Offer evaluation checklist

A practical, no-fluff guide for working professionals who want to say yes to the *right* offer — and walk away from the wrong ones with confidence.

Designed for career changers, consultants, early-to-mid-career professionals, and managers who are time-poor and outcome-driven. This checklist cuts through the noise and gives you a structured, repeatable framework to evaluate any job offer — from a startup to a Fortune 500 — with clarity and confidence. No guesswork. No regret. Just a clear-eyed decision you can stand behind.

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CHAPTER 1

Why Most Professionals Get Offer Evaluation Wrong

Most professionals spend weeks crafting the perfect resume and acing interviews — then make the most consequential decision in under 48 hours, often based on excitement, pressure, or just the salary number. This is where careers go sideways. A job offer is not just a compensation package; it is a multi-year contract with your time, energy, identity, and trajectory. Evaluating it properly is one of the highest-leverage skills you can develop.

The problem is rarely a lack of intelligence — it is a lack of a structured framework. Without one, you default to gut feeling, comparison anxiety, or whatever your well-meaning friend says over coffee. You miss critical variables like equity vesting cliffs, cultural red flags, role scope ambiguity, or the manager's track record. These are the factors that determine whether you thrive or quietly burn out twelve months in.

This resource exists to change that. It gives you a modular, reusable checklist that covers every dimension of a job offer: compensation, role clarity, growth potential, culture, leadership, logistics, and long-term strategic fit. You can skim it in five minutes or use it as a deep-dive worksheet over a weekend. Either way, you will walk away with a decision framework that is entirely yours.

Think of this as your personal due diligence process — the same rigour a smart investor applies to a deal, applied to the most important investment you make: your career. The sections ahead are organised into five practical modules. Work through them in order, or jump to the area where you feel most uncertain. Every section ends with a concrete checklist you can use immediately.

> How to use this resource: Read it once end-to-end, then return to each section with a specific offer in hand. Fill in the worksheets honestly. Share with a trusted mentor if possible. Revisit after 90 days in a new role to calibrate for next time.

CHAPTER 2

Module 1 — Compensation & Total Rewards

Base salary is the headline number, but it is rarely the whole story. A well-structured offer includes a total rewards package that can add 20–60% to your effective compensation — or subtract from it in hidden ways. Before you evaluate any number, you need to understand what you are actually being offered across four dimensions: fixed pay, variable pay, equity, and benefits.

Fixed pay should be benchmarked against your current market value, not just your current salary. Use tools like LinkedIn Salary Insights, Glassdoor, Levels.fyi (for tech), or industry-specific salary surveys. Know the 25th, 50th, and 75th percentile for your role, level, and geography. If an offer is below the 50th percentile, understand why — is it offset by equity, flexibility, or a brand that accelerates your career? Sometimes yes. Often no.

Variable pay — bonuses, commissions, profit-sharing — must be scrutinised carefully. Ask: Is the bonus guaranteed or discretionary? What was the actual payout percentage in the last two years? What are the performance metrics that trigger it? Many professionals accept offers with a 20% target bonus that has historically paid out at 6%. That is not a bonus — it is a number on paper. Get historical data, not just targets.

Equity deserves its own conversation. Vesting schedules, cliff periods, strike prices, preference stacks (for startups), and liquidity timelines all matter enormously. A 0.1% equity stake in a pre-revenue startup is very different from 0.01% in a Series C company with a clear IPO path. If you cannot value the equity, ask the company to walk you through a realistic dilution scenario. If they refuse or cannot, treat the equity as zero in your mental model.

Base Salary

- Benchmarked to market 50th–75th percentile?
- Reviewed against your target, not your last salary?
- Negotiable within a stated band?

Variable Pay

- Historical payout % confirmed (last 2 years)?
- Metrics and triggers clearly defined?
- Guaranteed first-year bonus offered?

Equity

- Vesting schedule and cliff understood?
- Strike price vs. current 409A valuation?
- Realistic liquidity timeline assessed?

Benefits

- Health, dental, vision — employer contribution %?
- PTO policy (unlimited vs. structured)?
- Retirement match, learning budget, WFH stipend?

⚠ Watch out for "unlimited PTO" policies — research shows employees with unlimited PTO actually take fewer days off due to social pressure. Always ask: what is the average PTO taken per year by the team?

Module 2 — Role Clarity, Growth & Manager Quality

Compensation gets you in the door. Role clarity and manager quality determine whether you stay — and whether you grow. Two of the most under-evaluated dimensions of any job offer are the actual scope of the role and the person you will report to. Research consistently shows that the number one reason professionals leave jobs within 18 months is not pay — it is their direct manager. Evaluate this dimension as seriously as you evaluate the salary.

