How to negotiate as a woman—and get what you ask for

Lean In Circle Discussion Guide for Asian Women
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Meeting agenda  approx 90 mins

Member updates  15 mins

Watch video  6 mins

Icebreaker  10 mins

Activities

- Activity 1: Tie your achievements to theirs  20 mins
- Activity 2: Don’t overlook likeability  15 mins
- Activity 3: Anticipate challenges  10 mins
- Activity 4: Practice the conversation  15 mins

One Action  3 mins

For Circles with only 60 mins, here are suggestions to shorten this agenda:

- Encourage members to watch the video in advance
- Spend 5 mins on member updates
- Spend 15 mins on Activity 1
- Skip Activity 2
Getting started

Member updates

| 2 mins or less per member | 15-20 mins depending on group size |

Go around your Circle and share personal updates. Generally, personal updates should be brief and focus on significant changes and important decisions in your life. (It’s OK not to have one every month!) If you have a One Action update, share that with your Circle.

Watch video

6 mins

Additional context

The activities below are geared toward negotiating for a raise or a promotion at your current organization. But you can adapt some of the general principles for other negotiations, such as discussing rates with a client, negotiating your salary at a new job, or advocating for a more flexible schedule.

Icebreaker: Lay the groundwork

| 10 mins |

Read aloud to the group: Asian women are more likely than many groups to be passed over for opportunities or leadership roles. That makes it more important to carefully prepare for negotiations in advance. These steps can help:

1. Months ahead of time, let your boss know that you want a raise or promotion
2. Ask them what they would like to see you do to achieve this next step
3. Put these requests into writing and share them back with your boss
4. Make sure your boss sees you taking these steps and share regular updates on your success
5. If you want a raise, research your salary by using online tools and asking others in your network

Discuss as a group: How have you laid the groundwork to prepare yourself for success in past negotiations? Go around the room and have everyone share one thing that has worked or hasn’t worked for them.
This step is important for anyone negotiating, but it’s especially crucial for women. Due to stereotypes that women should be communal and collaborative, we can face pushback in negotiations unless we convince the other person that we care about their goals, as well as our own.

In making our case, it’s also critical to document our achievements. This can be even more important for Asian women, since people are may unconsciously question or overlook some of our skills and accomplishments.

Write it down (10 minutes):

1. Think about the most important goals held by your boss or your organization: sales, revenue, cutting costs, customer satisfaction, productivity, or something else. Write those goals down. (If you don’t know the answer, you can make it your One Action to find out.)

2. Then, write down your biggest projects or accomplishments from the last few years.

3. Look at the list of accomplishments you’ve just made. Make notes of how these achievements serve the other person’s goals.
   ○ For example, you may have done work that increased customer satisfaction AND brought in new customers—but if your boss only cares about new customers, you need to show how your work brought in new customers.

4. Support your case with data:
   ○ Is there any data you can use to show how you’re supporting your boss’s core goals? The more you can put a number to your achievements, the better.
     ■ Make notes of any data you need to find later.
○ If there are no quantifiable outcomes, is there other evidence of positive outcomes you can gather (e.g., by requesting feedback from clients or colleagues)? Write that down, too.

○ The notes you’ve made today can be turned into a clearly formatted one-page document, which you should share with your boss or the person you are negotiating with.

**Discuss as a group** (10 minutes):

- What strategies have you used in the past to prove your worth when negotiating? For example, did you provide supporting documents?

- Did you have any new realizations about presenting your achievements so they directly support the other party’s core goals?

“The process of my promotion took place over several months. I was very intentional about putting it on the mind of my manager that I would like to go for the next step in my career. After I had that initial conversation, I found different opportunities to prove myself and grow new skills. Before my performance review conversation, I drafted an email and sent it to my manager and really advocated for myself. And when we had the conversation, I was pretty confident about what I wanted to say. So I got the promotion, but it was a long process and it definitely wasn’t just because one moment I asked for it and then I got it.”

