

The Top Ten Things Women Can Negotiate... *that they might not know they can!*

By Wendy Keller, author of “The Secrets of Successful Negotiating for Women”

www.WendyKeller.com

Women especially seem to get hung up about negotiating. It can seem scary, unfair, tedious, pointless or worse just to step up and ask for what you want, need or deserve. Maybe you feel like you're cheating a vendor if you ask for a better deal. Our childhood conditioning makes us want to “play nice” with others, and somehow, for some women, “nice” and “negotiation” don't go together.

I must protest. I know for certain that with a little shift in perspective, women actually have a lot of advantages that make us *better* negotiators than men. Really. Think about this: remember back to when you and your new friend were playing Barbies? You figured out quickly that if you didn't share the prettiest one, you were going to be playing alone. Guess what? That was a negotiation. You figured out what would be fair – how much time each of you played with her, or which days. You've been doing that all your life. Every mother knows that getting a kid to wash their hands before dinner, eat their veggies before dessert or clean their room before going to the park is a negotiation. You have been negotiating all your life. You're an expert at it. You just need to learn how to apply those well-honed skills to the world of commerce, add some basic skills and techniques, throw in a few core principles, summon some self-assurance and voila! You'll be able to confidently enter into any kind of negotiation. (More on this in my book “The Secrets of Successful Negotiating for Women.”)

Here's what shocks me most: some women haven't noticed that pretty much “everything is negotiable.” I've been to lots of countries where *not* negotiating is an insult to the vendor. But somehow, American women have become willing to pay the sticker price for everything, meekly accepting that as the real value of the goods. Did you know that even at fancy department stores and boutiques you can negotiate a better deal? Absolutely! I know – I do it. So here's a quick overview of the things we girls can negotiate that we might not even consider – and a little bit about how to do it yourself.

1. A discount on damaged goods at a store (grocery or retail). Often 10-30%, sometimes more, because it has a snag, a makeup smudge from someone trying it, is missing a button, a bruise on fruit or veggies, today's expiration date, a package that's been re-sealed, beaten up or opened, etc. Just ask the cashier and if that doesn't work, ask the manager. You'll never get what you don't request.

2. Competitive services, e.g., dry cleaners, carpet cleaning, gardening, dog walkers -- any company that provides services and is NOT the only game in town. If they have 2-3 or more local competitors, you can negotiate successfully. Women often think the service provider will damage or somehow take it out on them if they get a deeper discount than a “regular customer.” Rarely true – they want your continued business and your referrals. Remember: they have the power to say no, just like you do. By telling my gardening crew they could come “any day of the week as long as they came every week”, I saved hundreds of dollars on their services every month. Do you live just 10 minutes from the dentist or the hair salon? Be the “no show filler” in case someone else isn’t there when they should be and get a huge discount. One way to negotiate a better deal: After you’ve gotten the price, politely start the negotiations with “I am going to call XYZ and ABC providers, unless you can offer me a fantastic deal right now. I’d be willing to be flexible on which day you come to do the carpets...” Of course, this is after you’ve done your homework and already know the approximate price you’d be charged if you didn’t negotiate.
3. Expired coupons at stores (Bed, Bath & Beyond, Home Depot, local dry cleaners, etc.) – your coupon for that great discount expired before you wanted or needed to get in there? 9 times out of 10, simply ASKING the cashier or the manager to allow you to use the coupon will get it re-activated just for you “just this once”. Especially in this economy! Why? Because the purpose of a coupon is to get you in. The discount is a “loss leader”, like when you see lettuce on sale for 49 cents a head. They want you to come in and buy other stuff. So when you use the coupon is just fiction intended to make you feel a sense of urgency.
4. Anything sold by an individual or mom-and-pop store. These places are easy to negotiate with - it just takes a little courage to ask them for a deal. Repeat this phrase three times before shopping: “Is that the best price?” I went into a jewelry store in Chinatown in San Francisco and got \$600 off a ring the first time I asked if it was the best price. I turned it over thoughtfully, placed it on the counter and said I’d have to think about it, it was still too expensive. I acted as if I was about to leave. She gave me another \$180 off – which made it exactly the price I’d decided I was willing to pay when I first saw it in the window.
5. Construction and handyman services – if you tell the company/guy that you know all the people on the block or in your building, and you really do, tell him you’ll pass along your reference and his name/card/brochure to all of them, or that you’ll let him put a sign in your yard, etc. (make sure you negotiate for HOW LONG it can be there) if he does a good job at a fair/discounted price and on schedule.
6. An upgrade when travelling -- I find this works better on cars and hotels than on airlines. But on my way to the Dr. Phil show, I simply asked the rental car clerk for an upgrade. He gave me a car four levels above the one I had originally

reserved – for less than \$20 more per day than I was already willing to pay. In hotels, especially if you are at the front desk, ask for an upgraded room, a food coupon, a discount, a “nice customer” discount (especially if the person ahead of you was a jerk). I almost always get one of those. (I never ask for them all from the same person/hotel.)

