

the salary script card

they budgeted for you to ask — **silence is the only move that's off-script**. one sentence, one pause, four possible replies. this card is the whole conversation.

the one sentence (the counter)

"thank you — i'm really excited about the role. based on what i'm seeing for this position in this market, i was expecting something closer to **[your target]**. is there flexibility?"

one calm breath — **then stop talking**. the silence is the sound of someone checking a spreadsheet. every word you add is you negotiating against yourself. **the pause is where the money is**.

if they ask you first

"what are your salary expectations?" — return the question, politely:

"i'd love to make sure we're in the same ballpark — **what's the range budgeted for this role?**"

the four standard replies, translated

1 **"let me check with the team."** = this is going fine. the spreadsheet conversation is happening. say thanks, wait. waiting is winning.

2 **"that's above our range for this level."** = base is capped, but the negotiation just changed currency → non-salary list.

3 **"we can meet you in the middle."** = a raise for one sentence. accept, or name your sourced target once more, calmly — then take the best final answer. one counter is professional; five is a hostage situation.

4 **"the offer is the offer."** = also information. above your floor and you like the job? take it — you verified the ceiling. below your floor? "i completely understand — i don't think we'll close the gap, but i really appreciate the process." calm walking is a superpower.

if you remember one thing: the worst case, out loud: they say "the offer is the offer", you say "understood, i'm glad i asked." that's it. that's the catastrophe.

the non-salary list

when base is capped — in order of long-term value:

- ☐ **the title** — costs them nothing, compounds forever
- ☐ **signing bonus** — different budget than salary
- ☐ **review @ 6 months, in writing** — a raise with a delay
- ☐ **extra vacation days**
- ☐ **learning budget**
- ☐ **remote days**

ask for one or two, not the whole list. then: **"could you send the updated details over email?"** if it's not in writing, it was a nice conversation.

the 20-min homework

- 1 **three sources**
bls.gov/oes (official medians) · salary sites (overlap of three = signal) · five real job ads with printed ranges.
- 2 **two numbers**
target = middle of what you found.
floor = where you'd walk. never say a number you can't source.
- 3 **say it out loud x3**
your mouth needs the reps. nervous is fine — confidence is not the entry fee, it's the souvenir.