

THE EXECUTIVE GUIDE TO

Negotiating Your C-suite Compensation Package



Introduction

Negotiating your executive compensation is a crucial but final step to closing the deal on some of the most meaningful moves of your career. This isn't just about ensuring you're paid fairly – it's important to think about and negotiate your total compensation package (“total comp”), which may include everything ranging from stock units to perks to benefits and severance packages. A new role – and new executive compensation discussion – is the time to ensure you're optimizing your compensation and benefits. Do not let this chance pass to increase your income, ensure equal pay, and make the most of every opportunity before you.

Your base salary

Before you even enter into discussions with a hiring company, get a solid grasp on two things: the cash compensation for your role based on market data, and what you're seeking to make you feel happy and motivated. Both elements are equally important in your hiring and onboarding.

While you may have a range in mind for the role, keep in mind that the company does, too. And know that it may vary quite widely – anywhere from the 25 percentile to the 95 percentile depending on industry, function, or title. Every company has a range of its own, and it's typically up to the hiring managers and HR teams to ensure the specified range is equitable. However, some companies or roles may pay out in the higher percentiles to maintain a powerful competitive edge. In other words, certain companies or roles are known to pay more or better than others. That is not just chance – it's a very deliberate and intentional compensation philosophy from the hiring company. Certain companies are willing to pay top dollar for the world's top talent.



Leverage your network for insights

You've built up your network for a reason – now is the time to reach out and have straightforward conversations with those you trust about your compensation. Don't be shy: ask about current compensation ranges, the reputations or philosophies behind certain industries or companies, and – if you can – get your eyes on a copy of the VCECS Report, which shares salary ranges for VP and C-suite professionals. ([Check out an example here](#)). Your network should be leveraged to validate existing (public) data sources and encourage or dissuade your instinct regarding your approach to negotiating compensation. You may also leverage public sources for data points. For example, you can find the salary in a public database of any worker who is on an H1-B Visa.

Equity

Stock will be leveraged as an incentive for both private and public companies. For private companies, you'll likely receive stock in the form of restricted stock grants – whereby you're given an amount of stock units (and/or options) that vest over time, giving you the opportunity to purchase company stock at an employee price. For restricted stock, it holds value the day you receive it and as it vests over time. The opportunity is biggest at a growth-stage company, where the value of your stock will surely improve over time. Your restricted stock stays with you, even once you've moved on from the company, once vesting conditions have been met. Options, on the other hand, options are worth nothing – you must pay to purchase stock if you wish to exercise your options.

For executives at well-funded, venture-backed startups, it's not unusual to receive a blend of options and RSUs. The incentive is in the long-term: assuming the company grows and eventually hits the IPO stage, your stock can be worth a significant amount.

For public companies, stock is typically granted both at the time of hire and inline with annual bonuses. Public company stock can be quite lucrative, and it's all negotiable. Executives at public companies are likely to receive stock in the range of six-figures.

Perks

The range of perks you can negotiate as an incoming executive varies wildly. From titles to airfare classes, resources, home office décor, and even childcare, you're in a position to push for unique perks to support your goals and lifestyle.

Consider these perks:

- Additional vacation or unlimited PTO
- Gym memberships / health perks
- Upgraded travel, such as business class airfare or preferred hotel class
- Limited travel – you may want to limit your travel to a set number of days per year or a set number of times per month or quarter
- Professional memberships and conferences – any professional networking group, functional association, or specific conferences you want to attend
- Childcare – you may want to ask for an allowance for childcare or a nanny if you're a parent with young children who has to travel, which may disrupt your household's routine
- Relocation – even in our remote-work world, some companies may prefer employees to be located in a specific city or regional hub; from closing costs on a new home and movers to rentals to assistance moving your car or renting one – don't leave money on the table if you need to relocate

Healthcare benefits

Healthcare benefits are a standard, expected benefit – and you may find them more important if you have existing conditions or children. One area you can negotiate is in your contribution costs. Can your company cover your benefits entirely, and also for your dependents? Get crystal clear on this one: many companies may tout that they cover “100% of expenses” only you may find out later it was just for you, not your family.



Severance package

Executives will want to negotiate a severance package (also known as “exit package”) in the event they are laid off or terminated. Should one of those events occur, this package ensures you’ll receive compensation and benefits. It’s not unusual for executives to receive exit packages that pay them out for a year or more, depending on their title, company size, and length of employment.

Other things to consider

Make sure you understand any non-compete terms within your employment contract. In California, these terms are not enforceable – but that doesn’t stop a lot of employers from trying to put them into writing. Outside of California, if you’re in a very niche industry or built your career focused on one area of specialty, non-competes could be damaging to your future career prospects. You can negotiate your non-compete to be very narrow and specific, or you may wish to limit it to a narrow window of time. You could even work with your new company to list a few specific competitors where you could not work for a time in the future. Keeping it narrow protects your future employment prospects.



Final notes on negotiation

Negotiating anything starts with understanding and owning your value. When negotiating your executive package, know that absolutely everything is up for negotiation. Everything. It's up to you to know what is most important to you, where to flex or push harder, and what to potentially leave on the table.

When asking for more, aim to come across as dispassionate. Negotiating is not a time to be emotional or to get upset – this is the time to be professional, even a bit removed. You're simply asking for what you're worth.

It's easy to get overwhelmed during negotiations. Athena Coach Jenna Lange works with some of the world's top senior executives to help them confidently and effectively navigate high-stakes communications. In an Athena Salon on [Negotiation & High-Stakes Communication](#), Jenna noted it's difficult to organize our thoughts in the moment and forget what you were hoping to say.

“We bring the wrong emotion to the moment, and sometimes [the effects] can be lasting. The impact of that moment, if not appropriately planned, can be very, very hard,” she said. Before the conversation, think through what you need from the negotiation, what you want, your opening position, and at what point you'll walk away.

Jenna cites work from Wendy Palmer to help members settle into conversations and present the best version of themselves. Before and during the negotiation, she recommends an exercise called Lift, Lighten, and Settle.

“You lift your body up; you lighten by thinking of something, someplace, or someone that brings you joy; and settle back in the moment,” Jenna said. “The goal behind this is that it gives you power. You're going into your head for something that brings you joy, and nobody can take that away from you. Then you get ready for the conversation. You can do it throughout the negotiation to control your body and make sure that you're focused on being present. You can't have presence unless you're present.”

How Athena can help

Athena is a community of top women leaders who come together to support one another, to learn the latest business case studies, to exchange information, and to access new career or board opportunities. We know that any job transition can be challenging. We have the resources and the community to help you gain a competitive advantage in your next move:

— **A vast network of women leaders**, spanning all industries and all geographic locations. Our members regularly meet with one another for general support, but also to exchange information, as in salary ranges, fair compensation, company/industry insights, and more.

— **Branded Career Portfolio experts**. If you're considering a career shift, your resume must reflect your goals. We partner with experts in Branded Career Portfolios (LinkedIn updates, resumes, and bios) to ensure your professional documents are cohesive and working together to your advantage.

— **Executive coaches**. Our coaches can support you in all ways, from the internal work like overcoming imposter syndrome and navigating difficult conversations, to practical business applications like scaling, negotiating, or preparing for board interviews. Even better, our coaches have been in your shoes – they are business-savvy and executive-ready.

— **Access to opportunities**. Within Athena, executives and board directors are sourced, new opportunities are shared, and valuable relationships are made – all helping you gain traction, fast.

Learn more about joining Athena [here](#) or [schedule a live demo](#) to see how Athena helps women leaders reach their biggest career goals.