

// pillar 5 deep dive

Negotiate the offer



Turn the offer into a better offer. What to expect, how to counter, how to build real leverage, and exactly when a competing offer helps you, done honestly, so you keep the offer and your reputation.

baswe.ai // become a software engineer

This is pillar five, the last one. You did the work: you built the proof, ran the pipeline, and worked your warm and cold leads, so now offers are coming. This pillar turns an offer into a better offer, and does it in a way that protects your reputation. By the end you will know what to expect, how to counter, how to build real leverage, and exactly when a competing offer helps you and when it hurts.

The one rule: always counter

Almost every first offer has room, and companies expect a counter. Not countering leaves money on the table, often a lot, and because raises and future offers build off your current number, that gap compounds across your whole career. Countering professionally does not put the offer at risk: a company that would pull an offer because you negotiated politely is telling you something you needed to know.

As a default, ask for at least ten percent more than the first number, and more if your leverage or the market supports it. The worst case is almost always that they say no and you accept the original, which means the downside of asking is close to zero.

The first offer is a starting point, not the final number. Almost no one loses an offer for countering politely. Plenty of people lose money by not countering at all.

Know the whole comp picture

Compensation is far more than base salary, and the whole package is negotiable. Before you talk numbers, understand the pieces:

Base salary. The anchor, and usually the first thing to push, though it can be capped by a band.

Bonus. The target percentage, plus any signing or relocation bonus, which is often the most flexible lever.

Equity. Options or RSUs: the amount, the vesting schedule, the strike price, and the current valuation. This can be worth more than base over time, or very little, so understand it.

Level and title. Your level drives your comp band and your future raises, so a level bump can be worth more than a salary bump.

The rest. Start date, PTO, remote flexibility, and benefits all count, and all can move.

Research your numbers first, using market comp data for your role and level, so you anchor on facts rather than hope. When base will not move, ask what is negotiable, because sign-on, equity, or level often are.

How to counter

Countering well is calm, specific, and collaborative. You are not fighting them; you are helping them make it an easy yes.

Anchor high, with a reason. Name a specific number above their offer, tied to your value and the market. Do not apologize for asking.

Negotiate the package, not just base. If base will not move, push on the sign-on, equity, level, or start date.

Stay warm. Frame it as excitement to join and a wish to make the numbers work, not a standoff. You want them to keep wanting you.

Get it in writing. Once you agree, get the full offer in writing before you resign anywhere or decline anyone.

THE COUNTER

"Thank you, I'm genuinely excited about this role and the team.

Based on the scope and what I'm seeing in the market for this level, I was hoping we could get the base to [X]. Is there flexibility there?

I'd also love to talk through the sign-on and equity. I want to make this an easy yes for both of us."

Leverage: the real source of a bigger offer

Leverage is what actually moves numbers, and the strongest leverage is a competing offer, because it is hard proof of your market value. The good news is that the whole system you just ran was designed to create it.

▪ Cluster your timing

The reason you worked your warm and cold leads in parallel, instead of one company at a time, is so that several processes finish around the same time and real offers overlap. That overlap is your leverage. As you get into later rounds, gently line up your timelines so decisions land in the same window.

▪ Use real competing offers

If you hold two offers, you can, professionally and honestly, let each know you are deciding between strong options and ask whether they can improve theirs. You are not playing games; you are simply being transparent that you have a choice, which is the most natural leverage there is.

The competing-offer question: when to use it, and when not to

This is the tactic people always ask about: getting an offer faster or bigger by signaling you have, or might have, another offer. Here is how to get the benefit without getting burned.

- **The truthful, powerful version (do this)**

If you are genuinely interviewing elsewhere, say so. "I'm in final rounds with a couple of other companies and expect to decide by [date]" is true, it creates real urgency, and it can speed up or improve an offer, with no lie involved. Being in active processes is itself leverage. A real deadline works the same way: "I need to give another company an answer by Friday" moves things along, honestly.

- **The risky version (claiming an offer you don't have)**

Some people flat-out claim a specific competing offer they do not have. Be very careful here, because the risks are real. Employers sometimes ask which company or what number, and you can get caught. A caught bluff can get your offer rescinded, and the AI-hiring world is small and talks, so it can follow you. And it can simply backfire, they say "great, take it," and you have nothing.

So the rule is simple: never fabricate a specific number or company you cannot stand behind. If you want to gesture at other interest, keep it true. You are interviewing elsewhere, so say exactly that.

You almost never need to lie to get leverage. Real interest, real timelines, and real offers do the same job without the risk. Keep it true, and you keep both your reputation and your offer.

- **When not to do it at all**

Do not invent a competing process when you have none and cannot speak to one truthfully; lean on your value and market data instead. And be most cautious when the company is small, the team is tight-knit, or the recruiter is well-connected, because that is exactly where a bluff is most likely to be checked and remembered.

Handling common situations

An exploding offer or pressure to decide fast. Ask for reasonable time, and a good company will give it. Use your other real timelines to justify it.

"This is our best and final." Often not literally true. You can still push politely on a non-base lever, or accept gracefully if it is genuinely strong.

They ask your current salary or expectations first. Deflect to your target and the market ("I'm targeting [X] based on the role and market") rather than anchoring yourself low with an old number.

You only have one offer. You can still counter on your value and market data. You just have less leverage, so be a little more measured, and lean on being genuinely excited about the role.

Evaluate the offer, not just the number

Compare total compensation, base plus bonus plus vesting equity, across offers, not base against base, since a lower base can come with far more equity or a higher level. Then weigh the things a number cannot capture: the team and the manager, how much you will learn, the trajectory, remote or location, and whether the role genuinely advances your AI-engineering career. The best offer is not always the biggest headline number.

Common mistakes to avoid

- ▶ **Not countering.** The single most expensive mistake in the whole job search.
- ▶ **Negotiating only base.** You leave sign-on, equity, and level on the table.
- ▶ **Anchoring yourself low.** Giving your current salary or a low expectation first caps the whole conversation.
- ▶ **Fabricating an offer you can't back up.** High risk, and unnecessary when truthful leverage works.
- ▶ **Being adversarial.** Negotiation is collaborative. You want them to keep wanting you.
- ▶ **Accepting verbally or resigning before it's in writing.** Always get the full offer documented first.
- ▶ **Comparing base to base.** Compare total comp, and weigh the non-comp factors too.

That's the Get Hired system

Step back and look at what you built. You made real proof with your Signal Project. You set up the foundation and the tracker in pillar one, built a pipeline that sources jobs and flags warm leads in pillar two, worked your warm leads into referrals in pillar three, and reached decision makers directly on your cold leads in pillar four. Now, in pillar five, you turn the offers that produced into the best possible deal.

Almost no one runs a search this way. Most people apply into the void and hope. You built proof, ran a system, reached humans, and negotiated. That is exactly why it works.

→ You built the proof, ran the system, and reached the humans. Now counter, and go get the offer you earned.