

When to Ask for Your First Raise

by Justine Simon

There are a lot of firsts involved with your first job, and the one you may end up remembering most is the first time you ask for a raise. As you start your job, you'll soon see that you and your employer have naturally conflicting interests when it comes to your salary. You will most likely want to make more money, and your boss will most likely try to save money. Any talk of a raise should be well-thought out strategically.

In cases such as these, timing is absolutely everything. In order to make this potentially nerve-wracking experience go as smoothly as possible, it is important to pick the right time to bring up the raise talk. The first step in this process is for you to take an honest look at your performance and decide if you really are deserving of a raise. When you are certain that you've performed at a level worthy of increased compensation, you'll be in a better position to sell your boss on the idea.

You deserve a raise if you...

- Consistently exceed expectations
- Have increased skills and education since you started the job
- Perform significant duties beyond those outlined in your job description
- Frequently work overtime in order to complete projects

Another essential part of the timing is understanding the company's broader environment as well as your individual role within it. If the following ring true to your situation, then it sounds like the right time for you to ask for a raise.

- The organization seems to be on an up-swing: good earnings (if it's a publicly traded company this will be easy to find out), lots of new hires, and no shortage of resources.
- You have recently impressed others with your creativity, sales, performance, etc.
- Headhunters or representatives from another organization have been wooing you.
- You are due for your annual performance review. Note: it's easier to negotiate an increase in the amount offered at a performance review than to request a meeting and review mid-cycle.
- The region's job market is strong.

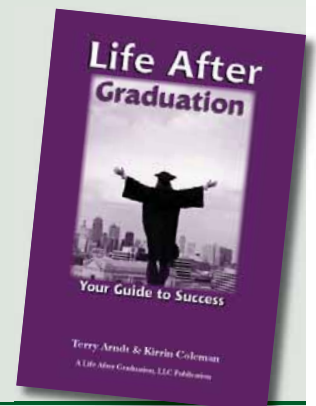
Now that you've determined that the organization can probably afford to raise your pay (or that you're so good they can't afford *not* to), there's another bit of timing to consider: when to approach your boss. Schedule an appointment with him or her so that you'll have adequate time to present your case. Make sure you give thought to what you're going to say beforehand. It's always a good idea to have a list of your accomplishments on hand, memorized and ready to pick from as you lay down your case.

When asking for your first raise, good timing and genuine preparation go a long way. The more confident you are in presenting your case, the more persuasive you will be.

How Much Should I Ask For?

- The national average for raises is just under 4%. Your human resources department might be willing to divulge the company average; this would give you a sense of precedent and expectations.
- Talk to your college's career professionals in the Career Center or Alumni Office. They have access to industry statistics for a number of positions and can help guide you to the information you need.
- Some experts recommend you ask for double what you really want. Others suggest a more conservative approach (asking for 7% when you know you'd be happy with 5%, for example).
- A quick surf online will also yield a number of useful salary calculators. Here are two that provide detailed information about comparable salaries—what other people with the same job title in the same region as you are making. See: www.salary.com or www.bls.gov

For more information about your first job after graduation, read *Life After Graduation: Your Guide to Success*.



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