

# How To Answer The Interview Question, 'How Much Money Do You Currently Make?'

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You're sitting in a job interview and everything has been going great. You're feeling really good about how you've responded to all the questions so far. Then, the hiring manager asks, "How much money do you currently make?" or "How much salary do you expect?" Your heart races and you begin to sweat. How should you answer?

As a recent mentee discovered, the salary question can be a difficult topic to discuss if you haven't already thought through potential responses. "James" (name changed) felt he had been close to being hired during several job interviews. Then the inevitable salary question came up and the hiring managers asked what James was making in his current position. He told the truth and, in both cases, the hiring managers responded that James' current salary was more than what the position would pay.

"What's the best way to respond to the question of how much are you making in your current position?" James asked me. "I let both hiring managers know I'm flexible with salary, but it seemed like once they heard what I'm currently making, they kind of switched off and didn't consider me as a viable candidate anymore."

For job seekers, I tend to think of the salary question in terms of a poker game with the goal being to get the hiring manager (or HR rep) to lay down their poker cards on the table first. That's because, as James found out, once you share a specific salary number, you might just have priced yourself too high (or too low) for the position.

Here are tips to prepare for the salary question/discussion during job interviews:

**Tip #1: Arm yourself with salary information.** Before you go to the job interview, spend adequate time conducting research to find out average salaries and salary ranges for similar jobs in your area, industry and geography. Websites for salary research include: [salary.com](http://salary.com), [payscale.com](http://payscale.com), [indeed.com](http://indeed.com), [careeronestop.org](http://careeronestop.org), [glassdoor.com](http://glassdoor.com), and [jobsearchintelligence.com](http://jobsearchintelligence.com).

**Tip #2: Deflect the salary question if it's asked early in the job interview.** It will do you no good to tell the hiring manager how much you currently make or a desired salary range if you haven't at least made it to the end of the interview to see if you and the hiring manager believe you're a good fit. Let her/him know you'd like to better understand the job responsibilities and requirements and how well you meet those needs before discussing the salary topic.

**Tip #3: Be prepared to provide a salary range.** This can be handled in a few different ways. You could provide the salary range you've researched, as in, "Based on my research, similar positions in this geography and industry are currently paying between \$x and \$y. Is this also the range for which you've budgeted for this position?" Or, you could share the salary range you desire, such as, "Based on the job requirements we discussed and my knowledge, skills and experience, I would expect the salary range of the position to be between \$x and \$y."

**Tip #4: Think about how much you'd like to make.** This doesn't mean sharing an exact number, because it can place you above or below the budgeted salary for the position. Instead, provide a range you'd like to make. "Because I'm changing industries, I'm not expecting to exactly match my previous salary, but, I'd like my pay to be in the range of..."

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**Tip #5: Think through ways to side step the salary question.** Remember, the goal is to get the hiring manager to tell you the budgeted salary range for the position before you share any salary information. Try to avoid giving out information by providing answers such as, "My research shows similar positions pay in the range of \$x to \$y. I'm sure you've budgeted a salary range based on competitive data for this industry. What is your budgeted range?" Or, "If I'm the candidate you'd prefer for the position, I'm sure we'll be able to reach agreement on the salary, as I'm willing to be flexible. What is the budgeted salary range?"

**Tip #6: Discuss the salary range with the HR rep during the initial screening interview.** You don't have to wait until you've made it to the interview round with the hiring manager. The initial telephone screen with HR is a good time to discuss the position's pay range to make sure your expectations are within the salary parameters. This also makes the salary discussion with the hiring manager (when it comes up) a lot less stressful.

As my mentee James found out, sometimes honesty isn't always the best policy. When it comes to discussing salary during job interviews, avoid sharing with the hiring manager what you currently make. Focus instead on getting them to share the salary range they're willing to pay. This isn't always easy and you'll need to be professional and respectful in your approach; however, it will help you walk away much closer to your desired salary.

~ Lisa Quast

