

Recruiter, Business Manager: no longer ask for your candidates' current salary

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Asking a candidate's current salary is a counterproductive, unfair practice and is soon to be banned. It's better to assess the value of the position and skills to recruit more fairly and effectively.

You, recruiter in ESN or Business Manager in a consulting firm, stop asking candidates their current salary in interviews. Yes, you read that right. This question is not only unwelcome but also counterproductive. It risks making you miss out on talents, offending candidates, and even raising ethical **and** legal issues. Let's explain why in detail.

The business angle: a losing calculation

Many recruiters ask about current salary thinking it's a "smart" choice. The idea is to **calibrate your offer**: check if the candidate fits your budget or offer just a bit more than what they're earning today to persuade them. On paper, it seems rational. In practice, **it's a trap**. Asking this question **gives the impression that you're trying to pay the candidate as little as possible rather than valuing them**. Consequence: you **dissuade good candidates** from continuing the process. In fact, more than half of candidates already refuse to apply to a job offer that lacks salary information. This opacity about salary drives talents away.

Even if the candidate plays along and shares their salary, your approach can backfire. If you offer a meager increase based on their old salary, they will eventually discover that they remain underpaid.

Result: motivation dwindles and early departure. As an HR expert points out, when you continue to pay someone based on their old salary, "*employees become less motivated and leave sooner*". By trying to save on recruitment costs, you risk **costly turnover and a poor employer image**. In the end, asking this question only **benefits the employer** during negotiation, and not the candidate. Is this really the relationship you want to establish with your future hire?

The ethical aspect: respect for the candidate and equality

You might think that asking for current salary isn't harmful, that "if the candidate has nothing to hide, they can answer." In reality, it's an **intrusive** question. The salary level is part of the candidate's private life and especially, **it has no link with their professional skills**. The French Labor Code reminds that questions asked in interviews must have a **direct and necessary link** with the job in question. Honestly, knowing whether your candidate earned €35k or €45k previously **teaches you nothing** about their ability to fulfill the position. Their previous salary depends on their sector, the size of their company, their location... in short, **it doesn't reflect their real value or potential**. Using this figure to evaluate or negotiate is confusing the **price** previously given with the **value** they can bring to you.

In terms of equality, this reflex can cause major damage. **Asking for salary history perpetuates unequal** pay. Studies have shown that women, for example, often start their careers with lower salaries due to past discrimination, and if they reveal this salary, **they subsequently receive lower offers** than a man in the same position. In other words, **you risk perpetuating unjust gaps** by matching your offers to the candidate's previous income. By asking this question, you **maintain historical biases and discrimination. It's neither fair nor modern. A good recruiter should instead aim to** correct these gaps, not prolong them.

Finally, consider the **trust relationship** you want to establish. Asking a candidate about their current salary sends the message that you might base your offer on that, rather than on their true value. For the candidate, it's a **red flag**: they understand that negotiation is starting off on the wrong foot, with a **imbalance favoring the employer**. It's not ideal for beginning a smooth and respectful collaboration.

The legal perspective: soon a prohibited practice

Legally, until now, **there was nothing explicitly prohibiting** asking this question in France. Asking for the current salary (or even requiring a pay slip as proof) was not illegal. It wasn't considered an invasion of the candidate's privacy. However, as noted above, the law requires every interview question to be pertinent for assessing the candidate's skills^[5]. In this regard, the **legitimacy** of the salary question **was already questionable**. It doesn't provide an objective element on the profile's suitability for the job, making it difficult to justify in the event of a dispute.

Moreover, the **legal framework is changing**. The European Union has adopted a directive on pay transparency to fight against pay inequalities, and France must transpose it by 2026. Direct consequence: **from June 2026, French recruiters will be prohibited from asking candidates for their current or past salaries**. This practice will be formally banned, and the inclusion of salary in job offers will become mandatory. For non-compliance, **administrative sanctions** are even planned. The reason for this prohibition is clear: to prevent existing inequalities from being perpetuated indefinitely and to **restore balance** in salary negotiation.

France is thus following in the footsteps of other regions around the world on this topic. **In the United States, the majority of states have already banned** questions about previous salary during recruitment. The stated goal is the same: force employers to base their decisions on the candidate's skills and value rather than relying on a biased figure inherited from past positions. Tomorrow, in France, asking the question "How much do you earn currently?" will not only be discouraged—it will be **against the law**.

Conclusion: value candidates differently

You understand: **asking for a candidate's current salary is no longer relevant**. It's a habit from the past that we need to drop. From a business perspective, you have nothing to gain in the long run. From an ethical perspective, you risk distorting the game and disadvantaging certain people. And from a legal perspective, this practice is in its final months. **So anticipate**: starting now, focus on the value of the position and the **candidate's skills**. Offer a salary that is **in line with the market and the position level**, rather than based on their previous pay slip. Not only will you comply with the law and fairness, but you'll also gain in attractiveness and mutual trust. In short, ask all the useful questions about the candidate's achievements, **but leave their current salary out of the interview**.