HOW TO ACCEPT OR DECLINE AN OFFER

Congratulations! You’ve received an offer. Now the question is – do you want to accept it? You are encouraged to meet with an OCP Director to address any questions or concerns you have about accepting the offer. Below are some tips for fielding an offer, analyzing whether to accept it, and communicating your decision.

RECEIVING AN OFFER

Offers can be extended in various ways. Some employers will call you with the good news, and then follow up with an offer letter. Others may convey the offer via letter or email. You may be contacted by the employer’s recruiting department, or an attorney with whom you interviewed.

- **Voicemail Greeting.** Make sure that your voicemail greeting is professional. State your name clearly and let the caller know that you are unavailable to take the call and will return it as soon as possible.

- **Answering an employer call.** Refrain from answering your phone if you are in a loud or otherwise inconvenient place and suspect that it is an employer calling. Let the employer leave a voicemail. Have a pen and paper on hand when you listen to the message to take note of important information. Save the message for future reference.

- **Prompt Acknowledgment.** Regardless of whether the employer leaves a simple message requesting your return call, or a substantive message with an offer, it is important that you return the call as soon as possible, within the same day if possible. If you do receive an offer, acknowledge receipt of the offer and express your gratitude. You do not need to accept it immediately, BUT you do need to acknowledge receipt. If you received an offer by mail or email, you can acknowledge receipt of the offer either by email or phone call.

- **Leaving a Message.** If you reach the employer’s voicemail upon returning their call, leave a clear, professional message that includes your name and contact information:

  - Example 1: “Hello, this is [first and last name] from USF returning your call. I’m sorry I missed your call, and hope that we can connect this afternoon. I will be in class from 1:30 – 3:00 PM, but am otherwise available. I can be reached at (415) 123-4567. I look forward to speaking to you. Again, this is [first name, last name] at (415) 123-4567. Thank you.”

  - Example 2: “Hello, this is [first and last name] from USF returning your call. I was happy to receive your message with the good news earlier today. I look forward to speaking with you, and can be reached at (415) 123-4567 any time this afternoon. If I don’t hear back from you before the end of the day, I will give you
another call. Again, this is [first and last name] from USF at (415) 123-4567. Thank you.”

- **Give Yourself Time.** When you receive an offer, do not feel compelled to accept on the spot! *Wait until you receive written confirmation of an offer before accepting it. It is best to wait until you receive the actual offer letter with the salary, start date, and additional details so you can review the employment details for accuracy.* Rather than accepting right away, thank the employer and express your excitement: “Thank you! I’m honored. When shall I get back to you?” Or, “Thank you! I’m excited about this opportunity. Will I receive a letter in the mail with the offer details?”

- **Deadlines.** Make note of the date that you received the offer, and the date that your decision is due. If it is a NALP employer, be mindful of the applicable rules that determine the deadline for your response. Consult an OCP Director if you have any questions regarding when you need to respond, as you do not want to lose an opportunity.

**DECIDING WHETHER TO ACCEPT THE OFFER**

Deciding whether to accept an offer – or accept one offer over another – is a personal choice. The OCP can help you with your decision-making process, including gathering additional information about the offer, and performing self-assessment, as needed.

1. **GATHER ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

- **Talk to Others.** Seek OCP’s help in identifying other students and alumni who previously worked for the employer, or are currently working for the employer. It is often helpful to speak with former law clerks and attorneys to get an “inside scoop.” You can also call the recruiting department and ask to meet with additional junior associates or attorneys in a specific practice area or on a certain committee (e.g., pro bono committee, diversity committee, women’s forum, etc.).

- **Ask Follow-up Questions.** Now is the time to ask more difficult questions of the employer that you were reluctant to ask before receiving an offer. You may choose to confirm information you have gathered from the employer’s NALP form, such as the salary, billable hours, and benefits.

