



Stanford eCorner

Negotiating Your Career

Dan Springer, *Responsys*

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Dan Springer, CEO of Responsys, provides counter-intuitive advice to young people by suggesting that when starting your career you should negotiate for the lowest possible title and salary at the organization of your choice. Although Springer provides this advice light-heartedly, he does so to emphasize the importance of setting up a situation in which you can exceed expectations and can rise to the top. In addition, he warns about the dangers of negotiating too hard for higher salary or positions which potentially make organizational members uncomfortable or lead to expectations that are difficult to meet.



Transcript

We think about negotiating your career. It's constantly in process. So what have you learned about that, the things to do differently or things that you were glad you did? I guess I'd put two or three observations. One is the advice that my undergraduate college counselor gave me which I hated as advice and now I give it to other people so they can hate it, too. When you're out negotiating a job, get the lowest salary and the lowest title that you can achieve in that first interaction with whatever company it is. And I remember he told me that. I thought, "That's got to be the stupidest thing I've ever heard in my life. I want to do the exact opposite." Right? And this is an economics professor, so that was particularly annoying. What college was this at? Occidental College. But in what he stood him in his name and the principle was, you want to blow people away.

You want to come in with expectations set that you're going to blow away and start a path of success in your career. If you come in at the highest possible title and the highest possible salary, you dramatically decrease the chance. There's a certain side that says, "Well, I don't want to set a low bar for myself." And so you've got to be cautious about going too far the other way. But really set up people that you're going to wow them. Make sure that when you get done with that first year, everyone's excited to have you on board. Now, obviously, you'd say, "Why don't I go get the highest I can start and then still wow everyone?" And of course, that sounds great. But a lot of this is around don't try to get the best short-term deal. One of the things that I sometimes think about is, if you're taking your first job out of college or your first job out of graduate school, the difference in the salary of the various jobs you might be considering, unless you're really one of these people who's all over the map, but if you focus down into a core area, is not that much. And if you go into it and extract \$5,000 more or \$10,000 more in that initial salary, it won't have that big of an impact on your lifestyle in that next period. Maybe nicer or better.

And it won't really have very much impact in the long-term, but you've got an interesting relationship you're building as part of your business career with this first place that you're starting. And so if the cost to get that extra \$5,000 is people looking at you saying you really focused on yourself and you're fundamentally selfish in what you're trying to do, because you know you're making the company uncomfortable. You're stretching a band, or whatever it is you're doing that's difficult for them to yield. They're really learning something about you, and they're thinking something about the long-term relationship. And I think that issue is much more important than that first starting piece. Let me just echo that. Some of you are probably thinking, "Stan

told him to say that." Because it's basically exactly what I say. But just to really hit that point home, how often have employees that have worked for you been hiding out in the weeds doing an unbelievable job and you didn't recognize it? It is fairly uncommon to find someone that you later realize was a star and they were not noticed. I would say quality rises to the top. But at the same time, it doesn't mean quality is always recognized right away.

In terms of the somewhat of a leading question, but appropriately so, sometimes companies miss stuff for a while. And so you could be that star that's hiding out in the weeds for a while, and be missed. But I really do believe, in the long run, cream does rise and you will be noticed. It doesn't mean you can't ever be self-promotional. It doesn't mean you can't say, "Hey, I just did this fantastic work and I want to share that with people." And there's a professional way to do that. Again, on the genuineness side, I don't think there's anything wrong with going to someone and saying, "I just did some work I'm really proud of. And I wanted to share it with you because I hope you feel great about it, and I want your opinion. Should I feel really good about it?" I think if you said that directly versus coming up with some sneaky way to try to sneak it in to someone or be faux self-deprecating, "This is terrible. I know it's terrible. But here it is." You know, people sort of see through that.