

Getting the Raise You Deserve

By BNet Staff

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You feel certain that you deserve a raise, but you're unsure about how to ask your boss. It's very important to think through a number of issues and to have lots of information available when you make your request. It's also important to know how to respond if you end up receiving a negative answer. Here are some questions that will help you prepare for your negotiations for a higher salary:

- When is the right time to ask for a raise?
- How has your performance been, and what's the evidence of your accomplishments?
- What's the typical salary range for a job such as yours?
- What's the best way to make the request?

What You Need To Know

Why should I even bother to ask for a raise? Won't they give me a raise at my annual performance review if I have performed well?

Organizations have to make a trade off between the need to pay enough money to keep people motivated to stay with the company and the need to keep down labor costs. You have to be your own agent and to promote your own case for why you should receive more money than you're currently making. It's helpful to learn about the salary philosophy of your organization. For example, does it pay the minimum it can to keep costs down, or does it pay higher than market rate in order to attract the best employees? Does it tend to give raises that are close to the cost of living increase for the year (which are really not raises)? Does it require managers to force a ranking among their staff and only give raises to the highest performers? If you have an understanding of the company philosophy, you can come to your performance appraisal well prepared to negotiate for a meaningful increase in salary. If you don't look out for yourself, the chances are pretty good that no one else will.

The company has not given many raises for quite a while. What should I do?

All companies go through boom times and difficult times, and they tend to retrench and cut costs when things are difficult financially. But that doesn't mean that you can't ask for a raise. If you've done a really outstanding job this past year and can point to concrete contributions, it's possible that the company might be able to find some money to reward your hard work.

I'm not good at asking for things for myself. How do I go about boosting my confidence?

If you go into the salary negotiation meeting with well-prepared documentation of your achievements (see "Document your Contributions to the Company" below), you'll have a stronger sense of your worth to the company and will feel more self-assured about asking for a raise. If you're really nervous about this, you might consider asking someone to role-play the situation with you so that you can practice beforehand. It's also helpful to visualize the meeting ahead of time and to picture what success would look like. Eliminate any negative talk in your head, such as "No one ever appreciates what I do" or "I never get what I want", and replace these ideas with something positive, such as "I have worked hard for this company this past year, and I can present a strong case for why I should receive a raise."

I was offered a promotion without a raise. Should I accept?

There are a lot of factors to take into account in this situation. If the promotion increases your skills, your responsibilities, and your visibility, and if the company is a start-up or is otherwise strapped for cash, you might agree to take the promotion. But you should also get written agreement from your supervisor that you'll have a salary discussion at a predetermined time in the future, for example, in three months.

What To Do

Decide on the Best Timing to Ask for a Raise

The most obvious time to ask for a raise is during your performance review discussion with your boss. However, it isn't uncommon for supervisors to put off these discussions for quite a while. It's one of their least favorite things to do. If it has been more than a year since your last performance review and since your last salary increase, you should approach your supervisor about your performance and your salary.

Ask Your Supervisor to Meet with You

Give your boss time to prepare his or her thoughts for this discussion. Don't ask your boss for this meeting in front of other employees, because it puts him or her on the spot. Tell your boss that you'd like to have a meeting to discuss your performance, your career plans, and your salary, and plan for it to last at least 30 minutes. Don't just drop into his or her office and say, "I'd like to talk to you about giving me a raise."

Document Your Contributions to the Company

The best way to do this is to keep a job diary or a file of your achievements regularly throughout the year. It's so easy to forget all that you've done, but if you keep track along the way, you'll have a great record of what you've contributed. When you ask for a raise, you need to build a business case

for why the company should pay you more. You need to show what you've done for the business and document why you should be rewarded. Be sure to keep track of measurable results from your actions, such as dollars saved, sales increased, level of quality improved, or percentage of employee retention. Prepare a one-page executive briefing on your accomplishments to take into your meeting.

Know Your Worth in the Marketplace

When companies calculate how much they typically pay for a job, they conduct wage surveys to compare salaries within the industry and geographic area. They also conduct internal pay analyses to make sure that comparable jobs within the company receive comparable pay. Such wage and salary information is now available on the Internet at sites such as www.salary.com and www.rileyguide.com. It's a little bit harder to find out information about the internal pay structure, but you can ask the human resources department for information on what jobs like yours typically pay.

Approach Your Meeting with Your Supervisor with a "Win-Win" Attitude

All successful negotiations end in both parties feeling like they received something of value. Your goal is to get a raise. Your supervisor's goal is to have a highly motivated and productive employee. Remember that raises are never given for potential or for what you're "going to do." Raises are given for meeting and exceeding performance goals. When you meet with your boss, you should be thinking about how your actions and accomplishments have helped to fulfill his or her own goals.

Discuss Both Performance and Salary

Begin your discussion with a description of your accomplishments and contributions. Next, discuss how you intend to build on those in the coming year, and what some of your key goals are. Describe your goals in terms of how they'll support your boss and make a difference to the company. Then ask for the amount and percentage of salary increase that you think you deserve and explain why.

Listen

As your boss responds, listen to any objections that are made to your requests. Consider this discussion as a mentoring session and keep an open mind about what you can learn that will help your progress in the company. Before trying to overcome any objections, make sure that you communicate your understanding of those objections through paraphrasing what you've heard. This is the first step in negotiation and objections are a normal response. Be prepared for objections and be prepared to explain why you still deserve a raise.

Know What to Do If You Get a "No?"

If you're told that you won't be getting a raise at this time, then ask what it is you need to do in order to earn one. Write down everything you're told. After the meeting, write a memo thanking your boss for his or her time, and listing the actions you need to take in order to earn a raise.

What To Avoid

You Threaten to Leave If You Don't Get the Raise You Deserve

Unless you're really unhappy and were thinking of leaving anyway, this strategy can do you much more harm than good. If you threaten to leave, you're sending the message that you aren't that committed to the organization and are basically out for yourself. This approach isn't career enhancing.

You Complain to Coworkers about Your Salary

Most organizations are insistent that all salary discussions take place only with your immediate supervisor. If you complain about your salary to your coworkers, you're very often seen as someone who isn't a team player, and who isn't politically astute. It's very unlikely that you'd get promoted or get a raise under these circumstances.

You Ask Fellow Employees How Much They Make

Unless you're in an "open book" company, most organizations prefer that salary information be kept private. They're concerned that if employees begin to compare salaries with one another, it may lead some to think that they're being treated unfairly and will therefore lead to lower morale. You can get a better idea of your internal worth by benchmarking similar jobs in your organization and then doing a search on the Internet for salary ranges for those jobs.

Where To Learn More

Books:

O'Malley, Michael. Are You Paid What You're Worth? The Complete Guide to Calculating and Negotiating the Salary, Benefits, Bonus and Raise You Deserve. New York: Broadway Books, 1998.

Pinkley, Robin L., and Gregory B. Northcraft. Get Paid What You're Worth: The Expert Negotiator's Guide to Salary and Compensation, New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000.

Web Sites:

The Riley Guide to Salaries: <http://www.rileyguide.com/salguides.html>

Salary.com: <http://www.salary.com>