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## Career Advancement: Ten Negotiation Strategies for Women in Higher Education

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# Academic Leadership Journal

## [Career Advancement: Ten Negotiation Strategies for Women in Higher Education](#)

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### Abstract

Women in the United States (US) are a vital part of the workforce and the economy. They represent 50.7 percent of the population and 49.8 percent of payroll employment in the US workforce. Women also outpace men in the number of college degrees conferred annually. However, women hold fewer board seats and executive level positions than men in American corporations and higher education institutions. Additionally, census data indicates that women earn approximately 77 cents on every dollar earned by men. Although the “glass ceiling” is getting lower, it is essential that women develop successful negotiation strategies for career advancement. This paper provides an overview of women in the US workforce and higher education, ten negotiation strategies for career advancement, and recommendations to increase the number of women leaders in higher education.

### Keywords

Women, employment, educational attainment, salary, corporations, government, negotiation, strategies, career advancement, communication

### Introduction

Women in the United States (US) are a vital part of the workforce and the economy. They represent 50.7 percent of the population (US Census Bureau, 2010) and comprise nearly half (49.8 percent) of payroll employment in the US workforce (US Congress Joint Economic Committee, 2010). It is projected by the US Department of Labor Statistics, Women’s Bureau (2009a) that women will “account for 51.2 percent of the increase in total labor force growth between 2008 and 2018” (para. 3). However, women represent fewer board seats and executive level positions than men in US corporations and higher education institutions. Today, women also receive approximately 77 cents for every dollar earned by men according to US census data (Institute for Women’s Policy Institute, 2010; Bolton, 2010; National Committee on Equal Pay, n.d.).

In terms of educational attainment, women are now surpassing men in undergraduate degrees by roughly 1.2 million (Yen, 2010). The New York Times reported in 2010 that women earned 60 percent of all master’s degrees awarded and 50.4 percent of doctoral degrees in the 2008-9 academic year (Craig, 2010).

### Women in the Workforce & Glass Ceiling

“Great leadership is not limited by gender; it is limited by opportunity.” ~ Molly Corbett Broad, President, American Council for Education

In 2009, the US Department of Labor reported there were 122 million women age 16 years and over in the United States who were labor force participants (2009a, para. 1). In reviewing the 20 most prevalent occupations for women in 2009, the majority of women in the top ten occupations were employed as secretaries/administrative assistants, registered nurses, teachers, cashiers, and retail salespersons. A full list of the 20 most prevalent occupations for women employed in 2009 as reported by the US Department of Labor, Women’s Bureau include:

1. Secretaries and administrative assistants, 3,074,000
2. Registered nurses, 2,612,000
3. Elementary and middle school teachers, 2,343,000
4. Cashiers, 2,273,000
5. Nursing, psychiatric, and home health aides, 1,770,000
6. Retail salespersons, 1,650,000
7. First-line supervisors/managers of retail sales workers, 1,459,000
8. Waiters and waitresses, 1,434,000
9. Maids and housekeeping cleaners, 1,282,000
10. Customer service representatives, 1,263,000
11. Child care workers, 1,228,000
12. Bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks, 1,205,000
13. Receptionists and information clerks, 1,168,000
14. First-line supervisors/managers of office and administrative support workers, 1,163,000
15. Managers, all other, 1,106,000
16. Accountants and auditors, 1,084,000
17. Teacher assistants, 921,000
18. Cooks, 831,000
19. Office clerks, general 821,000
20. Personal and home care aides, 789,000 (2009b, n.p.)

Despite educational attainment and increasing numbers of women in the workforce, a glass ceiling still remains when it comes to careers and career advancement.

