

How to decline a job offer: Email template

Been through the job application process only to be offered a job that doesn't feel like the right fit? Here's advice and an email template for declining a job offer and keeping doors open for the future.

You can put a lot of time and energy into applying for a job, so if you're offered a role and it's not right for you, it can feel hard to turn it down.

"Some people have no problem doing this, but others find it extremely difficult and feel almost compelled to accept an offer, particularly if the recruitment process has been quite drawn out and involved," says Leah Lambart, Career Coach at Relaunch Me.

But if you don't want to accept a job offer, remember that the choice about the next step in your working life belongs to you.

When should you decline a job offer?

First, it's important to get clear in your own mind on why you're declining an offer. When you're applying for jobs, it can be helpful to have a list of basic things you're looking for. Kelly Van Nelson, Managing Director of Adecco, calls them non-negotiables. "This may be career progression, engaging leadership and a high-performing team. You also need to consider the salary and broader package and benefits on offer, your daily commute and company culture."

It's also worth considering how the job aligns with your values, Lambart says. "Often someone can't really assess all of these factors until they have met multiple people throughout the recruitment process." So don't feel bad if you only realise that it's not the right fit at the time the offer is made.

Van Nelson says, "If you're offered a role that doesn't meet your needs and you decide it's not in your best interest to accept or compromise on your non-negotiables, then it's okay to decline the offer and move on to the next opportunity."

Focus on maintaining relationships

"The most important thing when declining a job offer is to ensure that you do so in a professional and respectful manner," Lambart says. "Many industries in New Zealand are relatively small and the last thing you want to do is to damage relationships. You never know where that hiring manager may end up in the future – as your boss or even as a client."

So, try to maintain relationships with the employer and the recruiter if there's one involved, Lambart says.

How to decline a job offer and what to say

Van Nelson recommends declining an offer honestly and respectfully. “Be clear on why the role is not a good fit for you currently, thank them for their time and wish them luck in finding the best person for their business.”

You could do this via email, however Lambart suggests calling the key contact to verbally decline the offer and then following up with a brief email. “This shows respect for their time and investment in the process. However, there’s no requirement to go into detail as to why you’re declining the offer.” Keep it brief, with a simple, honest and clear reason.

What to expect when declining a job offer

If salary was your main reason for declining the offer, Van Nelson says you might be met with a counteroffer with a higher salary to entice you to accept. But this isn’t always the case. “While some employers may be willing to counteroffer, many will stick to their guns,” Lambart says.

Be prepared that the recruiter or hiring manager may be a little taken aback when you call to tell them you’re declining their offer, Lambart says. “It’s likely that they will still appreciate and be impressed by the fact that you called them to let them know. They may probe to understand your reasons, but don’t feel compelled to go into detail unless you actually wish to negotiate on specific conditions of the offer.”

Here’s a straightforward email template that you can use when you need to politely decline a job offer.

Subject: Job offer – <Your Name>

Dear <Hiring Manager Name>,

Thank you so much for taking the time to interview me for the role of <Job Title>. It was a pleasure to meet with you and learn more about the team and the organisation.

However, after much consideration I have decided to decline the offer as I don’t feel it’s the right opportunity for me at this point in my career.

Thank you again for the opportunity and I hope that we cross paths again in the future.

Kind regards,

<Your Full Name>

Remember, it’s your career, so don’t be afraid to decline a job offer that’s not right for you.