

## HOW TO NEGOTIATE A PAY RAISE IN A PANDEMIC

Asking for a raise at a time when many organizations are grappling with the COVID-19 pandemic and an economic recession may seem counterintuitive. However, savvy employees recognize that tough economic times may offer unique opportunities to help their employer reduce costs, increase revenues, improve customer satisfaction, and enhance competitiveness. Perhaps while quarantining you've been forced to use once-forgotten (or newly developed) skills and capabilities that are now more valuable than ever—such as business development, social media marketing, process improvement, or project management. Improving a company's bottom line during economic hardships can warrant a much-deserved raise. Remember, you don't get what you don't ask for. The challenge lies in how you ask.

### Know your worth

Your new or improved skill set is a great point of leverage for negotiating a raise, but how much should you ask for? Here is where you should reflect on your contribution to the company, what is valuable to you, and your options for receiving compensation for that value. Research salaries for someone with your responsibilities, education, and experience. Demonstrate your current and future worth by communicating inefficiencies that your ideas have reduced, or include new clients you've brought in. Also, consider your company's goals in your preparation. Would your promotion enable your boss to offload tasks that would free up his or her time for more strategic activities? Look for voids that you might fill or problems you might alleviate.

### What if the boss says “no”

When you know what you want and why you want it, you're better equipped to consider multiple satisfactory alternatives. Going in with an ultimatum can harm working relationships. In times of budget crises, more salary might be difficult to secure, but there are other ways to meet your needs for recognition. Having alternatives to your goals gives you more confidence in the negotiation process since you aren't in the position of having to accept whatever is—or isn't—offered. It also gives you the ability to be persistent without alienating the other party. Some alternatives to pay bumps include a new position, “crafting” your current job responsibilities, expanded benefits, work schedule/location/mode, administrative support, or professional development (e.g., tuition or coaching reimbursement). By suggesting other possible solutions, you help reframe the negotiation into a collaborative problem-solving session.

### Finding a “yes”

Sometimes negotiation ends in a stalemate. The employee leaves unhappy and, as is often the case when a boss's hands are tied by rules or other constraints, the boss leaves frustrated. The economy may be tough, but talented employees with in-demand skills will find other options. Research suggests it can cost up to two times their annual salary to replace a professional or managerial employee.

To avoid a stalemate, prepare to present a yes-able alternative. For example, you might negotiate an increase (or bonus) that is tied to the accomplishment of a specific goal: “If my plan for decreasing production costs succeeds, I think it's fair to receive a bonus equivalent to 10% of those overall savings.” Another yes-able alternative would be a phased-in agreement: “Considering the data show I am underpaid by 20% compared to new hires, how about we increase my salary by 5% in August, and an

additional 5% by the end of the year?” At the very least, you might agree to revisit the conversation at a specific time, for example, in three months.

Can I negotiate virtually?

While there are some challenges to virtual negotiations, such as difficulty building trust or potential for misinterpretation, not being in the same room as your boss can actually bring distinct advantages.

Barring technical issues, all parties can be present, including those who might be working in a different region of the country. Additionally, power differences (such as fancy offices, large desks, assistants as barriers, or even a person’s physical size) that can negatively influence an in-person negotiation are rendered irrelevant in a virtual environment. Moreover, the ability to easily access notes without it being obvious to others can support you during your negotiation.

Beyond ensuring a reliable and secure connection and platform, one key way to overcome the challenges of virtual negotiation is to remember to be human. Negotiators must be mindful of engaging in conversation that builds rapport, delivering and responding to verbal and nonverbal cues, asking clarifying questions, requesting feedback as needed, and showing appropriate emotion.

What’s next?

Maybe you’ve come to this point and you’re inspired, but afraid. What is holding you back? If not now, then when will you have this conversation? If you decide to wait, use this time to practice your negotiation skills. Nothing increases confidence in a skill more than using it regularly and effectively. Find everyday opportunities to negotiate a discount at a store, a special price from a service provider, a barter agreement with a neighbor, or project allocation among colleagues.

Negotiations aren’t always comfortable, and virtual communications can be tricky. No wonder you think twice about engaging in virtual negotiations in today’s uncertain environment. Don’t let the anxiety of what could go wrong stop you from recognizing your value and advocating for yourself. You’ve got this.

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