



## Dr. Conflict

by Mark Light, MBA, PhD

As Dr. Conflict succinctly explains, if you don't ask, you don't get.

Recognizing your worth and making sure that your employer does too is the first part of the battle. But a word of caution: it's never a good idea to lead with a threat.

As the doctor says, "No one wants to negotiate with a terrorist."

**D**EAR DR. CONFLICT,  
*I am a major-gifts fundraiser at a large university in the Northeast. I have been doing a good job while working without a supervisor for the past year. My organization has finally selected a new supervisor, and is making an offer of employment to that person this week. This person has about eighteen months more experience than I do but no management or supervisory experience.*

*Meanwhile, I have a master's degree in nonprofit administration. The new supervisor will be earning close to double my salary while I train and show this person the ropes, and my promotion from assistant director to director is yet again delayed. I feel like walking into the vice president's office and demanding a raise or quitting, but that's just not realistic, and I truly love the organization I work for. But I feel like I've been kicked-in-the-teeth kind of wronged.*

*What's a good fundraiser to do?*

*Seriously Frustrated*

Dear Seriously Frustrated,  
Dr. Conflict hears questions like yours

all the time in his work as an executive coach. It is a story of unrequited love, of clueless bosses who neglect the talent right under their noses—or their feet, in your case. Dr. Conflict found the clues to your solution when he was on the advisory committee for a study a few years back: half of the 2,000 executive directors surveyed wanted a raise, but only one out of four ever asked for one beyond what was offered.<sup>1</sup> What's going on here? Why do these "Don't ask, don't get" executives behave this way?

Jan Masaoka, guru par excellence at Blue Avocado, tells a story about an executive who, upon receiving a larger-than-expected raise, began worrying about how she was going to come up with the money to pay for it.<sup>2</sup> Dr. Conflict calls this the "Be careful what you wish for" syndrome. A slightly different explanation for not asking—a glass-half-empty viewpoint—is that the executive director knows the money's not out there to be raised and doesn't want to put the budget in the red.

A third reason for not asking is that executive directors want more money to go to the clients. They didn't get into this work to get rich, after all. A more

cynical twist is that by keeping your compensation low, you gain a perverse form of job security. "The board can't afford to replace me," is how that goes.

Why should you be paid what you're worth? First, consider the old saying "You get what you pay for," which is a tenet of the social enterprise movement. Once an agency stops giving away its services, the recipients are no longer charity cases but rather customers who have skin in the game. As such, quality typically improves because customers can (and do) vote with their feet. The same theory applies to the employer-employee relationship.

If the employer pays less than an employee thinks he or she is worth, performance degrades accordingly. Underpaid people tend to expect less of themselves, waste time griping and searching for better jobs, feel "kicked-in-the-teeth kind of wronged," as you put it, and are generally chip-on-the-shoulder unhappy. When it's "good enough," compensation doesn't motivate performance, and it can be quite demotivating when it's not. And you're demotivated for sure, and certainly underperforming. Simply put, if you "truly love the organization," as you

say you do, you owe it the opportunity to deal with this issue.

Second, you owe it to those who work with and for you. That's because your unwillingness to ask for a raise yourself is actually hurting them; your salary is their top tier. If you're allowing your compensation to be capped at below-market rates, all of your employees and colleagues will be penalized accordingly. If you're worried about raising the money or causing a deficit, make a contribution to the agency, but don't penalize others because of your reticence to ask.

You ask, "What's a good fundraiser to do?" You give the answer in your own letter: "I feel like walking into the vice president's office and demanding a raise." So what's stopping you? Surely it's not because you don't know how to ask; Dr. Conflict ran a Google search for "how to ask for a raise" and got 167,000,000 responses in 0.9 seconds. No, what's holding you back is flat-out simple: fear. You're like the Cowardly Lion in *The Wizard of Oz* who needs a courage medal.

Think about the message you are sending to those who pay you by not asking. What are you saying to them about the value of your work? In the words of Marianne Williamson (often misattributed to Nelson Mandela), "Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you *not* to be?"<sup>3</sup> Let Williamson's words be your courage medal. And, consider the possibility that your boss is not aware of the problem; supervisors are many things, but clairvoyants they're not.

So here's what you must do: First, know what you're worth; don't guess. Identify three or four agencies like yours

that you admire and which are comparable in size. Dr. Conflict likes to call these your BOBs—the best of the best in your field.<sup>4</sup> Go to GuideStar and pull their 990s to see what they're paying. An even easier route for a fundraiser like you is to go to the Association of Fundraising Professionals ([www.afpnet.org](http://www.afpnet.org)) and download their 2011 *Compensation & Benefits Report*; it's free to members and only \$95 for nonmembers. That's money well spent.

Second, make your case for why you're worth it. You know how to make a case; you do it every day. Use Bernard Ross and Clare Segal's questions: What is the need? What evidence is there that this is a pressing need? How are you uniquely qualified to tackle this need? What will be the benefits of your action? What are the negative consequences if you fail?<sup>5</sup> Too complicated? Use the *Glengarry Glen Ross* AIDA method promoted by Blake (played by Alec Baldwin in the movie): Attention, Interest, Decision, Action. Watch the clip on YouTube for a refresher.

Third, practice. That's right, practice. Go to your local flea market this Saturday and haggle yourself silly. Google "how to haggle" before you go and bone up on the topic. Then put twenty \$1 bills in your pocket and fire away. Remember the *Glengarry Glen Ross* ABCs: "Always Be Closing."

Fourth, schedule an appointment and then make the pitch, do the ask, close the deal.

Fifth, if you don't get what you want, ask why not. You might learn why you're not worth it or what's holding you back. Don't threaten to resign—Dr. Conflict knows executives who make it a policy to always fire those who make threats; no one wants to negotiate with a terrorist. That said, sometimes the only way to know what your house is worth is to sell it. If despite all your efforts you can't get

the raise you want, put yourself on the market and move on.

#### NOTES

1. Jeanne Bell, Richard Moyers, and Timothy R. Wolfred, *Daring to Lead 2006: A National Study of Nonprofit Executive Leadership* (San Francisco: CompassPoint Nonprofit Services; Washington: The Meyer Foundation, 2006).
2. Blue Avocado; *Board Cafe*; "How Much to Pay the Executive Director," blog entry by Jan Masaoka, August 13, 2010, [www.blueavocado.org/content/how-much-pay-executive-director](http://www.blueavocado.org/content/how-much-pay-executive-director).
3. Marianne Williamson, *A Return to Love: Reflections on the Principles of a Course in Miracles* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), 190–191.
4. Mark Light, *Results Now for Nonprofits: Purpose, Strategy, Operations, and Governance* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2010).
5. Bernard Ross and Clare Segal, *The Influential Fundraiser: Using the Psychology of Persuasion to Achieve Outstanding Results* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 57–58.

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