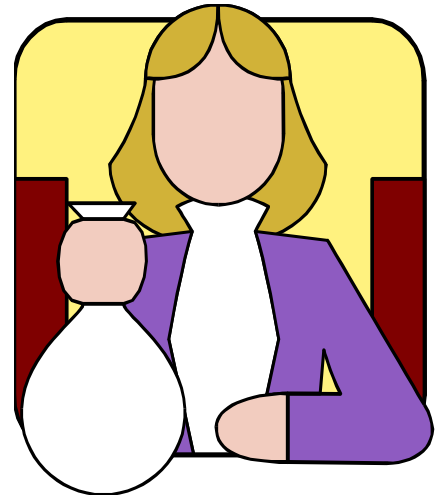


# Do you plan to ask for a raise anytime soon?

By JoAnn R. Hines, Chief People Packager

Asking for a raise is difficult under the best of circumstances. Asking for one in today's economy and business climate is down right brave. However, the fact remains that if you believe you deserve a raise, you need to make the request.

Employees and employers are becoming savvy in the art of negotiation. Consequently, a little advance preparation can give you the edge you need in your negotiations. Use my seven-point checklist to ensure you are ready, willing, and able to negotiate your next pay increase.



## 1. Raise or Recognition?

Are you sure it's a raise you want and not just more recognition or better working conditions? It is imperative to have this worked out in your mind before beginning any negotiations. Have an idea of what you expect but be realistic. Large raises are no longer commonplace. Research detailing what is a reasonable percentage increase to expect can be done using general economic business condition. Statistics are available for the inflation rate and general business benchmarks.

## 2. You deserve a raise, why?

Have you asked yourself why you deserve a raise? The answer should never be because you want or need one. Everyone falls in that category and a boss will not take you seriously without some warranted reasons. It's important to have a solid list of accomplishments to back up your request. This list should be similar in scope to a resume. If you don't have a long list, prepare a record of your special skills, new responsibilities or exceptional performance notations that sets you apart from your coworkers.

## 3. Are company policies in your way?

Does your company have policies regarding compensation? Read your employee handbook if you have one. (The compensation policy should be spelled out). Ask the company personnel director about compensation policies. Companies usually have guidelines such as annual raise rates, compensation percentages, etc.

*TIP: If these policies are dictated -- specific raises at certain times -- your boss may not have the latitude to award a compensation increase beyond these guiding principles.*

#### 4. Who gets paid what?

Do you know industry standard for your type of position?

If not, you need to do a little homework. Find out what other individuals are being paid in similar positions. Industry associations generally have studies available for most positions. Additionally, there are many salary studies available on the Internet. What if you find out that a coworker is making more than you? Should you approach your superior? This is a tricky issue especially since it is considered a no-no to talk about salary with coworkers. If you do find out inadvertently, its important not to use the other worker's name or the fact that you know they are making more money in your negotiations. This sets an adversarial tone to your negotiation. You are better off with strong industry statistics detailing what the going market is.

*TIP: A good way to benchmark your worth is to go on an interview. (Never turn down an interview opportunity). This is a very simple way to find out what the going salary scale is for someone with your qualifications.*

*TIP: If your research unveils that you are at the top of your pay grade, be prepared for a no response to your request for a raise and work out an alternative plan.*

#### 5. To ask or not to ask?

When should you ask for a raise? Timing is everything, yet there is no right time to ask for a raise. Here are a few things to consider: External market conditions; Your boss' temperament; Company policies restricting raises and promotions; Your current workload, performance, success; Upcoming annual evaluation. Ascertain which of the above considerations will make the biggest impact on your request. If companies polices are cast in stone, its best to set the stage in advance and ask for a raise before an annual review. If compensation policies are relatively informal, then asking for a raise after a major accomplishment might be most beneficial. Tip: It is not an accomplishment if only you are aware of it personally. Make others aware of your success. Plan a visibility campaign with the same strategy you set in asking for a raise. Watch for more on packaging yourself for increased visibility in a future article. Try to schedule an appointment during the least stressful time of the day. Work toward getting at least 30 minutes to an hour to state your case. Check out your boss' schedule first. Don't schedule your meeting before an important presentation or when he/she returns from a lengthy business trip. If the general company economy will not allow a raise at this time, ask when the freeze will be lifted.

## 6. Objection!

Have you prepared for your boss' objections?

Chances are your boss will automatically say no. Don't accept that right off the bat. The important part of the negotiation is that you clearly demonstrate why you should receive a raise. If no means no, be prepared to suggest alternatives. Part of negotiation is compromise. Be prepared and present alternative perks you would like to receive if an increase in wage is out of the question. Take ammunition. Use your project load or performance ratings to your advantage. If you have a letter from a customer, supplier or other senior level rep, take it with you to the meeting. Demonstrate your worth!

*Tip: Never give an ultimatum, demand or threat unless you have another job.*

## 7. Practice asking.

Have you prepared a dry run with business associates or colleagues?

This is a little bit like role-playing. Have someone you trust (not a coworker) play your boss. Ask them to give you a hard time and be the antagonist. Take your time. Make sure you get a chance to state your case. An outsider is likely to see a weakness or an area that you have missed. Listen to yourself and what the role player hears. When you select a role-playing partner, ensure that they are aware that this is important to you. A good way to get the juices flowing is to prepare some opening questions for the role player to give to you. Such as: Give me a one-minute sound byte why you deserve of a raise. Our company is in a serious economic downturn, how can I justify and increase at this time?

What sets you apart from your colleagues and coworkers?



Following these guidelines may not send you into the next tax bracket, but they will improve your chances of getting that well-deserved raise. Be certain you are prepared for the negotiations and make a solid case for yourself. Remember, you are talking about your compensation. Ensure you have the facts and present them well. Do not easily accept no for an answer. Negotiate, compromise, find the middle ground and strategize. If it seems to be that the ONLY answer at this time is no, find out why. Is it the economy or your performance? Work out the best possible solution to sell yourself and increase your worth when that obstacle is removed. Then, revisit these seven tips and try again!