

YOU MIGHT BE UNDERPAID IF...

Compensation rates for the same position can diverge wildly among different organizations, so managing your personal salary trajectory requires you to nurture your numbers the way you would your career — stay on top of it and manage the details! Sometimes we take our eyes off the ball and hope and pray that we will be compensated for our market worth. But it takes years to build up a great compensation package and if you are not strategic about it, you can set yourself back. If any of the following scenarios applies to your situation, you may need to re-evaluate your salary and take action.

SIGNS YOU MIGHT BE UNDERPAID



- **Your level of responsibility has increased, but your salary hasn't.** If your boss keeps piling on added duties, extra work, and more responsibilities without any increase in compensation or even a discussion about it, this is not a good sign. If your title has been upgraded a few times without any change to your paycheck, that's a clear sign you are underpaid.



- **You haven't had a performance review or raise in over a year.** An annual performance review is typically the moment to discuss pay bumps. If your review didn't include a pay raise, or you didn't get reviewed at all, you might have reason to think you're underpaid. You should ask for an annual review or ask when you can meet to discuss your progress in the company.



- **You're in a specialty area that's in high demand.** Some jobs are in higher demand than others. Data science and cyber

security positions are hot job specialties, whereas other positions are becoming increasingly automated. Consider where your field of expertise fits into the general job marketplace. If you're in a shrinking field, like journalism or desktop publishing, don't be surprised that you haven't experienced lavish pay increases. However, don't assume that just because your company is not paying you well, other companies would be unwilling to give you what you need.



- **The salary for your first job was below market, and it hasn't changed much since.** Think back to the salary you accepted for your first job. Maybe you accepted a salary you knew was low because you were desperate. Seventy-one percent of people do not negotiate their salary, which means most new hires leave money on the table. Now, consider how your workload has changed. If you took a position without negotiating it and your salary has not changed, you're probably underpaid. It can be difficult to play catch-up if you started low.



- **You receive salary increases, but they're tiny.** Perhaps you did get a raise last year or for the last two years, but it was consistently one to three percent of your salary. These sorts of bumps are just to keep up with inflation, and they don't reflect increased workload or recognition of your growing expertise and skills.



- **Your firm's revenue has taken off, but your salary has barely budged.** If your company isn't public, it's harder to obtain hard numbers about revenue growth. But you likely have a sense of whether your company is booming or busting. If it's the former, you have a good reason to argue for a raise.



- **Your boss is evasive when you want to discuss your career path.** Do you find it impossible to discuss your long-term career growth with your boss? Their real reluctance may be to get into a salary negotiation or something complex that they're unprepared to discuss. That's not something you should be willing to sweep under the rug for very long, even if your boss prefers it that way.



- **Your mindset is I'm just happy to be employed.** A positive, cooperative attitude is important — but seeming complacent can work against you. Most managers have a lot going on and if they see you as content, they may focus on other areas and employees. Your loyalty should be rewarded, and the squeaky wheel gets the oil.



- **A similar job listing on your company website offers higher pay.** If there are multiple positions like yours at the company, and the salary listing is higher for a job description that closely resembles yours, you are underpaid. If the salary is not listed, you can usually ask an internal HR manager who can indicate whether the job will pay more or if it is simply a lateral move. Stay on top of this by occasionally searching your own company's job postings to monitor what new employees are being paid.



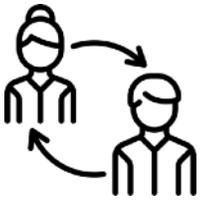
- **You make less than your colleagues with similar levels of experience and education.** People rarely talk openly about money and in many companies, salary discussion is discouraged. However, people talk. And people just entering the workforce talk a lot! When it comes to salaries, millennials are more likely than older workers to share the details of their salary among family, friends, and even coworkers. In a survey conducted by the Cashlorette, 63% of millennials ages 18–36 have shared their salaries with an immediate family member, 48% have shared with friends, and 30% have shared with coworkers. Only 41% of baby boomers ages 53–71 have shared their salaries with an immediate family member, 21% have shared with a friend, and 8% have shared with a coworker.



- **Talking to your peers and colleagues is the best way to gauge if you're being fairly compensated.** If you are not comfortable saying the exact amount you can mention the range you want for your position and ask, "Do you think that sounds right?" If the discussion makes your jaw drop, then there's a good chance you are being underpaid.



