



## FOR WOMEN, A FAILURE TO NEGOTIATE

*Their salaries may lag behind their male counterparts' because of poor bargaining skills. Here's how to correct that.*

Pallavi Gogoi – BusinessWeek

Although women have certainly made plenty of progress in the workplace over the past three decades, the glass ceiling remains firmly in place at many companies -- especially when it comes to compensation. But some experts now suggest that the wage imbalance between the sexes could have as much to do with women's failure to negotiate well as any other factor.

Indeed, while women now represent more than 47% of full-time executives and managers, their wages continue to lag far behind. College-educated women still earn only 72% as much as their male counterparts -- a gap of 28¢ on the dollar, according to the American Association of University Women.

A number of potential causes account for the disparity, of course -- some women work part-time, pursue lower-paying careers on the whole, or take time away from the workforce to raise families. But executive coach Lee E. Miller says the problem may be more basic and more easily remedied -- a lack of negotiating skills.

**TIES THAT BIND.** "Most women hardly negotiate when they get a job offer," says Miller, managing director of NegotiationPlus.com and co-author of *A Woman's Guide to Successful Negotiating*. "That's because they look at the offer as the goal, not the beginning of a relationship."

It's not that women lack big aspirations, Miller points out. Rather, many value the relationships they have built within organizations more than their ambitions, and that can hold them back.

So how can women -- and men too, for that matter -- negotiate better deals in the workplace? Miller recently spoke on the topic at a workshop organized by the Advertising Women of New York. Here's a crash course on his findings:

**Show enthusiasm.** The most important mistake you can make is to act passive and wait for them to lure you with a fantastic offer. The car-buying approach with a dealer -- "I'll go elsewhere if you won't give me the best deal" -- won't work with employment. You have to show excitement and enthusiasm and make the employer want you.

**Know what you want.** You're trying to get a better job than what you have, not a solution to all your problems. So don't get too emotionally attached to the job for which you're interviewing. Something may seem like a dream job from the outside, but it's important to remain objective. You should be able to walk away without remorse if they can't meet what you most want from the job.

**Avoid showing your hand.** In interviews, many candidates are asked: How much do you earn at your current job? Do you blurt it out? That's a huge mistake -- you lose a major bargaining tool. So how do you deal with it? Learn to say that it's not about the money, but rather the job itself that attracts you to the company.

Dance around the number and ask what they've budgeted for the position. If pressed, be prepared with a number that reflects your total current compensation, including all benefits and bonus.

**Show why you're the best fit.** Start by knowing that you already have the skills for the job if you get an interview, and that they're talking to at least five other people in the same situation as you. What you have to do is to show that you are the perfect match for their needs.

Ask the right questions about the culture and the job requirements, and pepper the conversation with what your own expectations are. If it's a team culture, give examples of situations where you have been a great team player. If the company centers more on individual performance, show how you generate great ideas.

**Wait until they really want you.** In fact, avoid talking about money until the last leg of the interview process, when they're ready to make you an offer. Then you'll know you're the candidate they want, and the ball is in your court.

**Be on the lookout at all times.** Even if you love your current job, it's always good to have one foot in the marketplace. It helps in determining your own worth and can give you another tool to negotiate a promotion or raise at your current job. So make sure you keep your ears perked up, albeit discreetly.

**Network, network, network.** Meet folks in the same industry by joining a professional organization and participate in high-visibility activities. Get to know people who are in a position to hire you before you're in a position where you need a job. It's easier to develop a relationship with people when you don't need anything from them.

Consider joining a social club or working for a charity. It not only helps introduce you to people in your area but also exposes you to people in other fields that you might be interested in exploring.

**Want a raise?** Some of the same negotiating rules apply within your current place of employment. First of all, don't be afraid to ask. Whether you want more money or more vacation time or even a better title, ask for it and demonstrate why you deserve it. You can't get something if you don't ask for it.

Don't wake up one morning and decide you want a raise. Understand where you are in the pay scale. There's no free lunch, so be prepared to take on more responsibilities. Know more about your own role within the group and acquire more skills that will justify a raise and even a promotion. Make sure that you're keeping your boss abreast of all the skills you're acquiring -- and also what you're willing to undertake.

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