

**Publication: TWSJ Online**

**Date: 8 June 2023**

**Headline: Job Applicants Can Support a Company's Mission—and Still Ask for More Money**

## **Job Applicants Can Support a Company's Mission—and Still Ask for More Money**

Research suggests that would-be employees fear that negotiating for a higher salary will make them look selfish



Want to work for a company that says it makes the world a better place? Be careful—you might feel guilted out of asking for higher pay.

Job postings today are peppered with language promoting an organization's mission, its purpose and the importance of making an impact. But those positive messages can have a chilling effect on applicants. In several studies, my colleagues and I found that the social messages in job postings make people think it would be a bad idea to ask for more money. They fear that the managers will think of them as selfish, or that company values make salary requests taboo.

Great reluctance

To be clear, the problem isn't that companies advertise broad social initiatives—known as social impact framing—or that they want employees to genuinely care about the work itself. Longstanding research has even shown that corporate social programs can benefit employees, who enjoy a greater sense of motivation and meaningfulness when their work demonstrably makes a positive difference.

But this notion of higher purpose can make applicants wary of seeking higher pay.

My colleagues and I tested this idea over five experiments that measured how applicants handled salary negotiations with different companies: Some were described with phrases such as "mission orientation," "higher purpose" and "giving back," while others weren't. We didn't say whether the company was a nonprofit, engaged in charitable giving or could afford

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higher wages; our focus was on the language or framing used to describe the work, regardless of the company's business model.

Social Impact on Pay

Job applicants in recent studies were significantly less likely to ask for more pay when the hypothetical job posting used social impact language.

Probability of negotiating pay

The results were remarkably consistent. Across the studies, job candidates exposed to social impact framing told us the company would see it as crass or inappropriate to ask for material rewards like a higher salary—so they avoided negotiating for more.

In the first study, 392 participants provided open-ended responses as to whether they would ask for higher pay at hypothetical companies, along with their rationale. Those who were given social impact framing were 32 percentage points less likely to say “yes” to negotiating. In addition, the group who gave negative responses was more than twice as likely as the control group to use phrases such as “doing so would be taboo,” “make you look selfish if you asked,” and “would likely make the organization less interested in hiring me.”

In the second and third studies, we tested the effect in real-world contexts. In one, we asked 438 undergraduate students whether they would ask for more money for a purportedly real on-campus job opportunity. In the other, we asked 1,525 online workers recruited from a crowdsourcing marketplace to bid for a purported writing-related task.

In each case, the odds of negotiating were approximately 42 percentage points lower when the work was framed in social impact terms. Survey responses showed that this was driven by workers' perceptions that they would be violating the organization's expectations for employee motivation by showing interest in higher pay.

Our fourth study replicated the effects above, while our fifth study showed that effects held across a range of industries—from education to financial services.

A matter of perception

Why did this happen? We theorize that the applicants assumed that managers and companies had motivation purity bias—thinking that employees who are interested in a job's material rewards care less about the work itself. And, indeed, previous research has shown that this bias does affect managers' decisions.

That means few applicants want to be seen as the person who gives priority to money over more lofty, altruistic goals. You either love the work itself and want to help others or care about material rewards like higher pay. It can't be both.

But that attitude is simply romanticizing. Research shows that people often do their jobs better when they get a combination of extrinsic rewards like high salary and intrinsic ones like idealism about a mission.

The consequences of holding back on salary requests can be huge. Previous research has shown that fear of asking for even a small increase in starting pay can cost people hundreds of thousands of dollars over the course of a career. For companies, skimping on pay because of misguided beliefs can lead to missed opportunities to boost performance and productivity.

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How to overcome the bias? Employees should do research on companies to see how the businesses react to salary requests. For their part, companies can create greater pay transparency, use objective criteria to set salary and train managers to watch out for bias.

