

# Don't get your knickers in a twist over the first offer

## Take time to think it over but don't burn bridges

### On the ladder

Barbara Oaff

The good news is, you've got a job offer. The bad news is, you're not sure if you should accept. There are interviews you are still waiting to hear back from. There are still more interviews at which you fancy your chances. What should you do? Take the bird in the hand? Wait to see what else comes your way? Or something else entirely?

Managing job offers can be a minefield," confirms Ted Edwards, managing director of the London-based recruitment company Next4grads. However, some potential employers will understand the difficulties involved. "They appreciate graduates are looking around and that they need time to make up their mind," says Ted.

But not everyone is so flexible. "The moment they

give you a job offer they can expect you to leap up, shake their hand and take it there and then," says Ted. "If you don't, they may threaten to withdraw the offer and leave you with nothing."

If you find yourself in this situation, what is the best way to proceed? Go with your instincts, says Maria Davies, who runs Ladders of Success, a career coaching service in Uckfield, East Sussex. "If you are being pushed into making a decision, trust your gut reaction," she says. But her advice comes with a caveat. "Remember what it is you want to do with your career. In the rush to say yes or no, and perhaps in the urgency to just get started, it is easy to lose sight of your objective."

Fortunately, you don't have to immediately accept or reject most job offers. Most large companies are prepared to wait several

weeks for an answer. "There is no panic," says Adam Bass, chief executive officer of the resource website Gradunet.co.uk

This is because large companies are often slow moving so there is usually no need for a rapid-fire response. In this case you should simply send a letter acknowledging receipt of the job offer and informing them that you will be in touch in the near future. In the meantime you can haul in any other offers before finally making a decision.

Smaller or medium-sized companies may not be able to give you this luxury. By their very nature they can be more dynamic. Their business must keep going, with or without you. So, out of fairness to them you should make your decision



within a couple of days says Adam Bass. He adds, however, that a sought-after candidate may be able to gain extra thinking time: "This kind of negotiation is possible if they really like you."

None of this alters the fact that choosing between one job offer and another is difficult. You're dealing with nothing less than that all-important first break.

Carl Gilleard, head of the Association of Graduate Recruiters, recalls the experience of one graduate in this situation. "He got himself into a dreadful state. He was completely stressed out. He just could not decide what to do."

Career coach Jane Barrett has also seen this happen. She runs the London-based consultancy Workmaze and,

to help graduates juggle job offers, she recommends a particular exercise. It involves thinking about where you want to be in the next five years. After asking yourself a series of searching questions, Jane says it will become apparent which job offer will best fulfil your ambitions.

If the answer turns out to be none of offers on the table, experts are divided about what to do. Some suggest waiting for the right one to come along. Others suggest going with the best possible option available right now, getting some experience, and then switching jobs later on.

Whatever you do, make sure you get the basics right:

- ★ Find out exactly how long you've got to make your mind up.
- ★ Gather as much information as possible about the job offer.
- ★ If you've got another interview approaching, ask if it can be brought forward.
- ★ If you're still waiting to hear back from an interview, contact the human resources department to ask when a decision will be made. If they sound sympathetic, explain your situation: they may just be able to let you in on something.
- ★ Always be courteous when rejecting a job offer and don't burn your bridges. You never know when you come across a person or their company in the future.