Role clarity starts with the job description, but cannot end there. In your final-round conversations, ask sharp questions: What does success look like in the first 30, 60, and 90 days? Who are the key stakeholders I will need to influence? What decisions can this role make autonomously versus escalate? What happened to the last person in this role — did they get promoted, leave, or get let go? These questions reveal the real shape of the role, not the aspirational version in the JD.

Growth potential is about trajectory, not just title. Ask whether this company has a history of promoting from within or whether senior roles are always filled externally. Ask where the last three people in this role ended up — inside the company or outside? Look for evidence of structured development: mentorship programmes, internal mobility policies, training budgets, sponsorship by senior leaders. A role that looks lateral today but positions you for a significant leap in 18 months can be worth more than a senior title that goes nowhere.

Your future manager is possibly the most important variable in this entire checklist. Request a 1:1 conversation with them if you have not had one. Observe how they talk about their team — do they use "I" or "we"? Ask them what they are most proud of developing in a team member. Ask how they handle conflict or a project that fails. Ask what their own career goals are. A manager who is growing, secure, and invested in their team's development is a career accelerant. A manager who is threatened, disorganised, or disengaged will cost you years.

Green Flags 🟢

- Clear 30/60/90-day success metrics defined
- Role has budget and headcount authority
- Manager has promoted team members internally
- Team has low turnover (ask directly)
- Learning budget available and actively used
- Role has visibility with senior leadership

Red Flags 🔴

- Role has been open for 6+ months
- Vague success criteria ("you'll figure it out")
- Manager deflects questions about team culture
- High turnover on the immediate team
- No structured onboarding or mentorship
- Role scope keeps expanding during interviews

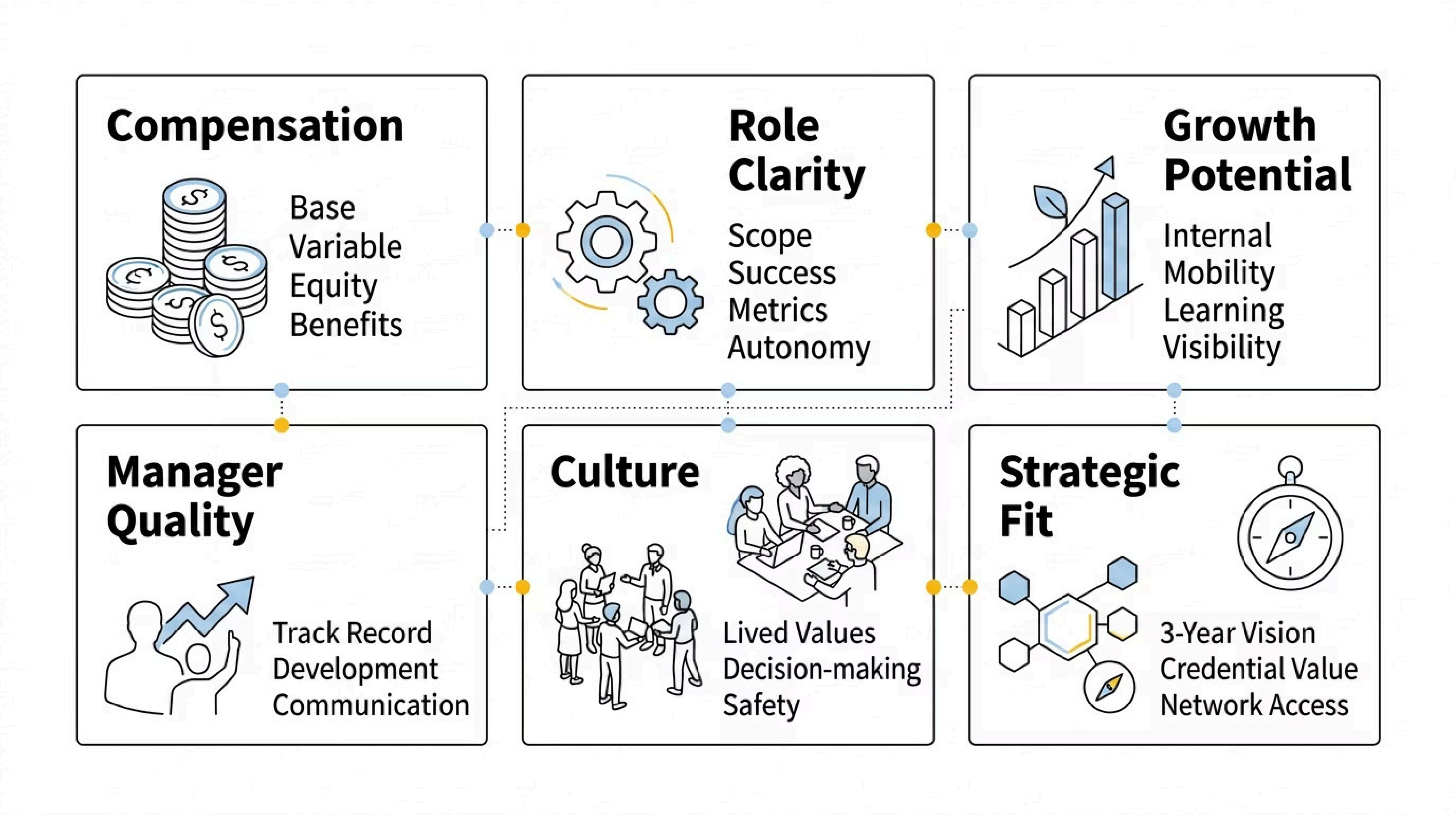
Module 3 — Culture, Strategic Fit & Your Final Decision

