Two of the five negotiation styles pay

In a study of 149 recently hired professionals, those who negotiated their starting salary gained an average of $5,000. Only competing and collaborating produced gains; the middle ground produced nothing.

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Summary

How you ask for a starting salary decides whether asking pays. In a study of 149 American professionals, published in the Journal of Organizational Behavior in 2011, those who negotiated gained an average of $5,000 over the first offer. The gains came from two of the five styles measured: competing and collaborating. Compromising and accommodating produced no measurable gain, and risk-averse participants negotiated least and were least satisfied afterwards. A $5,000 difference at the start compounds to roughly $604,000 over forty years at 5% annual raises, by our own arithmetic.

The easiest moment to move a salary is before the contract is signed. Yet a large share of new hires do not negotiate at all, and many who do choose the one approach that produces nothing. One American study of recent hires measured which ways of asking pay and which do not.

Five ways of asking

Researchers Michelle Marks and Crystal Harold asked 149 American professionals, hired in the three years before the survey, how they had negotiated their starting salary and with what result. The study appeared in the Journal of Organizational Behavior in 2011.

It distinguishes five styles, described here in our own words:

- **Collaborating**: widening the conversation to find the outcome worth most to both sides.
- **Competing**: putting the own result first and asking hard.
- **Accommodating**: putting the employer's wishes first.
- **Compromising**: steering quickly to the middle.
- **Avoiding**: not negotiating.

The analysis controlled for work experience, alternative offers and knowledge of the market, so the effect of the style itself remained.

Only competing and collaborating paid

Those who negotiated gained an average of $5,000 over the first offer. Nearly all of that gain came from two styles: competing and collaborating. Competing brought in somewhat more money; collaborating left people more satisfied with the process.

$5,000 average gain over the first offer for new hires who negotiated

Marks and Harold, Journal of Organizational Behavior, 2011, n=149 recently hired American professionals. Read via the Program on Negotiation, 31 August 2026.

Compromising and accommodating produced no measurable gain. That is the sharpest result in the study: the compromise feels like negotiating and behaves, in the numbers, like not negotiating.

Two patterns sit around it. Risk-averse participants negotiated less often, accommodated more, and were less satisfied with their salary afterwards. And women negotiated as often as men but ended with lower outcomes; facing a hard-bargaining counterpart, they responded more competitively than men did.

What one conversation is worth

The arithmetic is simple and the outcome is not small. Whoever starts $5,000 higher and receives the same percentage raises as a colleague who started lower keeps the gap for an entire career, and it grows. At 5% annual raises the difference adds up to roughly $604,000 over forty years. At a more Dutch 3% it is still about $377,000.

The assumptions are crude: forty years of the same growth, and a gap that never closes. In practice, moves and promotions repair part of it. The direction stands: a starting salary is not a snapshot, it is the base everything after it is calculated on.

The caveats

- It is one study, not a law. 149 participants, self-reported styles and outcomes, collected before 2011, in dollars, in the United States. People who negotiate may differ in ways the controls miss; this is correlation, not an experiment.
- Competing carries a price the study does not measure. Whoever plays hard without an alternative offer risks the offer being withdrawn. The Harvard program itself warns against it.
- The Netherlands negotiates in a different landscape. Where a collective agreement sets the scale, the conversation is about the grade and the step, not a free amount. The mechanism, how you ask, travels; the American amounts do not.

What this means

- **Asking is half the result.** Those who did not negotiate left an average of $5,000 in starting salary on the table.
- **The middle feels safe and pays nothing.** Accommodating and quick compromise produced no gain. Whoever asks has to actually ask for something.
- **Widen the conversation.** Collaborating works because more than an amount is on the table: start date, hours, training budget, responsibility. More issues make trades possible where a bare number is zero-sum.
- **For employers: silence is not satisfaction.** The risk-averse candidate does not ask and is the least satisfied afterwards. Moving only for those who press builds that resentment in.
- **For agencies: the recruiter can do the collaborating.** An intermediary who widens the package and puts the question sharply on the candidate's behalf brings in exactly the two styles that pay, without straining the relationship between candidate and employer.

Method and sources

This paper reworks two sources. The study is Who asks and who receives in salary negotiation by Michelle Marks and Crystal Harold, Journal of Organizational Behavior, volume 32, issue 3, 2011. The full article sits behind a paywall; this paper leans on the summary the Program on Negotiation at Harvard Law School published on 28 July 2026, retrieved on 31 August 2026. That article is under copyright and has been summarised and rewritten, not reproduced. The five style descriptions are our own wording.

The article carries three references of its own, and that chain belongs in the method note. The Marks and Harold study. The program's own profile of Nelson Mandela as a negotiator, which serves as an example and carries no data. And the origin of the text itself: the article is adapted from For a Higher Salary, Choose the Right Strategy, in the December 2010 issue of the Negotiation newsletter. That origin also explains a dating quirk: the article places the study in 2009, while the journal publication is from 2011. We cite the journal version.

The forty-year arithmetic is ours. The Harvard article states $634,000 as the career difference from a $5,000 starting gap at 5% annual raises; that outcome cannot be reconstructed from those assumptions. Our sum, $5,000 times the series of forty annual growth factors, comes to roughly $604,000 at 5% and $377,000 at 3%. The difference changes the amount, not the mechanism, which is why our calculation stands here.

What is missing: a Dutch measurement. No comparable study of negotiation styles and starting salaries in the Netherlands is included. The amounts in this paper are American, and their transfer to a market with collective pay scales is an assumption we name rather than hide.

Salary, Strategy, All markets

Sources

- Marks en Harold, Who asks and who receives in salary negotiation, Journal of Organizational Behavior 32(3), 2011
- Program on Negotiation, Harvard Law School, Salary negotiation: how to ask for a higher salary, 28 juli 2026
- For a Higher Salary, Choose the Right Strategy, Negotiation newsletter, Program on Negotiation, december 2010