



The Offer Stage, by Rabbi Maccabee Avishur

Congratulations! You polished your resume, applied to jobs, interviewed with school leaders, gave an engaging model lesson, and sent thank you notes to everyone you met. All the hard work has paid off, and a school leader you interviewed with has called you with an offer. Here's a list of what to expect and how to handle it.

THE OFFER IS MADE

In most situations, the school leader directly responsible for hiring you will contact you by phone to make an offer. Ideally, that offer will be similar to the following: "We are excited to offer you the position of [the position you applied for]. Your primary responsibilities would be [responsibilities]. Based on your qualifications, we're prepared to offer you [salary] as well as [benefits]."

Occasionally, school leaders may offer you a position without telling you a salary. Instead, they might ask something like, "What would you like to earn for this position?" or "How much are you earning at your current position?"

Employers typically ask this question for one of two reasons:

1. They want to know if you fall in the range of what they have budgeted for this position (i.e. Are you too expensive?).
2. They want to know if they can get you for cheaper than they might have thought.

You SHOULD NOT answer this question directly; answering with a number or range is not to your benefit.

If you are asked about your salary requirements, you can respond in the following way: "I'm not familiar with what the school had in mind as a salary for this position, so I'd be more comfortable if you made the initial salary offer. We can start the conversation from there."

Alternatively, you can say: "I've learned that schools typically have a budgeted range for their open positions. If the school is willing to share the range for this position with me, I'll be able to tell you whether I fit in that range."

If a school leader presses you to tell him about your current salary, you can say: "I'm certain that although there might be some similarities between my current job and the one your offering, there are surely some significant differences. Therefore, I'd like to discuss the expectations and responsibilities of this job and then hear what you and the school consider a fair salary for that."

YOUR INITIAL REACTION

No matter how you feel about the offer (giddy with excitement, confused about the position, or disappointed by the compensation), you should first and foremost express gratitude. You should say, "Thank you so much for the offer. I'm honored to be considered for this position at your school." But DON'T SAY YES just yet.

Make sure to contact us at the YUSP for objective guidance and help. Even if you have experience with salary negotiation, it's always helpful to have a neutral onlooker and advisor.

GET IT IN WRITING

It is appropriate for you to ask for the offer in writing to avoid any misunderstandings or confusion. Say, “Thank you again for the verbal offer. Could you please send me the details of the offer, including the benefits package, in writing?” The written offer is usually a concise outline of the job including the job title, the main job responsibilities, and the compensation (salary and benefits).

ASK QUESTIONS

If you have any questions at all about the job or the compensation, ask them now or schedule another time to speak about them. If you don’t gain clarity before accepting the offer, you may find that you regret it later.

NEGOTIATE

Once you’ve received the offer in writing, it’s time to do some homework and negotiate. Recent data show that in the business world, 4 out of 5 employers are willing to negotiate their initial offers; my experience tells me that the same is true in schools. So, unless you discussed and agreed to a compensation package before the official offer was made, it usually doesn’t hurt to negotiate.

A simple request based on your research is best. If everything in the offer is acceptable except for the base salary, say so. Consider a text similar to the following (but don’t copy it word for word; make it sound like you):

Dear [school leader],

I wanted to thank you again for considering me for a full time Limudei Kodesh teaching position at [school name]. I am excited by the opportunity to become a member of the [school name] team. As we discussed over the phone and you indicated in the written offer, the responsibilities of this job would be [responsibilities].

I think that the school would be a wonderful place to work and that I would fit in well to the school culture and be an active contributor to the team. As such, I’m very interested in accepting the offer with one minor change.

The salary offered for the position is \$40,000. I’ve done some research on comparable salaries in Jewish Day Schools in the area and have found that the market value of my [x] years of teaching experience and [academic credentials] is \$45,000. Based on this, I’d like you to consider as a compromise a base salary of \$43,000.

I hope that you will agree to this modest improvement to the offer. As I stated earlier, I think that I will make a great addition to the school community with my hard work and dedication. Again, I’m grateful for the opportunity to work at [school name] next year.

I hope to hear back from you soon.

Sincerely,

[Your name]



One very important thing to keep in mind is that your “research” must actually be real. Don’t make up a number. Talk to your friends in the field to find out what they earned their first year. If you’re applying for a General Studies position, you can find out the salary scale for public school teachers in the same district and use that as an additional guide (private schools usually pay a bit less than public schools, so keep that in mind).

If there's no research to back up your request to earn a higher base salary, you can still ask. Using our example above, you could say, "The salary offered for the position is \$40,000. I'd be more comfortable with \$43,000."

After you've submitted your counter-offer, you'll have some waiting to do. Usually, school leaders won't agree to a bigger offer right away, and some might not be able to offer any more money at all. Expect them to get back to you regarding your request at some later time. If you have a deadline you need to meet (you're entertaining an offer from another school that needs to hear back from you by the end of the week, for example), say so. Instead of writing, "I hope to hear back from you soon," you can write, "I would be grateful if you could reply by Thursday."

Also, remember that negotiations aren't limited to base salary. Sometimes benefits packages can be negotiated as well. You may be able to get a moving allowance (if you're relocating for the job), a commuter stipend, or some increase in tuition remission or retirement funding. Some schools will even agree to pay for graduate courses. Don't forget to talk about parsonage if it applies to your situation and the school (consult with a tax professional before going the parsonage route; it's much more complicated than your friends might have made it sound).