## **Women in “Corporate America”**

Today, women hold fewer board seats and executive level positions than men in US corporations and higher education institutions. Within “Corporate America,” Lang (2010) shares in “Have Women Shattered the Glass Ceiling?” that:

Among Fortune 500 companies, women occupy 15% of board seats and are 3% of CEOs. In Canada, women make up 14% of board seats and 4% of CEOs at *Financial Post* 500 businesses. There are only four female CEOs leading the 100 most highly capitalized blue chip companies listed on the London Stock Exchange, while 10% of board seats in Europe are held by women — a percentage largely buoyed by Norway’s strict boardroom diversity laws. (para. 4)

In *Pipeline’s Broken Promise*, Carter and Silva (2010) studied more than 4,100 women and men from Europe, Asia, Canada and the United States who worked full-time and graduated from international MBA programs between 1996 and 2007. According the findings in *Pipeline’s Broken Promise*:

Men start their first post-MBA job at higher positions than women, and in the years ahead their salary growth outpaced women’s. Even if they both started at an entry-level position, men progressed more quickly up the corporate ladder. These inequities persist regardless of global region, years of prior experience, industry, aspirations and parenthood status. (Carter & Sliva, 2010, para. 5)

## **Women in Higher Education**

The glass ceiling within the higher education sector appears to be lower than in the corporate sector but it does still exist. While women represent 57 percent of all college students, they represent “only 26 percent of full professors, 23 percent of university presidents, and 14 percent of presidents at the doctoral degree-granting institutions (The White House Project Report, 2009, p. 10). Women also represent only 38 percent of Chief Academic Officers are women, according to “A Measure of Equity: Women’s Progress in Higher Education” (2008).

The number of female presidents in colleges and universities across the United States has changed very little over the past decade. One obstacle, often cited, for women seeking career advancement and the path to the presidency may be the challenge of balancing work and family. The White House Project Report (2009) reveals that “only 63 percent of female presidents are married compared with 89 percent of male presidents” and “only 68 percent have children (mostly over the age of 18), compared with 91 percent of men” (2009, p. 20). But, these statistics should not be seen as deterrents for women pursuing their career aspirations. According to Selingo (2010), “As search committees look to broaden the pool of potential college presidents, they are coming across younger academics with babies at home, and those who became parents later in their careers” (para. 5). In fact, some presidential candidates are negotiating things such as childcare into their contracts (Selingo, 2010).

The Association of Governing Boards reports that women represent less than one third of public and private institution board members. Twenty-nine percent of public institution board members are women and 28 percent of private institution board members are women (Association of Governing Boards, 2010). While the percentage of female presidents and board members in the higher education sector is greater than the percentage of women in CEO positions and board seats in the corporate sector, there still exists opportunities to increase the overall percentage of women in leadership positions in both sectors. As indicated by The White House Project Report (2009), reaching a critical

mass of women in leaders roles, one-third or more women, is essential for implementing and maintaining change.

## **Women of Color in Higher Education**

“By 2050, minorities — those who identify themselves as Hispanic, Black, Asian, American Indian, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander or mixed race — will account for 54 percent of the U.S. population” (America.gov, 2008, n.p.). Despite increasing diversity in the US population and in higher education student enrollments, there is still limited diversity when examining current demographics for female faculty, administrators, and governing board members. According to The White House Project Report (2009), women of color represent:

- 16 percent of female faculty
- 6 percent of all faculty (male and female)
- 10 percent of all faculty at the instructor level
- 9 percent of all assistant professors
- 3 percent of all professors
- 4.4 percent of all college presidents. (p. 23)

In terms of trustee representation, data is available on people of color serving on boards but it is not broken down by gender. A 2004 study conducted by the American Association of Governing Board on Board on policies, practices and composition of institutional boards reports:

- On public boards, about 78 percent of public board members are white, 21 percent are racial and ethnic minorities, with 14 percent African American and 4 percent Hispanic; and
- On independent boards, 88 percent are white. About 12 percent are racial and ethnic minorities, including about 8 percent African American and 2 percent are Hispanic. (n.d., para. 4)

