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The Librarian's Taboo: Negotiating Salaries

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Leigh S. Estabrook, former dean of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Graduate School of Library and Information Science, provided a forum to discuss job compensation and urged librarians to openly discuss salaries during her session, "Salary Negotiation Skills for Law Librarians."

The Librarian's Taboo: Negotiating Salaries

Session provides tips to increase job compensation

by Elizabeth G. Adelman

Many librarians carry the baggage of their industry when they negotiate salaries. For example, the vast majority of librarians are female; according to the *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 2003*, 81.7 percent of librarians were women in 2002. While this does not justify the profession's historically low salaries, it does help explain obstacles faced at the negotiating table.

Enter Leigh S. Estabrook, former dean of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Graduate School of Library and Information Science. Estabrook provided a forum to discuss this difficult subject in her session, "Salary Negotiation Skills for Law Librarians," at the 2004 AALL Annual Meeting. "We are more likely to talk about our private sex lives than our salaries," Estabrook says.

Citing secrecy as a factor in maintaining low salaries in the library profession, Estabrook urges librarians to openly discuss salaries. She views salary negotiations as a form of behavior that allows employers and potential employees to protect their dignity and assures us that her six negotiation rules also apply to other workplace situations.

Six Rules of Salary Negotiation

Rule 1: Institutions pay market value.

For example, don't expect a high salary in a market flooded by library school graduates who have personal ties to that market.

Rule 2: Be careful what you say in negotiations. Don't say anything that will end the negotiations. "I can't take the job at that salary" can lead to "I'm sorry this didn't work out. Unfortunately, that is our highest offer."

Rule 3: Never discuss salary until the position is offered. Bringing up money prematurely may disqualify you from the job. If your salary expectations are requested prior to an offer, discuss salary as part of a whole compensation package of vacation, retirement, health benefits, and so on.

Rule 4: Never complete negotiations in less than two to three days. Even if the offer is more than you expected, wait a few days and ask for more. Estabrook gave an example of a response to an \$82,000 offer: "I really appreciate your offer, but I was expecting something in the low- to mid-90s. Can you come closer to my salary expectations?" Estabrook's general rule for counteroffers is to ask for 5-10 percent more than what is offered.

Rule 5: Negotiate recurring expenses, such as salary, annual travel budget, and percent of retirement contribution. In addition, avoid falling into the salary comparison trap. The typical employer's response to salary negotiations is, "If I pay you \$82,000, then you will be making more than the current employees." It isn't your problem if you make more than your co-workers.

Rule 6: If you get everything you ask for during negotiations, you did not ask for enough.

Audience Participation

Estabrook's lecture elicited excellent questions from the audience. For example, one attendee inquired about the rigidity of raises under a civil service scheme. Estabrook recommended hiring civil service staff at the highest rank possible, even if it means bringing them in at a lower salary so that the initial salary ceiling is the highest it can be at the outset.

Estabrook's training, including a Ph.D. in sociology, were apparent. She made the audience realize that some of the reasons for librarians' generally low salaries can be structural instead of individual. For example, librarian salaries are related to historical pay equity disparities because of gender discrimination and/or institutional practices.

Estabrook's session was practical, insightful, and empowering. Many attendees left the session feeling that they now have the tools to obtain a respectable salary in their current or future positions, despite the many structural barriers they face.

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