



What You Need to Know: Cracking the Salary Negotiation Barrier

Old wives' tales abound about women and their problems negotiating. To get off on the right foot negotiating a salary or any other benefit, a good place to start is by separating myth from reality,

Myth: Women are lousy at negotiation. Translation: Women negotiate differently from men. They basically aren't competitive or assertive enough to get good results.

Fact: Research turns up no marked differences in style between men and women. By and large, men and women from comparable groups negotiate in pretty much the same ways. Women may tip slightly to the collaborative and men to the competitive, but the differences just aren't that great.

The real disparities are not marked by style. Often women don't set the bar high; men invariably do. And women don't think much of their results even when they do very well indeed; again men tend to be pleased with their results and themselves.

Myth: The wage gap exists because women don't negotiate well for money.

Fact: Research does show that when money is involved, women do not fare as well as men, although the differences are small. But, like all truths, this one is more complicated. Women may value salary and benefits differently than men do, preferring time over money, promise of opportunity over immediate cash. And even those choices may be forced on some since women often bear a disproportionate share of childcare and other family responsibilities.

Myth: It's easier to say no to a woman.

Fact: Here folk wisdom comes dangerously close to reality because of the expectations it creates. When people—men and women—assume that a woman will sacrifice her own needs for the sake of a good relationship and not push for what's important to her, she negotiates under a handicap. It will be harder to get the other person to the table and even harder to get what she wants once they sit down to bargain.

What to do when you bump up against folk wisdom like this? Don't get taken in by the myths, take action. You can create positive momentum in a negotiation by preparing yourself to negotiate. Here are eight simple steps that can empower you as a negotiator and increase your chances of getting what you want.

Step #1: Set Goals

Odds are if you don't know what you want, you won't be able to ask for it. That puts you at the mercy of the person doing the interviewing. He or she does the defining and you simply respond.

Research shows that goals are a critical factor in determining how a negotiation plays out. They become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Set the bar too low and you inevitably come away from the table with less than you deserve. Set it higher and you are more like to meet your aspirations.

Step #2: Link those goals to your assets

Breaking into a new field, starting out on a career or resuming one is hard. Interviewers are fond of asking what you make or made on your last job. Questions about gaps in your resume or your lack of experience are common. Instead of lowering your expectations or focusing on the holes in your resume, concentrate on what you actually bring to the table. Three questions come in handy here:

- What skills and experience (actual and transferable) do you possess?
- What results have you achieved that you can point to?
- Where do you think you may be vulnerable? Once you identify possible weaknesses, you can figure out ways of using your assets to compensate--for a lack of experience, a low salary in a previous job, a layoff, whatever.

Step #3: Support your goals with concrete information

You need to be confident that your goals are realistic. Pluck a number out of the sky for your target salary, and you will find you'll abandon it quickly at the first sign of resistance. Your goals must fall within industry standards and be consistent with the organization's compensation system. Proper research converts your goals into defensible demands. The more you know about an industry, a company, a position—the salary it should command and the skills profile it requires—the easier it is to develop a convincing case and one that you will feel comfortable defending.

Women often begin negotiations without solid information about comparable salaries and pay scales. Instead, they tend to compare their salaries to those of other women in their field or organization and not to the full band characterizing the field. This creates a downward bias in their thinking.

Luckily there is a wealth of information on salaries available on the Internet. A few of the most highly trafficked sites are <http://www.salary.com>, <http://www.jobstar.org/>, <http://www.monster.com>, and <http://www.hotjobs.com>. With a firm salary range in mind, you can focus the discussion on the qualifications for the job (which you want) and what it should pay (which you deserve).

Step #4: Develop alternatives

You always do better in salary negotiations when you have choices; they give you bargaining room. When the other party senses that you have no alternative but to take what is offered, he or she will be tempted to give as little as possible and you will be anxious to take it. Another job offer or the prospect of one increases your flexibility. You are not captive of an offer because it is the only one you see on the horizon. Instead you can weigh the offer and decide whether it works for you.

It's not necessary to have other offers in hand for alternatives to be viable. But they do need to have been explored sufficiently to know that they are real and could produce offers if taken another step. If the options available to you aren't particularly appealing, ask yourself what you can do to improve them.

Step #5: Make your value visible

In order to get what you want, you must be able to demonstrate that you have something valuable to offer—something that the company needs and should be willing to pay for. That's one of the reasons it's so important to take stock of your strengths. But awareness of what you offer is not

enough. You have to make sure that your value is right there on the table. Hidden skills or assets don't do you any good. Be prepared to link those skills and experience to the profile the company is after. If the fit is not there or you are not sure what value added you bring, think harder. Unless you are secure on this issue, you won't be able to convince anyone else.

Step #6: Anticipate challenges

Challenges are a normal part of the negotiation process. Bargainers like to keep the upper hand. Think about ways your demands will be questioned or your experience and skills downplayed. It's next to impossible to negotiate the salary you want or a job in a new field when the interviewer puts you on the defensive. And that's the aim of any challenge. Luckily challenges fall into characteristic patterns and are fairly easy to predict. "That salary is unrealistic. You've never worked in the field before." "We get twenty resumes a week." The list goes on and you can probably add your own variants.

Challenges come up routinely in negotiations. Don't take them personally, but make sure you have responses ready. Unless you do, you will find yourself backtracking from your goals.

Step #7: Consider how you will introduce your demands—and practice

What you demand is important, but so is *when* and *how* you say it. The good news is that by the time you get down to discussing salary and terms, you'll know a lot about the other person and the job. Usually you won't even talk about compensation in the first meeting.

Obviously you can't plan the entire negotiation ahead of time without the other side's participation, but you can think about how to introduce your demands and practice various approaches. This exercise forces you to imagine different scenarios and helps you deal with them once you are in the thick of an actual negotiation.

It is often an advantage to put your demand on the table first. That figure then anchors the discussion. But it is only to your advantage if you have reasonably good information about the other person's bottom line and you know something about the salary range being considered. If you don't, let the other person make the opening offer.

Step #8: Be flexible

Flexibility and imagination are valuable currencies in salary negotiations. It pays to think outside the box when it comes to devising ways to realize your financial and career goals. There are many ways to get what you want. You can be creative on those means without sacrificing your priorities.

Payment comes in various forms. Straight salary is the most obvious. But you can also consider bonuses tied to performance and other means of deferred payment. Also, monetary compensation is only one element in the equation, and it needs to be evaluated in the context of other things that may matter to you—like health benefits and time for a full and balanced life.

By being flexible, you give the other person more room to maneuver. He or she has a choice in *how* to meet your demands and not just *whether* to meet them.

A last bit of advice: Almost everything is negotiable, but not unless you recognize that it is. Don't let opportunities to bargain slip by. Even if you cannot realize all your goals immediately, you can still create an impression that you can bank for the future.

To learn more about negotiation, the gender gap in pay, or the common obstacles women face at the bargaining table, visit the authors' website at <http://www.negotiatingwomen.com>. Take **Getting What You're Worth**, the first online negotiation course designed by women for women, or the crash course in salary negotiation—**Getting the Salary You Want**.

© 2001 - 20055, Deborah Kolb, Judith Williams and Carol Frohlinger. All rights reserved.