

The Decision: Taking a Job Offer by **Rose Jonas, Ph.D.**

The interview's finished, and the offer's on the table. How do you know this is the job for you? A generation ago, your grandmother would have said to your grandfather, "It's a secure job. Take it." Not only are there no secure jobs left for consideration, we've grown up feeling as if we want the right job for ourselves, not just any job. There may still, however, be an urgent insistence from a family member, "It pays well and we need the money. Take it."

Before you take the job or turn it down, run these questions through your mind.

1. Your current situation. "You can't always get what you wa-a-nt," sang the Rolling Stones, "but if you try sometime, you just might find, you get what you ne-e-e-ed." Is this the time you need to take the less-than-perfect job? Are both family-income earners out of work? Do you have no financial cushion? Is there a recession or few jobs in your field right now? Do you just want to get off the stress treadmill? Are you supporting people, looking at looming college bills, or is your so-called career just not as important to you right now as making money?

Sift through your heart to know what's true for you. If you're family's hard up but you're demanding a long wait for the perfect career to come along, that's irresponsible. Getting a job isn't indentured servitude. You can change your mind in a couple of years. It seldom happens that you can't pick up a dream again. If the wolf of hunger is howling at the door, you might need to take the job. Don't commit your time or soul to the bitterness of the unpursued dream. Understand clearly why you're making the decision, and embrace its reality with grace and acceptance. It isn't your turn.

2. The salary they've offered you. In general, you want to try to do between 5 and 15 percent better than where you were, and feel positive about your future money options. Is any of your salary at risk (commissions, bonuses)? Can you manage if you don't make the "nut"?

What if they're offering you the same as you're making now? Take it if you just absolutely have to get out of there, but realize you've just said, "It's okay that I don't get a raise this year. I just gotta get out."

Should you ever take less money? Yes, in several circumstances: (a) You've been out of work a long time; too many people are qualified to do your job; you keep losing offers to younger, cheaper people. (b) You can learn a new field, and in a few years you can leave and make a lot more money. (c) You just need a job now. (d) You were making an obscene salary before and NOBODY'S paying that. (e) You're jumping off the fast track or the salary matters less than your satisfaction.

If you take less money, look at the spread between what you're making now and what this new job will pay. Can you, through raises over the next two or three years, be at least where you are now? For example, if you make \$50,000 and the current offer is \$45,000, the answer is yes. If the current offer is \$40,000, the answer is no. If not, is that okay with you? Can your family

manage? If you can't make it up, then by taking the job you're also agreeing to a more or less permanent pay cut.

3. The experience this will give you. Does this offer more of the same that you already had, or will you get new mountains to climb? Do you feel interested and excited by what the interviewers told you?

4. The people you'll work with. Did you like the people you met? Can you see yourself socializing with them? Did they put you off because they were too smart or too uncool or too uptight or too uneducated or too old? Did it feel like the atmosphere that appeals to you (solid or kicky or fast-paced or calm)? Are you a people person thinking with dread about working in a one-person office? Pay attention to these feelings. You might not say aloud some of the things you feel because they're not polite, but they matter to you, and that's what's important.

5. The way they treated you. The interview process is kind of like dating. It's when everyone has on their best manners. It never gets better. If the boss seemed gruff to you, he'll be a monster in your eyes once he stops being what he considered overly when he first met you. Did they take forever to make the decision? Imagine trying to get a project approved when you're working there. Did they patronize you? Do you feel unclear about what your job responsibilities would be? You won't get clarity later on.

Put all these feelings and more on a piece of paper, right next to the offer letter, and see if this feels like the right place for you, with ALL things considered. You'll have a tendency to jump at the safety of a job and not think through all the aspects. Do a little thinking upfront, and you'll be happier later.