

RECRUIT A SPONSOR > FIND A NEW JOB > BOOST PAY

# Money & Power



**D**ebbie Hines made all the right moves to secure a great career. She graduated from both the Ivy League and a law school with a stellar reputation. A few years after joining a small law firm, she and a colleague confided to each other that they were both looking for new opportunities. Eventually, Hines's coworker interviewed for a position at a large national law firm and received a handsome offer. Unable to take the position because of the travel requirements, her colleague recommended Hines as a perfect candidate for the job. Hines wasn't surprised when she, too, received an offer. What floored her was the salary. Hines was offered \$30,000 less than her colleague. "We had the same amount of experience, and did the same job," she says. The only >

FIGHT FOR WHAT YOU  
**DESERVE**

*Making less than you should? Take these steps to earn what you're worth*

BY JEANNINE AMBER  
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difference? Hines is a Black woman; her colleague is a White male. "I was so hurt," says Hines, who tried unsuccessfully to negotiate a higher salary. "For years I felt embarrassed, as though it were my fault." Hines's story is hardly unique. According to census data from 2012, for every dollar White men earn, Black women earn only 64 cents (White women take home 77 cents). Experts say the disparity is caused by many factors, including educational inequality and unconscious bias—the belief of some employers that Black women are less skilled, capable and valuable than other hires. "For some people, Black women are still very much an unknown or are only known by the stereotypes on television," explains Ella L.J. Edmondson Bell, Ph.D., a professor at Dartmouth's Tuck School of Business and author of *Career GPS: Strategies for Women Navigating the New Corporate Landscape* (Amistad). Hines, the founder of [legalspeaks.com](http://legalspeaks.com), contends that bias must have been the reason she was offered a lower wage. "I can't see this huge disparity being caused by anything other than discrimination against me for being a woman and an African-American, because it wasn't my résumé." Hines took the position at the now-defunct firm, but says the lower salary made it difficult to negotiate higher pay in her next role. Once you are a victim of unequal pay, she says, "it follows you."

Want to break the cycle of lower pay? ESSENCE consulted executives, advocates and policy advisers around the country for their best tips to help you get top dollar.

## Get the Best Education



It's no surprise that the better educated you are, the higher your earning potential. According to the American Association of University Women (AAUW), African-American women with advanced college degrees earn, on average, nearly \$1,000 per week—twice as much as Black women with high school diplomas. But educated women may still be falling short of their earning potential. Consider this: Black women with bachelor's degrees earn, on average, almost \$400 less per month than their White counterparts. "This significant difference between women with the same educational background suggests there is negative bias at play," says Catherine Hill, director of research at AAUW in Washington, D.C. "For instance, some employers assume Black women are not well connected. That can be a concern in fields where who you know makes a lot of difference." For an employer with limited experience with Black women, edu-

cation can serve as shorthand, providing cues about the social circles in which you travel, the skills you possess and the corporate "language" you speak. A shared background makes prospective employers comfortable, which can impact hiring, promotion and compensation, explains Hill, who maintains it's the responsibility of employers to overcome their biases so they can evaluate prospective employees fairly. Still, she concedes, "while these social connections should not be important, anecdotally we know they are."

If your college days are behind you, you can still create common ground by finding out your boss's interests and getting involved: volunteer, join a club or learn to play golf. "Find ways to become a part of the informal network so you can build relationships and gain visibility for yourself," advises Bell, who is also founder and president of Ascent, an organization devoted to the corporate advancement of women of color. "If you're going to work with the attitude, 'I don't want to hobnob with them,' you're going to stay right where you are, particularly in the corporate world."

