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INSIGHT

How to Negotiate Your Next FM Role



Introduction

Most FM professionals do not negotiate badly because they lack nerve. They negotiate badly because they negotiate the wrong thing at the wrong time. They fix on a base salary figure, haggle for ten minutes, and then sign a contract whose real value, or real risk, sits in the scope of the job and the small print.

FM roles are unusually elastic. Two posts with the same title can differ enormously in the number of sites, the size of the team, the budget you control, the on-call burden, the contractors you manage and the person you report to. That elasticity is where your leverage lives, and it is also where the costly mistakes are made.

This guide takes the candidate's view throughout. It follows the order a sensible negotiation actually runs in: decide what matters, build your evidence, choose your moment, settle scope before money, work through the whole package, handle a counter-offer from your current employer, find the words, check the paperwork and then start the new job on the front foot.

One principle runs through all of it. A good negotiation leaves both sides keen to work together on the first Monday. You are not trying to win a contest. You are trying to agree a role you can succeed in, on terms that reflect what you bring. Be informed, be specific and stay calm, and you will do better than the person who simply pushes hardest.

Decide what you are actually negotiating for

Before you speak to anyone, write down what a good outcome looks like. Not one number, but a ranking. Most people discover they want three or four things at once, and that those things pull against each other.

Use a simple three-column test: must have, would like, can give. Must haves are the points that would make you decline the job. Would likes are where you will push but can bend. Can gives are the things you value less than the employer does, and they are your currency in the room.

- Must have: a base salary that covers your commitments with room to breathe, and a reporting line to someone with real authority.
- Would like: a title one step up, a development budget, a formal review after six months.
- Can give: a later start date, flexibility on handover, willingness to take on a live project early.

Be honest about what is driving the move. If it is money, admit that to yourself. If it is scope, ambition, a better boss or an end to a punishing commute, the package should reflect that. A pay rise that arrives with a worse on-call rota and a manager you do not trust is not a win.

Keep your list in front of you for every conversation. Pressure in the room drags people towards whatever was said last, and a written list stops you trading away a must have for a nice-to-have.

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Build your evidence before you open your mouth

Employers respond to evidence, not to confidence. Your case rests on two things: what the market pays for this kind of role, and what you have actually delivered. Prepare both before the first serious conversation.

For the market, use more than one source. Published salary guides, live advertised roles at a similar level, conversations with peers you trust and the view of a specialist recruiter will give you a realistic range. Treat any single figure with suspicion. Pay for FM roles moves with sector, location, site complexity, contract type and the mix of hard and soft services you are responsible for.

- Write three results from your current or last role that you can prove: a cost saved, a risk closed out, a contract retendered, a compliance gap fixed.
- Quantify scope using facts you already know: sites, square footage, headcount, annual budget under your control, number of contractors managed.
- Note the credentials that move the needle for the role, such as IWFM membership, NEBOSH, or specialist technical qualifications.
- Identify what is missing from the advertised spec that you can bring, whether that is a project background, TUPE experience or a regulated-environment track record.

Then convert this into a single sentence you can say aloud: 'Given the scope of this role and what I have delivered at this level, I was expecting something in this range.' Practise it until it sounds like a statement of fact and not a request for permission.

Choose your moment: when to talk money and when to wait

There are two moments that matter. The first is early, when you are asked for salary expectations. The second is later, when an offer is made. Handle them differently.

Early on, give a range you have thought about, anchored to the role and not to your current pay. Your current salary is history; the job on the table is the future. If you are asked directly, it is reasonable to say what you are looking for in relation to the scope described, and to say that you are open to discussing the full package. Evasion for its own sake irritates hiring managers and wastes everyone's time.

The decisive negotiation begins once the employer has said they want you. That is the point of greatest leverage, because they have invested time, told colleagues and stopped looking at other people. Before then you are one of several. After it you are the one they picked.

- Do not negotiate hard before you have a clear intention to hire from the other side.
- Never accept on the spot. A calm 'thank you, I am delighted, may I review the details and come back to you by tomorrow afternoon' is normal and respected.
- Ask for the offer in writing, including the full package, before you respond on any single element.
- Agree the response date, then keep to it.

