



**WB** WOMEN  
ON BOARDS®  
leaders and directors

## How to ask for a pay rise

### Getting the salary and seniority you merit

Researchers have long argued that one of the reasons men make more money in the workplace is that women don't ask for pay increases. However, if we scratch beneath the surface this assumption doesn't hold.

New research tells us that while it's true that women in part-time roles or on fixed term contracts do negotiate pay less, women in full time roles equivalent to their male colleagues, negotiate just as often.

#### **Women do, in fact, ask. They just don't receive.**

For example, [Australian research](#) on a sample of 4,500 employees across 800 workplaces found that men who ask for a raise receive one 20% of the time, compared with women who are successful just 15% of the time. This can add up to a huge amount over the course of a career.

The same holds true for promotions. Women not being promoted into the most senior positions is a huge factor in the widening gender pay gap. Clearly there are structural reasons for this gap including flexible working policies and the unequal division of labour in the home, but those women who do want the senior jobs (often jobs that have been designed for men with a full-time housewife at home) often find their requests for advancement are treated differently.

#### **Why don't women get as much?**

The risks are a lot higher for women. Not only do they face the real possibility of their requests being rejected, but there is also the risk of backlash for women who do ask. In the book 'What Works' by behavioural scientist, Iris Bohnet, she attributes biased gender norms for this difference. She says, "It isn't just that we are biased to expect women to be collaborative, agreeable and communal. It is that when we find certain women do not abide by these norms, we too often conclude we do not want to work with them."

Whilst this paints a dismal picture, the good news is that the research has also found some key strategies that can help women manage "a careful, precarious balancing act" to get the pay and positions they deserve.

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Here we summarise some, based on the research and personal experience of women in our network.

### 1. Negotiate your starting salary.

This is often overlooked but if you negotiate a higher salary from the get-go, it can make a dramatic difference over the course of your career. In the book *Women Don't Ask* it's revealed that there is a large gap in asking at this point - about 7% of women attempt to negotiate a starting salary, compared to 57% of men.

Bohnet found that when there was an explicit expectation or invitation to negotiate - for example, there was a salary range stated or the phrase 'starting at' was used - women who did so were viewed more favourably.

As a candidate you can elicit this type of 'invitation' to negotiate before putting forward your proposal. Considering asking questions like "Is there room to negotiate on that offer?" or "Is that the absolute top of the budget for this role?"

#### **If you are looking to negotiate a pay increase with your current employer:**

You need to pick the right moment. Whilst opportunities are most obvious at annual appraisals, it can be a busy time for managers and budgets may be constrained. Instead, consider bringing up your pay when there is a change in your responsibilities, or you have completed a successful project.

### 2. Know your worth.

Understand the competitive salary for your company and your industry. Websites and platforms such as Glassdoor and LinkedIn are a great tool for this but also ask recruiters and even friends, peers, and family to validate your research.



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### **3. Build your business case.**

You need to learn how to advocate for yourself and how to demonstrate your value. One way of doing this is to ensure you are consistently recording your achievements - and crucially making them known. Keep a record or an email folder of all the extra projects you have done, examples of when you have gone above and beyond, positive feedback from clients and peers.

Then look at your achievements through the eyes of your employer, which ones are going to stand out? Which ones meet the business objectives of your company, or align with its corporate values? In some companies or role this will be about sales made, for other industries it could be creative ideas or innovations.

Then crucially you need to make those achievements known. Research by Catalyst identified this was the key strategy for career advancement that is both under-used by women and absolutely essential to their success (more than it is for men). Identify appropriate opportunities and channels to highlight your own contribution to your boss and wider stakeholders, both throughout the year and when negotiating pay.

### **4. Highlight potential, not just performance.**

It's widely acknowledged that men are judged on potential while women are judged more on past performance. To help overcome this it's vital that you lay out your contributions but also focus on talking about what you will be tackling next.

Framing your request broadly, in terms of value to the company, wider team and your manager is helpful. Bohnet found any negotiation dilemma disappears when women are negotiating on behalf of others. She states, "women are expected to care about the people they represent and fight hard to advance their interests".

Clearly this is tricky when negotiating your own salary or seniority. However, putting your promotion and pay rise in terms of 'It's not just good for me; it's good for you' can have a similar impact. And if you are a manager, do remember this when looking at your salaries budget.



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## **5. Gain strategic leadership experience.**

Seniority is a huge part of pay, and demonstrating you are a strategic leader is key to getting a promotion to those senior roles. It can be hard to get the opportunities in a large company, but Women on Boards is clear that you're never too young to start considering your first board role.

Start positioning yourself to fill boards seats at your local sports club, school or charity as early as possible in your career as it's proven to be great for career acceleration in the long-term and will help you to stand apart from any internal competition.

You will need to check that your employer doesn't see any conflicts with you taking on that board role, but also make sure your growing strategic experience is known. Share the complexities of the issues you are steering on your board and relate back to how those lessons apply in your day job. This will help you be seen as the strategic leader you are (or are fast becoming).

## **6. Practise!**

As women, asking for more can feel out of our comfort zone, so make sure you practise. Get feedback from friends and family so you feel your most confident self.

Diana Faison, a partner with leadership development firm Flynn Heath Holt Leadership recommends using the three Cs: calm, conversational, and to establish an air of collaboration.

Pay attention to your tone of voice and don't use tentative language or frame your asks as questions. Instead of "I was thinking of a 5% pay rise" or "would you agree to 5%?" say "my proposal is 5% and this is why."

Resist the urge to fill the silence! When you've made your case, wait for the response.

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### **What next?**

Obviously, the best outcome is an immediate agreement to the pay rise you hoped for (or even more!). However, you should think through your response if your request is rejected.

Take a long-term view and avoid complaints or ultimatums. Don't put your manager on the defensive by suggesting they are not acting fairly or mixing in any annoyances you have with the role. Stay positive and focused on your contribution to the business' success.

Consider if there are other elements of your package that may be enhanced - such as bonus or stock options. Be wary of settling for non-monetary offers, unless they have real value to you.

Ask what you can do to achieve the pay and seniority levels you are aiming for. You may be able to cement this conversation into an agreed pay review at a certain point. Demonstrating you are a committed, ambitious employee who is considering your long-term future with the company is always a positive.

### **Additional Resources**

- Listen to [the podcast 'Underpaid'](#) by the Harvard Business Review
- Read [What Works](#) by Iris Bohnet
- Read [New Yorker 'lean out: dangers for women who negotiate'](#)

**Watch Women on Boards live webinar on  
How to Ask for a Pay Rise  
Thursday 25 November 2021, 12.30pm-1.30pm GMT**

[Register here](#)