If you make a counter offer to the original offer with specific requests, this is an indication that you would accept the job if the school leader matches your requests. Be prepared to either accept or reject the offer without too much hesitation at your follow-up conversation. If the employer has matched your request exactly, you are expected to accept the revised offer. If the school leader has countered and made a new offer that differs from your request, you can take some time to think about it. See below for more on this.

SLEEP ON IT

Usually, it's best not to accept a position on the spot. Instead, you'll want some time to think about it. After expressing your gratitude, asking your questions, and negotiating, you should say, "Again, thank you for the offer. I'd like to take some time to think over the offer and review the benefits package. When do you need to hear back from me?"

Usually, a school will give you one to several days or more to think about it. Even if you're sure you want to accept, take the night to sleep on it and talk about the offer with a trusted counsel (please DO include us at the YUSP).

If you are considering other offers at the same time and need more time than has been offered, you can ask for it by writing, "I'd like to carefully review this offer. May I ask for an extension until [a week from today/10 days from today/etc.] before replying?" The school leader may say that he needs to hear back from you sooner, which is understandable especially if he is considering other candidates for the position. Although most school leaders would like to hear from you sooner rather than later, most are willing to give a small extension.

If you are not in a position to accept the offer in the time window offered, you have a tough choice to make. You can either accept the position you've been offered and forego the possibility of other offers, or you can tell the school leader that you're unable to make a final decision in the time allotted. Doing so may remove you from consideration for the position (depending on how competitive the position is), but it's possible that you'll still be in the running.

An important note: We heavily discourage accepting one position only to reject it later in favor of another offer. Once you accept a position, you have given your word that you will fulfill your end of the contract. Turning around and accepting a different offer will put you on the "blacklist" of the first employer. In fact, the first school leader has every right (and perhaps a fiduciary duty) to alert the new school that you had previously

accepted an offer and then reneged on your agreement. In such situations, it's common for the second school to withdraw its offer. Be very wary of putting yourself and schools in this situation.

ACCEPTING AN OFFER

If, after following all the above steps, you've concluded that this is the job for you, contact the school leader at your earliest convenience and no later than the date you agreed to speak. Do this by phone, not email. If you don't get a hold of the school leader when you try to call, leave a message and follow up with an email indicating that you'd like to speak at the leader's earliest availability. Leave a number that you can be reached at and let the leader know how late in the evening you can be reached.

When you speak to the school leader, say, "I wanted to express my gratitude again for your offer [and your consideration of my requests, if applicable]. I am excited to accept the offer and look forward to being a part of your team." You may use this opportunity to ask to come visit the school again to sit in classes and gain a better sense of the school culture.

Follow up this conversation with a written acceptance letter. That letter should follow the basic format below.

Sample Acceptance Letter

Dear [school leader],

As we discussed on the phone, I am pleased to accept the position of [position] at [school]. Thank you for the opportunity. I am eager to make a positive contribution to the school and to work with everyone on the [school] team.

As we discussed, my starting salary will be [salary] and [list of benefits] will be provided according to the Employee Benefits package dated [date]. [Include additional provisions, like moving allowance, tuition remission, etc., if applicable.]

I look forward to starting employment on [starting date]. Until that time, I can be reached at [cell phone and/or email]. If there is any additional information or paperwork you need prior to then, please let me know.

Again, thank you.

Sincerely,

[Your name]

MORE FOLLOW UP

Once you've accepted an offer at a school, you are officially off the market. You should let any other schools you've applied to know, in writing (email is fine), that you've accepted another position. You don't need to give details, but should thank them for considering you. For example, you might write: "Thank you for considering me for [position] at [school]. I am writing to let you know that I've accepted a position at another school. I hope there will be opportunities for us to work together in the future."

REJECTING AN OFFER

It is certainly possible that you will choose not to accept an offer from a school. Whatever reason you have for turning down a job, the actual rejection can be awkward. All through the interview process you've been giving the impression that you'd love to work for the school, and then, when the offer is made, you "sing a different tune." It's incredibly important to do this in a tactful and professional way. After all, you never know when you might want to apply to that school again or when you might encounter the same school leader at a different school or in another professional setting.

Some say that, as with an acceptance, a rejection is best done through a phone call. However, one could make a strong argument that writing an email might be preferable in this situation. If you choose to call, don't leave a voice mail message; deliver the message live.

First, make sure to deliver the main point of the email right away. Explain plainly that you won't be able to accept the offer: "Although I appreciate the offer, I am unable to accept it." Then, express your gratitude for being considered and briefly mention specific things you liked about the school and the interview process.

You may choose to share specifics about why you didn't accept the offer, especially if the reasons are technical or logistical and if the school can revise its practices to become more competitive when recruiting candidates. If you received another offer with better salary or benefits, you can say so, although you don't need to divulge the amount of the other offer or whose offer you accepted.

Be careful, though. Don't be overly blunt when sharing your reasons or say anything that might seem judgmental, especially if it's about the culture of the school or personnel in the school. If the school leader asks you your reasons for not accepting the offer and you don't want to share, you can say, "After thinking carefully about the position and closely reviewing the offer, I didn't feel the job was a good fit for me."

CLOSING WORDS

Receiving and accepting an offer is incredibly exciting and is one of your first steps towards being inducted into the school and to establishing yourself as a professional in that school and the field. Make sure to act accordingly. If you have any questions or would like to talk to a neutral party about the offer process, please reach out to our team at the YUSP.