

Proving your worth

By Jennifer Kahnweiler, January 2006
SHRM's HR Careers Articles

Q: "How do I prove to my employer that I should be paid \$50K? Everyone in my department is making more than I am and since I administer the health benefits in our company of 500 employees I think this is unfair. I have received only incremental increases in recent years despite our company's strong revenues."

A: Not making what you believe you are worth can be a huge demotivator. Unfortunately the issue of salary has always been a challenge to address, for both companies and individuals.

That being said, you need to look at this as a negotiation process, as if you were starting out as a fresh hire. Except, this time, you should have a proven track record of successes to offer.

Here are some questions to ask in order to prepare the strongest case possible.

1) How does your employer view your current pay? You need to understand why you are being paid your current salary. Learn about the compensation system and how pay rates are calculated. It may be that you need to jump to another grade or salary band. In that case your job will have to be reclassified and that can take time. Most companies use a combination of market rates, job responsibilities, and individual skills and experiences in their calculations. You are at a distinct advantage being in HR, because you probably have more easy access to this information.

2) What is the unique value you offer to your company? Make a list of all of your accomplishments over your time with the company and highlight the top five examples. Practice describing them concisely and with sincerity to a friend. Sounded confident and assertive in your pitch is also half the battle. You have a feather in your cap with your specialized skillset of benefits administration. Calculate the ways in which you have helped the company control costs in this area -- for example, by implementing efficient processes, streamlining systems or so on. Bosses listen to bottom line results.

3) How are you managing perceptions? Looking at your situation as "unfair" sounds like whining to me. Don't to compare yourself to others; that is irrelevant to your manager and could hurt your case. You are more likely to be seen as competent and capable when taking ownership of the situation. That means communicating with your

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customers on a consistent basis with relevant updates and progress reports. You will be seen as more of a key contributor. Also, not to state the obvious, but have you directly asked for a salary increase? Sometimes that is what it takes -- to simply ask.

4) Do you know your bottom line? Know your objective. If you don't achieve an immediate increase how about asking for a one-time bonus? It is often easier in the short term to settle for this type of fix. However, if you are firmly set and nothing less than a salary increase suffices, put your energy into it. If your results are not achieved after an honest attempt than it may be time to dust off the resume and move on.

Q: "I am finishing my Bachelors degree in HR this year and especially enjoyed my organizational development courses. The process of analyzing and recommending solutions is very appealing to me. I have been coming up empty when searching for entry-level jobs and am even willing to relocate. Any advice?"

A: You stated the problem in your question: "entry level." Organizations generally seek experienced individuals for organizational development (OD) positions or use external consultants to play these roles. Another trend makes these jobs even more scarce. The traditional OD role is now increasingly performed by the internal HR consultant. They apply a variety of skills like performance consulting, needs analysis, facilitation and insights into how organizations work to uncover and respond to their client needs.

To find that next job, create a strategy that incorporates short and longer term goals. You can apply for HR generalist positions and obtain solid HR consulting experience in a company that sees HR's function as one of business partner. Through your assignments you will have a chance to refine your consulting skills and accumulate knowledge, skills and experience. This will make you more valuable to future employers or can lead you to more substantial roles in that company.

With your willingness to expand a job search out of your geographic area, you are increasing your options. Your development plan should also include shadowing and being mentored by more seasoned internal HR consultants, stepping up to serve on organizational restructuring and realignment projects and obtaining further training in your specialty.

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