

NEGOTIATING: EFFECTIVELY COMMUNICATING YOUR VALUE

Allergan recognizes the important role women eye care practitioners play in the optometric and ophthalmic communities. Visionary Insights for Eye Care Women—VIEW—is an initiative established by Allergan that is dedicated to supporting and promoting women optometrists and ophthalmologists.

This article marks the last in a series that appeared in *Advanced Ocular Care*, its sister publication, *Cataract & Refractive Surgery Today*, and the online publication, *MillennialEYE* (www.millennialeye.com).



GINA WESLEY, OD, MS

When I negotiated for my first job as an optometrist, I put together an analysis of the income that I could bring into the clinic. I estimated the exam revenue I would generate, and I also estimated some write-offs to be realistic. I think this exercise sends a message to your interviewer that you understand that there is a cost to having you as an employee. The people that I interviewed with really appreciated my analysis; that is a big part of showing your value to the practice.

An effective negotiator is fair and has conviction. You should have an understanding of what it is that you are asking for—from the employer's perspective as well as your own. You should be ready to demonstrate what you can bring to the table that the group does not already have. Be confident in backing up your requests with that fairness in mind.

You should also know the absolute minimum you will accept, and be prepared to walk away if you do not get it. Do not accept a situation about which you may ultimately end up feeling bitter. No one wins in that situation. Be prepared for some back and forth dialogue in which you confidently communicate and justify what you are asking for, whether it is a certain schedule, benefits, or pay level.

One of the mistakes people make when negotiating is not considering all aspects of the job offer, such as paid time off, educational and travel stipends, professional organization memberships, work schedule, bonuses, and even future buy-in options or employment agreements, such as guaranteed raises. Some of these may be an easy accommodation for your potential employer. Be sure to ask.

I believe that women in particular have some trepidation regarding their ability to communicate their worth and back it up. I recommend practicing. I role-played with my husband, and it was helpful when I was negotiating my first position's starting pay. There are women who are superior negotiators and who know what they bring to the table. But, on average, women are still paid less than men for the same type and hours of work in our industry.



JILL C. AUTRY, OD, RPH

One of the most important tips to remember when planning a negotiation—whether you are just starting out after graduation or you have worked with someone for a while—is knowing about the person with whom you will be negotiating. As a new graduate, you can use social media, look

at the office website, and have discussions with former employees to find as much information as you can. If you have worked with the person before, you understand his or her personality and interests. Knowing your audience, similar to when lecturing, is key to raising your position and making your mark. Make it a point to research what the practice is looking for right now and what they want for the future. Also, finding out what the practice may be lacking can help you during your negotiation.

To be an effective negotiator, make a list of what sets you apart from other candidates. Employers are not necessarily looking for someone who was at the top of his or her class, but someone who has a good work ethic, is motivated, and willing to increase his or her value even after finishing his or her education. For example, I am a partner in a multicenter, multidisciplinary eye care practice, with both ophthalmologists and optometrists. I came into this practice as a student extern, and it fascinated me. One day, I overheard the doctors discussing their interest in starting a residency program. Later, I told them that I could be their first resident and would help them establish the program. Fortunately, I knew about residency programs because I was previously a pharmacist and was familiar with residency programs through that experience. By offering them something they wanted and taking a lot of the minutiae out of the process for them, I was able to get my foot in the door. I framed it as something that would contribute to the practice long-term and help it grow.

Most people do a residency and leave, but I wanted a permanent job so I looked for ways during the residency to make myself more appealing to the practice. Although the

practice is in Texas, one thing I noticed was that most of the doctors did not speak Spanish. During my residency, I took evening Spanish classes and used that as well as my ability to develop the next resident to negotiate a permanent position.

Instead of merely listing what you did in school, show how you will go above and beyond to increase your value as an employee. This can help you negotiate a better position or a higher salary. You should research the salaries for your market, and base what you ask for on that plus what you have done to distinguish yourself from other candidates. Doctors interviewing new graduates often report that new optometrists believe they should be making a certain salary because they have a degree. Trying to negotiate based on your education only will not get you very far.

In my opinion, the biggest mistake people make when negotiating is giving up too easily. I believe this is especially true of new graduates and women physicians. Instead, ask the person hiring for the reasoning behind his or her decision, then counter each concern while asking him or her to see your point of view. If your requests are still denied, and you think you have proven your worth, you have to be willing to walk away.



MARGARET FOLEY, OD

Over the years, I have negotiated many things, from convincing patients of the importance of making good choices with regard to eye care and eyewear, to asking banks to loan me money to start my practice.

The most important tip when negotiating is to know everything you can about whom-ever you are negotiating with. Get to know the company and its values. If you were referred, ask that person about the hiring manager's strengths and weaknesses, and find out his or her position and reputation within the company.

Understand your goals and remember that everything is negotiable, in everything we do. The power is in your hands, and you can accept what comes your way, or you can advocate for yourself. Although people who advocate for themselves generally do have better results, women tend to be poor at doing so. Be able to communicate what is acceptable and what is not acceptable. If your requests are denied, understand that you have not lost anything by asking for it. You only have things to gain. A "no" is an opportunity for another negotiation. Always be able to walk away.

It is important to explain to the person hiring that you know how to improve the practice's bottom line. How can you help that physician do better? Maybe you can bring ocular surface disease management to the practice if they do not offer it, or vision therapy, or some subspecialty that you are passionate about. If you are asking for a raise, do not just ask for more money. Instead, explain how you can make that additional salary for the practice so that your raise does not affect the bottom line. Look at the numbers: Calculate the number of patients you have seen, how much you have earned for the practice, etc. It is critical to examine the numbers on paper to convince the employer of your value.

If you would like to delve deeper, there are many great business books I would recommend. One of my favorite authors is Simon Sinek, the author of *Start With Why* and *Leaders Eat Last*, the latter of which is helpful for those who own their own practices. *ROE Powers ROI* by Michael Rose is about the ultimate way to think and communicate for ridiculous results; it is an excellent book. For women, *It's Not Business, It's Personal: The 9 Relationship Principles That Power Your Career* by Ronna Lichtenberg is great. Her No. 1 thing is to always remember that it pays to be personal. It is important to understand the person with whom you interview because that really helps you influence him or her. ■

Gina Wesley, OD, MS

- In private practice at Complete Eye Care of Medina in Minnesota
- drwesley@cecofmedina.com

Jill C. Autry, OD, RPh

- In private practice at Eye Center of Texas in Houston
- jill_autry@hotmail.com

Margaret Foley, OD

- In private practice at Foley Vision Center, Eugene, Oregon
- Adjunct clinical professor at Pacific University's College of Optometry
- Senior board examiner for the National Board of Examiners of Optometry
- mfoley@foleyvisioncenter.com

