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If you don't ask, you don't get

Is it smart to seek a pay rise during the recession? **Simon Boulton** thinks so – if you're prepared.

Of all the job-related minefields you can enter, asking for a pay rise must be one of the most dangerous.

Would asking during an economic downturn be completely out of the question then?

Surely it would give good reason for your boss to think you are totally out of touch with reality, or maybe just insensitive.

However, despite the market conditions, organisations are looking to retain the best people.

The prospect of seeking a salary review is therefore not as far-fetched as one may think.

If your company is trading insolvent, that's one thing. But remember, work goes on and the best performers are the ones who reduce costs, bring in new sales and ultimately keep companies afloat.

The truth is that good employers want to keep their best employees.

The need to reward good employees doesn't change, whether the economy is in a downturn or an upturn. In fact, the need to keep good staff is even more critical during tough times.

Savvy companies invest purposely during a downturn to ensure they are prepared to thrive and not just survive.

The trick is to show your manager how much you are worth. Indeed, as the tide begins to turn, employees who have had salary packages cut need to brush up on how to approach a salary review. However unlikely the prospect may seem, being prepared is the first step to securing a pay rise.

Here are a few tactics that may help you.

Think like your boss

Second-guess them. What objections will be raised? Anticipate the problems and prepare for them.

Write a business plan

Know your worth and know what you want. Find out what similar jobs are paying by consulting a recruiter who specialises in your industry. Nobody has a better finger on the pulse than recruiters, as they know exactly what your competitors are paying.

Prepare a report that outlines all the salary data. This is about providing proof and nobody can argue with facts. Once you have collated this data, request a meeting with your boss.

Timing

Timing is everything, so make sure you get it right – preferably just after a personal success and not after the company has posted record losses.

Consider how unique your input is. Are your skills easily replaced? Would it be disruptive to the business if you left? Increase your productivity, keep learning, add value and get noticed in the weeks leading up to your request. You'll never feel bad about asking for a pay increase if you're taking the time to go that extra mile.

Approach

When asking for more pay, don't be aggressive. Be assertive. Don't threaten or moan. Don't say: "You're underpaying me."

You should prove you deserve more because of your merits rather than other people's failings.

So give examples of where you have contributed, where you have gone above and beyond the call of duty and where you have exceeded targets. Prove how valuable you are to the business.

Your goal is to let your employer know how difficult it would be to replace you. But never give an ultimatum. If you say you'll quit if you don't get a raise, you might talk

yourself out of a job. It's better to simply present your business case and leave the ball in their court.

Consideration

Give your boss time to consider your request.

Don't expect an on-the-spot response. Be prepared to negotiate. If you are not getting anywhere with a straightforward pay rise, never threaten to leave.

Instead, seek feedback and focus on the reason why your request has been denied.

If you can't get satisfaction in the immediate future, make sure you understand why and negotiate the timing and company expectations to guarantee your next raise.

Consider negotiating for perks outside of your salary, such as extra leave, training or even mobile phone expenses.

Ask them why you are being turned down and what it would take to get a raise.

Let the boss know you are willing to improve to earn the raise and try to obtain a time frame under which you can realistically obtain it.

Finally, remember that the hardest

part is asking. But never be afraid to ask – you don't know what opportunities could open up.

Simon Boulton is director of accounting and finance recruitment practice Aequalis Consulting. He has more than 12 years of finance recruitment experience in London and Sydney, where he has launched multiple divisions for international companies.

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