

How to ask for a raise in the middle of a pandemic

By Kathryn Vasel, CNN Business

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You've been working longer days and increasing your output, taking on more responsibilities, and really stepping up. You've earned a pay raise.

But is now the time to ask?

With massive job losses and continued economic uncertainty as the pandemic drags on, workers might be hesitant to ask for anything, let alone a raise.

"If you are in a place where you've had a significant impact on the organization and taken on more responsibility and the company isn't saying, 'Have some more money or this promotion,' you do owe it to yourself to ask," said Kate Dixon, author of "Pay UP!: Unlocking Insider Secrets of Salary Negotiation. "They may not say yes, but what if they do?"

Acknowledge the elephant in the room

Starting the conversation about a pay raise can be uncomfortable during normal times, but it gets a little more complicated in the middle of an economic slowdown.

Before you start negotiating, assess your company's health.

"You need to be conscious of your employer's situation," said Joel Garfinkle, executive coach and Author of "Get Paid What You're Worth: Learn How to Negotiate a Raise." "If there's a hiring freeze, or if they're really struggling financially, it does make it more difficult to make a case that you deserve a salary increase."

To help acknowledge the current climate, Shari Santoriello, a career specialist at Ama La Vida, recommends talking about it in a way that shows your contributions.

"I wouldn't lead with: 'I know times are tough, but I deserve this,'" she said. Instead try saying something like: 'The last several months have been challenging, but I've been able to continue to grow my sales, improve team morale, or have brought in X new clients' "I wouldn't lead with: 'I know times are tough, but I deserve this,'" she said. Instead try saying something like: 'The last several months have been challenging, but I've been able to continue to grow my sales, improve team morale, or have brought in X new clients in a tough climate.'

And don't apologize, she added. "If you start the conversation off with: 'I am sorry, I know it's a bad time,' that puts you in a less strong position."

Show your value

The argument that you are working hard isn't going to result in a raise. It's all about showing the value you bring to the company. Come to the meeting prepared with detailed examples of how you've helped the company.

"Be specific with the results you are delivering," said Dixon. "It's really about the impact, not the effort."

Keep track of your accomplishments throughout the year to make this process easier. Don't assume that your boss (or her boss) knows about your good work. Any quantifiable evidence of your value is good, like how much money you've saved the company or sales numbers. Examples of your leadership and team building can also help bolster your argument.

Determine what you want

Do your homework to find out what your peers with similar experience in your industry and in your area are making.

There are many online tools that provide salary estimates, including Glassdoor, Indeed and Salary.com

While talking about salary has become more common, it can still be an uncomfortable topic to broach with your peers. Dixon suggests saying something like: 'Hey, I am seeing jobs like this are paid between X and Y in the marketplace, does that sound right to you?' Rather than: 'How much do you make?'

And even if you have a salary number you are looking to hit, don't open with that number.

Give a range, suggests Nadine Franz, founder of APEX Career Services, "A range allows for good conversation and compromise."

"Try something like: 'I've had these successes in last six months or year, I feel like at this point a raise would be warranted given how much I have contributed to the growth and development and I would like to have a raise of XYZ.'"

Follow up and follow through

Even if you aren't successful in getting a raise, there are still benefits just from asking.

By making a carefully-thought-out case, you have established what you are looking for and highlighted your work.

Maintain your composure and move the conversation forward if your request does get denied.

Set up a timeline to revisit the conversation and figure out what you need to do to get to where you want to be. Ask for benchmarks and any gaps that need to be filled.

"Practicing your negotiation skills is great and letting people know you are serious about this topic is also great," said Dixon.