

Should I divulge my salary to the headhunter?

Q *“The headhunter wants to know my salary history before discussing a position with me. I’m afraid that if I tell him, it may rule me out or affect my ability to negotiate salary later. Should I give him the information?”*

A Divulge your salary information only if you have evidence that the headhunter will use it only for your advantage. (When I refer to salary, I mean your total compensation and whatever components it might include.)

Some headhunters routinely provide a candidate’s salary history to their clients. This almost always puts constraints on a job offer and sometimes affects whether the client will even conduct an interview—in spite of the candidate being qualified and motivated. (The candidate might be willing to take a lower salary.)

Ie A headhunter typically has no obligation to provide a candidate’s salary history to his client (unless he is bound contractually to do so). In fact, the headhunter’s obligation is to manage and resolve salary issues to ensure a hire at a competitive salary. A client who demands candidate salary information from the headhunter is micro-managing the search.

But put all this aside. You’re not a candidate yet. You’re talking with a headhunter for the first time. You don’t even know whether this job interests you. And remember—the headhunter *called you*, you did not call him. You’re under no obligation to divulge anything. Of course, your decision may affect whether you get an interview. You must decide whether you want to share the information. Just remember: Sharing it may affect your ability to negotiate later.

If the headhunter says he needs to know your current or desired salary before continuing the discussion, offer this suggestion:

How to say it “I’m flattered that you’ve called me and that I’m on your list. And I agree that if we’re not in the same salary ballpark, we should not pursue this. However, with all due respect, you called me—and I’m glad to talk. But the best way to decide whether to talk further is for you to tell me what kind of compensation we’re talking about, even if it’s just in terms of a range. I’ll tell you whether it fits my objectives, because I don’t want to waste your time or mine. If we decide to proceed, I will tell you all you need to know as we start working together—after I get to know you better and after I decide I want to pursue this.”