

Q & A



with
Dr. Rachel Needle

I have been in my current position for two years. While I receive a small annual bonus, there is never talk about a raise and my responsibilities have grown. I am frustrated but I'm not the most confident person. I think my boss has figured that out. How do I tell her I want a raise?

Asking for a raise, or being assertive and asking for what we want in general, can be difficult. Simply knowing that you deserve a raise shows confidence. Doing adequate research to support your request will help build that confidence even further. Do you know the salaries of others in your position? How often does the company give raises? What is the cost of living in your state? Next, request an appointment with your boss, preferably after you have successfully completed a big project or taken on new responsibilities. Rehearse your request in the mirror or with a friend or family member. This will build your confidence. At the meeting, bring your research as well as a list of your accomplishments from the past six to 12 months. Be clear on what type of raise you are looking for (e.g. a 3-percent increase or an actual number). Dress professionally. Be polite, respectful, positive and persistent. Above all, know your worth and value and be confident! If your raise is refused, ask for an explanation. If you continue to be passed up for the compensation you deserve and don't feel appreciated for the extra responsibilities you have taken on, then perhaps you should begin looking for another position. If you do receive a raise, ask your boss for an annual performance review where together you can discuss your professional growth and compensation.

My little brother has it all: great marriage, well-adjusted children and financial success. I'm divorced, my own child is in therapy and I'm pretty much living paycheck to paycheck. My parents are always telling me to ask my brother for advice. I think he just got lucky but I feel like a loser. How do I handle my jealous and inferior feelings?

It sounds like you don't feel very good about yourself at the moment. While there might naturally be some jealousy or envy in regards to your brother's situation, this may not be about your brother at all. You may be projecting your feelings about yourself onto your brother. The most important thing for you to do is work on processing how you feel about the events—divorce, difficulty with your child and financial stress—that have transpired in your own life. It might be helpful to do this with a therapist. The therapist can work with you on identifying your negative thought patterns and replacing them with more positive ones. The second step to work on is self-acceptance. You are where you are right now, and where you are is OK. The world might feel heavy, but if you can put your judgments toward yourself away and focus on being mindful, it will lighten your load. Work on being happy for your brother, regardless of whether he got lucky or is responsible for the life that he has. Once you are able to gain some self-acceptance and empathy (not to be confused with sympathy) for yourself, I am certain that some of this jealousy will go away.

I have a close male friend who has been in my life since college. We have always been "just friends." Lately though, I have had feelings toward him that I don't understand. I think I might be falling in love with him. Should I tell him or keep it to myself?

First, falling in love with your best friend is not uncommon. This happens for a number of reasons. Similarity breeds attraction. The more time you spend with someone, the more likely you are to be attracted to him. In addition, given that he is your best friend, it is likely that you enjoy each other's company and have a lot in common. Before you act on your feelings, spend time dissecting the ones that you "don't understand." They may not truly be feelings of love. Pay attention to signs. Has he reciprocated your feelings in any way? Does he flirt with you? Is there more physical contact between you? This situation may be tricky. While I am a big fan of open communication and authenticity, don't jump the gun. If you tell him and the feeling is mutual, then hooray. Let the fun and romance begin. On the other hand, if he does not reciprocate your feelings, then your relationship could change. Think about whether your friendship is mature enough to survive such an experience.

My husband has always looked through my cell phone. I have nothing to hide so I haven't said anything about it. Does this mean he doesn't trust me or is he just nosy? Should I accept this quirk, or politely ask him to stop, and how do I go about it without him feeling attacked?

Couples in successful relationships develop and implement rules together that are respected by both parties. If you have never communicated about this issue and do not have rules and boundaries regarding cell phones, then this is the time to set them. You have two options: You can accept that your husband will check your phone regularly and surrender to that, or you can openly and kindly communicate with him how you feel about his checking your phone. Work toward understanding what it is that compels him to do this. It may have very little or nothing to do with you, and more to do with his history or personal issues. An honest conversation will be an entry point to establish the terms for your cell phone agreement going forward.

How do I handle 40-year-old mean girls who are gossiping about me? What's the healthiest reaction? Do I take it on or ignore it?

The ignoring card always wins because eventually the gossip will be replaced by another juicy detail. People will forget and move on. But if the whispering is too intense for you to look the other way, then confront it in a forceful but courteous manner. What hurts you about the gossip? What is the trigger point? Your healthiest reaction will depend on that. By confronting the gossipers, you are calling attention to their negative behavior. Some people will react positively and see their wrongdoings. Unfortunately, some will continue. Either way, express your feelings rather than placing blame. This makes it harder for them to become defensive. Make a mental note about these people, no longer confide in them and keep your distance.

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