UNDERSTANDING GENUINE JOB OFFERS

Identifying a Genuine Offer

A certain amount of misunderstanding arises when an over-anxious applicant misinterprets what is no more than a “feeling out” activity on the part of the prospective employer. For example, you may interpret the question “Would you be willing to work irregular hours and be on call over weekends?” as “Will you be willing . . .” and feel that your agreement to such terms means the job is yours. Never assume you have been offered a job until the employer makes a specific verbal offer, which will usually be followed up by a written offer.

In the same vein, a general statement such as “Well, I think we have a meeting of the minds here. Why don’t you come back on Monday morning?” may sound like a job offer, but don’t do any celebrating until Monday morning rolls around and that “meeting of the minds” is spelled out in detail. It could just be a second interview.

Beware, too, of “We’ll almost certainly be able to use you in two months from now.” If the job is one you really want, with the organization you most want to join, you may justifiably feel it is worth waiting for. After all, two months is not too long, and you might not find anything else, anyway. That’s all fine and good if this is a bona fide offer. But “almost certainly” and “two months from now” is vague. Do you have a firm offer? What will be your actual report-for-work date? Has a definite salary been established? Have job responsibilities been explained in detail? And, finally, do you know why the job will not be available immediately? In other words, you must determine if the interviewer is saying the job is yours in two months, or if this is a variation of “Check with us later, something may develop.”

A firm job offer may be made verbally – usually after a series of interviews – or may come in written form. However the offer is made, it will contain (or, at least, it should contain) most or all of the following specific information:

- A clear “we are offering you the job” statement
- Your position title and a definition of duties
- Identification of your immediate supervisor
- Starting salary
- A description of conditions of employment such as probation period, initial training program, employee benefits, travel required, etc.
- The date and time to report for work

Not all employers make it a practice to mail written job offer confirmations. There is nothing wrong with you asking for one at the time you get a verbal offer, but do not be surprised or alarmed if your future employer declines to do so. A useful step at that point would be for you to verbally review the items listed above, jotting down your own notes in case you need to refer to them later. Or, you might even take the initiative by sending a confirming acceptance letter to the employer, including the employment terms. Presumably, if there is any disagreement about terms, the employer will quickly respond.