



## Women Don't Ask

Negotiation and the Gender Divide

by Linda Babcock and Sara Laschever  
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### Take-Aways

- Women make less money than men. Why? In part, because they don't ask for more.
- Women undermine themselves because they don't take the initiative in forwarding their own interests.
- If women asked for more and negotiated with more confidence, they would get more.
- Men negotiate more often and more successfully than women.
- Women must recognize that they have the right to ask, and even demand.
- Social norms and expectations should change to encourage women to demand more.
- Women are held back by their fear of competition, disapproval and dislike. Women who are assertive in the workplace do incur dislike, which can hurt their careers.
- Women encounter fierce and sometimes violent opposition when they attempt to assert themselves.
- When women do negotiate, they still don't do as well as men, but they do better than they would have without negotiating.
- Women should seek work environments that encourage their professional development, or start their own companies.

### Rating (10 is best)

Overall	Applicability	Innovation	Style
<b>8</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>8</b>

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## Relevance

### What You Will Learn

In this Abstract, you will learn: 1) What limitations women impose on themselves by failing to ask for money and benefits; 2) Why women do not negotiate as frequently or as effectively as men; and 3) How to get what you want.

### Recommendation

The debate on gender equity often emphasizes that women earn less than men with similar experience. Authors Linda Babcock and Sara Laschever say that while women may indeed be the victims of external forces, they also to some extent may suffer from their own inability, unwillingness or aversion to negotiate or make demands. In fact, men negotiate four times as frequently as women, and get better results. Men are much more apt to make demands and ask for benefits, pay increases and so forth. Men make more money not necessarily because the system is overtly discriminatory — though it well may be — but because men demand more. The book tends to belabor its point, and sometimes the evidence does not seem as well-presented as it might have been, but *getAbstract.com* finds that it sheds useful light on a knotty social problem. Perhaps it will spur more women to fight — or to continue to fight — on their own behalf.

## Abstract

### Glass Ceilings

Women earn less pay than men. They get promoted less frequently and they are offered jobs that are less prestigious, less powerful, and less remunerative. They hit glass ceilings that men go right through. Why? Not necessarily because the game is overtly rigged against them, though in some ways it may be. Women do less well than men throughout their careers because they fail to negotiate effectively at the beginning of their careers.

Women don't like to compete, and negotiation is competitive. Women who attempt to push for their own interests incur social disapproval and, because women fear social disapproval, they hold back. Because they hold back, they end up settling for less than they could get. The effect of these early failures compounds over time. A woman who accepts a pay rate 10% less than that of a man, because she fails to negotiate effectively on her first job, will pay for that failure all of her career because subsequent pay increases are based on that initial salary. The power of compounding can turn a sum as small as a \$1,000 into a very significant amount of money during a 20 or 30 year span.

This handicap in the negotiation game is becoming more important and more damaging over time. Increasingly, companies are beginning to offer employees highly individualized arrangements. In merger and acquisition scenarios, it is not unusual for in-demand employees to negotiate title, salary, location, office size, hours and many other components of their employment package. Even when companies are laying workers off, those people receiving pink slips often have room to negotiate the terms of their departure.

But women don't negotiate. Consider the demands on the time and skills of women, the many roles a woman may have to play, as employee, supervisor, wife, mother, daughter, friend and so on, to understand how important negotiating skills are. A female professional may have to negotiate with the school system, with the doctor, with the

"The women just don't ask."

"In addition, even when women do negotiate, they often get less than a man in the same situation might get."

“Although both men and women are raised with this idea, evidence suggests that women hold tighter to the conviction that hard work alone is — or should be — sufficient.”

“We’re convinced that as a society we are paying a substantial price for leaving women undisturbed and unaware of how much they may be missing.”

“For women who want to influence other people, research has found that being likeable is critically important — and that women’s influence increases the more they are liked.”

nursing home, with her boss, even with her children and friends, as well as with her employers and employees. Why do women suffer a 73% standard of living drop after a divorce, even as their ex-husbands benefit from a 42% improvement? Negotiation is part of the reason.

