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Bounty hunting

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Chances are when you last asked someone out on a date, you spent more time engineering that romantic idyll than you spent preparing to ask your boss for salary bump or a new job title.

Such rewards may be in your reach, but only if you know how to ask for them properly.

@work queried career gurus about the proper way to request the big things workers want from management: raises, promotions and recognition. Follow their advice, and you may get what you want. At worst, you've started a process that can pay off down the road.

And even in a lousy market, if you're delivering the goods, you're not being a jerk to ask for what you deserve.

"Down economy or not, I believe people with talent and potential should be given their due," says Gina Rudan, author of the forthcoming "Practical Genius: The Real Smarts You Need to Get Your Passions and Talents Working for You."

Her advice: "Put that fear aside and make the ask."

Money Honey

The first rule of asking for a raise is that you better be ready to prove you're worth it. That you have a brand-new kid or are putting an older model through college is your problem, not your boss'.

"One of the mistakes people make is complaining about high bills or their rent just went up, when the reason an employer is going to give you a raise is you make the company money, or you do something no one else does," says Jim Hopkinson, author of the new book "SalaryTutor: Learn the Salary Negotiation Secrets No One Ever Taught You."

So your job is to prove it — and it's best to have it in writing, notes business guru Harvey Mackay, author of "Swim With the Sharks."

"There are three rules to a successful [salary negotiation]. No. 1, documentation. No. 2, documentation. No. 3, documentation," says Mackay, whose new book, "The Mackay MBA of Selling in the Real World," is due in November.

You also need to be able to demonstrate that what you're asking for is in line with what others are paid in your industry based on title, geography and experience.

"If you walk into your office in Omaha, Nebraska, and say people in New York City make twice as much as I make, it's not going to cut any ice," says Kerry Patterson, co-author of "Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes Are High." "You have to have figures for a similar job in your region."

There are resources on the Web to determine what others in your position are making — Hopkinson cites PayScale.com, Salary.com and Glassdoor.com. Asking folks in your industry is another way to find out where you stand.

If what you find convinces you you're getting the shaft salary-wise, don't take an attitude about it, warns Patterson, noting that this is a common mistake.

"People feel like they've been underpaid for a while, so they're angry. They come in with this demanding tone rather than, 'Can we talk about our relationship?'" he says.

In fact, sometimes going cigar-store Indian is a good strategy, says Hopkinson.

"You can use silence as a technique, because it creates an awkwardness that people will try to fill," says Hopkinson. "They say, 'We're looking to offer you something in the \$50,000 range.' You'd just say, 'I see. So you're saying that the range is \$50,000. [Silence].'" Just leave that silence in. And a lot of times they might say, "But, but, but, we might be able to get you 55 to 60."

Keep in mind that you may be able to negotiate nonmonetary compensation in addition to or in lieu of more dinero.

"Maybe there's an extra week's vacation. Or working from home. Or there's a conference in San Diego in January and you live in New York City," says Hopkinson. "It's not always about money."

Climb time

As with raises, those asking for promotions should be ready to make a case for why they deserve it.

"Talk about why you're interested in moving up in terms of how it benefits the organization. It can't be about 'I need a title.'" says Donna Flagg, author of "Surviving Dreaded Conversations: How To Talk Through Any Difficult Situation at Work."

You need to show management in tangible ways what you bring to the table, because it's never a given that they're aware

of it.

“A lot of people get into this conversation, and they’re surprised because their boss doesn’t think what they think about themselves,” Flagg says.

To separate yourself from the herd, you need to show management what Patterson calls “positive salience,” something that makes you memorable. That means not only showing what you’ve done, but that you’re going to be a colleague they’ll enjoy working with and one who can bring creativity to the fore.

Being emphatic helps.

“A promotion to a different job demands different skill sets,” says Patterson. “And you haven’t necessarily demonstrated this. You need to be able say, ‘You’ve seen me do this, but you need to know I’m prepared to do these other things.’”

“Practical Genius” author Rudan notes that securing a promotion shouldn’t be contingent on one conversation with a supervisor. Rather, it should be the end result of a long “campaign” where you secure written recommendations from friends within the organization.

“You want to plan your moves. You want to plan your allies and ambassadors to champion you,” she says. “You want to build a team that’s going to help make this happen. These decisions don’t happen in isolation, so you shouldn’t go at it as a one-man show.”

Prop signs

Sometimes workers aren’t after more money or a vp’s title — sometimes they just want recognition. If you’re someone who thrives on appreciation, there are ways to secure it without coming across as needy and insecure, two qualities generally unrewarded by bosses.

For starters, don’t simply ask for praise, ask about your general performance, advises career consultant Mary Crane.

“Sit down with your manager at the end of the project and say, ‘Can we do a quick debrief? What went well? What can we do better in the future?’” says Crane. “That resonates with managers.”

Flagg believes a more pointed conversation is fair game if you feel you’re bringing the goods but losing morale due to a lack of recognition. But frame the talk as focusing on what’s good for the business, not for you personally.

“Say the lack of recognition is having a deflating effect on me, and I’d hate to see that become problematic in terms of performance,” she says.

Getting recognition is a skill, and like any other skill it needs to be cultivated through practice, says Rudan.

“People should be asking for recognition regularly, from a place of confidence in the work they’ve done,” she says.

Of course that’s contingent on actually delivering.

“If you haven’t, don’t waste your time,” she says. “Then you’re looked at as a jackass.”