

President's Message

I could use this column to update you on the new business processes we have in place at the office, or to tell you that WLAM renewed our contract with AMR for another six (6) months, or to tell you how excited I am about our new Great Lakes Bay Region. All of these things are important, but they aren't as important as what I'd really like to talk to you about today: WLAM's support of legislation to help improve pay equity in Michigan.

Jennifer Salvatore, Gender Equity Committee Chair, and her committee have been working closely with State Representative Rebekah Warren (and other women advocacy groups) to help promote pay equity legislation -specifically addressing wage secrecy. How can a woman negotiate her salary when she doesn't have sufficient information about what a job truly pays?

It reminds me of a situation that happened over 20 years ago. Annie was a successful manager at a large corporation in Michigan. Annie prepared herself to negotiate an increase in salary (and a bonus) with her boss, a male Vice President at the company. Annie could provide data to show how she had increased revenues at the company. Her performance reviews were always "Exceeding expectations."

Annie thought she had aggressively negotiated her salary and bonus. The Executive Board rejected her request for an increase, using the standard objections: "this is all we can pay for this year," "I'm sorry, the board froze budgets this year and there will be no increases in salary or bonuses," and "no performance merits this year- we didn't make enough profit." As far as Annie knew, her salary was in line with other salaries within the company.

The following month, Annie needed to hire someone to fill a new position on her team. The most promising candidate was a man. Annie discussed the salary with him, explaining that there was no room to negotiate. The candidate accepted the pay. The candidate's second interview was with Annie's boss, the Vice President. The candidate was hired, paperwork was processed, and he joined Annie's team, reporting to her.

Six months into the year, Annie began the budget review process. It was at that time Annie found out that her new employee, her subordinate, was hired in at \$10,000 more than she was being paid and \$20,000 more than the job had been budgeted for. He also was receiving a bigger bonus than she was! Annie addressed this with the Vice President and Human Resources and was given the business reasons why this pay was justified, even why they went "outside" budget. Management, overwhelmingly men (only 25% of management were women and the Executive Board had only one female officer), increased Annie's bonus by \$5,000 to appease her.

This is just one woman's story. I have no doubt that each and every one of you could share a story about pay and compensation inequities you have personally experienced.

As your President, I am asking that you support the pay equity initiative in any way you can. We will be sending out more information as it becomes available. We are asking you to write to your legislators, participate at events, come to WLAM's annual meeting to get educated, hold house parties and teas to educate your neighbors and friends, cross-network with other women professional groups, and talk to everyone about the impact of this legislation and why it is important to support it.

Let's make 2010 the year for big change!

Kim Winokur

WLAM President