

Let salary issues stay confidential

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By tradition, your salary is a private matter between yourself and your employer and not a topic for comparison and point-scoring among fellow-employees.

In support of this principle, your contract often forbids disclosure of the figure, even after you've moved on to your next job. But this "restriction" has proved difficult to enforce, and casual gossip about salaries is clearly impossible to outlaw completely.

Furthermore, other "perks", such as different grades of company supplied housing or car, are impossible to conceal. Nonetheless, employees may feel that they have the right to check that they are not lagging behind others in the same category i.e. doing the same job with similar responsibilities - but perhaps in another department.

My opinion is that the confidentiality principle here is quite sound because it is the prerogative of management to set the remuneration for every employee as an individual case. It is not the right of the individual to compare salaries and to complain that he or she should be paid more because the person in the next office is on a different salary scale.

Worth of an employee

There are many aspects to evaluating the worth of an employee and the amount that should be paid for a particular job at a specific location and the only person who has all that information is the recruiting manager.

It is rather like the government of a country. We may complain about various laws and services, but we are not in receipt of all the relevant facts - only the law-making authority has all such information. Inevitably, this means that may be instances where a person in one department, with virtually the same duties and responsibilities as someone else in another department, but within the same company, is being paid on a different salary scale.

There can be any one of many reasons for this, ranging from the assessment of individual ability to company policy considerations.

Imprudent disclosure

On another note, I remember once observing one effect of the imprudent disclosure of salaries, when I worked for the Samaritans - a confidential crisis helpline agency. I took a call from a famous dressmaker, who was suffering from depression and who, in her career, had been totally identified with one particular short-lived fashion.

When that fashion passed, she was embarrassingly unemployable. One couturier took pity on her and gave her a job in the workroom, but nobody guessed what a tiny salary she'd settled for. Then one of the accountants mentioned it and before long the whole office knew. It was a terrible blow to this once-proud figure of the industry. She never worked again.

I think we should keep such a story in mind.

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