### Negotiating Gone Wrong

Men get richer and more powerful than women. They also have more leisure. One reason, perhaps the most important reason, is that men ask, demand, negotiate and fight for more. However, women not only fail to negotiate, women fail when they do negotiate, usually settling for much less than men. Most women have not been trained to negotiate.

One study showed that among men and women graduating from top-ranked MBA programs, men negotiated and won salary packages on average 4.3% above their first offers, but women won packages averaging only 2.7% above their first offers. So men got payoffs on average 59% better than those of women (4.3 being 59% bigger than 2.7). If a man and a woman both receive an initial offer of \$35,000, the man’s negotiation will have won an actual starting salary of \$36,505, but the woman’s negotiating will win her only \$35,945.

If they negotiate annual raises identical to their initial percentage improvement over that first offer, the man will retire at a salary of more than \$200,000, but the woman will retire at a salary of about half that.

### The Importance of Asking

An old saying says, “Who doesn’t ask, doesn’t get.” And women don’t ask.

Women lose the negotiating game before it ever begins. Negotiations are give-and-take. Women give, but they don’t take because they don’t ask. They accept what they are given. In a negotiation — a competitive contest in which each side is trying to get as much as it can while giving as little as it must — that passive acceptance spells doom, especially if the other side is male.

Oddly, 40 years of the women’s movement in the United States do not seem to have done anything to change women’s reluctance to negotiate. Studies show that women of every age group behave similarly — they don’t ask. Is this an exaggeration? Not at all. Among graduates of Carnegie Mellon, men and women behaved quite differently when they approached their first jobs. Men negotiated much more frequently than women — eight times more frequently. As a result, women started the career race a few steps behind. A salary differential of as little as \$5,000 annually on your first job can add up to a wealth difference of half a million dollars or more by retirement.

The most important step in negotiation is asking. Willingness to accept lower pay sends an important message about one’s self respect and self-judgment. Employers are unlikely to dispute a new candidate’s low self-assessment. Why should they? Who knows what she is worth better than herself?

### Why Women Don’t Ask

Asking isn’t hard to do, and failure to ask is costly. So why don’t more women advocate their own best interests? There are several possible reasons:

- Women may not know that they can ask.
- Women may fear being considered “pushy” or “bitchy.”

“Even women who have themselves escaped overt forms of punishment for pursuing their ambitions cannot ignore the messages from every side that it’s risky for women to try to become too successful.”

“Ellen, the senior partner at a law firm, told us that when she was a teenager, her father said to her: ‘Honey, you know you can’t act like a tiger. You have to act like a kitten.’”

“The very real risks involved in displaying their competence, trying to ensure that their work is fairly evaluated, and promoting their own ambitions can cause many women so much anxiety that they choose instead to avoid negotiation altogether.”

“The strength of women’s need to avoid any hint of conflict can influence their behavior even when there’s no need for them to care about their relationship with the other negotiator.”

- Women may not know how to ask.
- Women may yield too easily when they encounter initial resistance.
- Women may assume that the rules of the game are fixed and accept them as such (while men may assume that the rules are flexible and will bend when pushed against).

Indeed, women typically score lower than men on a scale that measures the aptitude to recognize and exploit negotiating opportunities. Women also score higher on “locus of control” scales, indicating that they are more likely than men to think that others control their circumstances. Men are much more likely to believe that they can influence their environment.

The roots of these differences between men and women may go to childhood, or even to genes. Parents impute differences to boys and girls even when they are babies in a hospital nursery, when measurements indicate that there is no objective difference in strength, alertness, assertiveness or other such personal factors. As children, boys are much apt to receive independent work assignments, while girls are likelier to find themselves working under Mom or Dad’s close supervision.

