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GUIDE

Queen of Negotiations

How to Get What You Want

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Queen of Negotiations

How to Get What You Want

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How to Use This Guide

Negotiation is not a gift some women are born with and others lack. It is a set of learnable skills: preparing well, listening closely, asking clearly, trading wisely and knowing when to walk away. This guide teaches those skills through a collaborative approach that treats the other person as a partner in solving a shared problem, not an enemy to defeat. That approach plays to strengths many women already use every day: reading people, building trust, staying curious and finding solutions that work for everyone at the table.

Collaborative does not mean soft. You will learn to be warm with people and firm about what you need, and you will learn exactly what to say when warmth alone is not enough.

What you will learn

- Why asking can feel harder for women, what the research actually shows, and practical ways to reduce the social cost of asking.
- The interest-based method developed at the Harvard Negotiation Project: interests, options, objective criteria and your BATNA (your best alternative if there is no deal).
- How to prepare for any negotiation with one worksheet.
- How to use emotional intelligence at the table: calming your nerves, reading the other side, labeling emotions and asking questions that move things forward.
- How to make a first offer, use silence, handle “no”, plan concessions and close with everything confirmed in writing.
- Fill-in scripts for a raise or promotion, a job offer, freelance rates, sharing work at home, a landlord or contractor, and a big purchase.

How to get the most from it

1. **Pick a real negotiation.** Choose one conversation you want to have in the next 30 days. Use it as your case study while you read.
2. **Read Chapters 1 to 8 in order.** They build on each other. The script chapters (9 to 11) can be read in any order.
3. **Write your answers.** The exercises have space to write. Thinking on paper is where most of the preparation happens.
4. **Say the scripts out loud.** A script you have spoken five times sounds like you. A script you have only read sounds like a script.
5. **Review after every negotiation.** Each conversation, win or lose, teaches you something for the next one.

TIP

About the examples and scripts

The women in the example boxes are illustrative composites, written to show the techniques in action. They are not real clients. The scripts are starting points: change the words until they sound like you, and adapt them to your culture, your workplace and the person in front of you.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Negotiation is a learnable skill, not a personality trait.
- The collaborative method is warm with people and firm on substance.
- Use one real upcoming negotiation as your practice case while you read.

CHAPTER 1

Why Asking Feels Hard, and What Actually Helps

01

If you have ever rehearsed a request for days and then talked yourself out of it, you are not alone, and you are not broken. There are real reasons asking can feel risky for women, and some of those reasons live in the world around you, not in your head. Understanding them is the first step to working around them.

What the research found

In their 2003 book *Women Don't Ask*, economist Linda Babcock and writer Sara Laschever brought together research showing that women, on average, were less likely than men to initiate negotiations, especially over pay. One frequently cited study described in the book looked at graduating master's students and found that far more men than women had negotiated their first job offer (about 57 percent of the men versus 7 percent of the women). That sample was small, and later research paints a more mixed picture. Some studies find that in certain settings women now ask about as often as men, but are less likely to receive what they ask for.

So the honest summary is this: women do not have a "confidence defect". They are responding, often quite rationally, to a world that has historically reacted differently when women ask.

THE SCIENCE

The social cost of asking

Hannah Riley Bowles, Linda Babcock and Lei Lai ran a series of experiments (published in 2007) in which people evaluated job candidates who either accepted a salary offer or negotiated it. Evaluators were less willing to work with women who negotiated than with women who did not. For men, the penalty for negotiating was smaller or absent in most conditions. In other words, women who hesitate to ask are often reading the room correctly. This is called a double bind: if you do not ask, you get less; if you ask in the same way a man might, you may be liked less.

What reduces the cost

The good news is that researchers have also tested what helps. None of these approaches is a guarantee, and you should not have to use them. They are strategy, not self-betrayal.

1. **Reduce ambiguity with data.** Research by Bowles, Babcock and Kathleen McGinn found that gender differences in negotiated salaries were larger when it was unclear what a fair number looked like. When you bring clear market data and objective standards, you shrink the space where bias and guesswork operate.
2. **Use a relational account.** In later research, Bowles and Babcock found that women could ask for more with less backlash when they explained why asking was legitimate and showed concern for the relationship. A relational account answers the unspoken questions “Why are you asking?” and “Do you still care about us?”
3. **Advocate for others, honestly.** Studies by Bowles and colleagues, and by Emily Amanatullah and Michael Morris, found that women tend to negotiate more assertively, and face less pushback, when advocating for someone else. When your ask genuinely serves your team, your clients or your family, say so. Never invent this, but do not hide it either.
4. **Frame it as a shared problem.** “How can we make this work?” invites partnership. It keeps you firm on the goal and collaborative on the path.
5. **Combine warmth with firmness.** Warmth (friendly tone, appreciation, curiosity) plus firmness (a clear number, a clear reason, then silence) is a pairing that works for many women. You do not need to choose one.

EXAMPLE

Relational accounts in action

Mei, a senior analyst, had avoided asking for a raise for two years. Her first draft opened with an apology: “I’m sorry to bring this up, I know budgets are tight.” She rewrote it with a relational account: “I’m raising this because I want to build my career here, and my manager at the last review encouraged me to bring data to this conversation. Here’s what I found.” The facts were the same. The message shifted from “I am demanding” to “I am invested, and here is a fair basis for the conversation.”

The cost of not asking adds up

Small differences grow over time. Here is simple illustrative math (not a statistic): imagine two people in the same role, one starting $4,000 a year higher. If both get a 3 percent raise each year, the gap grows every year because each raise is a percentage of a larger base. Over ten years, the higher starter earns roughly $45,900 more in salary alone, before retirement contributions or future offers that are pegged to current pay.

You will not win every ask. But the asks you never make have a guaranteed result.

EXERCISE

Your Asking History

1. List three times in the past two years when you wanted something (money, time, help, credit, flexibility) and did not ask.