## Don't Compare Yourself to "Becky"



Tempting though it may be, if you discover that your coworker is getting paid more than you, don't run into your boss's office demanding a raise. "You don't know if she has a degree you don't have, five more years' experience or a stellar performance review when yours is mediocre," says Sharon S. Hall, partner at the global executive search firm Spencer Stuart in Atlanta. "Now you look greedy, nosy and pushy. That's how we get labeled." Instead, counsels Hall, engage your employer in a conversation about what you can do for the company. "Ask your boss, 'What are two or three things I can do over the next year to increase my earning potential?'" Then follow up. "Say, 'Over the last six months I've done A, B and C, so we're on track for this increase in compensation, right, Jim?' What's he going to say, 'No, I've been lying'? No, he's going to say, 'Wow, this is sounding good!'"

## Pick the Right Company



Be strategic when choosing an employer. Look for an organization with a good track record of hiring and advancing people of color. "You want an employer who really takes the issue of diversity seriously," says Hill. "If you see women of color in leadership roles, that's a good sign." Also consider whether a prospective company will help you reach your >



**WORDS TO LIVE BY** "BE CLEAR ABOUT WHAT YOU'RE BRINGING TO THE TABLE. SAY, 'THIS IS WHAT I DID, THIS IS HOW I CONTRIBUTED, THIS IS HOW I HELPED YOU CREATE A WIN.'" —ELLA L.J. EDMONDSON BELL, PH.D., TUCK SCHOOL OF BUSINESS



long-term career goals. "One of my mantras is, 'Know why you are where you are,'" says Hall. "For instance, 'I came to this company to get some experience or a promotion.'" Does your workplace provide on-the-job training or tuition reimbursement for college? Taking advantage of these opportunities can lead to greater compensation down the line. So can joining a top-tier organization versus taking a higher-paying job at a lesser-known company. "When you move to your next position, you'll have a leg up in job and salary negotiations if you have prior experience at a company known for producing the very best," says Hall.



## Do Your Homework

Before you accept a position, whether it's your first job out of school or a mid-career placement, check sites such as salary.com and salary expert.com to find out the average compensation for your position, in your city, at your experience level. "That way, you can be clear about your salary expectations and make sure you have a strong argument for why you should be at the top of that range," says Carla Harris, vice chairman of global wealth management and managing director at Morgan Stanley in New York.

"If someone wants you to take a lower salary, you need to know why your qualifications justify something lower than the market rate. If you enter a company at a wage deficit, it's very difficult to catch up."

## Negotiate Effectively



Never show up for a salary negotiation empty-handed. Bring documentation showing revenue generated, money saved or positive feedback from clients and higher-ups. "There can be enormous trepidation about having these conversations," says Harris. "But it can be as simple as saying, 'I think I've had a terrific year. Here are the five things I've contributed. I'd like to discuss reward associated with my performance.'"



## Lobby for Change

The wage gap affects all women, but mothers are impacted most. "One study from Cornell University found that with equal résumés and job experience, mothers were offered jobs 80 percent less often than nonmoms and offered starting salaries \$11,000 lower than nonmoms," notes Kristin Rowe-Finkbeiner, executive director and cofounder of the advocacy group momsrising.org. Blame long-held assumptions that mothers are less focused on their careers and more likely to take time off than women without children. "The truth is, there's no greater incentive to being a spectacular person in the labor force than being able to provide for our children," says Rowe-Finkbeiner. In December, New York senator Kirsten Gillibrand introduced to Congress the FAMILY Act, which would provide, among other things, up to 12 weeks of paid maternity leave. Gillibrand says supporting this bill would go a long way in closing the gender wage gap. "In countries with similar policies, we see the gap narrow," adds Rowe-Finkbeiner. "That's why it's important for women to advocate for public policies that allow women, children and our economy to thrive."



## Attract a Sponsor

For years we've been told that mentors—experienced colleagues who give career advice and direction—can help us get ahead. But the latest research from the Center for Talent Innovation reveals if you really want to advance, you'd get better results with a sponsor—a champion with the power to get you noticed and promoted. Think of having your boss's boss in your corner, and that will give you an idea of the clout a sponsor could wield. For tips on attracting a sponsor at any stage in your career, read Sylvia Ann Hewlett's *Forget a Mentor, Find a Sponsor: The New Way to Fast Track Your Career* (Harvard Business Review Press).

