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## *Women Fall Behind When They Don't Hone Their Negotiation Skills*

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In most workplaces, it still pays to be a man. Women often are less adroit at winning better salaries, assignments and jobs -- either because they don't ask or because they cave in when they do.

Skipping or bungling a single negotiation can inflict a huge penalty. A 22-year-old woman who fails to get her first job offer of \$25,000 boosted by \$5,000 stands to lose more than \$568,000 by age 60, says Linda Babcock, a Carnegie Mellon University economics professor. Men are eight times as likely as women to bargain over starting pay. "It's the accumulation of disadvantage," she says.

A growing flurry of books, online courses and executive-education programs aim to fix this situation by teaching women to be more effective advocates. I attended one such workshop in Boston last week. The three-day "Negotiation Edge" was run by Deborah M. Kolb, a Simmons School of Management professor.

Eighteen women overcame their negotiation jitters by discussing case histories, role playing a few scenarios and videotaping simulations of their own pending negotiations, such as a bid for severance.

Dr. Kolb's bottom line: If a woman develops good negotiating skills, she can enhance her career in many ways. She cited a senior vice president of a major corporation who repeatedly accepted better-paying positions without question. Officials recently passed her over for an important assignment requiring negotiation skills because they didn't know she had those talents.

Workshop participants learned to make their value visible and to avoid sabotaging themselves. Setting goals too low "is likely to become a self-fulfilling prophecy," Dr. Kolb warned. "Backbone really is about preparation."

In salary talks, for instance, she told the women to gather data about pay

rates, jot down their strongest attributes and rehearse explanations for weaknesses. "I give up too easily," grumbled a 40-year-old computer saleswoman as she completed a self-assessment. "I don't set my expectations high enough."

The woman explained how she wrangled a signing bonus of stock options, only to discover later that equally qualified new hires had won bigger grants.

If a potential employer insists times are tough, swap a hefty raise for an unusual perquisite, Dr. Kolb proposed. Consider "trading things that have value for you for things that have value for others."

The collaborative strategy worked well for participant Terry Regan. In hiring the human-resources manager, a suburban Boston biotech concern balked at giving her more than its promised 10% raise. But the company agreed to immediately pay all expenses so she could complete graduate school. Official policy partly covered tuition after six months' service. She also got time off to study. "It was a mutual gain for both of us," said Ms. Regan, now 39.

Some women tend to accept extra work without negotiating fewer regular duties or higher pay because they don't want to appear pushy, Dr. Kolb observed. "Never make a unilateral concession," she suggested. "Say, 'At what price?'"

Her point rang true for Sheryl Smith. The 47-year-old human-resources manager of a Boston construction firm said she never pursues tradeoffs when her boss assigns additional tasks she thinks colleagues should assume. "I don't want to be confrontational," Ms. Smith explained. The workshop made her realize she is undervaluing herself.

Dr. Kolb also taught participants techniques to position themselves well: Figure out the other side's hidden agenda, devise an alternative if you can't reach agreement and plan to deflect moves that put you on the defensive.

Three women practiced this "shadow negotiation" concept by re-

enacting a true story. Each pretended to be an overworked program director of a home health-care agency whose short-fused male chief executive (performed by an actress) opposed promoting her to vice president with higher pay.

The first woman clashed with the agency head and threatened to quit. The second admitted defeat when the CEO declared, "We don't have anyone else to fill your role."

But Debra Coleman succeeded. Exuding calm, she praised her boss for mentoring, noted how she already handled many duties of the vacant vice presidency and cited costs required to fill two spots if she quit. She proposed a six-month tryout as VP. He agreed -- after postponing her raise six months, too.

The exercise "was really stressful" because initially, "I wasn't making him happy," the 48-year-old participant recalled. "A lot of times we're taught to go along to get along."

Ms. Coleman believes the practice negotiation will help her succeed as director of gift planning at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston. She has received her requested raise every year -- until this fall, when she got less than she wanted. "I will be a more effective negotiator for myself" in the future, she predicts. Women should press hard "even when it doesn't feel comfortable."

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