Di Hu, VP, education administration, Lean In Network Leader, Washington, DC, USA (she/her)
Activity 2: Don’t overlook likeability

Read this information aloud to the group (5 minutes): Unfairly, Asian women are sometimes expected to be “nicer” than their white women counterparts. When we speak up, as anyone needs to in a negotiation, it goes against stereotypes that Asian women will be quiet and deferential.¹

Compounding this difficulty for Asian women, hiring and promotions are often based on likeability, and likeability is often based on similarity. So, for women from diverse backgrounds, it can be more challenging to create likeability—particularly in a negotiation where you need to speak assertively.

There is no easy solution, but you can help overcome this challenge by working to build rapport with colleagues at the start of any negotiation.

You can do this by showing your authentic interest in the other person, using communal language, and emphasizing your boss’s needs and your organization’s goals.

1. **Start with small talk.** Ahead of time, make notes of friendly conversation openers you can use when you begin the meeting. For example, “I remember you said your dog was sick—how is she now?”

2. **Use communal language.** It’s important to talk up your achievements, but when possible, talk about “we” as well as “I,” and “our” as well as “my.” You won’t be able to do this for every instance of “I,” as you’ll have to talk about your own accomplishments and goals. But every time you state what you have achieved, clarify how it serves your team or organization.

3. **Listen actively** and validate what the other person is saying.

Discuss as a group (10 minutes): Go around the room and share how you’ve built trust and rapport in past negotiations.

- What are some ways you’ve built rapport or connections with a manager who was different from you?
Activity 3: Anticipate challenges 10 mins

On your own (3 minutes): Make some notes on the objections your boss might raise and plan how you would address them.

Here are some examples of how to respond:

- Think about a concession you can make to your boss so they don’t feel like they’re “losing” the negotiation.
- Brainstorm other requests you’d want to make instead, such as more PTO, more flexibility, or a high-profile project.
- Prepare what you’ll say if your boss responds with a hard “no.” You may want to ask what and how long it would take to get to a “yes,” and get your boss to agree to it in writing.

Discuss as a group (7 minutes): How have you responded to challenging responses in your past negotiations? Go around the room and have a few women share what worked and didn’t work for them.
Activity 4: Practice the conversation

Before you head into a negotiation, **practice exactly what you want to say.** Rehearse the conversation out loud. Research shows that a lot of people skip this last step—but rehearsing **how** you’ll deliver your pitch is really important.

If you’re doing these activities with your Circle, break into pairs. Use this script:

- **Partner 1 (the “employee”):** Make your request, and include the top one or two reasons that support why you deserve it. Make the request specific (e.g., an amount of money or a job title). And aim high! Decades of research support this.

- **Partner 2 (the “boss”):** Respond, “I don’t know, that’s hard for us to do with our current resources” or “I’m inclined to say no, since you’re relatively new here.”

- **Partner 1:** Follow up by offering reasons why your request benefits the company. At this point, you could offer a concession in return for what you want, or make an alternate request.

- **Partner 2:** Provide feedback. Start by telling your partner what she did well. Then, make suggestions, if you have any, for what she might do differently.

After 7 minutes, switch roles and repeat.

“Nearly every single job move I've taken, I've negotiated my salary, and I've probably increased my salary between 25% and even 50%. Before I go into the conversation, I rehearse over and over. I build up the muscle. And I go in with a bit of a script of what I'm going to ask for.”

Sarah Lands Ramrup, senior lead, consumer goods industry, Missouri, USA (she/her)
Commit to taking one of the following steps that will help you in your next negotiation:

- Find out the major goals of the person you’ll be negotiating with
- Make a one-page document to support your request, based on the steps in Activities 1 and 2
- If you work for a company that has formal requirements for promotions, review the requirements and make notes on where you are meeting or exceeding them

Congratulations on a great meeting!

Endnotes