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5 STEPS FOR BETTER CAREER CONVERSATIONS WITH YOUR BOSS

The act of asking your superior for something important in your career progression may make you feel vulnerable – yet summoning the courage to do so actually demonstrates strength. Whether you seek money, higher status, increased visibility, additional resources or more time off, you likely won't get it if you don't specifically ask your boss for it. Many executives would expect you to ask for what you want directly. It shows both self-confidence and respect for your boss by acknowledging that you are requesting, not just expecting, help.

1. What outcome are you trying to achieve?

- Be clear about what outcome you are seeking. Example: salary, title, scope of responsibility, stretch assignments, oversees opportunities, flex time, etc. If you can't articulate clearly what you want, others can't help you get it.

2. What do you do to prepare?

- Rarely will it work to just walk into your manager's office and ask for a raise. This is a process.
- Know your value in the marketplace. Speak with recruiters who specialize in your field, talk to mentors who are communications leaders and know what their teams earn.
- Gather feedback from stakeholders with whom you work closely or prepare them that you would like to give your manager their names to provide input during performance review time. If this is not a process already in place in your company, ensure you ask permission of stakeholder to share their names and willingness to share their experience working with you.
- Be mindful of your company's compensation cycles (i.e., have a salary conversation 6-8 weeks before salary review process starts instead of a week before those decisions are communicated...it is typically too late to influence the outcome then).
- Be mindful of how your company views titles. Some organizations are very flat, so there may be a wide salary band for a given title. Others may require a title bump to get the pay bump you are seeking. Identify standard practices in preparation for the conversation.

3. How do you initiate the conversation?

- Request a meeting with your manager and indicate you would like to have a career conversation. (Even if your company does not have a formal program to have quarterly career conversations, I recommend asking to create a routine for a focused career discussion. Most leaders will welcome the initiative if you come prepared. Help them help you!)
- Your manager will likely ask if you want to talk about something specific (especially if it's not a routine conversation). Provide context so they can also prepare for the conversation.

4. What are your key messages? Questions? Proof points?

Just like when preparing for a media interview, know what questions to ask and have your key messages and proof points ready.

Examples of questions that get your boss to be your champion:

- “I would like to explore expanding my scope of responsibility so that I am more competitive for a raise and promotion. What do I need to do to be ready for the next level here? Can you help me create an action plan that will help me achieve my goal of being promoted by the end of the year?”
- “Over the last 18 months I have really expanded my role by adding XYZ to my plate. Would this effort make me eligible for an increase in salary above the standard annual 2%? What would I need to do to make this possible?”
- “I am really enjoying my role here and would love to continue to grow in my career at this company. I’m learning that my compensation is not keeping up with what the market is doing in this region. What is the process or policy to review my salary and get it to where it is more aligned with the marketplace?”

Tips for preparing your key messages and proof points

- Salary discussions are personal to the one who is asking for the money. Try to separate emotion from business reality to have a better negotiating mindset.
- Make it easy for your manager to advocate for you. Come to 1:1 meetings with an agenda and summary of recent key deliverables.
- If your performance management process includes a self-assessment, submit it ahead of schedule -- especially if you know the management team meets to discuss ratings or compensation decisions. Make sure it is detailed. You are informing your manager’s view of how they should see your performance.
- Go above and beyond -- volunteer for additional projects and deliver.
- Ask for feedback after a significant project or body of work is complete. Ask if it meets expectations for consideration of a one off or spot bonus if your company has such a program.
- Don’t show salary data off crowdsourced internet sites like Glassdoor or talk about how your friend down the hall shared their compensation information with you. Explain how your job scope has increased and why you believe it warrants a change to your compensation. Ask how your current compensation fits within the salary range for your job level (i.e., is it below the midpoint of the range, close to the minimum, close to the top of the range?) If it is on the high end, ask how you can further increase your job scope so your job level can be increased.

5. How do you follow up after a career conversation with your boss?

- Write up a summary of your conversation with an action plan that the two of you can agree upon. The action plan should cover those things discussed that will help you achieve your career goals. There will be mostly items that you will be committing to, but also include those things your boss agreed to do for you. (Email this document to your boss!)
- Create a cadence of quarterly career conversations. These conversations should be a way to share your career vision and enlist their help to get you there. Review progress on your action plan and gain commitment on timelines for the requested raise or promotion.