

HOW TO PREVENT RESISTANCE WHEN ASKING FOR A RAISE

Let's jump right into the lesson by facing a common fear:

"I'm afraid asking for a higher salary will have unpleasant repercussions."

That statement was checked off by close to half of the women who took my Pay Raise Survey.

What were they afraid of specifically? Here's a sample of their responses:

- "Rejection and anger from my boss for asking again."
- "That they will look to get rid of me."
- "Rejection and then it going against me in the future."
- "I worry that by asking for a raise, I will be perceived as a trouble-maker and it will be used as an excuse to fire me." Wow. That's some serious fear.

Can you relate? The sad fact is, many women won't ask for a raise because they believe asserting themselves in this way will have negative repercussions. Even social sanctions that will negatively impact their career.

Well, in fact, negotiation researchers have shown that this *does* happen. Consciously or not, individuals show biased behavior toward women *who don't conform to expected social norms* that say women are expected to be nice, not aggressive, or even assertive.¹

So what can you do to help prevent this biased response when you ask for a raise?

In this lesson, we'll talk about **behaviors** and **conversation styles** that **prevent** the negative responses and repercussions that you fear. Once you're equipped with the right tactics, you can move forward with your request with confidence.

Prevention happens as part of building a healthy working relationship with your manager. As the authors of *Getting to Yes* tell us: "The best time for handling people problems is before they become people problems. This means building a personal and organizational relationship with the other side than can cushion the people on each side against the knocks of negotiation."²

Keep in mind, the people and the problem are separate. Instead of viewing your raise negotiation as a confrontation with your manager, *approach it as a collaborative conversation*, exploring ways to reach a fair agreement, based on the merits of the request.

All that sounds good, and it is. But there's more. There are specific ways for you to act during the conversation—ways that make it more likely that your request will be well-received rather than resisted. Let's take a look at what those are.

For one, being likable trumps being assertive. The authors of *Women Don't Ask* caution us as follows: “For women who want to influence other people, research has found that being likable is critically important...Unfortunately, research has revealed that assertive women are less well-liked than those who are not assertive.”³

Whoa! So what's the takeaway here? As you talk to your manager about your raise, take “the likability factor” into account. For women, being assertive or coming on too strong can backfire when asking for what they want.

What does being likable look like? I've culled some of the research findings from the *Women Don't Ask* book and formed them into friendly advice for you.⁴ Here we go:

Adopt a warm, friendly, social style when addressing the raise issue. A **social** style has been found to work best for women who want to be influential and persuasive. In contrast, a **dominant** style or a **submissive** style brings social sanctions on women.

That's the backfire response you fear and, of course, want to avoid. So again, adopt a warm, friendly, social style when asking for a raise.

Be nice during the raise conversation. Nice is a gender norm requirement; because it's expected of women, the response you get is more likely to be positive.

Besides being friendly, warm and pleasant, nice is being interested in the needs of others. That one is *really* important. You may recall Sheryl Sandberg's advice in her book *Lean In*. She suggested women substitute the word “we” for “I” whenever possible, and show concern for the common good.⁵

The effectiveness of “we” language is backed by the research of Hannah Riley Bowles, an expert in negotiation and gender issues at Harvard.

She says that, “women can increase their salaries by using what we call **relational accounts**. Accounts are **the explanations** we use to persuade others to accept our behavior. In a compensation negotiation, a relational account conveys both the legitimacy of your request and your concern for organizational relationships.”⁶

The suggestion here is, women have to justify and explain their request. As an example, the third-party market value salary data you uncovered earlier conveys legitimacy and thereby justifies the request for a Competitive Pay Raise. In Bowles example, she describes two types of relational accounts that worked.

Here they are, in her words:

“In the first, the negotiator uses “we” language and explains that a supervisor suggested she make a compensation request, thus conveying that she is embedded in positive organizational relationships.

In the second, the negotiator calls attention to her propensity to negotiate, identifying it as a key skill she brings to the company.