7. A raise – You’re kidding, right? No. I’m not. Here’s the secret: figure out WHY this is in your boss’ best interests. Be prepared. Know the facts. I have a doctor friend whose office manager came in and said, “I’ve been with you two years, working four days a week. With bonuses this year, I’m making only 5% more than I made last year. Therefore, I am giving you two options: either you give me \$X thousand per year raise starting today and I’ll work 5 days a week OR I’ll keep this current salary and only work three.” My friend, a wise negotiator, said he’d get back to her and called his CPA. The CPA laughed. She said the employee was mistaken – she was making almost 15% more this year than she was last – she’d miscalculated her wages. My friend instantly took the office manager up on her offer to work five days a week at the price she’d named – and pocketed an extra \$6,430 a year in savings. Figure out the real cost to your employer of having you work. Include taxes, vacation, a desk, supplies you use. Can you save the whole company money on supplies? Could you work flex-time and save them money? Be creative – but always present a raise request from how it will either make or save your boss money – more than you’re asking for. Don’t mention the fact your kid needs braces – no one grants a raise out of sympathy. By putting your request in the other person’s terms, you give yourself negotiation strength.
8. Discounts on grooming services (hair, nails, even cosmetic surgery) – There are some people who will NOT want to give you a discount on this stuff but guess what? They need your business. So what about extras? Can they throw in a trim? How about a shampoo? A free touch up? Spa services? Women worry people are going to do something evil if they agree to do the job for a discount. Guess what? Especially now, businesses are hurting. They can’t get the prices they got last year, and they may be a little slow to lower them formally on paper. But they are craving your business more than ever – and will be grateful for the money you DO give them. Of course, don’t make a rude offer, but expect success with a reasonable one. And tip generously when appropriate.
9. Rent (on an apartment, storage space, condo, party goods, backhoes, etc.) – Rental prices are always about supply and demand. If your kid’s birthday is on or near the same day as a national holiday, chances are no party store is going to give you a break. But a week earlier or later? Step right up, Ma’am. Same with an apartment. Look around. Check out Craigslist and the chubby little magazines in the grocery stores. What’s the competition for a tenant? If there are more apartments available than there are people renting, you can negotiate. If there are more people renting than there are apartments available, you cannot. But that doesn’t mean you can’t ask for that dent in the door to be fixed before

you move in, and the walls, since they're going to repaint them anyway, to be in a color you prefer.

10. Love, dating, marriage and sex – Bet you didn't expect this on the list. Why do women think we don't have an equal right to be treated right? Why do so many single women "put out" and then get angry when the guy still isn't falling in love? Why do women allow themselves to be pushed into marriage, or wonder why the guy they love isn't popping the question? Having been single, in love, married, divorced and been on 3,000 first dates (or so it seems), I have a strong opinion about why women often get the "short end of the stick." It's the same problem we have getting what we want in other situations. It comes down to this: not having the confidence, skills and strength to negotiate properly. And if the guy still won't budge? You have the right to walk away from a bad deal in your personal life just like the carpet cleaner has the right to refuse to clean your whole house for \$40. You have the right to get what you want and need from your partner. You have the right to be in charge of your body and not use it as a negotiation tool. You deserve to get what you need in this area of your life just as much as you do from the commonplace things above. (More on this in my book "The Cult of the Born Again Virgin: How Single Women Can Reclaim Their Sexual Power.")

Learn the skills of negotiation and they will serve you well in every area of your life. There's not one part of human existence that isn't affected by the principles of negotiation. Mastering them isn't all that hard – you just need to know what to do, practice a little and have the confidence that most of the time, things will go your way. Good luck!

For more information, get a copy of "The Secrets of Successful Negotiating for Women" or go to www.WendyKeller.com for information on presentations on this and other topics of interest to women.

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