do the following:

- ☐ Pass a physical examination, a drug screen, or both
- ☐ Document your citizenship or immigration status
- ☐ Obtain or keep a security clearance as a requirement to keep your job
- ☐ Undergo a thorough background investigation, in which your credit history, police records, and travel history might be examined
- ☐ Verify your academic credentials
- ☐ Provide proof of your past employment, salary, or military service

If you are rejecting the offer, it is presumably for one of two reasons:

- ☐ You have learned through the interview process that you are no longer interested in the position.

If this is the case, you can politely and professionally notify the recruiter and hiring manager that you respectfully decline their offer of employment. You can do this via e-mail or a phone conversation. If they ask for a reason, it is advisable that you be as general — and generic — as possible, because you may be interested in a different position in their company under different terms at a later date. Along the lines of “not burning your bridges,” this is the time when less is indeed more.

- ☐ You are interested in the position; however, your terms have not been met.

If this is the case, again, thank them for their offer. However, you may let them know that it is not in line with your minimum requirements. At this point, the process will likely go in one of two directions: the employer will end the process there or else open the floor for additional negotiations.

If your unmet terms are any of the *intangible* benefits described in this chapter, be specific about what did not meet your requirements. There may be some level of flexibility; however, do keep in mind that you are not completely in the driver's seat just because they are willing to discuss your requirements.

If your unmet terms are any of the *tangible* benefits described in this chapter — specifically, those related to salary — this step circles back to the “Money Talks” section of this chapter. Review your requirements with them. Perform any necessary negotiations, and close the conversation. Politely and respectfully, request that they generate a revised offer.

The bottom line is to always keep the value of your potential contributions in sight — throughout the entire interview and job acceptance process. Unless you are desperate for a job, use your time, effort, and negotiation skills to make sure that you are compensated for the skills you have to offer. Keep in mind that although you are employing strategies and resources to secure your perfect job, your prospective employer is investing just as much to make sure that it hires the best candidate for the position out of the candidate pool available. Patience and perseverance are key, and you just might be pleasantly surprised at the outcome!

Chapter 1: Finding, Interviewing for, and Getting the Job

Summary

The job search can be a daunting task if not done carefully and thoughtfully. It all starts with what you want out of a job — that is, your requirements. Benefits are an important aspect of the job that will keep you happily employed and productive, which in turn will continue to keep you employed. After you have clearly defined what you are looking for in a job, the next task is to spice up your résumé. The résumé is the key to gaining access to the hiring manager, which kicks off the interview process. Remember that your first impression starts with the recruiter, so keep this in mind during your communications with the company. The recruiter is the gatekeeper. If you are not careful and considerate, you may never get past this critical person.

Headhunters are a great resource for locating the job of your dreams. They are motivated to get you placed with a company because they don't get paid (by the company) until you get paid by your new employer. Typically, headhunters have to wait it out for a defined probation period (30–90 days after you start) before being paid. Keep this in mind when asking them to do your bidding. Always show respect for both headhunters and recruiters. It is a very small community, and they take their database of names with them everywhere.

You have many resources. Use some of the techniques discussed in this chapter and you are sure to find a win-win situation for both you and your new employer. Negotiating a salary offer can be worse than reading *Moby Dick* in Russian. It really isn't a big deal at all, and you need to remind yourself of that before, during, and after these conversations. Remember, 10 minutes' worth of poker face negotiations can mean winning a hand worth thousands of dollars.

The remaining chapters of the book introduce you to topics that are more technical. You should be somewhat familiar with some or most of the technical chapters in this book at this point in your career. If some of these concepts are foreign to you, don't worry — the book has plenty of references to other resources to bring you up to speed.

Nontechnical Interview Questions

You should practice answering some of these questions in the shower or while you stare at yourself in the mirror. Some of these questions can be downright insulting, so take note of your tone and articulate a thoughtful response. A few of these questions are meant to push your buttons.

- Q:** Why should we hire you? (This insult can frustrate the best of us, so note your tone when you answer it.)
- Q:** Why are you leaving your current job?
- Q:** What are your top three strengths?
- Q:** What are your top three weaknesses?
- Q:** What is an example of a difficult situation with a peer, and how did you resolve it?
- Q:** What is an example of a difficult situation with a supervisor, and how did you resolve it?
- Q:** If I asked your current or previous supervisor about your greatest strengths, what would he or she say?
- Q:** If I asked your current or previous supervisor about your weaknesses, what would he or she say?

Chapter 1: Finding, Interviewing for, and Getting the Job

- Q:** Do you like working in a team environment?
- Q:** Do you like working alone?
- Q:** How do you keep up-to-date on the latest technologies and best practices?
- Q:** What are your hobbies?
- Q:** What do you want to do? What are your short-term goals? Long-term goals?
- Q:** Tell me about one of your proudest accomplishments.

