JOB-OFFER DEADLINES AND
MAKING A DECISION

by Kayla Villwock

What is the proper amount of time an employer should allow you to thoroughly assess— and accept—a job offer?

The organization I represent targets two of the most sought after skillsets in the student market today: analytics and computer science talent. With a growing need for these skills, students in these fields have many choices when it comes to potential employment opportunities, often resulting in multiple offers… especially for the top talent.

It is a race among employers to access this top talent as early as possible. Most employers seeking May grads are recruiting in the fall for their openings. Employers are also using internship programs as pipelining opportunities to lock in the top talent before they begin their final year of school. I have even recently heard of employers actively interviewing graduates over a year before they even graduate!

So what timeframe is considered reasonable for offer deadlines, so you can feel comfortable accepting an offer without regrets?

Here's my take on it: when employers are making offers for May graduates in early in the fall, say August through October, giving students until at least Thanksgiving before they are required to make a decision is reasonable. Universities typically host fall recruiting events in September, so students should be well-educated on employer opportunities by that time.

I envision you sitting around the Thanksgiving dinner table with your family talking about your offers and coming back from the holiday with a decision. When it gets later in the recruitment season, say December/January, I think it is appropriate to give shorter deadline windows, but in my opinion, no less than two weeks.

Here's the challenge: most employers cannot wait for an indefinite period of time to hear back from you regarding your decision because they have a need to fill. The longer you have to decide, the likelihood of finding another great new hire for the position will be lessened.

I tell students:

"The offer you have received is filling a spot at our company. The later the deadline we give, the harder it will be for us to find another rock star like you who is still available to fill the position. You may have a classmate or friend who is very interested in this opportunity and if we give you too much time, they may not have access to the opportunity if you choose to decline (which we hope you do not do)."

EXPLORING OPTIONS

Many times I find that students want to "explore all of their options" before they commit to an offer. The more options the better, right? Or is that true? I personally get overwhelmed when I have too many options to choose from…so why is exploring all options such a common direction for students seeking full-time employment? Is it so multiple offers can be put up against one another in order to negotiate a higher base salary? Student loans are crippling these days (I speak from experience!) so I can understand why this would be a factor.

I would much rather that you spend time prior to the job search figuring out *what is most important to you* in the career you are seeking. Is it the company? Is it the role? Is it location, compensation, the culture of the company?

If you are well-educated on what you are looking for and then seek out the roles that meet these criteria, then you will have a basis for accepting the right opportunity once it is offered, or declining an offer to continue to seek out the role of your dreams. I would rather that you proactively *know your career goals* and seek them out rather than explore all of your opportunities and then make a selection.

Here are additional suggestions:

- Spend time prior to the job search to understand what is important to you. There are many aspects of a career. You should know your top three career priorities, and do your best to accept interviews only with the companies that meet your career goals.
- Be transparent with recruiters about your career goals and any reservations you have about accepting the offer. This way, they can set an appropriate and fair deadline that allows you to feel comfortable with making this very big decision in your life.

Below is a sample list of job factors to rank in order to help you evaluate offers:

- Compensation
- Benefits
- Location

- **Type of work**
- **Manager**
- **Work/Life balance**
- **Culture/Values of the company**
- **Industry**
- **Travel as part of the job**
- **Opportunity for advancement**
- **Global opportunities**
- **Job stability**

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