

# The best salary negotiation tactic might be too awkward for most people to try

By [Shana Lebowitz](#)

July 26, 2018

Psychologists often talk about the supposed benefits of [embracing discomfort](#). The idea is that, by leaning into feelings like anxiety and anger instead of resisting them, you'll take away their power to consume you whole.

This idea has always [held a lot of appeal for me](#), but I haven't always been sure how to put it into practice.

So I had a lightbulb moment towards the end of Melissa Dahl's book "[Cringeworthy](#)," in which she describes a very practical strategy for acknowledging your discomfort and giving it a big ol' hug.

Dahl writes specifically about embracing the inherent awkwardness during a salary negotiation. She quotes Katie Donovan, founder of the consultancy firm Equal Pay Negotiations, saying that the first step in a negotiation "is to be silent, hush up, or SHUT UP!"

Donovan said that if you're offered a starting salary that's lower than what you know is the median salary for this position, you can say something like: "Thank you for the offer. I'm a little surprised about the salary, though. Based on my research I would have expected it to be in the [X] range."

Even if the hiring manager raises her eyebrows; even if he gasps in horror, don't backpedal, and don't run your mouth out of nervousness.

As Dahl writes, the hiring manager "might not be able to reach the number you're asking for, but let *them* tell you that; don't undercut yourself by saying that for them."

A top executive says she uses the awkward-silence strategy to win negotiations

Alison Green, the woman behind the popular "Ask a Manager" advice column, has said something similar. On an episode of the [Ask a Manager podcast](#), Green tells a confused caller to ask, "Any chance you can go up to X?" and then stop talking.

Green said: "Wait for an answer. It might take them a minute, there might be a pause there. That's totally okay. Sometimes people get really nervous when there's a pause there and they start talking again to fill in the silence, and then they end up undercutting themselves and kind of backtracking. Say the words and then wait."

Note that this strategy isn't used exclusively by knock-kneed entry-level employees. It's also used by the likes of Joanna Coles, who is the chief content officer at Hearst Magazines, and has served as editor-in-chief of both Marie Claire and Cosmopolitan magazines.

On an episode of Business Insider's podcast, "[This is Success](#)," Coles shared with Business Insider US editor-in-chief Alyson Shontell her best strategy for [winning a negotiation](#): silence.

"In any kind of negotiation, silence is often your best friend because you don't want to give too much away," Coles told Shontell. "I'm always amazed when I'm negotiating with people from the other side of the desk, how people will rattle on and not stop talking. People talk a lot when they're nervous."

Dahl quotes Green, the Ask a Manager columnist, in "Cringeworthy," too. "My advice is that you should embrace it," Green said of awkwardness at work, "and find the humor in it."

*This [article](#) first appeared on [Business Insider](#).*