

How to get yourself a higher salary

This is staff development review season, prior to budget and salary increase rounds. A higher salary, like professional success, is usually a combination of hard work and good fortune, a clear grasp of corporate culture and politics, involvement with the right projects and not least, sound personal performance.

So, how do you know your worth? Do you look to your peers, think you're entitled to your boss's salary or compare your capability and contribution to others, perhaps even in non-aligned sectors? The answer, in these days of blurring professional boundaries and increasing scarcity of high-performing talent, is a combination of all three. Having readily recognised transferable skills means your marketability is at a premium.

Most organisations today are struggling to find the best way of attracting bright minds and then persuading them to stay. This can be a bigger problem for businesses that do not traditionally pay high salaries. Getting the salary you believe you are worth depends on the performance of the organisation overall and your division/team, as well as you in your own right. Length of service does not automatically entitle you to extra money; indeed it might even work against you.

Consider how your company uses pay rises. To reward excellence, or an action of last resort when a respected employee threatens to leave? When entering pay negotiations, keep your bid in perspective. Compare current salaries within the company, if you can get accurate details. Maybe only a few employees share your income level, or perhaps not everyone is getting a rise like yours this year, if at all. If any of these criteria apply, instead of feeling discontent, you should be feeling valued.

No one is going to increase your salary significantly just because you ask them to. All jobs change, partly because organisations are not static. List your duties outside your original job description. Record extra things that you do, and rank them in order of what your boss views as important. But be cautious - if the practice is struggling and has let people go, chances are that everyone is doing more than before. Be clear about what makes you more deserving than others. Show how your work has significantly benefited the company.

Universally, significantly boosting turnover, the bottom line or efficiency are good negotiating openers. Relate success to your company's announced business plans for the future if you can, particularly if there's a strong culture and you've contributed to its reinforcement.

Avoid playing mind games, they may come back to bite you. Don't threaten to leave unless you are prepared to deal with the consequences. Some people believe Friday afternoon a good time to hint at another job offer and to suggest a pay rise, giving the boss a weekend worrying that you might leave. However, this also gives the boss time to consider just how much you're wanted on, or by, the team. The result might not be what you expect.

You might get the money, but it could well be accompanied by resentment from colleagues, managers or directors. With bad feeling created, you may leave eventually anyway, or find that having played the leaving card once you can't play it again, and lose out in subsequent pay rises.

Be pragmatic. It may not be financially possible for your employer to reward all staff as much as they deserve. If you get knocked back through genuine fiscal reasons, be big about it and take a long-term view. If the answer is 'we can't right now but let's talk in six months' then accept the situation and put it behind you for that period, getting on with the job.

If you decide the way to more money is to chase promotion in another company, consider your position carefully. The marketplace is constantly seeking talent and good managers. Individuals with leadership potential are also always in demand and can generally command more in job package negotiations. If you can prove your ability to add value, eg win new work or improve profitability, your chances of getting a higher salary and other benefits are even better. You need a good idea of your market worth. Check against a recent salary survey, ask around your personal and professional network, check job ads or call a recruitment agency. Be realistic about your skills, and the true, tangible value you can bring to an employer. No one is going to pay more than the top end of your market value.

Whatever route you chose – jobs pages, recruitment agency or possibly responding to a call from a headhunter – at some point successful interviewing will bring you to salary negotiation. New employers generally expect people to ask for more than they were previously earning, as well as a possible promotion. However, if other people are hungry for the job, adjust your expectations accordingly. Take a long-term view about future earnings and status potential with any anticipated job move.

Changes in the market mean more companies are making employment decisions based on a candidate's personality as much as technical skill. How you sell yourself as a person is as valuable as your practical/professional ability and flair. Don't try to put across a personality you think the employer wants to see; this will appear false. It's crucial that you are not over-confident. Squeezing every last penny out of your future employer will not get the relationship off on the best footing. Prioritise the things you want to negotiate. For example, what matters more: a high base salary or the chance of a higher performance-related bonus?

Some employers have their hands tied when it comes to salary, but may have other benefits that bump up the deal. Consider the tax benefits and liabilities of a company car, for example, or opportunities for flexible working or working from home, if this is important to you. With family commitments, private health and better pension arrangements might be good, tax effective salary trade points. Ironically, in the early stage of negotiating, the important things tend to be what you don't say, rather than what you do. Don't discuss money and other employment conditions until a job offer is on the table.



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Trojan specialises in supporting organisations by headhunting high performers (individuals, teams, companies) and growing incumbent management/leadership talent.