

## **OFFICE SPACE: CAREER COUCH; You Deserve a Raise. Now Try Telling the Boss.**

By CHERYL DAHLE (NYT) Question words  
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Q. You've patiently toiled through the last three years of wage and promotion freezes at your company. Now that the economy is beginning to thaw, isn't it about time to ask for a raise?

A. Quite possibly -- particularly if your company is performing solidly in a recovering industry. While you don't want to make a request that will make you look out of touch with reality, you shouldn't assume that merely asking for a raise will hurt you, said Rayona Sharpnack, an executive coach and founder of the Institute for Women's Leadership in Redwood City, Calif.

Q. So how should you make your pitch for a raise?

A. Before you do anything, check your attitude. "Your story line for the request should be something a little more aggressive than, 'I'd just be happy if they just noticed me,'" but it should not convey any arrogance or feeling of entitlement, Ms. Sharpnack said. Such mind-sets can show up in your voice and body language and sabotage your case. Try to develop an internal voice that repeats something like: "I bring considerable demonstrable value to the company, and it's completely appropriate that I ask to be compensated for that."

Q. How do you make the case for the value you bring to your job?

A. Establish a connection between what you have accomplished over the last year and the company's success. If your division's customer-retention rates have gone up and you handle customer service, bring that up, Ms. Sharpnack said.

Ideally, you have been saving any internal e-mail messages praising your performance, and you have a portfolio of accomplishments to mention. Remember that you need to present evidence that you did more than just fulfill your job responsibilities.

Q. Should you produce a written proposal?

A. Sure, if that's appropriate, given your boss and the company culture. A few years ago, Courtney Attwood, director of product management at a Web

publishing company in San Francisco, received a one-page proposal from one of her subordinates, making a case for a raise and a promotion. Ms. Attwood found the document useful in lobbying her superiors about the raise. "I knew the quality of her work, but that succinct summary made it easier for me to go to my managers and to the budget controllers to really advocate for her."

Q. Just what about the woman's proposal for a raise was so persuasive?

A. The brief outlined the woman's recent accomplishments but, more important, it noted company goals and how her skills could contribute to them in a new role. "She demonstrated not just what she was capable of in her existing role, but how she had looked to what we were doing strategically, and what she brought to the table on that front," Ms. Attwood said.

Q. Should you do anything else to prepare to ask for a raise?

A. It certainly helps to know the salary ranges in your field and how your request meshes with the company's tiers of compensation. If you have reached the top of your work classification, you'll need to make a case for a promotion as well, or have a good answer for why your job should be an exception, Ms. Sharpnack said.

Q. What if the boss says no?

A. You still have several options. If the denial is based on the idea that the money just isn't available, you can suggest alternative compensation -- a performance bonus or a perk like some unofficial days off.

A marketing manager at a telecommunications manufacturer in Silicon Valley was able to negotiate a performance bonus for herself recently, despite the company's four-year raise freeze. "They gave me a \$2,000 performance bonus as recognition for my efforts," she said. "While that wasn't a raise, I saw this as very positive, in that it required approval from two levels above my boss, thereby gaining me exposure as a top performer." And it will provide more evidence to justify a raise once the company is flush again.

Q. What if a bonus isn't good enough?

A. You don't have to give up at the first "no." An artist at a computer graphics company in the San Francisco area recently got a raise after lobbying for more than a year. His job description changed in February 2003, moving him from working for a single department to coordinating the work of several departments. At the time, his superiors didn't see the job shift as a promotion.

The artist thought differently. After he repeatedly -- and calmly and politely -- emphasized that point, he was offered a bonus. He turned it down on principle, saying that his work merited a raise, not a bonus. (Bonuses, of course, don't figure into future percentage raises.)

Q. By rejecting a bonus, aren't you shooting yourself in the foot?

A. In this case, persistence won out. The artist kept bringing the conversation back to the unique value he had created for the company in his new role. He recalled: "At one point, a manager actually said to me, 'The way I see it, you have the coolest job at the company.' I had to talk through the fact that just because I do, indeed, like my job doesn't mean I don't deserve to be compensated."

Ultimately, he got an 18 percent raise.

Q. Are there any pitfalls to avoid?

A. Whatever you do, don't whine, Ms. Sharpnack said. And remember that if your company doesn't have the money or vision to reward its employees, there are other companies out there that do. It's not a bad time to start looking, she said.

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