The Confidence Gap, the Pay Gap, and Some Solutions

The AAUW’s “Graduating to a Pay Gap” study found that seven percent of the pay gap for women can’t be explained by choice of major, college attended, career path pursued, or other factors.¹ So what causes this seven percent? Discrimination? It surely plays a part, but in recent years researchers have spent a lot of time focusing on how women’s confidence plays into the pay-gap equation. And the results are astounding. Women are, as a group, significantly less confident academically and professionally than their male counterparts. Because of this, qualified women end up in low-paying jobs, forgoing advancement opportunities, avoiding negotiating for salary, and hesitating to take on leadership roles.²

The confidence gap starts in school and follows women throughout their careers. Although collegiate women earn better grades than men, “they tend to suffer from comparatively low academic confidence.”⁴ Women’s overall lack of confidence also leads to lower starting salaries after graduation. Women are four times less likely to initiate salary negotiations than men, and when women do negotiate, they ask for 30% less than a man does.² The failure to negotiate, or to negotiate for the best salary, isn’t just an inherent female trait, it “stems from a lack of confidence.”² In fact, data suggests that women “effectively believe they are 20 percent less valuable than men believe they are.”² This lack of confidence also holds women back from pursuing leadership roles at work. In a 2015 KPMG study, more than 60% of women expressed a desire to serve in corporate leadership roles.³ So where is the disconnect? Confidence. Women self-report a lack of confidence as holding them back from leadership roles, which in turn holds them back from advancement opportunities.³ After all, taking on leadership roles is key to life-long success, regardless of your field.

So what can we do to close this confidence gap? And what is the Center doing to help? Read on to page 2 to find out.
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There is no one quick fix to solve each woman’s individual confidence woes, but there are several evidence-based methods for addressing confidence on a macro level. Studies suggest that the three best ways to help women gain the requisite confidence is to provide skills-based learning and leadership opportunities, highlight role models, and recognize women’s accomplishments. That’s just what we do at the Center. And this Equal Pay Day the Center, alongside a consortium of University Career Centers, is hosting a salary negotiation skills workshop to help fight the pay gap and the confidence gap in fell swoop.

The workshop’s design is intentional. Research tells us that women do not feel comfortable doing something unless they have experience with it. So attendees will learn to (1) identify the appropriate starting salary for their field, (2) see what a negotiation is and learn tips for how to succeed in one, (3) get tips from our expert panel, and (4) practice the skills they have learned in small break-out groups so that by the time the 2 hours are up, attendees leave ready to initiate and succeed in their first salary negotiation. Want to attend the Salary Negotiation Skills Workshop yourself? Join us in the Spooner Commons at 5:30pm on April 12th, it’s free and open to everyone!

Giving women a safe place to take action and fail, and in so doing teaching them to aim for “good enough” not “perfect,” is the best way to help them gain the confidence necessary for success.

—The Confidence Gap (Link Below)

Resources

Sexual Assault Awareness Month Calendar (with more event details): https://sapec.ku.edu/calendar

ETC4WGE: www.emilytaylorcenter.ku.edu

The Confidence Gap: www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/05/the-confidence-gap/359815/

The Office of Diversity and Equity: www.diversity.ku.edu
Bibliography


4. Linda Sax, Her College Experience is Not His, 55 Chronicle of Higher Education (Sept. 26, 2008)

Want to Learn More About the Pay Gap or the Confidence Gap? Email Nicki Rose at nickirose@ku.edu for research she has compiled that was used in the writing of this newsletter.