If a recruiter is running the process, use them. A good one will already know the budget range, the flexibility on each element and the hiring manager's real priorities, and can carry difficult messages so that the relationship between you and your new boss stays clean.

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Know the market, then set the salary



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Negotiate scope and authority before you negotiate money

In FM, scope is the engine of pay. A role that covers more sites, more people, more risk or more budget will be worth more over time, and a role with a bigger title but no real authority is a trap. Settle what the job is before you settle what it pays.

Ask the questions that expose the real shape of the role. Who signs off spend, and up to what limit? Who hires and fires in your team? Which contracts do you own, and which does procurement or a head office function control? Where does your accountability for compliance begin and end? Who do you call at two in the morning, and who calls you?

- Reporting line: who you answer to, and how often you will actually meet them.
- Budget authority: your delegated limits for opex and capex, and how overspend is handled.
- Team: the number and seniority of direct reports, and any vacancies you are expected to fill.
- Accountability: which statutory duties and compliance regimes sit with you, and what support exists.
- Seat at the table: whether you attend senior leadership or board meetings, or receive reports second-hand.

If the scope is bigger than the advertised title and pay suggest, say so plainly. 'This role as you have described it is closer to a head-of level responsibility. Can we discuss how the title and package reflect that?' is a fair and commercially sensible question. If the answer is that scope will grow and pay will follow, ask for that to be written down with a review date, not left as goodwill.

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The best candidates are rarely looking



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Look at the whole package, not just base salary

Base salary is the most visible number and often not the most valuable lever. Employers frequently have more room on other elements, and some of those elements cost you very little to ask about. Build a full picture before you decide whether an offer is good.

Work out what each element is worth to you in real terms, and what it costs you in time and stress. A modest bonus that depends on targets set by someone else is worth less than the same money paid in base. A car allowance that is taxable may be worth less than it looks. Take independent advice on tax and pension treatment where the amounts are material.

- Bonus or incentive: how it is calculated, who sets the targets, when it is paid and what happens if you leave.
- Pension: the employer contribution, not just the existence of a scheme.
- Holiday, including bank holidays and any buy or sell arrangements.
- Car, travel or fuel allowances, particularly if the role covers multiple sites.
- On-call, standby and overtime: whether they are paid, time-off-in-lieu or simply expected.
- Professional fees, training and memberships, such as IWFM or NEBOSH, paid by the employer.

Do not ask for everything. Choose the two or three items that matter most to you, link them to your reasons, and be ready to give ground on the rest. A tight, reasoned request is taken seriously. A shopping list is not.

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It starts with a good first call



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Flexibility, location and on-call: the terms that decide how the job feels

Some of the most important terms never appear in a salary conversation, yet they determine whether you will still like the job in a year. In FM, where the work is physical, site-based and sometimes unpredictable, they deserve particular attention.

Start with where you will actually work. Many roles that are described as hybrid or flexible turn out to mean a fixed pattern on site, with remote working only when nothing is happening. Ask what a normal week looks like, what is expected during a plant failure or a major event, and whether the arrangement is a contractual right or a favour that can be withdrawn.

- Place of work: the main site, any named additional sites and any clause allowing the employer to move you.
- Hours: core hours, shift patterns, and whether there is any weekend or out-of-hours expectation.
- On-call: the rota, how often you are called, who covers when you are away and how it is compensated.
- Flexibility: the written policy, and who can change it.
- Travel: how much, how it is paid and how long the journeys are.

The test is simple. Imagine the worst normal week in the role, not the best, and ask whether the terms still work for you. If you would not accept it as written, negotiate it now. Once you have started, your leverage on these points drops sharply.

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Handling a counter-offer from your current employer

If you are good, your current employer may well try to keep you. A counter-offer is flattering and sometimes genuinely right, but it deserves cold analysis before you respond, not a warm glow.

