

Why women get paid less

Even star employees often shy away from asking for more. Here are 6 tips for women on how to get a raise.

By [Anne Fisher](#), Fortune senior writer
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(Fortune) -- **Dear Annie:** My sister, who is in her late 30s (as am I), is a super-successful salesperson, one of only two women on an 18-person sales staff. She recently found out that she and her sole female colleague make about 20% less than the men, even though both women are highly productive "stars." I think she owes it to herself to talk to her boss about this, but she says she's satisfied with her current pay and doesn't want to "rock the boat." Should I butt out and mind my own business? What do you think? - *Just Cathy*



Dear Cathy: I think that women's unwillingness to "rock the boat" is a big reason why, according to the Economic Policy Institute, the wage gap between college-educated women and their male counterparts has actually gotten bigger since the mid-'90s. A decade ago, women earned 75.7 cents for each dollar paid to a man. Now it's 74.7 cents.

"Talk to your sister and help her try to figure out why she puts up with this," suggests Barbara Stanny (www.barbarastanny.com), a career counselor based in Port Townsend, Wash., who specializes in women's pay issues. "Women often get paid less because we allow it. Why doesn't she value herself enough to mind that she's making less money than her peers?"

Encourage her not to put off dealing with this. In the course of her coaching work, Stanny says, "I met one woman who tolerated being paid less than the men she worked with for decades, until she was 48. When she finally got around to confronting her boss about it, he said, 'You're right.' This woman said to me, 'Just imagine how different my life would be now if I'd done that 20 years ago.' "

Remind your sister, too, that even though she apparently feels her present pay supports her current standard of living just fine, she needs to think about what kind of retirement she wants: Defined-benefit pensions, company-matched 401(k) contributions, and Social

Security benefits are all based, directly or indirectly, on the level of her income during these prime earning years.

You might also get your sis a copy of Stanny's book, *Overcoming Underearning: Overcome Your Money Fears and Earn What You Deserve* (HarperCollins, \$24.95). It's packed with terrific down-to-earth advice, including these tips on asking for a raise:

- Research the going rates in your field, by checking out salary ranges in want ads and on Web sites like salary.com. Then ask for the high end of the spectrum. It's easier to negotiate down than up.
- "No" often means "Not now." Even if a pay hike just isn't in the budget at the moment, that doesn't mean it never will be. Don't get discouraged.
- Negotiate more than plain dollars and cents. Your total compensation might include other items you may want more of, like performance bonuses, profit sharing, paid time off, flexible work hours, tuition reimbursement, and club memberships.
- Act confident (even if you don't feel it). Communicate with authority. "Perceived confidence has a big impact," Stanny says.
- Remember, the best time to negotiate is when you have other offers.
- Have points prepared and build a case around your value and what you bring to the company.

In your sister's case, that sounds like plenty. Good luck to her!

Do you think women shy away from asking for more money, or do you think discrimination is the real problem? What tips do you have on asking for - and getting - a raise? [Post your thoughts](#) on the Ask Annie blog.

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