

# Why negotiating for higher salaries makes women nervous

VIKASH SHARMA

## Are you seen as being overly demanding?

by Sobha Menon

**A**RE WOMEN seen as being overly demanding when they attempt to negotiate their salary? Some studies do seem to suggest that and much more. Women may even face higher social risk compared to men when they appear to negotiate salary.

These findings came up while studying the salary patterns of women and men. Yes, the studies highlighted the same old story — that in most sectors women were found to earn less than their male counterparts and one of the arguments that was put forward was that women earn less because they don't push as hard as men for higher salaries. And the 'why' to that revealed further that women felt nervous as it was perceived as being "less nice or overly demanding", according to Hannah Riley Bowles, associate professor at Harvard University.

Now, did the current crop of senior executives in post-liberalisation India feel the same way? Yes and no, depending on which sectors they belonged to. In banking and financial services, information technology, hospitality and other sectors which have many women in their workforce, it's not the case.

As Aparna Sharma, director - HR at leading biopharma firm UCB India, puts it: "Mindsets are gradually changing alright, but there are still those who do wonder loudly why a woman wants more money if she has a husband who must be earning well." Ask for a raise in position and there still are people who want to know why is she being so aggressive. "Does she want to become the CEO or a board member — that's the question asked. And this mindset will change only when more women make it to the Board and take senior positions," Sharma says. "Conventionally, women are seen as more compliant, less ambitious, less aggressive and assertive, and this image has to do with stereotypes in society," adds Sharma.

In the BPO sector, for instance, which has a huge female workforce, especially at the entry and middle levels, executives say that by and large there's emphasis on rewarding the best talent regardless of gender or caste. "If a female employee has demonstrated commitment and is willing to shoulder responsibilities equivalent to the male colleagues, we provide her the same growth opportunities in terms of salary hikes as a male employee would get within the organisation," says Anju Talwar, senior vice president, training and hiring, Genpact.

As for the banking and financial services sector — that's where you see women in core functions, not just the soft

areas, and the greatest number of woman CEOs and MDs too.

According to Sharma, this is an industry-specific issue and it's in the male-dominated industries that a woman who demands a better salary or a larger role is perceived negatively. But Sharma's advice is that no matter what your colleagues may think, you must stand your ground, be assertive and have the courage to demand what you think is your due.

"My personal experience is that men aren't shy to make demands, whereas women feel you should understand their

needs. But if you don't ask, there'll be many who will say, 'But we thought you were happy with what you were getting'," says Sharma.

**T**HE BEST time to negotiate is at the time of the appraisal, according to Sharma. "It's not about whether you're male or female, but about the value that you bring to the organisation," Talwar says that from her expe-

rience, the best way to move up the ladder is to develop and demonstrate the right leadership skills, be willing to take risks and get out of one's comfort zone, learn new things, always deliver to commitments, be fast with decision-making, develop a good organisation, and most importantly be able to network.

While negotiating, Sharma advises women to go for some hard-sell. "There was a time when I felt I wasn't being compensated enough — since there were few in the industry with my specific job-profile, I demanded

that my role be benchmarked against industry standards. We did get someone to do that and thereafter my compensation was revised," she says. Women also need to work harder at perception management since they aren't very good at showcasing their skills.

But the bottomline is that a woman draws negative attention when she demands more because there are so few of them demanding a larger role. The only way to change that is to ensure that there are more women in senior positions.

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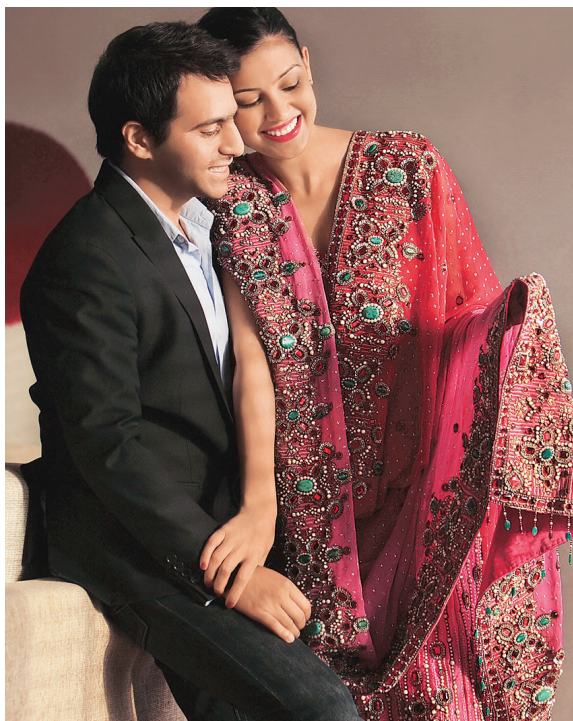
‘Mindsets are gradually changing in some sectors’

APARNA SHARMA, DIRECTOR-HR, UCB INDIA



‘Get out of your comfort zone and pick up new skills’

ANJU TALWARSR VP, GENPACT



## HOW TO ENSURE YOUR PARTNER HAS ENOUGH TIME FOR YOU

*Payal emailed to ask: My husband is always so taken up with work that we haven't been able to manage even a small weekend getaway in ages now. Is there a way out?*

This is one situation where your husband's work-life imbalance is affecting your work-life balance in a major way. You could try some of the following remedies to get out of this situation. wing questions to resolve the issue:

■ **Be a patient listener:** Encourage him to share his problems at work. Understand the situations that force him to work over the weekend. If he is constantly complaining about being tired, talk to a dietician and plan a healthy menu

for him. If the problem persists, visit a doctor for a routine check-up.

■ **Help him help himself:** Help him think through options that will allow him to plan better and manage time more efficiently. This way, he will gain better control over his work and be in a more relaxed state of mind. This might help you take off for a vacation. Otherwise, even if you manage to go, his mind will be on work and you will only come back feeling worse.

■ **Share more:** Once you get your husband to start sharing the problems he goes through at work, you could start sharing yours too. However, never do so during the same conversation. In addition, never

make him feel guilty. Both of you need to take responsibility for each other's well-being and not play the blame game.

■ **Start small:** Plan for dinner at home with his office colleagues. This will help him bond better with his staff. It could also boost productivity at work leaving him with more time for you during the weekends, also increasing chances of planning a longer holiday.

(Sanjay Salooja, is as an educator, corporate philosopher and life coach)

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