Ask yourself why the money or the scope was not offered before you resigned. If you had to threaten to leave to be taken seriously, consider what that says about how you will be treated next time. Then ask whether the offer fixes the reason you wanted to leave in the first place. If you were going for scope and ambition, a bigger salary alone will not do it.

- Decide before you resign whether you would accept a counter-offer at all, and in what circumstances.
- If you would, write down the specific changes that would make it worthwhile, and keep them as a test, not a mood.
- Be professional and brief if you decline: thank them, confirm your leaving date and do not criticise.
- Tell the new employer promptly if a counter-offer is likely, so they are not surprised.

Never use another employer's offer as a bluff. FM is a small world, hiring managers talk to each other, and a reputation for gaming offers follows people. If you intend to accept the new role, say so clearly. If you are genuinely undecided, be honest about that too.

Find the words: scripts for the difficult moments

Many people understand what they want and then lose it in the room. Use plain, polite and specific language, and prepare it in advance. Short sentences carry authority. Long apologetic ones signal doubt.

Here are some lines that work. Adapt them to your own voice rather than reading them out.

- Opening a negotiation: 'I am really keen on the role and the team. I would like to talk through the package so we can get this right for both of us.'
- Asking for more on pay: 'Based on the scope and what I would be delivering, I was hoping for a base nearer the top of the range. What flexibility is there?'
- Trading, not demanding: 'If the base is fixed, could we look at a six-month review with a defined path to the next level?'
- Pausing: 'That is helpful. I would like to consider it properly and come back to you by Thursday.'
- Closing: 'If we can agree those two points, I am ready to accept.'

Then stop talking. Silence after a clear request is uncomfortable and effective. Let the other side think. And always follow up in writing, restating what you have agreed in a short, friendly message, so there is a record and no room for later misunderstanding.

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Hire the person who improves the room



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Check the paperwork, then start well

A verbal agreement is only as good as the contract that records it. Read the offer letter and the full terms before you resign, and compare them line by line with what you were told. If anything differs, raise it before you sign, not after.

Pay particular attention to the clauses that can bite later: probation length and its notice terms, your notice period, restrictive covenants affecting where you can work or who you can approach, flexibility clauses on location and duties, and anything about bonuses and clawback. If the role involves a transfer of staff or contracts, ask who your employer will be on day one. These are matters on which you should take professional advice from an employment solicitor where the stakes are high; this guide is not legal advice.

- Confirm job title, start date, salary, review dates and every promised benefit.
- Check that agreed items such as a review, a development budget or a flexibility arrangement are written down.
- Ask for the job description, and compare it with what you discussed.
- Know your notice period and your obligations to your current employer before you resign.

Once signed, protect the relationship. Thank everyone who helped, resign gracefully, and arrive with a plan for the first month. How you negotiate becomes part of how your new colleagues first see you. Direct, fair and well-prepared is exactly what a senior FM hire should look like.

Your negotiation checklist

- [ ] Rank your must haves, would likes and can gives in writing.
- [ ] Gather salary evidence from several sources, not one.
- [ ] List three provable results and the scope you currently run.
- [ ] Prepare a one-sentence statement of your expectations for this role.
- [ ] Ask about reporting line, budget authority, team and compliance accountability.
- [ ] Request the full offer in writing and agree a response date.
- [ ] Value every element of the package: base, bonus, pension, allowances, holiday, on-call.
- [ ] Test the terms against the worst normal week in the role.
- [ ] Decide your position on a counter-offer before you resign.
- [ ] Compare the contract with what was agreed and take advice on restrictive clauses.

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Next steps

Negotiation is not a performance. It is a structured conversation about whether a role and a person fit, on terms both can live with. Prepare properly, ask for specifics, keep your tone warm and your requests clear, and you will usually be treated as the senior professional you are.

Your next step: before your next interview, write your must haves, would likes and can gives on one page and share them with a trusted peer or a specialist adviser. Maxwell Stephens is a specialist Facilities Management recruitment consultancy, and a conversation with a recruiter who knows your market is a sensible place to test them.

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