

FROM YOUR ADVISOR HOW TO ASK FOR A RAISE

Be prepared to mount a strong case that you deserve more money. And don't get emotional when discussing money with your employer

About a year into Jordann Brown's first full-time gig out of university, she was startled to discover she was earning less than most other Canadians working in the same type of position.

Brown, who was saddled with about \$38,000 in student and car loans at the time, had jumped on the job offer without doing much research. But, later on, while scouring the Internet for tips on how to earn more, she came across salary-comparison websites detailing just how much she was being underpaid.

The emboldened but nervous 22-year-old Brown started making a plan to ask her boss for a wage increase.

"I decided to [ask] because I knew there was a good chance that I could argue for a raise successfully," says Brown. She's now 26 years old, works in marketing and also runs her own personal finance blog.

After presenting some compelling arguments — followed by an uncomfortably long pause — her annual pay was increased by about 10%.

Asking your employer for more money may be a nerve-wracking experience, but being well prepared to present a strong business case of how you add to your company's financial bottom line can be persuasive. Preparation is key, notes David King, district president of the Canadian arm of staffing agency California-based Robert Half International Inc. in Toronto.

In addition to knowing comparable salaries, you should highlight ways in which you've helped your company increase revenue, boost efficiency or lower costs, he says: "When you can draw a correlation to your value and the bottom line of the organization, [that] certainly helps your position."

In Brown's case, she came prepared to her meeting with her boss with a list of the projects Brown had completed over the past year and their positive impact on the company. She also highlighted the good customer feedback and the skills she had acquired since her start date.

Whether you should ask for a large or small raise will depend entirely on your situation, says Alan Kearns, founder of job coaching agency CareerJoy.

These criteria include your starting and current salary, total compensation package and notable achievements — leading a project to an unexpectedly large profit, for example. There also are some common benchmarks to consider, Kearns adds, such as inflation.

In 2016, the average pay bump for non-unionized employees is estimated to be 2.6%, according to the Conference Board of Canada's compensation planning outlook report on a survey of 370 organizations.

Another salary tactic is to ask for more than you are willing to settle for, says Kearns, to create some wiggle room for negotiation. Also, consider asking for benefits beyond money. For example, you may be able to negotiate flexible work hours or extra vacation time in lieu of increased pay.

However you choose to approach your meeting to discuss a raise, be sure to practise your presentation, says King. You don't want to stumble through the negotiations.

Avoiding talk of personal circumstances is best, King stresses, even if they are the reason behind the discussion. Paying more for the same job when you decide to buy an expensive vehicle or take a long vacation is not up to your employer, he says.

Another bad move is getting emotional.

Don't wait too long to ask for a raise, Brown says, as that can breed resentment, which, in turn, could boil over into a demanding, frustrated tone during salary negotiations.

"[Asking for a raise] shouldn't be an argument," agrees King, "and that's best avoided with homework that's done proactively."

An increase in pay won't always come your way, despite you taking all the right steps.

If the roadblock to more money is your employer's desire to see a boost in your performance — and not poor company finances — consider creating a plan to enhance your skill set through, for example, online certifications, Brown suggests.

But if the boss makes it clear there's no opportunity to progress, that's another situation.

"Then, it might be time to quietly start job searching," she says.

By Aleksandra Sagan (CP)