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It's happened to many of us. You work hard at finding a new or better job. You send out dozens, maybe even hundreds of resumes, and finally, you get a response. The interview goes well for what seems like a perfect match: you really like the employer, and its recruiter says they really like you. You'll be getting an offer shortly, they promise, and so you wait.

But while you do, another employer contacts you and you go through the same drill all over again. Although you don't quite have the same enthusiasm for this organization, they actually deliver: you get an offer as you walk out the door. Not unreasonably, they also ask that you give them your answer in a week. Meanwhile, you still haven't heard from the first employer—the one you really want to work for—so what do you do?

I call this situation “the winner's quandary.” Here's my suggested game plan for how you should handle it.

First, call the hiring manager at the organization from which you haven't yet heard. If at all possible, call that person on their direct phone line. Second, use the following outline in your conversation with the manager, once you actually connect with them:

Step 1: Restate your interest in the opening for which you interviewed and the contribution you believe you can make to the hiring manager's team.

Step 2: Explain that you've had an offer from another employer, that you have a tight timeline for response, and that you would prefer to work for the hiring manager if possible. Provide enough detail—the title of the position for which you have the offer or a description of the kind of work it entails, but not the name of the employer. This information will give your claim the credibility necessary for them to take it seriously. Unfortunately, hiring managers and recruiters are often jaded about such calls as candidates increasingly make false claims of having a competing offer in the hopes of prying one out of another organization.

Step 3: Go on to say that, since you were told to expect an offer from the hiring manager's organization in short order, you are calling to check on its status. As best you can (and without being overly dramatic), position your lack of an offer as a matter that's personal to them. For example, you might say “I just wanted to check on the offer because I'm looking forward to working for you and to helping you get that new project off the ground.” Then, stop talking and listen.

Step 4: If the manager confirms that you were selected and an offer is in process, ask them if they know how much longer it will be until you receive it, and if there's anything they can do to help speed up the process. Make sure you tell the manager the date by which you must respond to the other offer, so that they can use that deadline to hammer away at the internal holdup. You should also recognize, however, that:

- your offer is probably not the only one being processed and its position in the queue is likely to be based on timing or perceived importance to the organization;
 - offers are getting more internal scrutiny to ensure that they adhere to organizational policy and to federal and state law; and
 - there is some risk to your call as the HR Department may be displeased that you contacted the hiring manager directly.
- Nevertheless, I think the stakes are high enough—you could lose the job you really want because of bureaucratic dallying—to make the call regardless of the other factors involved.

Step 5: If the hiring manager indicates that the organization has changed its mind and offered the position to another candidate, accept that news as gracefully as you can and hang up. I know you'll be disappointed and even feel as if you've been badly treated, but do not burn your bridges behind you by taking it out on the hiring manager. Circumstances can and often do change:

- the person to whom they made the offer may turn it down;
 - the hiring manager may, at some later point, have another opening for which they think you are better qualified; or
 - the hiring manager may get promoted and remember you as someone they should have hired in the past.
- In today's ever changing workplace, you just never know what may happen, so you should always try to leave every personal interaction on a positive note.

This process, of course, is not foolproof. Despite your proactive intervention and a positive response in Step 4, you still may not receive the offer you want before the deadline from the other employer arrives. At that point, you're going to have to make a choice: you can accept the offer you have and make the best of it or you can turn the offer down and roll the dice with your preferred employer. The path you take should depend on:

- your frank evaluation of your financial situation (i.e., can you afford to hold out);
 - your judgment of how important the preferred employer and its position is or will be for your career;
 - your candid self-assessment of how good a fit you really are for the opening and with the employer; and
 - your gut feeling about how straight the organization is being with you.
- If you aren't absolutely positive about all four of those areas, take the offer you have, and do everything you can to be a success in that organization. If you are positive about all of them, on the other hand, waiting may be the better course of action. Do not, however, call the hiring manager again and again. They usually don't mind getting one such call or two at the most—that shows you really are interested in the position—but they don't like to get 3 or 4 or 5 calls—as that simply paints you as desperate ... and a pest.

Difficult as this dilemma may seem when you're going through it, remember this very important fact: you've just had not one, but two employers tell you they want to hire you. That's impressive by anybody's standards, and it's why I call this situation **The Winner's Quandary**.