

Compensation negotiation among women in the workplace

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Studies have shown that women are less likely to take the most direct approach to ensure that they receive fair pay compared to their male counterparts – simply asking. So what happens when women begin to negotiate for higher salaries? Could women begin to close the gender pay gap simply by learning to negotiate for more money?

A new study finds that [women](#) can successfully negotiate higher salaries, but unlike men, they have to pay attention to the approach they use in order to avoid social backlash. This study was published in *Psychology of Women Quarterly* (a SAGE Journal).

"The anticipation of social backlash or pay [discrimination](#) is taxing for women and undermining of their human potential," stated the study authors Hannah Riley Bowles and Linda Babcock.

In part one of their study, Bowles and Babcock surveyed 402 participants who were asked to watch a video in which a recently-promoted female employee negotiated her new salary. In some of the videos, she expressed a concern for her [relationship](#) with her manager, for example by including phrases such as "I hope it's OK to ask you about this" and "My relationships with people here are very important to me," in others she negotiated her salary while alluding to another offer she had received, while in others, she did both. The survey participants were then asked to answer a series of questions about whether they would enjoy working with the woman and whether or not they would grant her the [salary](#) she desired.

After analyzing [survey results](#), the researchers found that alluding to another offer increased the likelihood that the women would get the pay desired and that showing concern for business relationships helped to mitigate social backlash. However, combining these strategies was not successful and did not avoid social backlash

In part two of their study, the researchers surveyed 177 college-educated Americans with [work experience](#). Like part one, the participants were asked to view short episodes in which female employees negotiated their salaries using different techniques. Additionally, the participants watched male negotiators use the same negotiation scripts. The survey participants were then asked to rate their willingness to work with the negotiators (both male and female) as well as their willingness to grant their compensation requests.

The researchers found that when the study participants watched episodes in which female negotiators legitimized their compensation requests and communicated concern for organizational relationships, the [participants](#) found the women to be more relational, found their requests for compensations to be more legitimate, and did not socially punish the women for having negotiated. Conversely, the men who expressed the same relational concern as they negotiated were not more successful than when they used a direct negotiation approach.

The researchers called for further research that will take into account both monetary outcomes of women who negotiate for higher compensation as well as the social and relational factors that might affect compensation negotiation.

"While gender constraints are real, they are not inescapable," the authors continued. "We expect men to be in charge because they are, and we expect men to earn more because typically they do ... every woman who reduces the gender gap in pay and authority reforms the social structures

that keep women in their place."

More information: "How can Women Escape the Compensation Negotiation Dilemma: Relational Accounts are One Answer", Psychology of Women Quarterly: pwq.sagepub.com/content/early/.../84312455524.full.pdf

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