- **Get Benefits Information (if applicable).** Remember that your salary is only part of the overall package that the employer is offering you. If your benefits information was not included with your offer, request it. You will want to know what the medical and insurance coverage is, sick time offered, vacation, and other fringe benefits. Knowing this information is helpful when deciding if this offer is right for you, and when comparing various offers.
2. DO SELF-ASSESSMENT

- How does the offer for employment fit into your long-term plans? Consider how the offer aligns with your employment priorities. Priorities will be different for everyone. Some may include salary, practice groups, size of firm, exposure to clients, billable hours, lifestyle, and “fit” within the firm culture, firm diversity, prestige, location, work environment, training, and level of responsibility.

ACCEPTING THE OFFER

If you have carefully considered your written offer and are prepared to accept it, you are ready to contact the employer with the good news.

- Typically, the written offer instructs you how to accept the offer – e.g., call the recruiting department or the hiring partner, and send in a signed acceptance. If you do not have specific instructions, call the person who extended the offer and orally accept, then follow up with written acceptance.

- Once you have accepted your offer, you quickly notify any additional employers who have extended you offers or interview invitations and decline those opportunities. You may call the recruiting department or attorney who extended the offer/invitation to thank them for the opportunity, and inform them that you have accepted another offer of employment. Or you may let them know you have not yet accepted elsewhere but have decided to pursue other options, and did not want to hold onto an offer that would be a better fit for someone else.

DECLINING AN OFFER

If you have carefully considered your written offer and have decided to decline it, decline as soon as possible. Call the recruiting department or attorney who extended you the offer, thank them for their time and the opportunity, and let them know that you have decided not to accept the offer. In some situations, you may also want to follow-up with a written decline letter or email – e.g., if you orally decline to an attorney, you may want to let the recruiting department know in writing as well.

RESCINDING AN ACCEPTANCE TO AN OFFER

Carefully evaluate the offer BEFORE you accept it. Gather all the information you need to make an informed decision, and do your self-assessment about whether this job is the right one for you, before saying “yes.” Do not accept the offer unless you intend to follow-through and work at that office, and are ready to decline any other offers or interview invitations and end your job search. It is inappropriate to accept an offer of employment while holding out for a better opportunity, or continuing to apply and interview for other jobs. Your reputation and professionalism are on the line. The legal community is a tight-knit group, and unprofessional actions have far reaching effects well past this immediate job decision. When you accept a position at a firm, government agency, or non-profit, even if the position is unpaid, that employer is relying on your acceptance. The employer may have already closed the
hiring process, and rejected other highly qualified candidates (who may have accepted another offer) to extend the opportunity to you. Having to re-open their hiring process may be time-consuming and a drain on resources. Additionally, depending on the timing of a rescinded acceptance, the employer may have already set up office space for you, hired an assistant, or made other arrangements.

Not only would rescinding an acceptance potentially hurt the employer, but it could adversely affect fellow students and the law school. Students who were turned away by the employer based on your acceptance likely had to expend extra time and money seeking alternative placements, and/or enrolling in summer school or study abroad programs once the employer closed their hiring. Inappropriately rescinding an acceptance does a disservice to the law school as a whole, and your fellow students in particular, as employers may avoid recruiting at USF in the future. Remember, you are a representative of the law school, and your actions reflect upon the school.

There are extraordinary, unforeseen, and emergency situations that may call for withdrawing an acceptance. If these circumstances do occur, please contact OCP for assistance and proper protocol. You will need to inform the employer immediately and apologetically. A major unexpected life change that precludes you from fulfilling your employment obligations should be understood by the employer but to rescind an offer because you got a better offer is a completely different matter. Below, you will find the NALP Principles and Standards on this issue, which apply to NALP member employers and most law schools, including USF.

**CONCLUSION**

Whether you ultimately decide to accept or decline an offer, do it in a professional manner. While there may be thousands of lawyers, the legal community is actually quite small. Being polite and gracious, even when turning down an offer, will be appreciated and remembered by employers. Lastly, if you do accept employment, please let the Office of Career Planning know for important tracking and statistical purposes.