Critical: Be Ready for Salary Conversations

Purpose

To avoid anchoring too early or too narrowly in compensation discussions.

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1. Never Lead with a Fixed Number

Avoid:

- "I'm looking for $X"
- "My last salary was $X so I need…"

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2. Use Range-Based Framing

Example:

"I'm looking at roles in the range consistent with market benchmarks for this level of responsibility."

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3. Anchor to Market, Not History

Position yourself based on:

- Scope
- Complexity
- Leadership level

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4. Push for Context First

If asked early:

- Redirect to role scope
- Ask about compensation structure

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5. Key Principle

You are negotiating from role value, not past compensation.

Continued...

How to Navigate Salary Conversations with Executive Recruiters:

1. The Question You'll Get

Recruiter:

"What are you looking for in terms of compensation?"

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2. Your First Response (Always Redirect First)

Use this verbatim:

Script A — Preferred Redirect

"Compensation is definitely important to me, but I want to make sure there's a strong fit on the role and scope first. Do you have a range you're working with for this position?"

Why this works:

- Shifts anchoring power back to them
- Forces them to reveal budget first
- Keeps you from naming a ceiling too early

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3. If They Give a Range (Most Common Outcome)

Step 3A — Acknowledge, don't react emotionally

"That's helpful, thank you."

Step 3B — Position yourself inside the top end

*"Based on what you shared, I'd **likely be toward the top end of that range**, depending on the full package."*

Key principle:

You are not negotiating yet—you are positioning yourself inside their band.

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4. If They Push Back and Ask for Your Number Again

Stay calm. Don't over-explain.

Use this verbatim.

Script B — Controlled Range Anchoring

"I'm currently interviewing for roles in the $X to $Y range, depending on scope and total compensation structure."

Rules:

- Always give a **range, never a single number**
- Anchor slightly above your current base
- Keep it **base salary only** at this stage

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5. If They Try to Lock You Down Immediately

If they insist or pressure you:

Script C — Soft Boundary

"I'm flexible depending on the full opportunity, but I'd expect alignment with market ranges for similar scope and level."

This prevents:

- premature commitment
- low anchoring
- loss of negotiation leverage

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6. When You Want to Anchor Strategically (Optional Advanced Move)

Use this only when you have clarity on market value:

"I'm currently targeting roles in the $350K–$450K base range, depending on scope and overall package."

Important:

- Only use if it is **credible and aligned with your market position**
- Never stretch beyond plausibility just to "aim high"

Pro-Tip:

- Recommend, where applicable, **to anchor your base 15% - 20% above your current base.**

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7. Final Positioning Statement (When Closing Compensation Topic)

Once alignment is clear:

"That works. I'm comfortable within that range, and we can refine details as we get further into the process."

Core Rules to Remember (Non-Negotiables)

- Never lead with a single number
- Always try to get their range first
- Anchor to **base salary, not total comp**
- Stay calm and neutral—no emotional signaling
- Treat compensation as **information exchange, not disclosure**

Mental Model to Hold in Live Conversations

You are not "answering a question."

You are:

- establishing range boundaries
- gathering intelligence
- protecting upside leverage

STAR Stories (Interview Readiness)

Purpose

To prepare structured leadership examples that demonstrate impact and decision-making.

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1. STAR Structure

- Situation
- Task
- Action
- Result

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2. Build 3 Core Story Types

- Leadership under pressure
- Complex problem solving
- Measurable business impact

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3. Executive Upgrade Rule

Every story must include:

- Scale (size, scope, budget, org size)

- Decision-making complexity
- Outcome impact

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4. Common Mistake

Too tactical, not strategic.

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5. Key Principle

Your stories should demonstrate leadership patterns, not isolated tasks.

References

Purpose

To proactively manage credibility validation before it is requested.

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1. Choose Strategic References

Select people who can speak to:

- Leadership ability
- Results delivered
- Cross-functional influence

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2. Diversify Perspectives

Include:

- A former boss
- A peer or partner stakeholder
- A direct report (if applicable)

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3. Prepare Them in Advance

Do not wait for late-stage requests.

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4. Brief Your References

Align them on:

- Target roles
- Key strengths to emphasize
- Core accomplishments

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5. Key Principle

References should reinforce your positioning—not discover it.

Headshot Strategy (Market Alignment)

Purpose

To ensure your visual brand aligns with your target market and role positioning.

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1. Match the Market You Want

- Tech / innovation → modern, relaxed professional
- Finance / corporate → structured, formal
- Advisory / consulting → balanced, credible, approachable

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2. Have Multiple Variations

Ideally:

- One formal
- One slightly relaxed / modern
- One adaptable for broader use

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3. Avoid Generic or Outdated Photos

No:

- Cropped group photos
- Casual selfies
- Low-quality images

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4. Consistency Across Platforms

Your LinkedIn, resume, and outreach should visually align.

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5. Key Principle

Your headshot is a positioning asset, not a personal photo.