

FORETHOUGHT IDEA

Women negotiate less than men—and everyone pays the price.

Nice Girls Don't Ask

by Linda Babcock, Sara Laschever,
Michele Gelfand, and Deborah Small

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Men and women are still treated unequally in the workplace. Women continue to earn less, on average, for the same performance, and they remain underrepresented in top jobs. Research has shown that both conscious and subconscious biases contribute to this problem. But we've discovered another, subtler source of inequality: Women often don't get what they want and deserve because they don't ask for it. In three separate studies, we found that men are more likely than women to negotiate for what they want. This can be costly for companies—and it requires management intervention.

The first study found that the starting salaries of male MBAs who had recently graduated from Carnegie Mellon were 7.6%, or almost \$4,000, higher on average than those of female MBAs from the same program. That's because most of the women had simply accepted the employer's initial salary offer; in fact, only 7% had attempted to negotiate. But 57% of their male counterparts—or eight times as many men as women—had asked for more.

Another study tested this gender difference in the lab. Subjects were told that they would be observed playing a word game and that they would be paid between \$3 and \$10 for playing. After each subject completed the task, an experimenter thanked the participant and said, "Here's \$3. Is \$3 OK?" For the men, it was

not OK, and they said so. Their requests for more money exceeded the women's by nine to one.

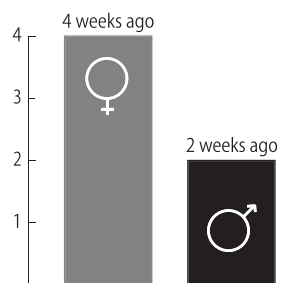
The largest of the three studies surveyed several hundred people over the Internet, asking respondents about the most recent negotiations they'd attempted or initiated and when they expected to negotiate next. The study showed that men place themselves in negotiation situations more often than women do and regard more of their interactions as potential negotiations. (See the exhibit "Can We Talk?")

Getting What You Settle For

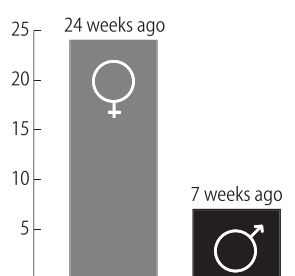
Women are less likely than men to negotiate for themselves for several reasons. First, they often are socialized from an early age not to promote their own interests and to focus instead on the needs of others. The messages girls receive—from parents, teachers, other children, the media, and society in general—can be so powerful that when they grow up they may not realize that they've internalized this behavior, or they may realize it but not understand how it affects their willingness to negotiate. Women tend to assume that they will be recognized and rewarded for working hard and doing a good job. Unlike men, they haven't been taught that they can ask for more.

Second, many companies' cultures penalize

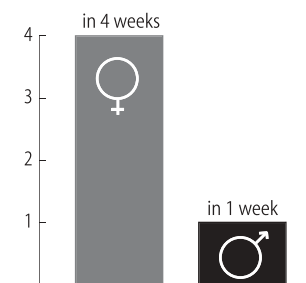
When was your most recent negotiation?



When was your second most recent negotiation?



When do you expect to negotiate next?



Can We Talk?

A survey of 291 men and women selected to match U.S. census demographics demonstrate women's hesitation to negotiate.

What Managers Should Do

- Tell women employees they must ask for what they want and need.
- Inform female reports about the benefits of negotiating.
- Give men and women comparable raises for comparable achievement.
- Recognize that many women have a style that's less assertive than men's—and don't leave them out because of it.
- Monitor their own track record for advancing female employees.
- Walk the talk: Create a workplace in which men and women are rewarded equally.

women when they do ask—further discouraging them from doing so. Women who assertively pursue their own ambitions and promote their own interests may be labeled as bitchy or pushy. They frequently see their work devalued and find themselves ostracized or excluded from access to important information. These responses from women's colleagues and supervisors may not be conscious or part of any concerted effort to “hold women back.” More typically, they're a product of society's ingrained expectations about how women should act.

As a result, women in business often watch their male colleagues pull ahead, receive better assignments, get promoted more quickly, and earn more money. Observing these inequities, women become disenchanted with their employers. When a better offer comes along, rather than using that offer as a negotiating tool, women may take it and quit. This happens even in organizations that make concerted efforts to treat women fairly. Managers who believe (rightly) that an important part of their job is to keep their employees happy may give women smaller pieces of the pie simply because they give their employees what they ask for. They do not realize that the men are asking for a lot more than the women are.

Making the World Negotiable


Managers need to confront this problem. At the individual level, they can mentor the women they supervise, advising them on the benefits (and the necessity) of asking for what they need to do their jobs effectively and fulfill their professional goals. Managers also can make sure that women understand how many aspects of their working lives can be negotiated. This can effectively compensate for women's more limited access to many of the professional and social networks in which men learn these lessons. Our studies found that women respond immediately and powerfully to advising and rapidly begin to see the world as a much more negotiable place.

Managers also should pay attention to the different rates at which men and women ask for advantages and opportunities. For example, managers shouldn't assume that the per-

son requesting an assignment (often a male) wants it the most—and therefore will be the most motivated and do the best job. Good managers should realize that an equally qualified woman might be just as interested and motivated.

Similarly, when a man asks for a raise and a woman doing comparable work does not, a good manager should consider giving both, or neither, of them raises. That way, the manager can help to ensure that the company is treating its employees equitably and prevent the woman from becoming disillusioned if she later discovers a pay difference.

Managers can also develop detailed and transparent systems to evaluate whether they're doling out opportunities and rewards to all employees based on skills and merit, rather than on who asks and who doesn't. Incentives for managers themselves don't hurt, either: They should be measured on how *all* of their reports are advancing.

Finally, managers should drive larger scale cultural change. Throughout any organization, undoubtedly, people respond in different ways to the same behavior in men and women—behavior that in a man might be called assertive or principled in a woman might be considered overbearing or strident, for example. By finding ways to examine different responses, leaders can open eyes to hidden barriers and create an atmosphere in which women and men can ask—and receive—equally. 

Linda Babcock is the James M. Walton Professor of Economics at Carnegie Mellon's School of Public Policy and Management, *Sara Laschever* is a writer specializing in women's life and career obstacles. Their book, *Women Don't Ask: Negotiation and the Gender Divide*, is being published this month by Princeton University Press. *Michele Gelfand* is an associate professor of psychology at the University of Maryland. *Deborah Small* is a PhD candidate in Carnegie Mellon's Department of Social and Decision Sciences.

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