

Women must set the stage for negotiations

Thorough preparation can give confidence and help even out the imbalances in how men and women are perceived when it comes to salary discussions



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Women's earnings have been inching up, albeit erratically, since 1960. At that time their pay cheques were about 60 per cent of those of men - less than in the 1950s, before the feminist revolution. By 2002, the fraction had climbed to about 76 per cent.

"Mommy tracking" issues aside, there are several explanations for the continued pay gap. One of them is women's failure to negotiate better deals for themselves.

Unless they have been trained for it, most women find negotiations on their own behalf a particularly onerous undertaking, says Lee Miller, managing director of NegotiationPlus.com, a consulting, mediation and training company.

Mr Miller and his daughter Jessica set out to help women overcome their handicap. They interviewed more than 60 successful women, who had learnt negotiating techniques as they advanced in their careers. The results, along with Mr Miller's own experiences as a negotiator and professor teaching negotiations, are found in *A Woman's Guide to Successful Negotiating*, published in 2002.

Jessica Miller, now a 26-year-old associate at Grubb & Ellis, a leading commercial real estate company, says she was her father's first guinea pig as he developed his techniques. Starting in early childhood, she learnt to explain why she wanted something, why she deserved it and why it would be fair for her to get it.

She opened negotiations for a car when she turned 16. It was two years before Mr Miller

agreed to her offer that whatever scholarship money she earned could be used for a car but she could buy it only after making at least a 3.5 grade point average in her first semester of college. She earned a 4.0.

While the Millers' book can be useful for men, it is particularly oriented towards women, based on the not altogether alien notion that men and women are different. There are a number of pitfalls for negotiating women. For example, they often fall into the "empathy trap".

"Men tend to be more task-oriented. They care about the other person's feelings only to the extent that those feelings are relevant to the successful conclusion of the negotiation at hand," the Millers write. "Men tend to negotiate, reach agreement and move on to the next task."

Women put themselves in their adversaries' shoes. They think people want to be fair and would not take advantage of them. They instinctively want to fix things. They have difficulty walking away from bad deals.

Women generally have trouble promoting themselves and their achievements because they have been taught not to "brag" and don't like to feel greedy, says Ms Miller. They may be ignored when it is time for raises and promotions because they mistakenly believe that their work will automatically be recognised by their busy bosses.

"Men and women communicate differently," says Mr Miller. "For men, the tone [in negotiations] should be consistent with the message. A tough message, a tough tone. Women should do the opposite. The tougher the message, the softer the tone, but it must be firm."

Women may overcompensate by appearing unnecessarily tough and intimidating. "Women who engage in this type of behaviour quickly get labeled 'titch', although rarely to their

face, by the men with whom they are negotiating. They also frequently find themselves marginalised or taken out of a negotiation altogether because men don't want to work with them," the Millers say.

Richard Miller (no relation), a lobbyist and former labour negotiator, agrees that men and women have completely different styles. "Women try to build a consensus, as opposed to men, who force people to where they want them. But women can get eaten by the good old boys. The exception is women lawyers. They can be as obnoxious and vicious and painful to tolerate as men."

Like men, women have to prepare carefully for negotiations, says Ms Miller. "You need to have confidence. You need to walk in and wow them. If you don't, they'll walk all over you. They'll disregard what you are saying."

The book advises: "Figure out which questions you want to ask, both to gain information and to make a point. Anticipate what questions the other side will ask, and determine how you plan to respond to them."

Pei-lin Hsu was a student of Mr Miller's at Seton Hall University, where he teaches MBA management courses. She credits the skills she learnt there with helping her negotiate a higher salary before accepting a job with a big software provider.

She did her homework, as instructed, and went into negotiations with a plan. "I made sure they loved me. I told them I was enthusiastic. I'm a quick learner. I have strong verbal skills, and I work well with people." She studied the employer and the details of the job she was seeking. She called friends in the company to learn about the hiring managers.

Then, when the offer came, she told them she was expecting \$10,000 more and stood her ground during the negotiations.



The Millers provide tips for convincing negotiating partners that a proposal is to their advantage. They show how collaboration can change the focus of an adversarial negotiation to one of problem solving. When the collaborative approach is not yielding results, they show how to search

creatively for other solutions. Bonnie St John, a motivational speaker, executive coach, consultant and Olympic athlete, went to Mr Miller for help. She was in a complex negotiation with a celebrity spokesman who wanted to expand his client list. She was ready to offer several services but rather than fixing a

total charge that might have seemed high, she unbundled her services. She broke the contract into eight different sections, each with separate fees. The client could buy any of the services or receive a 10 per cent discount for accepting the whole package. He took the whole package.

When the Millers wrote their book together, they agreed on the basic themes but found it necessary to negotiate some of the details. "Everything is negotiable," says Ms Miller, "but you must pick your battles. It would be a terrible headache going through life fighting for everything."