

**Work & Career**

Exercise



30 min



Client



No

Career Deal-Breakers

While each of us faces career-related decisions at one time or another, making considered choices can be challenging and overwhelming. Whether changing a career completely, moving to a new company, or applying to certain roles, the process becomes more complicated when individuals are uncertain about what is important to them professionally. Indeed, inertia in decision-making and decision avoidance are direct consequences of uncertainty [1]. Before considering career options, people must define the parameters, conditions, and limitations that make them accept a position or walk away from it [2]. One effective way to gain this clarity is to identify one's career deal-breakers.

A deal-breaker is, in essence, a specific non-negotiable issue that people absolutely must have or absolutely cannot tolerate in a job [3]. Identifying non-negotiable career deal-breakers - such as base salary, commute time, and work environment - helps people make clear distinctions between what is important and what is essential in a job.

When individuals recognize their career deal-breakers, they become aware of what they are and are not willing to compromise on, allowing them to make confident career-related decisions [4]. Further, knowing what is and is not a deal-breaker makes compromising on lesser-valued aspects of a job a much simpler task [4]. For example, if individuals realize that flexible working hours are one of their top priorities, then compromising on other, less important elements will be easier.

This exercise will help participants identify the factors they believe to be non-negotiable deal-breakers in their careers and distinguish them from the desirable (but not essential) elements. Individuals will gain greater clarity about what they want professionally, recognize what they are - and are not - willing to compromise on and make confident career-related decisions.



Author

This tool was created by Elaine Houston.



Goal

This exercise aims to help participants identify the factors they consider to be deal-breakers in their careers. By highlighting the aspects of work-life they are not willing to compromise on, individuals will gain greater clarity about what they want professionally, allowing them to make career-related decisions based on important, non-negotiable deal-breakers.



Advice

- Some participants may find it challenging to reduce their initial list (step 1) to just three deal-breakers (step 2). In such instances, it may be helpful to ask participants what they would be willing to negotiate for each factor. If participants can think of a reasonable compromise, this can be viewed as important but not a deal-breaker and removed from the list. If participants cannot think of a reasonable compromise, this may be considered a deal-breaker.
- If required, a list of common deal-breakers can be found in Appendix.



References

1. Sautua, S. I. (2017). Does uncertainty cause inertia in decision-making? An experimental study of the role of regret aversion and indecisiveness. *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization*, 136, 1-14.
2. Adomaitis, A. D., Saiki, D., Schofield, S., Sanders, E. A., Eike, R., & Myers, B. (2015, November). Knowing your value for academic career negotiations. In *International textile and apparel association annual conference proceedings* (Vol. 72, No. 1). Iowa State University Digital Press.
3. Phillips, G. (2006). *Soul search before you job search: Bridging the gap between purpose and practicality*. Clariscope Press Ltd.
4. Berman, R. A., & Gottlieb, A. S. (2019). Job negotiations in academic medicine: Building a competency-based roadmap for residents and fellows. *Journal of general internal medicine*, 34, 146-149.



Career Deal-Breakers

Whether you are actively job hunting or tentatively thinking about a career change, considering your options and making the right choices can be overwhelming. What if you end up in a role that you hate? How can you be sure you are making the right decision? While it may be tempting to apply for every job that seems like a viable opportunity, it is important to think more strategically about what you want - and do not want - from a job. One way to do this is to identify your career deal-breakers.

Deal-breakers are the factors you must have (or cannot tolerate) in a job. While your career deal-breakers are unique to you, they might include things like the kind of people you want to work with, the base salary you expect, or location and commute time.

Identifying your career deal breakers will help you:

- Understand the factors you are - and are not - willing to compromise
- Evaluate career opportunities and give your attention to the ones that match your deal-breakers
- Make confident career-related decisions when planning your career, choosing positions to apply for, turning down offers, and accepting a role.

This exercise will help you uncover your career deal-breakers to highlight the aspects of your work-life that are most important, gain clarity about what you want professionally, and make career-related decisions based on these important, non-negotiable factors.

Step 1: Identifying important factors in your career

First, you will take some time to brainstorm the important things in your work-life. Think about your past experiences, what you currently need and want from your career, what is important, and what is unacceptable. For instance, it may be important that organizations have values similar to yours, offer flexible working hours, or require a short commute. Perhaps working from home and opportunities for advancement are important factors for you.

Use the space below to write down everything you consider important in your career. Do not worry about writing these in any order, as this step is only about identifying these important factors.

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Step 2: Identifying your non-negotiable career deal-breakers

This step will help you identify your deal-breakers, the important factors you are unwilling to compromise on.

Take some time to go through your list from the previous step and cross out the things that, while important, are not necessarily deal-breakers for you. For example, you might consider a commute of fewer than 45 minutes important but are willing to compromise on this for the right job.

Continue crossing out these factors until you are left with three non-negotiable career deal-breakers. Write these down in the spaces below.

A list of common deal-breakers can be found in Appendix.

My Career Deal Breakers:

1.	
2.	
3.	

These are the *most important* factors you should not compromise on when considering a career change, choosing roles to apply for, turning down offers, or accepting a position.

Step 3: Analysis

You will now take some time to reflect on the three deal-breakers you identified in the previous step. Consider the following questions and write your responses in the spaces provided.

1. What do your deal-breakers say about what is important to you in your career?



2. In what ways does your current role align/not align with your deal-breakers?

3. What careers/roles would allow you to fulfill your deal-breakers?

4. What small steps can you take to integrate these deal-breakers into your professional life?

Step 4: Reflection

- What was it like to complete this exercise?
- How does it feel to think more strategically about what you want - and do not want - from a job?
- In what ways has this exercise helped you evaluate your career choices?
- How has this exercise helped you understand what you need from a job?



Appendix: Examples of career deal-breakers

- Lack of autonomy
- Inflexible hours/days
- Expected to work when 'off the clock,' e.g., responding to emails etc.
- Unrealistic job requirements
- No opportunity for advancement
- Long hours
- Unpredictable hours/shifts
- Cannot work from home
- Not enough variation in daily tasks
- Poor communication
- No opportunities to work independently
- A commute longer than 60 minutes each way
- Expected to complete tasks outside of job description
- Working on weekends
- Poor work/life balance
- Incompatible personal/organization values
- High-pressure environment
- Working for a micro-manager
- Working evenings
- Vague/unclear expectations
- No health insurance
- Required to work over 40 hours per week
- Salary below X amount
- Lack of company integrity
- Toxic/unfriendly work environment
- Being undervalued
- Little job security
- Unsupportive management
- Poor leadership
- Involves little to no creative work
- Lack of employee benefits/perks
- Expected to travel out of town