Many bars and restaurants have recognized the popularity of watch parties and looked to capitalize on the trend, particularly for sporting events. Watch parties can make for a fun night out, but homeowners can do many things to make their own living room a go-to spot for the next big game or series finale.

- **Expand seating space, if necessary.** Of course, guests for the big game or movie night will need a place to sit. Homeowners who love to host can determine their ideal gathering size and then work to ensure their entertaining space has enough seats to accommodate everyone. Multifunctional furniture can help if space is limited. For example, some stools that are typically used as footrests can be repositioned as seats when guests arrive, and an upholstered coffee table can provide an additional space for guests to sit. Another option is to collaborate with a contractor to add a built-in window seat or bench beneath a picture window.

- **Convert an existing space into an open floor plan.** A 2023 survey from Rocket HomesSM found that more than half of individuals surveyed preferred open layouts to traditional plans. Open layouts can make living spaces feel more airy and less claustrophobic, and such designs also make it easy to accommodate more guests. Homeowners can speak with a local contractor to determine ways to convert living spaces into open-floor plans.

- **Invest in your internet.** Whereas cable television used to be the go-to way to watch games and shows, streaming platforms have now taken over as many, including Peacock, Amazon Prime Video, and Netflix, are now even broadcasting National Football League games. Homeowners who want to host watch parties must invest in high-speed internet and perhaps even a new router to ensure games and shows are not interrupted by the dreaded spinning wheel of death or issues that can arise if internet speeds are slow. It is necessary to relocate the router to the living room to reduce the risk of streaming interruptions.

- **Consider upgrading your television and sound.** It is obvious that a television is wildly important when hosting a watch party. The experts at Best Buy note that 8K resolution is the highest resolution available in the television market. Such devices provide an extraordinary viewing experience, but they also can stretch the screen so everyone can see it but will not appear in the frame and adversely affect what viewers can see.

- **Reconsider your lighting scheme.** Recessed lighting in the living room can reduce glare and reflections on the screen once a movie or show begins. Recessed lighting above a mounted television can illuminate the screen so everyone can see it but will not appear in the frame and adversely affect what viewers can see.

- **Look into alternative seating arrangements.** Even a new router to ensure games and shows are not interrupted by the dreaded spinning wheel of death or issues that can arise if internet speeds are slow. If necessary, relocate the router to the living room to reduce the risk of streaming interruptions.

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**Looking for a Quick Sale?**

**FINDING AN AGENT**

First, you’ll need to find a reputable real estate agent. You have the option to sell your own home, of course, but an experienced pro can provide valuable insights into the market dynamics and help you sell the home faster. Look for an agent with a proven track record of prompt completed sales. This is the biggest indicator that they understand the local market.

Ask for references and check for positive online reviews from past clients. Arrange meetings with prospective agents at your property to learn more about their approach to sales, and ask their advice on how to make the quickest sale possible.

**FAIR PRICING**

Finally, yes, price matters. Here is another area where it is smart to rely on a local real estate agent who has in-depth knowledge of the market so they can assist in determining a reasonable price point. Consider the prices of comparable homes in the area, while leveraging their expertise on how long it typically takes to complete recent sales. This will help you set a price that falls inside the lower end of the listings for listings in your area. Be prepared to closely monitor and then potentially adjust this number, depending on how the market continues to evolve — and how long your home is on the market.
Then Monika Spykerman will help you know what to make — quick and easy with what you have on hand.

Wednesday Food section and on Instagram
@monikasplayfulpantry

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How to Negotiate Better Pay, Benefits

Ask for What You Want

Don’t ask if the offer is negotiable. Ask for what you want. This grounds the negotiation on the assumption that the organization’s offer is the opening round rather than the final say, and it could lead your future employer to be more flexible than they intended to be. Asking if something is negotiable is only inviting the answer “no.”

Negotiate for More Than Salary

Comparison isn’t just the numbers in your paycheck. Instead of focusing on salary, look for opportunities such as more time off, other benefits, paid training or tuition, more days off, or a training budget. If you want that money in your check, ask if you can trade for another benefit you actually like to see.

Don’t Get In Your Own Way

Some of us are plagued by self-doubt, and that can make us back off. Instead of conceding on some other fronts to get you to the number you like, for instance, if the company balks at paying more in your paycheck, ask for more days off or a training budget. If you want that money in your check, ask if you can trade for another benefit you actually like to see.

Justify Your Counteroffer

Use that list, along with the research you’ve done, to justify to your potential employer why you think you deserve what you are asking for. Also include any competing offers you may be considering and any unique skills or experiences you may have. It’s important that both employee and employer feel an offer is fair, Harvard says.

Above all, remember that this negotiation is the first step on what might be a long and fruitful journey together. This is an opportunity to not only get what you think you deserve, but also to show off your negotiating skills, reasoning skills and your willingness to work on a team. Avoid hardball tactics at all costs.

Don’t threaten to walk away or insist on certain things for the sake of winning. That could lead to you losing the offer altogether.
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