- **Your benefits are less than what your coworkers are getting.** Don't forget about everything that comes with your salary. Consider all the benefits included in your compensation package, such as health insurance, 401 (k)s, paid vacation time, flexible work, free gym membership, your cell phone plan, and childcare. While your coworkers might not be keen on discussing their salary, they may mention that they have significantly more paid time off than you or a company phone, you can use this information for a personal upgrade.



- **Your company has a high turnover rate and you have remained loyal.** A high employee turnover can be a sign that your organization doesn't pay competitively. If the workplace is otherwise cheery or supportive, below-market pay might be forcing your colleagues out. Loyalty shouldn't go unrewarded, but all too often it does. If your coworkers have bailed out at the first sign of stress or as soon as they get their bonuses, it's time to discuss your salary.



- **Everyone around you seems to be getting bonuses — but you're not.** Your coworkers are chatting about holiday bonuses or performance bonuses, but you've never gotten that happy direct deposit. It may simply have been an oversight, but if it was intentional, you should find out why you're not getting the extra money you deserve.



- **You have never asked for a pay increase.** An analysis by Salary.com found that failing to negotiate could potentially cost you more than a million dollars over the course of your career. The number one way you know you are not getting paid your worth is you haven't asked for a raise. Duh!



- **The No. 1 sign you're underpaid: research says so.** If any of the previous signs ring true, it's a good catalyst to do some investigating. According to a Glassdoor online survey conducted by Harris Poll, 69% of US employees say they wish they had a better understanding of fair market compensation for their positions within their local job market.

EFFECTIVE RESPONSES TO FINDING OUT YOU'RE BEING UNDERPAID

- Discuss your concerns.** Schedule a one-on-one with your manager well in advance of your pay review to discuss your findings. The theme of this conversation should be "What does success look like for me?" Ask for specific numbers that reflect what's expected of you — how many new clients, completing which project by what deadline, how many hires, etc. — so when it comes to review time, there's no room for disagreement. In order to avoid confusion, you need to have a clear discussion with your manager about what success looks like not just for you, but for your department and company as well. By understanding what success looks like for your business you have a record of everyone's expectations and can create a clear plan of how to help get there. Then, on review day, you can bring evidence of your accomplishments to compare to your notes from the original conversation. Now you can ask for that raise — knowing your demand is backed by facts.



- Negotiate.** A little finesse goes a long way during these conversations to ensure they don't become confrontational. Decide how much you're asking for and develop a script outlining what you want to say. Then practice. To minimize the confrontational tone and maximize your chances of getting what you ask for, go into the discussion thinking of your boss as your negotiating partner, not your adversary. After all, you have the same goal: to make sure that you're able to do your best work. Request a meeting for a time when you'll both be able to concentrate — outside of your most hectic season or the busiest day of the week, for example. [For more, check out our Negotiation Process and Flow download in the Education Suite.](#)



- Finally, be confident.** PayScale's data show that 75% of people who ask for a raise get some kind of bump, so the odds are in your favor. Believe in yourself and what you bring to the table. Being underpaid at work can lead to a downward spiral in your performance and attitude, which will get in the way of your ability to level up your pay through annual merit increases — a vicious circle you can avoid by taking even a small stand for your own value. [WAGER's pro service packages provide support and information to help](#)



you with your negotiations.

- **Look elsewhere.** If all else fails at your current gig, it may be time to start job hunting on the outside. Getting the salary you want has everything to do with being really clear on what you are willing to accept. It's pretty simple to make a decision when you are clear about what you need, and if your boundaries are not lining up with what your company is willing to give you, it's time to go.



When you're unhappy at work it often shows, so it's better to be honest about your needs and not let your negative feelings fester. If your company's financial situation means it doesn't have the ability to pay you more, consider the other things you can negotiate: *I Can Negotiate That?* But remember, it takes a lot of time and effort for employers to find good employees. By having this conversation and giving your boss an ability to respond, you are saving the company a lot of possible stress and headache. Document the time you've spent at your company, what you've brought to the table, and any new responsibilities you've taken on since being hired and bring all that to your boss. A clear conversation can help you both figure out the best steps forward.

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