

Start Date Just Part of Negotiations

By [Amy Lindgren](#)

Updated: 04/24/2009 07:13:21 PM CDT

Congratulations! You got an interview, and it's for your dream job. That's the good news. The bad news? You're holding tickets for a European vacation scheduled for the first two weeks of the job.

You'd gladly change the vacation, except that you're escorting your parents, who are celebrating their 50th wedding anniversary. And they're visiting elderly relatives who might not be around a year from now. And you're an only child — no one else can accompany your folks on this trip of a lifetime.

So anyway, congratulations on that interview ... hope you don't get an offer, though.

This may not seem like a major dilemma, unless you're the one holding those tickets. In a tight market, most people would advise you to skip the vacation, accept the job and count your lucky stars. More daring advisers might suggest telling the interviewer and counting on that person's sympathy — maybe you'll get points for being a good son or daughter.

I guess my answer to both options is nope and nope, but only because I've got a more strategic approach in mind. This isn't the only example of an awkward topic faced by job seekers in an interview. Some are more delicate than others, but all can be made smoother if you plan for the conversation.

Your first step is to decide whether an issue should be raised during the interview, or only after an offer is made. The reason for this distinction in timing? You need to let the interviewer fall in love with you before you start piling on conditions for your employment. Also, some issues that loom large in your mind are actually small potatoes for the employer. One guideline for your decision is to ask yourself how relevant the issue is to the interviewer's immediate objective of evaluating your qualifications.

Here are some common issues and the timing I would recommend for raising them.

TOPICS TO RAISE DURING THE INTERVIEW

Anything that could be a game-changer might fit this category. If you have information that fundamentally changes the way you would do your job, or that would help the interviewer see you in a better light, consider bringing it out yourself in the first or second interview.

Examples of issues to bring up yourself include:

- Your willingness to take a lower salary than might be expected. This can be an issue with career changers who have reached a level of expertise in one field but are now switching to a new field where the salaries are lower or where they would be starting near entry level. It's important to tell the interviewer that you understand the differences in salary and have already adjusted your budget for them.
- Immutable obligations such as Army Reserve. Although you could bring this up after an offer is made, you'd miss the opportunity to discuss the skills you've gained in the service. Instead, consider phrasing things this way: "I currently have an obligation to my unit to spend two weeks a year in training, but I'll do everything I can to handle my work before and after those two weeks to reduce the impact on the team."

I probably wouldn't introduce the concept of a potential deployment, but if the interviewer asks, the honest answer would be that you don't know that you'll be called up, especially now that plans are being made to bring troops home.

TOPICS TO HOLD UNTIL AN OFFER IS MADE

Issues that won't affect the company over the long term or that have little impact on your daily work can be delayed until you have an offer. Until that point, they will be more distracting than informative and may even work against you.

Items in this category include vacations that have already been planned, as well as small accommodations such as the use of noise-canceling headphones or the need for a specific desk chair. I would also hold off discussing temporary scheduling issues, such as needing Friday afternoons off while you finish taking a course.

HARD TO CALL

Some issues are more difficult to strategize, such as a pregnancy that is already underway. Smaller employers will be deeply affected by this, while large companies may have no trouble covering a worker's prolonged absence soon after starting. Of course, if the pregnancy is already showing, the topic needs to be broached; if not, the candidate will have to make a choice.

So, back to the person with the European vacation — yes, go to the interview with confidence, but don't bring up the vacation until an offer has been made. Then put your folks on the telephone. If that doesn't work, nothing will.

Amy Lindgren owns a career consulting firm in St. Paul. She can be reached at alindgren@prototypecareerservice.com