## **Women & Salary**

Equal pay for women has been a national topic of discussion dating back to 1848 with the first women’s rights convention in Seneca Falls, New York and the 1920s with the founding of The Women’s Bureau within the US Department of Labor. In 1963, the Equal Payment Act was passed. Women at that time were earning 59 cents to every dollar earned by men. Almost five decades later, women are earning approximately 77 to every dollar earned by men (Institute for Women’s Policy Institute, 2010, Bolton, 2010; National Committee on Equal Pay, n.d.). When breaking earnings down by race, White women earn 75 cents for every dollar earned by men while Asian women earn 82 cents, Black or African American earn 69 cents, and Hispanic or Latino earned 52.9 cents , (Institute for Women’s Policy Institute, 2010, n.p.). In reference to the gender salary gap, the National Women’s Law Center (2010b) states:

This wage gap cannot be dismissed as the result of “women’s choices” in career and family matters. In fact, authoritative studies show that even when all relevant career and family attributes are taken into account, there is still a significant, unexplained gap in men’s and women’s earnings. Thus, even when

women make the same career choices as men and work the same hours, they still earn less.  
(para. 2)

The salary gap for women is still quite visible in higher education despite the increasing number of women in the field. According to The White House Project Report (2009), “Female faculty have not made any progress in closing the salary gap with their male counterparts. In 1972, they made 83 percent of what male faculty made: today they make 82 percent of what male faculty make” (p. 10). Of the top 10 highest paid public college and university presidents for 2008-09, only one was a female and she was the lowest paid. Of the top 10 highest paid private college and university presidents for 2008-09, four were female. One female was the top paid president in the United States and the other three rounded out the bottom of list in terms of salary (Staley, 2009).

### **Males vs. Females: Career Advancement & Negotiating**

Although government policies and regulations are in place, women across the United States still lag behind men in terms of career advancement and salary. Therefore, it is important that women identify opportunities for advancement and become stronger negotiators as well as their own advocates.

Research indicates that women and men are different when it comes to “asking” and “negotiating” salary and promotion. According to “Salary Stats: Women vs. Men” Women, on average, ask for 30 percent less money than males.

- Men are four times more likely to negotiate a first salary than women.
- Men are eight times more likely than women to negotiate their starting salary and benefits.
- Women ask for raises or promotions 85 percent less often than their male counterparts.
- 20 percent of women (22 million people) say they never negotiate at all, even though they recognize negotiation as appropriate and even necessary.
- 2.5 times more women than men said they feel “a great deal of apprehension” about negotiation. (McCarty, 2008, n.p.)

Additionally, most research continues to illustrate how women tend to negotiate via promoting *the team* while men tend to focus more on *the self* (Babcock & Laschever, 2007). Women also tend to show a higher level of discomfort with any type of conflict that may arise while men are able to embrace the situation with controlled emotions.

These described characteristics may serve as a deterrent for women during any negotiation by not allowing them to fully focus on their needs and not being able to control their reactions to various situations. Women need to choose wisely and negotiate their contracts. According to “Have Women Shattered the Glass Ceiling?,” Lang (2010) writes that “a woman’s first job can seal her fate in the corporate world. Choose wisely — the glass ceiling is much lower than you think” (para. 11).

### **Ten Negotiation Strategies for Career Advancement**

The following ten strategies have been developed to assist women in becoming stronger negotiators and advocates so they can advance their careers in higher education. It is imperative to keep in mind

that these strategies can be deployed during any type of discussion for effective resolution and utilized at the different stages of a woman's career from contract negotiation to preparing for the next professional opportunity.

