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# Don't Ask for a Raise — Negotiate It

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**Summary.** Whether you are looking to secure a salary increase, a promotion, a lateral move, more flexibility, or something else that makes you feel valued, respected, and optimistic at work, follow these steps to get the results you want: Before going into the negotiation try to... [more](#)

Does the thought of asking for a raise or promotion make you nervous? Most people say it does. A recent survey of 3,000 employees in the UK revealed that 55% of people are unwilling to ask for a raise. Among the reasons were not knowing what to say (16%), worries about appearing greedy (15%), or simply being afraid (12%). Whether your nerves stem from fear, low self-confidence, or a lack of knowledge surrounding your market value, asking for more from your employer is uncomfortable — even when the odds are in your favor.

As an executive coach, I've found that taking a step back and approaching these interactions strategically can help calm nerves and increase confidence. One approach that I encourage my clients to practice involves an important principle of negotiation: creating a win-win situation, or what I call a “two-way commitment.”

The idea is to first communicate the value you are going to bring to your boss and to your organization, and then discuss what you hope your employer will do for you in exchange. It requires some preparation and a clear understanding of their expectations so that you can make a strong case for yourself and demonstrate your commitment to their success.

Whether you are looking to secure a salary increase, a promotion, a lateral move, more flexibility, or something else that makes you feel valued, respected, and optimistic at work — follow these four steps to put this approach to practice.

**Understand the other party in the negotiation.**

Before going into the negotiation try to understand your boss's perspective. While a part of their job is to provide you with useful feedback and support your development, they also have multiple, competing priorities — including balancing budgets, meeting business targets, managing your peers, and progressing their own career.

You can get a sense of what these priorities are by paying attention to the announcements your company makes about business objectives and asking your manager how your work contributes to those goals. Similarly, make note of what your manager highlights or praises when things are going well and any concerns they express when things are not. These cues may show up during team or one-on-one meetings, or in departmental updates.

Take note of the work you do that specifically supports the priorities you identify — you can bring these up later, in your negotiation.

Depending on what you want, you should also be aware that your manager may not be the only decision-maker. Often, there are HR guidelines to follow, and for larger requests, your boss may need authorization from *their* boss. For example, let's say you are advocating for a pay raise within the pay band for your role. This is a fairly straightforward request that your manager can probably grant. On the other hand, if you want to be promoted into an entirely new role or transfer teams, that is a much larger request that will require other stakeholders, as well as a review of the headcount and budget.

This means that securing a win could sometimes take a significant amount of time. Other times, it may be dependent on circumstances outside of your control. Whatever the case may be, it's important for you to understand these circumstances so that you can be strategic when timing your request. If you know that the company has not been meeting its financial goals, for instance, then this might not be a good time.

## **Set your manager's expectations early and often.**

The last thing you want to do is surprise your manager with an unexpected request. You can better position yourself for success by bringing up the topic gradually during one-on-one meetings with your boss and gauging their reaction.

I recommend first mentioning what you want in a low-pressure way. If you want a raise, for example, you might start with, "At some point, I'd love for us to talk about my contributions and what I can do to get to the next level," or, "I'd like to discuss my career growth and how I can continue to develop in this role at my next performance review." Your boss's initial response can provide you with a lot of information.

If the reaction is positive, consider it a green light to initiate a more serious discussion down the line. If the reaction is negative, consider it a sign to ask for feedback on your progress or performance. You might ask questions like: What did you think of the last project I worked on? Any advice for what I can do better? Do you have any feedback from the team? What's the most important thing for me to work on right now?

Make sure you listen carefully and incorporate the learnings into your next project, before going back again to talk about pay or progression. The more you can learn about what the issue might be, the more effectively you can address it.

At times, you may discover that the issue has nothing to do with you but is related to a budgeting or business challenge. If this is the case, you can follow up with a question around how much room there will be later on this year to think about pay and progression. Although it may feel like a sensitive subject, you can do this gracefully by explaining your intentions. For example: "I'm really committed to doing well here and I can see this isn't the right time for this conversation. What is your sense of how things might look later on this year?"

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### **Prepare what you want and what you will offer.**

When you are ready to have a more formal negotiation, make sure you think clearly about what you want. Write down your requests in order of priority. Do you want a higher salary? A new title? A change in reporting line? A bigger budget or team? Which of these is the most important? Are you flexible around the timing on anything? Where can you compromise and where can you not?

Remember that your manager may have more leeway in certain areas than others. For instance, salary may be more difficult to secure than promotions (or vice versa). If you can't get the first item on your list, have a Plan B.

Next, think about how you will articulate what you are going to offer in exchange. This is where the “two-way commitment” we discussed earlier comes into play. Your employer wants to invest in people who are loyal, enthusiastic, and dedicated to contributing to the success of their company. They do not want to invest in disgruntled employees who are looking for another job or bringing down the morale of their team.

When you are asking for the company to do something for you, it is very important for your commitment to come across in a way that is authentic to you. There are a few ways you can do this:

- Express enthusiasm for where the company is growing
- Talk about your satisfaction with a recent project that you completed
- Reiterate how much you care about your teammates

- Highlight how your work is helping your manager reach their goals

Through my work, I have heard consistently from organizations that an investable employee is engaged, optimistic, and interested in developing their career and skills. That is the kind of person that companies want to sponsor, develop, retain, and promote. Try to display these characteristics not only in the negotiation, but in your general interactions at work.

### **Manage the negotiation.**

Now you should be ready to talk to your boss. Go into the meeting with an egalitarian “we are both adults” attitude rather than that of a subordinate asking for a favor. If you’ve done your homework, then you should already have insight into what your manager’s priorities are, whether they view your performance in a positive light, and how much authority they have to say yes.

It is normal to feel nervous, but a glass of water and some slow, deep breaths can be highly and surprisingly effective should anxiety kick in.

Begin the conversation by reminding your manager that you’ve been building up to this. You could start by referring to your previous conversations: “I wanted to build on our earlier conversations about my career, as I’m really excited to be here and want to progress,” or, “Thank you for the great feedback on Project X. I’ve learned a lot and I’d like to talk to you about how best to take that forward in my career here.” Be sure to mention how committed you are to growing your career *within the company* before diving too deep.

Mention one or two things to highlight specific areas where you’ve made a big contribution. Then transition into what you want. Be brief and be clear, as a long explanation might sound defensive or argumentative: “It would mean a lot to me to look at my salary and see if the company can support a raise of X,” or, “I

love working with you and with the team, but I also feel it's time to learn something new and increase my responsibilities. Would you be able to support an internal move/my progression to the next level?"

Once you've made your case, pause to give your manager time to speak. If you have done the right preparation and approached the conversation in a collaborative spirit, you may well hear good news.

Finally, keep in mind that getting what you want at work is a process. Whatever the outcome may be, you will gain insight into your employer's priorities and how you fit within them. You may get exactly what you want or you may realize that will need to go elsewhere to do that. The important thing is that you do everything in your control to get the outcome you deserve, and that starts with speaking up for what matters to you.

## CH

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