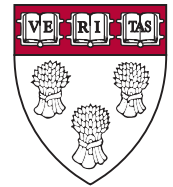


Negotiation

Helping you build successful agreements and partnerships

Program on Negotiation
at Harvard Law School



What happens when women don't ask

Stereotypes and the threat of backlash sometimes hold back women negotiators. Tailored strategies can motivate them to ask for what they need.

About 10 years ago, a group of female graduate students appeared in the office of their program's director, professor Linda Babcock, at Carnegie Mellon University's Heinz School of Public Policy and Management, with a complaint. Their male counterparts in the program would all be teaching their own courses in an upcoming semester, the women said, while they were left serving as mere teaching assistants. Why had they been passed over?

As Babcock recounts in her new book with Sara Laschever, *Ask for It: How Women Can Use the Power of Negotiation to Get What They Really Want* (Bantam, 2008), she took the students' concerns to the associate dean in charge of teaching assignments. He explained that he sought out opportunities for students who approached him about teaching courses. The gender difference was simple to explain, he said: "More men ask. The women don't ask."

Babcock recalled other situations in which male students had negotiated for what they wanted, and female students had waited for career opportunities to come to them. Was there a larger trend? To find out, Babcock started a research program with several colleagues. Their laboratory findings confirmed her observations: in general, men initiate negotiations to advance their interests about four times more often than women do.

At the same time, research by Babcock, professor Deborah Kolb of the Simmons School of Management, and others has revealed that women negotiate just as often

as men in certain circumstances. Moreover, many successful women show no difficulty identifying and asking for what they need.

When do women pass up opportunities to negotiate, and at what cost? What strategies can women adopt to ensure that their appeals are well received? How can organizations better support women negotiators? Current research on gender and negotiation offers answers to these pressing questions.

The hidden costs of not asking

Over the course of a woman's career, the costs of overlooking opportunities to negotiate for her own interests can be staggering. As an example, Babcock and her colleagues found that only 12.5% of women graduating with master's degrees from the Heinz School in 2002 had negotiated their starting salaries, as compared with 51.5% of male graduates. Babcock calculated that students who did not negotiate their starting salaries would forfeit at least \$1 million in income over their lifetimes.

Salary aside, Babcock says that men are more likely than women to negotiate for resources, training, and other factors that boost job satisfaction and success. It stands to reason that men who seek out career opportunities will advance more quickly in their organizations than equally qualified women who do not. In reaction to such inequities, women may grow frustrated and decide to quit. Given that turnover costs American companies billions of dollars each year, Babcock and ▶▶

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EDITORIAL CORRESPONDENCE

E-mail negotiation@law.harvard.edu, or write to:

Negotiation

Program on Negotiation, Harvard Law School
1563 Massachusetts Avenue, 513 Pound Hall
Cambridge, MA 02138-2903

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Laschever argue that organizations suffer significantly from the fact that women ask for what they need less often than men do.

How stereotypes hold women back

Why do women sometimes pass up opportunities to negotiate? One factor may be *gender schemas*, or stereotyped assumptions about sex differences that shape our expectations and behaviors, says Kolb.

One persistent gender schema is the belief that women are worse negotiators than men, write researchers Laura Kray of the University of Arizona and Leigh Thompson and Adam Galinsky of Northwestern University. The stereotype of women as cooperative and men as competitive leads many people to expect that men will negotiate better deals than women.

Of course, we all know that women can be competitive, just as men can be cooperative. But women understand that acting contrary to gender schemas can carry a high price. Suppose that a woman has misgivings about the travel demands of a work assignment she's been offered. The fear of seeming pushy or demanding—too “masculine”—might lead her to accept the assignment without negotiating a better fit.

A second generation of bias

Although overt gender discrimination in the American workplace is largely a thing of the past, a more subtle form of inequity persists, according to Kolb and Kathleen McGinn of Harvard Business School. Rather than intentional acts of bias, *second-generation gender biases* reflect the continuing dominance of traditionally masculine values in the workplace.