1. *Be Your Own Advocate* – The Human Resources (HR) field related to women's rights is extensive and highly dynamic. There is a long list of bills and laws that continue to be debated and passed in the US Congress affecting women and their careers. It is imperative for women to be well versed on these issues and become their own advocates at their work and any other venues. Women must be subject matter experts and be confident in knowing their rights as they go into any type of negotiation.
2. *Comfortable with Self* – This strategy requires that every woman be her own "Number One Fan." Nobody else will take the time or interest to be her top supporter. A woman needs to have a platform on which she can describe herself as a working professional. This platform must represent who she is and how she can and will be beneficial to the institution. Women must ensure they share their platform strategically with upper administration as well as colleagues. The platform acts as a key informational tool able to effectively spread a working woman's accomplishments and skills. The platform also serves as an essential tool when negotiating with administrators, co-workers, and colleagues.
3. *"Life is a Campaign"* – A woman needs to be ready to approach any negotiation and conversation at work as if she is running a campaign. This means she needs to be expertly versed about her needs and wants with the intent of developing effective talking points that can be shared with all members in the college or university. Remember, whether or not a woman is "formally negotiating" or just "having a chat" the information shared will always be on record. Therefore, it is imperative that a woman's colleagues are always able to associate her with intelligence, capability, and strength.
4. *Communication Styles* – Women need to be familiar with their communication styles and be willing to fully embrace the different styles that may be present in men. For instance, studies continue to illustrate how men view any conversation as if it is a negotiation while women consider conversations to be a form of "getting to know each other." Additionally, men view the action of talking as an opportunity to illustrate their knowledge; women on the other hand consider the art of talking as the opportunity to create intimacy and interest among the parties (Babcock & Laschever, 2007). Another major difference is how men talk in "sound bites" no matter the topic, while women tend to be more storytelling-driven in their communication. These differences may cause major discrepancies across genders especially when a woman needs to negotiate her work-life balance needs with a man. Women must acknowledge these differences and be willing to utilize the more male-driven style when negotiations are taking place with the opposite sex.
5. *Do the Research* – To be a successful negotiator, women need to be proactive and do the research. Being an advocate goes beyond just knowing women's rights, it involves knowing what may or may not be negotiable. In contract negotiations, it is important to find out in advance what can be negotiated. Remember, men are eight times more likely than women to negotiate their starting salary and benefits (McCarty, 2008, n.p.). Visit the HR website of the college or institution for which you are in contract discussions to learn more about the institution and what may

potentially be negotiable. When involved in meetings that may require negotiation strategies, do the research to find out as much as you can about both sides of the discussion. Successful negotiations is also not simply knowing one side of a discussion, it is about knowing all sides of the discussions. Turn the office environment into a mini- “research” center and learn from those around. Identify individuals who are strong negotiators and write down what makes them successful negotiators. Identify individuals who are weak negotiators and write down what makes them less successful. Becoming a successful negotiator will take time and practice. With future negotiations, find a time after the negotiation to identify what went well and what could be enhanced. Negotiating for many women does not come easily, therefore, it is important to identify opportunities to use new negotiation skills so they become intuitive.

6. *Embrace Conflict* – A woman must feel empowered to deal with difficult conversations without becoming emotional. This requires a woman to fully understand and be cognizant of how she reacts during any type of conflict. Research conducted by Thomas and Kilmman (2010) identifies the following as the five most commonly used conflict styles: (a) competitive, (b) collaborative, (c) accommodating, (d) avoiding, and (e) compromising. Studies have shown that men tend to act more aggressively and focused on solving the problem via the deployment of a competitive style while women tend to be more comfortable deploying collaborative, avoiding, and compromising styles (Thomas & Kilmman, 2010). Although these styles aren't considered bad they must be paired with some level of competitiveness to ensure the woman's needs and wants are seriously considered during any type of negotiation.
7. *Be Ready to React at All Times* – Women need to realize that any conversation has the potential to turn into a negotiation. Therefore, she must be prepared to deal with it. This means readying herself to (a) listen effectively, (b) reframe what has been said, (c) count to 10 before answering any pointed questions, and (d) illustrate open body language with a smile on her face while maintaining full eye contact with the other individual. By following these simple steps a woman will be viewed as an effective communicator able to control her emotions while having the crucial conversations that are relevant to the situation.
8. *Understand Negotiation Efforts Are Highly Dynamic* – Working women must realize that their needs will change as they progress through life. This calls for different requirements in terms of work schedule, salary, and projects. For example, a woman may have negotiated the “deal of a lifetime” while going to a new institution; however, as time evolves so do her needs. She must be cognizant of these changing needs and be willing and able to proactively discuss or defend them to upper administration. Even if the entry deal was spectacular, such a deal may not be as relevant two years in to the position. Hence, it is time to do the research and go back to the negotiating table to cut a more realistic deal.
9. *Don't Agonize – Organize and Negotiate* – Women may feel overwhelmed by the task of balancing work and family commitments (children, aging parents, spouse, partner, etc.) and forget about negotiating with their employer. Some women may feel uncomfortable even considering the work-life balance as part of any type of negotiation. These feelings need to be immediately suppressed via the art of organization. This includes identifying what may or may not be negotiable during the hiring phase. Remember to do the research and find out what may or may not be negotiable. In the article “More College Chiefs Bounce Babies on Their Knees,” Selingo (2010) discusses work-life balance and how some presidential candidates are now



