

Found out your colleague makes more than you? Here's what to do about it

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Why does the gender wage gap still exist?

Sharing your salary used to be considered taboo.

Now it's more acceptable to talk money to help workers better know their worth in order to negotiate salaries and raises.

But what should you do when you find out a colleague [is making more money than you](#) for doing the same job?

Take a breath, then start doing your research

"Get the emotion out of it," said Olivia Jaras, a salary negotiation coach. "When you go through such a visceral and emotional reaction to the situation, the negotiation or the attempted negotiation tends to fail."

She recommends crafting two plans.

The first is to ask for a raise. But you need to be prepared. Being paid less than a colleague should not be the only reason you say you deserve more. You need to make the case independently from what others are earning.

Start by doing your research to determine your worth: Find out what others in your position are making at other companies, collect evidence of the value you've brought to the company and list your job duties to see if they've evolved since you started.

"What you often find, particularly if you are underpaid, is that your position has changed significantly since the last time it was reviewed," Jaras said.

After you've done your research and [come to a number you feel represents your contributions and qualifications](#), set up a meeting with your manager to make your case for a salary increase.

"Most employers want to pay fairly," said Cheryl Pinarchick, an employment attorney and partner at law firm Fisher Phillips, which represent employers. She's also the co-chair of the firm's Pay Equity Practice Group. "If you think you aren't being paid fairly, you should go to the company and raise the issue."

The second plan is to consider other options. Start by updating your résumé, researching the job market for your industry and reaching out to potential employers. "Find [another opportunity out there that](#) is either going to give you a different career option or at the very least, help create leverage for you when you go through the negotiation process."

Name names

Experts agreed it's generally not a good idea to name the person who shared their salary. At least, not at first.

"If you make it about the other person, it is not about the bottom line," said Jaras. The idea is to make the case for more money based on your own qualifications and merits, not simply because someone else is making more.

There are legal reasons that could justify why you're making less than a peer: the other person has added responsibilities you aren't aware of, has performed better in their job or has more experience.

If you decide to name the coworker, do it at the end of the conversation, after you've detailed all the facts that show you deserve a pay raise, recommended Joel Garfinkle, executive coach and author of "Get Paid What You're Worth."

"After they see your value and you've made your case, you can mention that you recently found out so and so makes more," he said. "If you started with it, they can immediately dismiss you that you haven't made a case for value and you come off as disgruntled."

Know your rights

Sometimes there may be a good reason a coworker earns more. But it's also possible you're the

victim of workplace discrimination. If that's the case, you have legal rights.

The federal Equal Pay Act [requires employers pay men and women](#) performing substantially equal work at the same company equally.

Additional [legal protections prohibit wage discrimination](#) based on race, religion, national origin, age or disability.

Certain states and cities [have also passed laws](#) that ban employers from asking about salary history.

"States are much more protective of employees and tend to give employees more rights," noted Pinarchick.

If you feel like you're being discriminated against, your first stop should be your employer's human resources department, Pinarchick said. Bring up your concerns and ask that the company conduct an investigation.

There are also laws protecting workers who make a legitimate complaint from being retaliated against.

"As long as the complaint is made in good faith you are protected, even if you are incorrect with your underlying issue," said employment attorney Alex Granovsky.

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