Culture is the operating system of a company — it determines how decisions get made, how conflict is handled, how credit is distributed, and how people treat each other when no one is watching. It is also the hardest dimension to evaluate from the outside. A company's stated values and its lived culture can be wildly different. Your job in the evaluation process is to close that gap as much as possible before you sign.

Start with Glassdoor and Blind, but do not stop there. Look for patterns across reviews — not individual complaints, but recurring themes. Three reviews mentioning "leadership is out of touch" across three years is signal. One disgruntled review is noise. Then go deeper: reach out to 2–3 current or former employees on LinkedIn and ask for a 15-minute call. Ask them what they wish they had known before joining. Ask what kinds of people thrive there and what kinds leave. These conversations are gold — and most people are willing to have them.

Strategic fit is the question of whether this role aligns with where you are trying to go — not just where you are. Map the role against your 3-year career vision. Does this company give you a credential, a skill, a network, or a platform that advances that vision? Or does it feel like a lateral move driven by a salary bump and the relief of having an offer? Both can be valid — but you should be choosing consciously, not by default. The best career decisions are made from strategy, not from fear or urgency.

Your final decision framework should integrate all five modules into a simple scoring exercise. Rate each dimension — compensation, role clarity, growth, manager, culture, strategic fit — on a 1–5 scale. Weight the dimensions based on what matters most to you at this stage of your career. Sum the scores. If the total is above 80%, the offer deserves serious consideration. Below 60%, walk away unless there is one non-negotiable deal-breaker driving your decision. Between 60–80%, negotiate — there is almost always room to improve an offer on at least two dimensions.



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Evaluation Dimensions
Score each from 1–5 for a total out of 30

80%
Accept Threshold
Scores above this signal a strong, well-rounded offer

60%
Negotiate Zone
Between 60–80%: identify two dimensions to improve

18mo
Regret Window
Most avoidable job regrets surface within 18 months

Key Takeaways

→ Total Compensation, Not Just Base

Always model the full package — salary, bonus, equity, and benefits — before comparing offers. A lower base with strong equity and benefits can significantly outperform a higher headline number.

→ Your Manager Is Your Career

Invest dedicated time in evaluating the person you will report to. A great manager in a decent company will almost always outperform a poor manager in a great one. This is the variable most professionals underweight.

→ Culture Is Observable, Not Just Stated

Go beyond the careers page. Talk to real humans. Look for patterns in reviews. Observe how people communicate during the interview process itself — that is a live preview of the culture.

→ Negotiate More Than You Think You Can

Most offers have room to move on at least two dimensions. Salary, signing bonus, start date, remote flexibility, title, and learning budget are all negotiable more often than professionals assume. Asking never kills a genuine offer.

→ Align to Your 3-Year Vision

Every offer evaluation should include the question: does this role build the career I am trying to have? A strategic yes with slightly lower pay almost always beats a reactive yes driven by urgency or flattery.

> ✓ You now have a repeatable, professional-grade framework to evaluate any job offer. Save this document. Return to it each time you receive an offer. Share it with a colleague or mentee who is navigating a career decision. The best career moves are made deliberately — and you now have the tools to do exactly that.