

## How to Evaluate a Job Offer

The job market is slim right now, but some folks seem to have found their niches. How do you evaluate a job offer? In this article, Linda offers some tips on how to evaluate that job offer to learn whether or not it is right for you.

### ***It's Money – Just Take the Job***

Let's get down to basics here. If you cannot read this article because your power bill has been cut off or if you've had to sell your computer for rent, then – by all means – take that job as a waiter or as a garbage collector to get back on your feet.

But, if you haven't drifted that far down the food chain yet, if you still have a glimmer of hope about that job as a Web designer or programmer, then you need to begin evaluating job offers when you get them.

How do you evaluate a job offer? How do you know if a job is right for you, let alone whether or not you are right for any given job? Unfortunately, most businesses will give you little time to accept or reject a job offer, which is one sign that you are – in essence – a commodity for that business. If you don't respond in time, there's another person right behind you ready to take what could have worked for you.

If you entered the job market and sent a resume to an organization without doing your homework first, then only you are to blame if you end up with a lousy job when you accept their offer. In essence, it's just about the money – just take the job.

But, if you are seeking a career or a life-altering experience (meaning more money, more travel, more time off or something else that cranks your tractor), then how do you go about finding that job?

### ***What To Discover First***

Before you send off your resume in response to any job offer, do a little homework first. You might ask yourself the following questions:

- Will the organization provide a good work environment?
- Will the job be interesting?
- Are there opportunities for advancement?
- Is the salary fair?
- Does the employer offer health or other benefits?

Depending upon whether you're seeking a job in the U.S. or in Europe (or in some other part of the world), the answers to those questions might vary in their values. For instance, if the job is in the U.S., you'll want to work for an employer that offers health benefits – otherwise, you'll end up paying for health insurance. The addition of benefits can equal up to 30 percent of a person's actual salary.

Therefore, if a salary doesn't seem up to par, you might consider time off, the offer of overtime pay, health insurance, travel benefits and other issues that would make the job appealing to you.

### ***The Organization***

Even if you cannot learn the answers to the above questions immediately, you can learn more about the organization that is offering the job before you apply. Factors to consider include the organization's business or activity, financial condition, age, size, and location.

You generally can get background information on an organization, particularly a large organization, on its Web site or by calling its public relations office. If you're going for a job at a publicly-traded company, you can find information about that company's financial status and philosophies in their annual report to the

stockholders. Press releases, company newsletters or magazines, and recruitment brochures also can be useful. If possible, speak to current or former employees of the organization.

You could go as far as seeking information about the company at the public library, but if you are seeking a job at a company that focuses on online venues, then most of the material you'll need is online. Which brings me to another point...evaluate the company simply through the ad that they run...

## Evaluating Ads

If you are desperate for work, you might be game to apply to just about any job offer. But, if that offer doesn't supply the name of the company, let alone a location, then don't bother wasting your time. If that company is so inexperienced that they cannot run a decent ad for employees, then you don't want to work for them.

On the other hand, check out [this ad produced by Quora](#):

## Jobs at Quora

**We're currently hiring engineers and product designers.**

Quora is a continually improving collection of questions and answers. We believe it has the potential to become one of the largest sources of high-quality information available. We are currently in limited beta.

We're looking for engineers and product designers to help. Some of the challenges are highly algorithmic, such as coming up with ways to organize and categorize the information effectively so that users can efficiently find what they need; others are very technical, such as working to make a web application that is complex while still being very fast; and many of the challenges are in product design, such as figuring out a way to set up and grow a healthy community and constructing intuitive interfaces for users. Quora is based in downtown Palo Alto, CA and is funded by Benchmark Capital.

We are committed to building a cutting-edge technology company that develops software the right way and is a place where engineers love to work. Some of the tools we are using include Python, Pylons, nginx, memcached, Thrift, and git. We're using continuous deployment and EC2, so all code you write will go live to production within minutes no matter what time it is. Both founders are developers. We want to build a fantastically strong engineering team and the first engineers that join us should set the tone for that.