negotiating child care into their contracts. The art of organization also includes dividing the workload fairly at work and at home. Women need to be intentional about taking the time to negotiate with co-workers, colleagues, bosses, and partners about the tasks at hand. Furthermore, they need to determine each person's responsibilities and timeframes. Working women need to make sure they are always *in the moment* when at work or with family. This can be a difficult task to accomplish especially these days with telecommuting and working from home. However, when a woman is at home she needs to do her best to focus only on her role as a wife, partner, mother, daughter, care taker, etc.

10. *There is No "Silver Bullet"* – Attending workshops, reading books, and listening to the latest self-help gurus on an iPod will only add to one's knowledge base. There is no "silver bullet" in terms of career advancement. Women go through many stages throughout their careers. Therefore, career advancement requires women to proactively identify the skills, knowledge, and experiences needed to strategically prepare one's self for promotion or a new professional opportunity. Simultaneously, women need to continuously update their skills, including negotiation skills, so they are prepared for each stage of their careers. As shared by Chester L. Karrass, "In business, you don't get what you deserve, you get what you negotiate."

Career advancement will not happen on its own. Women must take charge of their careers and lives by becoming their own best advocate and negotiator.

## **Recommendations**

Career advancement requires constant focus, dedication, and on going professional development. Women must also be their own advocates when it comes to effectively managing and negotiating their careers. Women cannot expect their company's Human Resource departments to fully take care of career advancement. Quite the opposite! Working women must be the fountains of information that guide decisions made by upper management teams and HR departments. Women must be ready to overcome their fears of negotiating career mobility, needs, and flexibility. *Nobody else will do this for them*. It is imperative for women to be their own strongest advocate.

There are five recommendations put forth that build upon the literature to increase the number of women leaders in higher education. These recommendations also build upon the previous ten negotiation strategies for career advancement.

1. Increase the number of women serving on boards within higher education institutions. In the article "The Gender of American Academic Leaders Matters," Ehrenberg (2010) states that prior research on corporate boards of directors suggests there needs to be a critical mass of female directors on the board before fundamental changes occur in board operations. Similarly, research indicates in academia that "a critical share of the board of trustees of an academic institution of 25% must be reached before the gender composition of the board influences the speed with which an institution diversifies its faculty across gender lines" (Ehrenberg, 2010, para. 7). As revealed in the article, "colleges and universities with female presidents and female provosts, and those with a greater share of female trustees did increase their share of female faculty at more rapid rates" (Ehrenberg, 2010, para. 6).
2. Colleges and universities need to institute a checks and balances system. As shared in "Have

Women Shattered the Glass Ceiling?,” organizations, at minimum, should (a) build in checks and balances that root out unconscious biases, (b) collect and review salary growth metrics, and (c) provide development across all levels (para. 7). Additionally, “managers must guard against stereotypes influencing judgment and make assignments based on qualifications” (Lang, 2010, para. 7).

