

December 22, 2009

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## Career Strategies Banking Bonus Points for Better Times

By Jane Porter

It's no secret that bonuses—if they are given out at all—are likely to be less-than-hoped-for this year. According to Payscale.com, a site that provides salary reports across industries, bonuses dropped an average of 33% across the hard-hit financial sector over the past two years.

But even if you received a small bonus check, you can set yourself up for a more substantial bonus when company financials are better. First off, don't vent too much. It can feel good to commiserate with co-workers, but maintaining a positive attitude at a time when most people are disgruntled will help you stand out.

Don't take the dollar amount you receive personally and try to take stock of the company-wide strategy as a way to sort out your disappointment. Joining a chorus of complaining won't change things and can hurt the image your boss has of you.

"It's career-limiting to come across as dissatisfied," says Marsha Egan, CEO of Egan Group Inc., a Reading, Pa., professional coaching firm. If you have unanswered questions, talking with your manager about how bonuses were determined is acceptable, but be sure to take a forward-looking approach, says Ms. Egan.

Dwelling in the past is a surefire way to anger your boss, says Don Hurzeler, a retired executive with insurer Zurich North America, who handed out bonuses for more than 30 years. "When it comes to bonuses, you need to plan for the long run and not the short run," he says.

Frame your conversation around how you can help the company rather than making it all about you, advises Ms. Egan. Ask what you can do to help bring bonuses back for everyone or how you can play a bigger role moving forward.

**One thing you should not do: less work. In a tough economy, there's nothing more dangerous than slacking off, says Rick Smith, co-author of "The 5 Patterns of Extraordinary Careers." Instead, consider taking on a leadership role to set yourself apart from the crowd—especially the complainers. "The worst possible thing you can do for your career [is to feel] 'You're not paying me so can I slack off,' " says Mr. Smith.**

If you are convinced you should have received more money, it might be appropriate to approach your boss to request a reevaluation—but make sure to have a clear case for how you contributed to the bottom line before you ask for the meeting.

Jack Chapman, career and salary coach and author of "Negotiating Your Salary," recommends researching the marketplace to see how your compensation stacks up to others. Web sites like [Payscale.com](http://Payscale.com) and [Salary.com](http://Salary.com) offer data-driven estimates for bonuses and salaries by field and job level, while sites like [Glassdoor.com](http://Glassdoor.com) and [Vault.com](http://Vault.com) profile careers and often include compensation data.

Go into a renegotiation with a specific number in mind, says Mr. Chapman. Knowing what you want and putting it out there will do you far more good than letting the boss throw out a number first. **While compensation tends to be similar across different companies in the same industry, opportunities for growth can be vastly different, says Mr. Smith. Don't let one year's results govern the rest of your career by overreacting. "Keep your head down, build value for yourself and eventually you will get paid down the road," he says.**

If you see the paltry bonuses as part of a larger trend at your company, you could consider looking for a job elsewhere. But, Jim Piper, principal at Stanton Chase International says it's a longshot. He gets about 20 resumes a day from traders alone. "It's probably a good time to eat your dissatisfaction," he says. "The bonus structuring situation will never be as it was before."