When confronted with either of these strategies (as compared with a simple request for a raise), evaluators were more inclined to grant the compensation request and to work with the female negotiator in the future.”⁷ This is good stuff—really powerful—and you’ll want to study this lesson more than once to really get it.

Again, convey the legitimacy of your request—that is, present your case—but remember to **convey your concern for organizational relationships**, as well. Take the communal approach, not a solo, self-focused stance.

Okay, a few more tips here:

- Use non-threatening social mannerisms and communal behaviors, such as smiling. Yes, really. Smile when you ask for a raise.
- Be appreciative, cooperative and considerate during your discussion.
- Be confident, yet non-confrontational.

Got all that?

Does using this approach mean you have to give in or back down? No. It's just that your presentation and conversation need to weave in these so-called "**social softeners**." Isn't that a great term? Social softeners.

Now let me ask you this: does the advice here rub you the wrong way? Some women resent these instructions which reinforce gender stereotypes. But they work.

Several studies have shown that a woman can improve her chances of a successful negotiation when she uses a softer style.⁸ It's also the approach highly successful women leaders follow to get what they want.⁹

All that said, you *can* expect *some* resistance in any negotiation. Don't get defensive. Here's the mistake to avoid: Don't make a statement in response to pushback; that will only provoke resistance.¹⁰

Instead, and this is crucial, in a friendly and concerned sort of way, **ask questions**. Use your pleasant tone to convey that you're aiming to gain more understanding of the other side's point of view, so you can continue to explore a path to mutual agreement.¹¹

When you ask questions, pause and wait for the response. Yes, be quiet. The *Getting to Yes* authors assert that "Silence is one of your best weapons. Use it...some of the most effective negotiating you will ever do is when you are not talking."¹²

ACTION STEP: Re-read this lesson. Right now. These behaviors are that effective and that important to your pay raise conversation success. Then, print this lesson to put in your pay raise notebook for reference. Which brings us to a second action step to employ even after you ask for your raise.

ACTION STEP: The next time you want something at work, practice these tactical behaviors and observe what type of response you get. Try the "we" language when asking for something. In response to resistance, ask questions to learn more about the other side's viewpoint. Use their answers to improve, rework, or reframe your request to better align with their interests, while still meeting your core interests.

NOTES*

1. Why Some Women Negotiate Better than Others <https://hbr.org/2014/10/why-some-women-negotiate-better-than-others/> Accessed June 19, 2017

2. Roger Fisher, William Ury and Bruce Patton, *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In, Third Edition* (Penguin Group, 2011), 39
 3. Linda Babcock and Sara Laschever, *Women Don't Ask: Negotiation and the Gender Divide* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 87
 4. Ibid, 105-108
 5. Sheryl Sandberg, *Lean In* (Knopf, 2013), 48
 6. Hesitation to Negotiate on One's Own Behalf May Hold Back Female Negotiators.
<http://www.pon.harvard.edu/daily/women-and-negotiation-daily/women-and-negotiation-negotiating-the-gender-gap/> Accessed June 19, 2017
 7. Ibid.
 8. Linda Babcock and Sara Laschever, *Ask for It*, (Bantam Dell, 2008), 253
 9. Linda Babcock and Sara Laschever, *Women Don't Ask: Negotiation and the Gender Divide* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 108
 10. Roger Fisher, William Ury and Bruce Patton, *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In, Third Edition* (Penguin Group, 2011), 113
 11. Why Do Women Negotiate for Less Than They Deserve at Work?
<http://www.fastcompany.com/3036636/strong-female-lead/why-do-women-negotiate-for-less-than-they-deserve-at-work> Accessed June 19, 2017
 12. Roger Fisher, William Ury and Bruce Patton, *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In, Third Edition* (Penguin Group, 2011), 114
- * You may not have time to read the books cited, but the online articles above are a quick way to get a fuller picture of the issues referenced here.