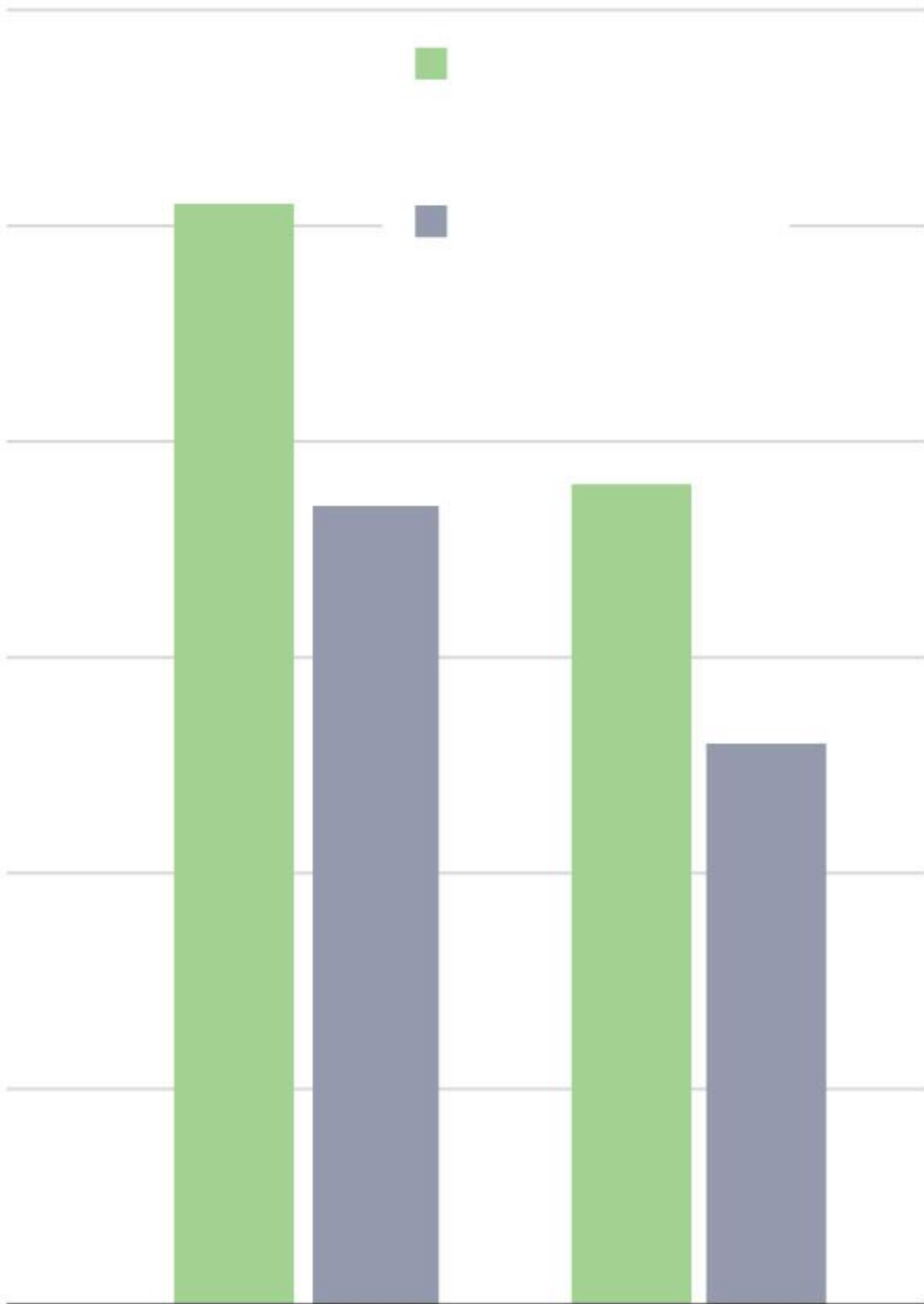
Passion for work is wonderful. But we shouldn't romanticize it as the only legitimate reason to take a job.

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