

Relocation Negotiation

What to Ask for If They Ask You to Move

by Michael Chaffers



Sooner or later, many of you will take jobs that require you and your family to move. You will likely incur significant expenses in the process, and if you are like most people, you will want your employer to pay for at least some of them. The following advice should help you handle this negotiation as effectively and collaboratively as possible.

1. Focus on Your Interests.

The whole point of negotiating for something is to address your real needs. Before you limit what you ask for, make sure you know what you want. Think broadly and do not limit yourself to financial expenses. For example, one client of mine decided these were her needs:

- Assistance in selecting and paying for childcare (She still had to finish paying her old nanny.)
- A higher cost-of-living subsidy
- A higher mortgage cost allowance
- A bridge loan, because she could not sell her house before she had to relocate
- Assistance in choosing a good local school for her older child

Once you have thought about what help you need, you can prepare to negotiate for a package that suits your unique needs.

2. Find Out What Assistance Is Typical.

Your preparation for this negotiation should include the following:

- Ask your new employer's HR department if the company has a written relocation policy or if it offers standard benefits.
- Find out who has recently moved at the company and ask about their relocation packages.
- Ask your friends or other contacts in similar firms about their experiences or their companies' policies.
- If you are using a recruiter, he should be able to provide guidance as well.

Keep in mind that companies tend to vary in what they offer, and larger companies have more standardized policies. Therefore, compensation can differ by industry, city or even position in the company (executives tend to get more). Nonetheless, the following expenses are commonly covered:

- Moving costs
- Temporary lodging costs
- Travel costs back home if you relocate before your family moves

- Assistance for a spouse who has to find a new job (may include job search reimbursements, referrals to a recruiter and arranging for interviews inside the company)
- Assistance in selling your house

3. Develop Ideas that Benefit Both Sides.

No matter what is standard, many companies are willing to negotiate packages that address the distinct needs of their new employees. Still, even though everything is negotiable, your employer is more likely to agree to your ideas if they benefit the company as well. So anticipate this reality, and provide the advantages for them when you share your ideas.

For example, my client made sure to tell her new company, "I will be able to work longer hours and be more productive from the start if I can get a few important matters settled quickly." Another client had an employer who, while willing to provide extra assistance for her relocation, did not want to set a precedent of deviating from its written policy. This person solved the problem by saying, "Well, what if we agree that this assistance will be called a signing bonus?"

4. Get It in Writing.

Once you and the company agree on a compensation package for your relocation expenses, make sure you capture that agreement in writing. A formal contract is not necessary, just a simple signed letter explaining what assistance is being provided by what time.

A negotiation about relocation compensation is the same as any other negotiation. If you focus on effective preparation, collaborative negotiating and out-of-the-box thinking, you will do well.