**Women and Negotiation: Narrowing the Gender Gap in Negotiation**

**Strategies for narrowing the gender gap in negotiation, especially when it comes to salary.**

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Men tend to achieve better economic results in negotiation than women, negotiation research studies have found overall. Such gender differences are generally small, but evidence from the business world suggests that they can add up over time, and if you want to narrow the gender gap in negotiation, there are strategies you can employ. If men ask for and receive slightly higher starting salaries than women, for example, and continue to negotiate more assertively for themselves over the course their careers, the gender gap can add up to millions of dollars over time.

The gender gap in negotiation may in part explain why women in the United States earned only about 77.4% of men’s median annual earnings in 2011, according to the [Institute for Women’s Policy Research](https://iwpr.org/).

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Deeply ingrained societal gender roles lie at the root of the gender gap in negotiated outcomes, researchers have concluded. In many cultures, girls are encouraged and expected to be [accommodating](http://www.pon.harvard.edu/tag/accommodating/), concerned with the welfare of others, and relationship-oriented from an early age. Notably, these goals clash with the more assertive behaviors considered to be essential for negotiation success, which is more in line with societal expectations that boys and men be competitive, assertive, and profit oriented. As a result, women may be uncomfortable negotiating forcefully on their own behalf, a tendency that’s supported by evidence suggesting they face a social backlash in the workplace for doing so.

How can women and the organizations that employ them narrow the gender gap in negotiation results? In a study in the Psychological Bulletin, Jens Mazei of the University of Münster and his colleagues analyzed 51 past studies that compared women and men’s negotiation results with the goal of determining whether women can capitalize on certain characteristics of negotiation to improve their outcomes.

In addition to confirming with their analysis that the gender gap between women and men’s negotiation performance is indeed narrow, the team identified several types of negotiation that reduce the gap or give women an advantage over men.

*The findings point to several concrete suggestions for women negotiators, all of which their organizations can capitalize on as well:*

**View Yourself as an**[**Agent**](http://www.pon.harvard.edu/tag/agent/)**for your Organization.**

Women [negotiate](http://www.pon.harvard.edu/tag/negotiate/) more assertively for other individuals, such as their employees, than they do for themselves, research finds. Because [negotiating](http://www.pon.harvard.edu/tag/negotiating/) for others is a communal behavior consistent with the traditional female gender role, women may feel more comfortable pushing harder for others than they do for themselves, researchers argue. Consequently, in [negotiations](http://www.pon.harvard.edu/tag/negotiations/) for other people, women effectively narrow the gender gap in negotiated outcomes. Notably, however, women achieve lower economic results, on average, relative to men when they are representing an organization in their negotiations. Women may be able to avoid a social backlash and narrow this gap by viewing themselves as advocates for their organizations and pointing to their organization’s needs during negotiations.

**Capitalize on Training and Experience to Narrow the Gender Gap in Negotiation.**

Across the studies they examined, Jens Mazei and his team found that the gap between men and women’s outcomes narrowed as they gained negotiating experience.

The results suggest that women in particular tend to achieve more favorable economic outcomes the more time they spend at the [bargaining table](http://www.pon.harvard.edu/tag/bargaining-table/). This might because they develop a stronger sense of the protocol of appropriate behavior specific to the situation and/or because they tend to shed traditional gender expectations as they gain experience.

Whatever the case, the results suggest that women, in particular, should benefit from negotiation training and experience.

**Prepare, Prepare, Prepare.**

Gender differences in economic outcomes tend to be smaller when negotiators receive information about the bargaining range in a negotiation simulation, past research has found.

It appears that when women have access to information about upper and lower limits, they may “rely less on preconceived gender roles as guidelines for their behavior in negotiations,” Mazei and colleagues argue. Although thorough preparation is always important in negotiation, women, in particular, may be able to capitalize on this result by researching the typical salary range in a field, for example, and then, to avoid a social backlash, referencing these standards during their negotiations.