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In this beginning part of the ad, Quora states who they are (a question-and-answer site), they state that they are in limited beta and that they are seeking engineers and product designers to work in Palo Alto, California. They also go on to state the type of software that they use. By the time you're through reading this part of the ad, you know if you game for this position or not.

The second part of that ad includes lists that you can tick off to learn if you are right for the specific job.

## Engineering

### Requirements:

- B.S., M.S., or Ph.D. in Computer Science or equivalent
- Extraordinary software engineering talent
- Substantial experience developing web applications
- Knowledge of TCP/IP and network programming
- Experience with compilers, distributed systems, and machine learning a plus
- Proficiency programming in Python a plus
- Familiarity with functional or declarative programming languages (OCaml, Erlang) a plus
- The number of years of professional experience you have isn't important to us
- You should be ready to make this startup the primary focus of your life

In the short run, the most important thing is to scale and improve our first product, and so it is critical that you can immediately make big contributions to our complex web-based application. In addition to working with us in writing the software, the ideal candidate should be proficient outside the technical realm--making good product decisions, designing user interfaces that are both pretty and functional, being an effective marketer and recruiter, and being capable of handling anything else that comes up. You should also be fearless and broad inside the technical realm, happy to tackle CSS and JavaScript as readily as you are to take on optimizing the performance of a backend service in C or Java. You should be ready to jump down into C and write an interpreter for a simple language if necessary, or hook up a cluster of machines to run a distributed machine learning job you wrote. In general, you should be very good at getting things done outside your comfort zone.

You will be required to make good decisions about important things without much oversight. You should be comfortable with autonomy and ownership of large areas of product and infrastructure. It's a plus if you have worked on projects in your spare time, such as programming games in middle school or high school. An ideal candidate will have the potential to grow into a strong leadership role over time--in either a technical or management capacity (i.e. eventually the equivalent of a Google Fellow or a V.P.)

We think we are working on something that is very important and that lots of people will use every day. If you're interested, e-mail us at [jobs@quora.com](mailto:jobs@quora.com).

We also have some [challenges](#) -- you can try them for fun, or if you want to make your application stand out.

The engineer's position is pretty straightforward. If you don't have a degree in computer science, or the equivalent of that degree, then you can forget about applying. If you have that degree, then read on down the list to see if you match the other requirements. They're fairly specific, aren't they? This is a well-written ad, and one that shows the world exactly the calibre of individual that this company wants to hire. Let's look briefly at the product designer job:

## Product Design

At Quora, we are as much a product company as we are a technology company and we expect continual product innovation from our product designers. As a product designer at Quora, you will have the authority and ability to make strong decisions about important parts of the product without much oversight. To help accomplish this goal, you will have the environment to execute on your vision, powerful tools to rapidly iterate through your ideas and an incredible team to help make you and your work better.

### Requirements:

- Strong portfolio including self-started projects
- Extraordinary product, interaction, and visual design talent
- Curiosity and passion for crafting amazing experiences
- Excellent communication skills and ability to explain your design decisions
- Substantial experience designing interactive online products
- Ability to build what you design
- The number of years of professional experience you have isn't important to us
- You should be ready to make this startup the primary focus of your life

### Exceptional candidates will have:

- B.S. in Computer Science, HCI, MIS, or equivalent experience
- Experience with product management
- Experience with mobile design
- Familiarity with Python

You should be comfortable with autonomy and ownership of large areas of the product but open to and interested in gathering feedback. An ideal candidate will have the potential to grow into a strong leadership role over time--in either a individual contributor or management capacity (i.e. eventually the equivalent of a Google Fellow or a V.P.)

We have built up technical infrastructure that makes it easy for us to quickly implement products and features that are composed from reusable building blocks, and that automatically update in real time as the underlying data in our system changes, without any extra work. These abstractions power the current Quora product, and this means that we can focus more on design and less on implementation in getting a product or feature built and released. As a result, product designers are highly empowered and are especially important to us.