Social attitudes and prejudices push women toward passive, subservient roles, even today. Women put themselves at the service of their husbands and their children. It is perceived as unfeminine to be forward and aggressive. Girls get dolls and dresses as gifts, while boys get trucks and guns. Children’s books tend to present the Mommy figure as passive and supportive. In the movie *Toy Story*, the Mr. Potato Head toy went out on an adventure, but the Mrs. Potato Head toy just packed his bag and stayed home. Violent computer games feature boys as the action heroes, but show girls as scantily clad objects of desire. Girls learn from these models that they should be passive and pretty, and that they should grow up to be nurturing mother or wife figures. Boys learn that they should get what they want by taking risks and fighting for it.

### Societal Models and Messages

Women are bucking powerful social and emotional pressures. Contemporary culture conditions women not to get what they want. Consider articles in women’s magazines that discuss reasons why women sometimes fail to experience all the satisfaction they want from intimate relations. Similar articles seldom, if ever, appear in men’s magazines. Does society assume that men get satisfaction and women do not, as part of the natural, expected order of things?

Women seem to believe that good, hard work will speak for itself. It doesn’t of course. Women may value playing by the rules and assume that others value it as much as they do. Women may assume that others will notice inequities and redress them. But a manager who gives a man a promotion because the man asked for it is unlikely to give a promotion to a similarly qualified woman who hasn’t even asked for it.

But women can’t overcome the inequity of treatment just by acting just like men. Jean Holland is the founder of a California-based coaching firm called the Growth and Leadership Center. She specializes in sanding the hard edges off women who are perceived as too pushy or tough. She admits that many of the behaviors she attempts to modify would be no problem at all for a man. But she teaches women who speak forcefully to speak softly, stammer a bit, hesitate and even cry. They must look vulnerable and soft. They must apologize. Ninety-five percent of the women who come to the center arrive because their companies have sent them, seeking to make them less intimidating to their colleagues. The

“Men acquire more economic resources than women — they earn higher salaries, own more property, boast bigger stock portfolios and leave behind larger estates when they die. Women also fare badly when it comes to noneconomic resources, such as leisure time.”

“In some situations people routinely take a tougher stance against women than they take against men.”

Center also coaches men. But companies don't send men to make them less intimidating. Most men come to learn to delegate more effectively or to cope with stress.

There is a double standard. Women have to be likeable to be influential, and studies have shown that assertive women are not generally likeable. Because likeability matters so much to women, many women sacrifice other potential advantages to avoid the risk of dislike. Clearly, women are caught in a bind. If they assert themselves, they may incur dislike and, thus, a loss of influence. If they do not assert themselves, they risk life-long career disadvantages and salary inequities.

Fear of confrontation, disapproval and dislike is a powerful disincentive for assertive behavior. Women may undergo so much stress and risk when they push to get their abilities noticed, endeavor to obtain fair performance assessments or promote their own ambitions that they opt out of trying to bargain at all. Even those who succeed and who do negotiate for the proper salaries and benefits may still be more hesitant about the process than men would and may still settle for lesser results.

### **Learning to Ask**

Women all too often allow their own low expectations to defeat them. Women who expect little and don't ask for more, don't get more. But women can learn to ask and when they do ask, they can get more. To improve their professional lot, women in the workforce should:

- Get information. Research the market value of the work that you are doing, and make sure to include men in your sample.
- Admit to yourself that you not only want to get more, you deserve it.
- Not only admit that you deserve it, but convince yourself that you deserve it.
- Ask for more than you deserve; take what you deserve and no less.
- Recruit more women into your company or field to reduce male domination and make female voices more audible.
- Choose to work for companies and in settings where women get respect and advancement.
- Look for workplaces where sanctions against women are weak or nonexistent, and where evaluation systems have clear structure, benchmarks and metrics.
- Overcome your fear of asking. Ask nicely if you have to, but ask.
- Start your own business.

Women should learn to negotiate, so that their bargaining skills enable them to set and achieve high goals and high expectations. Don't settle for less.

## **About The Authors**

Linda Babcock is James M. Walton Professor of Economics at Carnegie Mellon University's H. John Heinz III School of Public Policy and Management. Sara Laschever is a writer whose work has been published in *The New York Times*, *New York Review of Books*, *Village Voice*, *Vogue* and other publications.