

Pay Attention – asking for and getting that increase in pay

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It's that time of year – Spring is here along with the start of the new financial year. You're looking forward to your summer break but the cost of living continues to rise and it's hard making ends meet. What can you do? A pay increase would be good, but how?

The creative sector has a history of relatively low pay, despite considerable personal investment by individuals and frequently high levels of education. But there is considerable variation in the types of employer and salary structures across the sector. This makes it difficult to generalise where pay is concerned. Larger organisations might have an annual salary review or a structure which implements 'across the board' increases. But many arts sector companies are small and as Charles Cotton, CIPD (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development) Reward Specialist notes, 'With smaller organisations, less than 49 employees, pay is more of an issue as standardised pay increases don't necessarily take place.'

This needn't be a drawback, however. It can, in fact, mean more scope for negotiation and increases in pay for the enterprising employee. And as Charles Cotton goes on to say, 'According to surveys, earnings in general are increasing. What has changed however, is that, whereas in the past there might have been increases across the board, now, in the private sector, there may be so much in the pot for pay increases but more individual variation in what people receive.'

It seems the future could be bright. So what steps do you need to take before you approach your boss for that much needed rise?

Know your company and the wider picture

Any request for a pay increase has to be put into context. You need to be sure your request for an increase is appropriate. Study these issues before taking further steps.

Flexibility: what sort of pay structure does your company have? Is it standardised, is it rigid? Is there scope for

flexibility in terms of pay?

Recognition: does your company have a track record of valuing and rewarding individual performance? Is there potential in the system for this?

Can they afford it: is the company performing well, what are its future plans, are resources available for salaries?

The economy: examine the economic climate and the company's position within this, including local conditions. Variations in the cost of living in different areas, for example, can be reflected in levels of pay.

Studying your company and its context means you won't waste time requesting a pay rise if it's not an option. If this is the situation and it's not going to change, you could always consider moving on. But ask yourself first if pay is the only reason you're considering leaving? A move might make you richer in pay and poorer in other terms. Are there other benefits to be gained by staying? At the very least, this analysis will make you more informed about your organisation and the potential opportunities.

Know yourself

There's more to getting a pay rise, however, than knowing your company. You also need to ask yourself some tough questions. As Charles Cotton notes, 'You need to assess your value and demonstrate it.'

Market value: study your role and salary in comparison with similar roles in the organisation and sector. This will give you a good idea of your market value. You can do this by examining job advertisements, salary surveys (eg, by recruitment agencies) and trade magazines. You can talk to your professional institute if you have one. All these will give you a good understanding of your place in the market.

Your performance: obviously, you should be giving your best. But are you able to bring added value? Do you have rare or specialist skills or valuable contacts? Are you making a direct or obvious contribution to profitability? Do you consider yourself a team player? Are you easily replaceable? Discover what qualities and skills your boss values and develop these. See your job and the company through your manager's eyes, help him (or her) achieve his targets and keep him informed of your progress.

Your visibility: being seen to be doing a good job is vital. Networking and team work are useful here. You also need to be able to demonstrate your contribution. 'This may be built into a formal performance management and appraisal system,' says Charles Cotton, 'but if you're not part of one, you can monitor your performance yourself, such as by keeping a record of achievements.'

Your position vs. you: it may be that you're performing really well, but you're just in the 'wrong' job. Each job will have a value placed on it, beyond which you can't go. In this case you might want to think about seeking promotion or taking on extra responsibilities. The latter is an excellent way of enhancing your value but does not necessarily guarantee a pay increase either now or in the future. Also, be wary of taking on more commitments than you can handle.

Approaching your employer

You've done your research and you're now ready to approach your manager. Request a review meeting to discuss your development – don't just ask outright for a pay increase – a formal meeting with time to discuss the issues is vital. Before that meeting:

- Ensure you have a specific salary figure or range in mind: be realistic in relation to your expertise and sector (not over the top) but don't underestimate your requirements. Be prepared to negotiate

- Have facts and figures (evidence) on your performance available: eg, challenges resolved, savings made, supervisory roles or additional responsibilities undertaken, qualifications achieved and positive client feedback – as well as supporting your case, providing facts and figures helps maintain objectivity during the discussion
- Prepare a business case in support of the requested pay increase (what you can do for them), backed up by the facts. As Charles Cotton says, ‘Your boss may need to ask for the money from his boss, so it's important to demonstrate to your manager the business case as to why you should have an increase.’ This makes it easier for your boss to justify his request
- Decide whether you're prepared to accept alternatives to a straightforward pay increase, eg, more leave, a company car. Pay-related options could be a staggered increase (eg, half now, half in six months' time), a lump sum bonus or an element of performance related pay (PRP) – permanent or on a trial basis. A lump sum payment can be more attractive to an employer as there is no long-term financial commitment as there is with a salary increase. PRP can be on top of, or instead of, part of your salary – the latter obviously includes an element of risk. With PRP you need to consider how much control you have over the issues that influence your achievement: with less control, you're more vulnerable

And get your timing right when approaching your manager: eg, following successful completion of a major project, not when your boss is preoccupied with other issues or the company is having financial difficulties

In the meeting – do

- Stress how much you enjoy your job and working for the organisation
- Be clear about what you're aiming for from the meeting and what you have to contribute (your business case)
- Be professional and objective – back up your case with facts
- Expect to negotiate
- Be positive throughout, assertive but not aggressive
- Be prepared for your manager to have to get back to you (he/she may have to seek approval from his manager) – if possible agree a timescale for this
- Before you leave, clarify what has been agreed and from when (with something in writing to follow if relevant)
- If the answer is a definite no, try to find out why (is the reason the company, the job or you?) and whether there is something you could do to change the situation

In the meeting – don't

- Cloud the issue by discussing other matters
- Appear to be complaining or dissatisfied
- Discuss or compare yourself to colleagues
- Use threatening, manipulative or argumentative behaviour

What else can you do?

Willy Donaghy, Supervisory Official (Arts & Entertainment Division) for BECTU says joining a union can help. ‘Ideally, get together with some of your colleagues and join collectively. Unions provide advice and representation on a collective basis, and working collectively to increase pay makes it less of a personal issue. Arts organisations can work hand in hand with unions on areas of joint interest, such as pay and training, to the benefit of all.’

There is guidance on unions on the TUC website at: tuc.org.uk

In summary, there's more to getting a pay rise than just asking. Some factors, such as the economy and overall organisational performance, may be beyond your control. But there's one thing you can do. ‘Be good at your

job,' says Willy Donaghy. 'As well as protecting yourself, you can justify asking for a pay increase if you're performing at the top level.'

And while there's no guarantee that good performance will lead straight to a pay rise, it does add to your value. So be valuable, be visible. That way, even if you don't get the increase you want at first, you're still making a contribution. And not just to your employer, but to yourself.