We think we are working on something that is very important and that lots of people will use every day. If you're interested, e-mail us at [jobs@quora.com](mailto:jobs@quora.com).

This job is far less demanding in the educational aspect, but no less demanding in the “exceptional” requirements. Unlike the engineering portion of the ad, the product design portion sends strong signals about the actual job:

1. You will have the authority and ability to make strong decisions about important parts of the product without much oversight
2. Portfolio requires self-started projects
3. You must have excellent communication skills and ability to explain your design decisions
4. You should be ready to make this startup the primary focus of your life

In other words, if you decide to take this job, you are responsible for your decisions. There is no one to blame for sending you off on the wrong track, or for producing an inappropriate project. Number four tells me that this company expects me to be married to the job...at least for a year or two and maybe more.

This job may not suit the wallflower nor the student who has no experience. But, it can provide you a clue to some jobs that exist on the market, and you can decide whether that job is for you or not.

## You're Right for the Job, but is the Job Right for YOU?

During your research, both before and after you apply for a job, consider the following:

**Does the organization's business or activity match your own interests and beliefs?** For instance, as soon as you learned about Quora through the ad above, did that company's mission turn you on or off?

**How will the size of the organization affect you?** It's a trade off. Larger firms can offer a greater variety of training programs and career paths and better employee benefits than do small firms. Jobs in small firms may offer broader authority and responsibility, a closer working relationship with top management, and a chance to clearly see your contribution to the success of the organization. Quora, for instance, offers this responsibility quite succinctly in their job offers.

**Should you work for a relatively new organization or one that is well established?** Some people really enjoy working for new companies, even with the risk that those companies may fail. As you get older, however, you may like to lack of risk that comes with a regular paycheck to put the kiddies through college.

**The job.** If you are addicted to freelance work, don't think about applying for a 9-5 job. That's why you quit the 9-5 in the first place – because you couldn't tolerate it (or, it couldn't tolerate you). But, if you're determined to take that job because freelance work is slim, then consider the following:

- Where is the job located?
- Does the work match your interests and make good use of your skills?
- How important is the job to the company or organization?
- What will the hours be?
- How long do most people who enter this job stay with the company?

A good job offers you opportunities to learn new skills, increase your earnings, and rise to positions of greater authority, responsibility, and prestige. Quora does this in an interesting way – basically, they are offering a promotion to any engineer and product designer who feels dissatisfied with their current positions.

The employer should give you some idea of promotion possibilities within the organization, and Quora does this as they explain the next step on the career ladder include becoming a Google Fellow or a V.P.

## Salaries and Benefits

When an employer makes a job offer, information about earnings and benefits are usually included – even as early as in the ad for the position. This offer usually determines who will apply as well as the degree desired, etc. You want to see the salary in the ad, because you will want to research to determine if the offer

is fair. If you choose to negotiate for higher pay and better benefits, objective research will help you strengthen your case.

If you are considering the salary and benefits for a job in another geographic area, make allowances for differences in the cost of living, which may be significantly higher in a large metropolitan area than in a smaller city, town, or rural area. You can use tools such [Payscale](#) or [Salary.com](#) to determine if the pay scale is normal for any given area.

This next note is very important, especially when you see an ad like Quorum's, where you are expected to be devoted to your job...what is that company's policy regarding overtime? Depending on the job, you may or may not be exempt from laws requiring the employer to compensate you for overtime. Find out how many hours you will be expected to work each week and whether you receive overtime pay or compensatory time off for working more than the specified number of hours in a week.

Also take into account that the starting salary is just that – the start. Your salary should be reviewed on a regular basis; many organizations do it every year. How much can you expect to earn after 1, 2, or 3 or more years? An employer may be unable to be specific about the amount of pay if it includes commissions and bonuses.

