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How to Overcome a Fear of Negotiating and Get a Bigger Paycheck



By Jennifer C. Berkshire

When Erica Pacheco was offered a job as project manager at Presente.org, a Latino advocacy group, she tried something she'd never done before: She asked for more money.

“I didn't even know that negotiating was an option until a mentor explained it to me,”

says Ms. Pacheco, who started her new job in October and now works in the national organization's Massachusetts office. And while she was initially nervous about a back-and-forth over salary, she was happy with the outcome.

“We had an open, honest discussion about money, and I said, 'Here's where I think I should be,’” says Ms. Pacheco.

Negotiating over salary is commonplace in the for-profit world but can still be a source of discomfort for new or even veteran employees of charities. One reason: the mission-driven nature of many nonprofit jobs, says Allan Luks, director of the Fordham Center for Nonprofit Leaders, who also once led Big Brothers Big Sisters of New York City.

“There's a perception out there that you work for a nonprofit because you care about the cause rather than the money,” says Mr. Luks, who trains midlevel nonprofit employees who hope to lead a charity. “But you still deserve to get paid what you're worth, no matter how passionate you are about the mission.”

Experts also attribute the resistance to haggling in part to gender; three-quarters of nonprofit workers are women.

“Women tend not to feel comfortable negotiating on their own behalf,” argues Sara Laschever, co-author of *Women Don't Ask: Negotiation and the Gender Divide*. Ms. Laschever notes that such reluctance toward negotiation can be found across professions and education levels.

But avoiding money talk can have serious consequences. Ms. Laschever and her co-author, Linda Babcock, found that women on average sacrifice more than \$500,000 over the course of their careers by not negotiating their first job offer. Studies continue to reveal persistent pay gaps between men and women in the nonprofit world.

“The irony is that women who work in philanthropy tend to have no problem negotiating on behalf of the causes they care about,” says Ms. Laschever.

Following are some suggestions from nonprofit hiring experts about how to negotiate a good salary:

Do the homework. Mazarine Treyz, a fundraising adviser in Portland, Ore., and the author of *The Wild Woman's Guide to Fundraising*, advises her clients to arm themselves with facts and figures before any negotiating session. “Take a good look at the organization,” says Ms. Treyz. “What’s the size of the budget? How much does the executive director make?”

Such data are widely available. *The Chronicle* conducts an annual survey of executive-director pay at large organizations, while GuideStar, Charity Navigator, and the Foundation Center offer a wealth of financial information about nonprofits. Also, some state umbrella associations may do their own regional surveys of nonprofit salaries.

Put a price tag on your strengths. While candidates should be knowledgeable about how much the position they are seeking typically pays, Ms. Treyz encourages her clients to go a step further.

“Try to calculate what you actually brought to your last job,” she says. “How much money did you raise? How many people did you help? What processes did you put into place? Having that information at your fingertips conveys that you know your stuff and will help you negotiate from a position of strength.”

Employees who are seeking additional compensation should also keep an inventory of their contributions, says Ms. Treyz. “Pointing to something extra you did to help the organization really strengthens your case, especially if it’s something that groups are always in need of, like fundraising or media,” she says.

Find a niche to fill. Richard Male, a nonprofit-management and fundraising consultant in Denver, argues that negotiations these days have less to do with what a prospective employee wants than with the perceived value of what he or she brings to the charity.

“What are you specifically going to do to help the organization carry out its mission?” asks Mr. Male. “If you can demonstrate that you bring something the group really needs, that is key.”

He says candidates should delve deeply into the background of the charities they want to work for to understand the groups’ strengths and weaknesses. “Read the annual reports, talk to staff if you can. This isn’t just a numbers game but a question of culture and fit,” says Mr. Male, who started the Community Resource Center, which offered management support to other nonprofits. “In order to demonstrate that you have value to add, you need to understand the larger picture.”

Identify the nonprofit’s future needs. For established nonprofit employees who are seeking to negotiate higher salaries, the Fordham Center’s Mr. Luks suggests that they familiarize themselves with their charity’s strategic plan, if they have access to it. “You will go into your review with an understanding of how your work is helping to achieve the goals laid out in the strategic plan,” says Mr. Luks.

He recounts a recent experience of a charity worker who took his advice. “Her executive director was shocked that she understood the plan,” he says. “It helped her successfully make the case for more money.”

Role play. Even extensive research might not be enough to overcome the negotiation jitters completely. To put these to rest, experts recommend plenty of practice, particularly for candidates and employees who have never negotiated before or feel uncomfortable asking for more money.

For women in particular, Ms. Laschever says, role playing can help them gain confidence about haggling for higher pay. “Get a friend to play the part of the employer, then go through the scenario until it starts to feel natural,” she says. “If you practice responding

calmly ahead of time, you are much more likely to feel calm when you are actually negotiating.”

Prepare responses. A few well-rehearsed lines can also help keep candidates and employees from getting flustered, says Katie Donovan, whose blog, Equal Pay Negotiations, offers advice to women seeking higher salaries. She recommends that candidates prepare for what they don't want to hear and have a response at the ready. “You might say something like 'I'm interested but surprised at the starting salary. My research indicates that the norm is higher,'” says Ms. Donovan.

Think long-term. A recent *Chronicle* survey of new nonprofit employees found widespread discontent with starting salaries at charities, even as these new workers were relieved to have found jobs in a still-struggling economy. Brian Vogel, a senior principal at Quatt Associates, a management consulting firm in Washington that works with nonprofit clients, encourages early-career workers to take a longer-term view of what's being negotiated.

“This is an opportunity for a candidate to ask, 'What else do I get?' What's the career path like? What sorts of positions have other people moved on to? How is working here going to help me build the skills to go on to a real nonprofit career?” asks Mr. Vogel. “Negotiation is about more than just the nuts and bolts of salary.”

Request a compensation review. Walking out the door isn't the only option available when a salary negotiation fails.

John Salveson, principal of the Salveson Stetson Group, an executive search firm in Philadelphia, suggests asking the nonprofit to review the salary sooner than it normally would.

“This is a way of indicating that you are sensitive to the organization and the budget and still holding open the possibility of getting more money in the future,” says Mr. Salveson. He also encourages candidates to identify some concrete objectives around which their performance will be evaluated.

“What should determine your compensation is the value you bring,” says Mr. Salveson. “A review of your salary gives you another chance to demonstrate that you are contributing more than your current compensation reflects.”

8 steps to securing higher pay

- Check the data. Research what the position typically pays, as well as the charity's financial standing.
- Dig deep. Try to get a sense of the organization's culture by surveying annual reports and talking to current staff members, if possible.
- Look to the future. Read the charity's strategic plan, if available, and make a case for your role.
- Do the math. Add up the value of your skills, including how much money you raised.
- Role play. Act out various negotiating scenarios, with a friend playing the boss.
- Learn your lines. Practice a variety of responses to break down an employer's resistance to offering more money.
- Ask questions. If the salary offered is very low, ask why. Also, inquire about the sorts of opportunities that the position has led to in the past.
- Request a review. If you can't negotiate better pay now, request a salary review by a particular date. Specify goals by which your work will be evaluated.

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