3. Colleges and universities need to support qualified women with career advancement and succession planning across divisions to increase the representation of women across campuses nationally and internationally. According to the article “Not All Differences in Earnings are Created Equal:” If women are underrepresented in higher-paying fields, that could be due to hostile environments in those fields rather than women’s preference to work elsewhere. But advocates for closing the pay gap say these differences in industries, job titles and career tracks might themselves be evidence of discrimination, rather than of free will in the job market. (Bialik, 2010, para. 10) Therefore, examining policies and trends relating to career advancement and succession planning of women within colleges and universities should be added to the previously recommended checks and balances system.
4. College and university presidents, vice presidents, provosts, and deans need to read the *Pipeline’s Broken Promise* published by Catalyst in 2010 to learn more about what women around the world can do to bring the “pipeline’s promise” to fruition for all women starting today. According to the *Pipeline’s Broken Promise*: The premise of the promise is that the pipeline for women into senior leadership is robust. After all, over the past 15 years, women have been graduating with advanced professional degrees in record numbers often equal to or even surpassing the rates for men, swelling women’s representation in managerial ranks. Concurrently, companies implemented diversity and inclusion programs to eliminate structural biases and foster women’s full participation in leadership. Given these accomplishments, who would question whether the pipeline for women to senior leadership is lacking? While women represent just 3 percent of Fortune 500 CEOs, 15 percent of board directors at those companies, and less than 14 percent of corporate executives at top publicly-traded companies around the world, overall they represent 40 percent of global workforces, with growth in some parts of the world projected to reach double digits. Surely, with this vigorous pipeline and the competitive focus on talent, women are poised to make rapid gains to the top. If only that were true. (Carter & Silva, 2010, p. 1) *Pipeline’s Broken Promise* link:  
[http://catalyst.org/file/340/pipeline%27s\\_broken\\_promise\\_final\\_021710.pdf](http://catalyst.org/file/340/pipeline%27s_broken_promise_final_021710.pdf)
5. Women must become successful negotiators if they want to advance their careers in higher education. Therefore, it is important that women develop professional development plans that may include, but not be limited to, attending seminars, mentoring, hiring career coaches, and reading new literature relating to negotiation, communication, and effective persuasion. Moreover, it is critical that women utilize the knowledge and skills garnered through their professional development plans as they advance through different stages of their careers. The book *Ask For It: How Women Can Use the Power of Negotiations* by Linda Babcock and Sara Laschever (2009) provides a great first start to learning to “ask” more often and with confidence. The following six sample chapter titles from *Ask For It: How Women Can Use the Power of Negotiations* unveil the need and power of negotiation for women:
  - 1. Why You Need to Ask

- 2. How Much Are You Worth?
- 5. Aim High
- 9. Refine Your Strategy
- 15. The Closer
- Conclusion: If You Never Hear No, You're Not Asking Enough

As shared previously, there is no “silver bullet,” but change can start today. The book *Ask For It: How Women Can Use the Power of Negotiations* is an excellent resource for women that provides an overview and detailed examination of the power of negotiation in career advancement.

## Conclusion

When we look at where women stand in the leadership ranks of academia, so much more is at stake than the mere numbers of women who have reached the top. The presence – or absence – of female academic leaders can have far-reaching influences not only on the institutions themselves, but beyond that, on the scope of research and knowledge that affects us all. ~ The White House Project Report, 2009, p. 16

Future presidential retirements within higher education will provide new opportunities for women across all levels of administration. The White House Project Report reveals that in 2006, 92 percent of university and college presidents were over 51 years old and 49 percent were 61 years old or older (2009, p. 21). This projected impending wave of retirements over the next five to ten years has the potential to change higher education administration demographics and to lower, possibly even break, the glass ceiling. However, women must take charge of their careers, learn to be successful negotiators, and become their own best advocates. The opportunity and time to positively affect change for higher education, society, and future generations of women is today and it begins with you!

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