

7 Things to Say When You're Asked, 'What Is Your Current Salary?'

Google, Facebook, and Amazon have banned this interview question.



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You're cruising through a phone interview with a recruiter for a promising position, and then she drops the dreaded question: "[What is your current salary?](#)" You may hear a variation of it with something like, "What was your W-2 last year?"

It's a [salary](#) negotiation tactic disguised as a gatekeeper-type question to screen you in or out of the [interview process](#), depending on how much money you're currently making.

The problem with this question.

Your salary could be much lower than the position for which you're interviewing. But if you're put into a position where you must answer the question, reflect on some of your own questions to prepare ahead:

- Does your current salary really reflect the market rate in your field?
- Does your current salary reflect what you're actually doing? (Hint: For most, the answer is no.)
- And is your current salary what you hope to get in your next job?

While some of the interview techniques below will aid you in knowing how to tackle the dreaded salary question, you may not need to answer it at all!

A [law was passed in 2017](#) in New York City making it illegal to probe for salary history with questions like, "What is your current salary?" or "How much did you make at your last job?"

Several cities and states have followed suit and passed legislation to ban the questions in order to protect prospective employees from pay inequality.

Tech giants Google and Facebook were among the first in Silicon Valley to ban salary history questions -- applying it nationwide to all job applicants. Amazon's hiring managers also are no longer allowed to ask U.S. job candidates about their salary histories.

But until it's unlawful everywhere, you'll have to deal with it. Also remember, recruiters and head hunters do not have your best interest in mind. At the end of the day, they're working on behalf of their company-clients (who are paying them a fee of up to 30 percent of the salary for the posted position).

Here are seven ways of dealing with the dreaded question, "What's your current salary?"

1. Tactfully redirect.

If confrontation is not your thing, a tactful approach is to frame your answer by reciting the current pay range for people in similar roles and experience level. Simply share what your expectation is based on what you know the market is bearing.

2. Don't fall for the e-mail trap.

Beware the question may be posed via e-mail. While you shouldn't flat out ignore it, be positive and encourage future discussion about pay once you reach more formal stages of the interview process. You can say, "I'd love to learn more about the responsibilities of the role so I can get a better idea of what salary I should seek."

3. Hack the online application.

Most automated application forms will require that you put in a number in the salary field. While typing in a random number or leaving it blank could result in your application being rejected or ignored, a good rule of thumb is to answer it anyway to confirm that everything you provided is accurate and true. Before submitting it, look for a place in the form where you can type in "desired salary, not current salary, was provided." Or "target salary will be provided in the interview."

4. Talk about the future.

When talking to a recruiter, use the question to segue to the topic of your desired earning potential. Be honest and upfront about your underpaid status: "At my last company, I came in at a much lower salary for my skill set and experience in this city. Based on what I've researched for this position in the current market, I am looking for [state your desired salary range]."

5. Shoot for the higher end of the salary range.

Stick to the top--not the middle--of the salary range for the position for which you're interviewing. Assume that you're entitled to the upper range and leave room to negotiate.

6. Put them on the spot.

When asked the dreaded question tell the recruiter, "I'm not sure my current salary is relevant, but if you must know, I'd be happy to provide it after you share the salary range for this position."

7. Know when not to answer the question.

Regardless of whether the question is illegal in your city or state, this simply isn't an appropriate question to ask a job candidate, period. If your recruiter persists to get an answer after you've deflected, and your intuition alarm is going off in your head, it may be time to part ways.

Remember, handing over private information like your salary history only benefits the potential employer when it comes time for negotiation. Even if you're making a lateral move doing the same thing for another company, your new job, the work environment, management style, benefits, and duties and job expectations will most likely be quite different.

This means comparing salaries from a current job to a prospective job is not an apples-to-apples comparison and you may shoot yourself in the foot by revealing your salary. But if you must and your hands are tied, try one of the approaches above.