Consider subtle discrimination practices such as these:

- A woman's boss assumes she won't want a promotion because she is pregnant and hires a less-qualified man instead.
- A manager chooses a man to conduct a negotiation in which “toughness” is needed, rather than a woman who has more experience with the client.
- A department head routinely assigns women rather than men to administrative tasks that attract little attention.

These “micro-inequities” don't just slow a woman's career, according to Kolb. They also require her to negotiate over issues that many of her male colleagues do not have to face. Moreover, a woman may find herself confronting cultural norms, such as the notion of an “ideal worker” who is on call 24/7. Challenging the status quo can be a risky move.

A very real backlash

A recent series of experiments shows that women do face a significant backlash when they assert themselves in negotiations. Babcock and colleagues Hannah Riley Bowles of Harvard and Lei Lai of Carnegie Mellon had male and female participants imagine that they were senior managers evaluating an internal candidate for a position within their firms. Next, participants watched videotaped interviews of pairs of actors carrying out the job negotiation.

In evaluations of the candidates, both male and female participants (whose average age was 29) were significantly less willing to work with a female candidate who attempted to negotiate her salary than with a female candidate who did not try to negotiate salary. Female participants

also penalized male negotiators who asked for more money, but male evaluators did not. Participants of both sexes viewed women who asked for more to be less nice and more demanding than women who didn't ask.

The stark truth: Women who asked for more money were disliked—and penalized accordingly. Women's reluctance to negotiate may actually be a reasonable choice in such instances.

Having achieved significant gains in the workplace, women now face a double bind. To advance and succeed, they need to advocate for their interests—yet when they do so, they may be punished for being unfeminine.

Advice for women negotiators

How can women ask for what they need without triggering a backlash? Here are three pieces of advice:

1. Collaborate to be liked. In *Negotiation*, we stress the importance of using collaborative techniques to get what you want. When you explore the other side's interests, engage in joint problem solving, and use influence strategies rather than coercion and demands, you'll be in a better position not only to create value for both sides but also to claim greater value for yourself.

Although a collaborative approach obviously benefits all negotiators, it may be crucial for women. Why? Because women need to make an extra effort to be liked during negotiation, write Babcock and Laschever, or risk a backlash.

That doesn't mean pasting on a permanent smile when asking for a higher salary. Rather, it means expressing appreciation for the other side's perspective, supporting arguments with objective

criteria, and framing comments in positive terms—"I'm ready for a new challenge" rather than "I'm really tired of my job." (Babcock and Laschever offer a refresher course on mutual-gains negotiation for women in *Ask for It*.)

2. Connect your goals to the organization's. Despite research showing that many women are reluctant to ask for what they need, evidence also suggests that women who do negotiate are likely to thrive. That's the conclusion Kolb and her Simmons colleague Jill Kickul drew from a 2005 survey of 470 professional women attending a leadership conference.

These women recognized the value of negotiation as a tool for career success; 53% of them showed

a strong proclivity to negotiate. Attesting to the power of negotiation, this group was much more satisfied with their jobs than those who asked less regularly for what they needed (74% versus 26%).

How did these women negotiate effectively for their success without triggering a backlash? By identifying pressing concerns within their groups, they were able to lobby for resources and responsibilities. These "small wins" in turn attracted positive attention. Connecting their individual interests to the good of their organizations helped these leaders avoid appearing aggressive and established a formula for success.

3. Navigate the shadow negotiation. Suppose that a manager named

When women *do* ask

Researchers have identified certain contexts in which women routinely negotiate and achieve outcomes that match or exceed those of men:

- **When issues matter to them.** In a survey of investment-bank employees, Iris Bohnet and Fiona Greig of Harvard's Kennedy School of Government found that women professionals were ready and willing to negotiate career issues of particular importance to them, most notably their work-related travel and daily schedules. This could be in part because women feel it is socially acceptable for them to negotiate issues that directly affect their families.
- **When they negotiate on behalf of others.** Although some studies have found that men excel in competitive negotiations, women negotiators in one study achieved better outcomes than men when bargaining on behalf of someone else. In an experiment involving graduating MBAs, researchers Hannah Riley Bowles, Linda Babcock, and Kathleen McGinn found that acting as someone's agent seemed to motivate female participants to work extra hard, perhaps because they expected that assertiveness would be better tolerated than if they were lobbying on their own behalf.
- **When they have good information.** In highly ambiguous situations, gender stereotypes are more likely to emerge, putting women at a disadvantage. In their study, Bowles, Babcock, and McGinn found that men negotiated higher salaries than women in fields where starting salaries were ambiguous, including telecommunications, real estate, health services, and media. Yet women performed just as well as men when negotiating for jobs in industries where compensation was fairly clear, including investment banking, consulting, and high technology.

Old gender roles die hard

If you think you are immune to gender schemas, consider the results of a popular online test.

The computerized Implicit Association Test (IAT) developed by Anthony Greenwald of the University of Washington, Mahzarin R. Banaji of Harvard University, and Brian Nosek of the University of Virginia reveals deep-seated biases by requiring test takers to make connections quickly, without time for conscious thought.

In one IAT, thousands of men and women have proven much more adept at linking words associated

with work (such as *salary* and *office*) with men's names than with women's names. At the same time, people are much better at linking words associated with home (*parents*, *children*, etc.) with women's names than with men's names.

As open-minded as we strive to be, we may still find the image of a woman leading a work team or a man cooking dinner for his family to be unnatural at a subconscious level. That's all the more reason to be vigilant about double standards at the office and at home.

Gwen makes a case for a significant raise following a year of excellent performance. To her surprise, her usually supportive boss responds by downplaying her achievements: "That request is way out of line with what I've seen from you." Gwen is tempted to back down, though she knows a male colleague was recently awarded a hefty raise for meeting similar targets.

When you negotiate issues that challenge people's deeply seated beliefs about gender, they may respond with moves that question your credibility and competence, according to Kolb. In their book *Everyday Negotiation: Navigating the Hidden Agendas in Bargaining* (Jossey-Bass, 2003), Kolb and Judith Williams write that such moves are part of a "shadow negotiation" that goes deeper than the issues at stake. Your shadow negotiation with someone encompasses how you treat each other, who gets heard, and how cooperative and open you are.

Women can counter demeaning, critical, and threatening moves

by turning the conversation in a more productive direction. Rather than backing down or becoming defensive, Gwen might ask her boss about his reasoning: "Can you explain why you feel that way?" She could also reference data showing the cost savings she has achieved. When you recognize a move as a power tactic, you gain the ability to respond strategically and effectively.

Advice for concerned leaders

Without support from higher-ups, even women who negotiate regularly will advance only so far. To ensure that your organization takes greater advantage of women's

talents and skills, follow these three tips from Babcock and Laschever:

1. Audit your assignments. Reflect back on the work assignments you made in the past year. How often did male or female employees approach you about taking on a new opportunity? Were female employees less likely to initiate such negotiations? If so, pause the next time a man asks you for a plum assignment and consider whether he is truly the best candidate.

2. Serve as a mentor. If you've noticed that certain talented female employees are working behind the scenes, talk to them about opportunities that might attract more attention. Simply telling someone that "everything is negotiable" can have a big impact. After Babcock took steps to encourage women graduate students at the Heinz School to negotiate their starting salaries, the percentage of women who did so rose from 12.5% to 68% within three years, matching the negotiation rates and starting salaries of male students.

3. Raise awareness. Organizational policies may subtly discourage women from negotiating and advancing. If administrative staff can work flexible hours but managers cannot, some women may have trouble getting ahead, and men striving for a greater work-life balance may be at a disadvantage as well. Examine your organization's culture for such hints of bias, and institute more gender-neutral practices. ♥

5 take-aways for women negotiators

- 1 You may be passing up opportunities to negotiate on your own behalf.
- 2 Avoid a backlash by meshing your interests with those of your organization.
- 3 Set high negotiation goals for yourself—and reap dramatic results.
- 4 Be on the lookout for power tactics, and turn them to your advantage.
- 5 Start a movement in your organization by encouraging other women to ask for what they need.