

Exploding Offers: A Principles for Professional Conduct Committee Position Paper

An exploding offer requires a student to choose a job offer within a very short amount of time or face having the offer rescinded. The Principles Committee examined this recruiting practice and developed the following position paper, which was approved by the NACE Board of Directors.

When the job market for graduates, particularly for technology-related majors, is robust and fast paced, some employers may attempt to mitigate the effects of job market competition with recruiting practices that threaten the integrity of the recruiting process. These practices include providing giveaways (such as laptop computers) to students between the offer and the decision; providing financial incentives for accepting an offer; requiring the job offer to be accepted within a short time frame; and requiring that the offer be accepted by the beginning of the traditional recruiting season. In a number of instances—sometimes because of these practices—some students accept offers, continue their job searches, and renege on their accepted job offers once “better deals” are found.

One questionable practice is that of the “exploding job offer.” Consider this real-life example:

An engineering student receives an attractive job offer at the beginning of on-campus recruiting and is given one week to accept the offer.

The Principles Committee believes that the practice of exploding offers is an issue for both career services and employment professionals, as it affects their mutual customers—students. The best employment decisions (for both students and employers) are those that are made with the greatest amount of information. Students given sufficient time to gather thorough information related to all available job opportunities are more likely to make good long-term employment decisions and less likely to renege on job acceptances. By the same token, however, the committee recognizes that there are legitimate business reasons for an employer to have an offer accepted or rejected within a specific time frame.

Deliberation

The NACE Principles Committee examined the issue based on a number of basic precepts for career services and employment professionals, including the preamble to the *Principles for Professional Conduct* document that directs members to:

- Maintain an open and free selection of employment opportunities in an atmosphere conducive to objective thought, where job candidates can choose optimum long-term uses of their talents that are consistent with personal objectives and all relevant facts.
- Maintain a recruitment process that is fair and equitable to candidates and employing organizations.
- Support informed and responsible decision making by candidates. The committee’s opinion also drew upon several specific principles from the *Principles* document, including:
- Employment professionals will refrain from any practice that improperly influences and affects job acceptances. Such practices may include undue time pressure for acceptance of employment offers and encouragement of revocation of another employment offer. Employment professionals will strive to communicate decisions to candidates within the agreed-upon time frame.
- Career services professionals will provide students with information on a range of career opportunities and types of employing organizations. They will inform students of the means and resources to gain access to information, which may influence their decisions about employing organizations. Career

services professionals will also provide employing organizations with accurate information about the educational institution and its students and about the recruitment policies of the career services office.

The committee also considered similar issues that were addressed in *Spotlight* (June 15, 1994, and May 3, 1999). According to *Spotlight* (June 15, 1994), “A student must be given a sufficient opportunity to consider an offer. Certainly, if the student is offered a cash incentive and is also told that he/she must accept the offer within a short time frame, then there is improper influence.”

The committee decided that while cash incentives certainly influence a job decision, the short time frame in which a person must make a decision to accept or reject an offer should be considered “improper influence.”

Conclusion

The NACE Principles for Professional Conduct Committee understands that not all employers recruit at the same time of the year, nor do all colleges follow the same academic calendar. Therefore, recommending specific calendar dates for offers and acceptances would not be appropriate. Furthermore, many employers issue offers to their graduating co-ops or interns at the start of the employer’s recruiting cycle, in order to provide those students priority consideration prior to extending offers to other students. Finally, shorter decision time frames would be appropriate if the candidate’s graduation date and start date are very close.

If offers are extended early in the campus recruiting cycle, the Committee recommends that employers (1) provide students a minimum of three weeks to decide and not require decisions earlier than six months prior to the candidates graduation; and (2) provide students the opportunity to request deadline extensions to allow a reasonable period for investigation of other recruiting opportunities for comparison. However, we recognize that the definitions of "sufficient time" and "a reasonable period" will vary, given industry standards, a student's prior experience with the employer, offer timing, and proximity to graduation date/start time.

The Committee believes that providing sufficient time for students to evaluate the employment opportunities offered to them allows them to make the wisest decisions for all concerned, creating a positive experience for candidates and employers, and ultimately reducing renege and attrition rates.

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