Benefits also can add a lot to your base pay, but they vary widely. Find out exactly what the benefit package includes and how much of the cost you must bear.

## **The Aggressive Employer**

At some point in your career, no matter if it's straight out of college or about two decades in, someone may tap you on your shoulder and ask you why you're not working for so-and-so instead of slaving away for this-and-that. This question may come as a surprise to you, but – depending upon your situation – it may also be quite flattering. At the same time, it could spell the end of working with a long-term job that offers all you need in the way of salary increases, benefits and more.

No matter how aggressive these employers become, stay polite...but also keep your distance so you can learn more about that business and so you can make a well-thought out decision. An offer often is much more than a salary, so if you haven't already, you might identify and rank your values. What areas can you sacrifice? Some areas you may want to consider:

1. Stress level
2. Hours
3. Prestige
4. Personal growth
5. Supervisory Style
6. Work Environment
7. Location
8. Stability
9. Family goals

## **Conclusion**

Most of you know how to look for a job and how to read the ads. But, there's a new element that you might notice while out job-hunting...the "exploding offer." This refers to offers given with an explicitly stated deadline that is unnecessarily short. Generally, exploding offers provide less than 2 weeks time for consideration. If you are given a job offer, you should that, although many employers may encourage you to accept an offer as quickly as possible, unless deadline is explicitly stated it can not be considered an "exploding offer."



An offer can also be considered "exploding" if given with a changing benefits package. Generally, this means that the longer you take to decide, the less benefits you have. Decreasing benefits usually come in the form of a smaller signing bonus, loss of relocation assistance, etc. Unless you're willing to play this game throughout your employment, you might leave these job offers behind. These companies are looking for the best deal, not the best talent.

With that said, it is important to know that offers may not all come at the same time. Once you have received an offer, you should contact all other employers to see whether a responding offer can be made. Depending on the amount of time you have, employers may or may not be able to provide a responding offer. Because of this, it is important to review your offers continuously and know your personal preferences and the priority of various opportunities from the moment you submit your resume through the interviewing process.

## Acceptance or Denial

Finally, you might think about accepting or declining an offer – how is it done?

**Accepting the offer:** Many employers do not make offers via email or leave voice mail but prefer to deliver an offer through a telephone conversation. When you answer that phone, be sure to have your notes with you...in those notes you'll see the following:

1. Thank the caller for the wonderful news
2. Express continued interest in the position
3. Ask for or give a date for the response
4. If the employer wants immediate response, say, "I'd like to share this offer with my family before I respond."

When you receive an email or letter of acknowledgement from an employer, you should acknowledge receiving the offer. In the letter of acknowledgement, state your understanding of the terms of the offer and indicate the date by which the employer will receive an answer from you. Often the deadline date for accepting an offer is determined by the company. Simply restate this date in your letter. If you anticipate that you will not be able to reach a decision within the specified time period, request an extension.

It is often acceptable to send an acknowledgement e-mail, particularly if you are deciding within a brief time frame. In some cases, employers may send you a contract to sign and return and you should do this as well.

If you are notifying the company that you have accepted the offer, you need to call all other job applications and let them know that you're out of the game...

**Rejecting the offer:** Rejection letters are used to inform the organization that you are turning down their offer and/or have accepted another offer. Verbal rejections should be confirmed in writing. A rejection letter consists of a simple note of thanks to the employer you are rejecting. Decline the opportunity extended to you, and state your appreciation for the employer's time and interest. Be polite and tactful. It is generally appropriate to give a reason for why you've chosen a different offer. These reasons can include: offer with better fit to your career interests, offer with better training program, more responsibilities, broader experience, better salary/benefits, etc.

Remember that it is important to express a proactive decision-making process but also express an interest to consider an opportunity with the organization at future date. Many professionals in the same field know one another, and others may learn of your behaviour. Besides, at a future time in your career, you may want to work for the organization you are now turning down.