

# HR Examiner

*Examining practical HR issues business owners  
and managers encounter every day*

## Pay Equity

Arlene Vernon

Recently Matt Krumrie from the StarTribune contacted me to help respond to a question from one of his readers. Whether you're an employee connecting with this situation or a manager dealing with this situation, compensation and pay equity is an issue that we've all faced and are likely to face again.

[Here's a link to the article](#), or read below, and see what resonates with you.

### **I THINK I'M BEING PAID LESS THAN MY MALE COLLEAGUE**

**Dear Matt:** I'm a female employee who believes I'm being paid less than a male colleague at my company for doing the same job. I don't know if this is true, but it's really eating away at me. We do the same job – we even sit right by each other. How could I find out if we are making the same salary or if he's making more – and if so, what could I do about this?

**Matt says:** There are many, many factors that come into play here, and one specific answer likely wouldn't provide the response you are looking for. But it's important to understand how two people doing the same job could be paid differently based on these factors.

“Compensation is always such a difficult issue and one that we take personally as employees,” says Twin Cities human resources consultant Arlene Vernon (arlenevernon.com). “It’s important to recognize that employees are paid different rates for a variety of reasons, which could include more experience, more education, length of service, job performance or just better negotiation of pay at time of hire.

“There’s no law that says that two employees doing the same job have to be paid the same rate. And most often, they’re not.”

As difficult as it may be, put gender aside for a moment, says Brad Lelemsis (@TalentMattersMN), a Twin Cities-based talent acquisition leader. Ask yourself:

- How do factors such as company tenure, education, unique technical skills and years of experience come into the equation? How do you measure up in those areas?
- What was your last performance review score? Were there areas mentioned that you needed to improve – and have you worked on improving them?

If you bring this situation to your boss, don’t bring up the “you versus him” angle. Instead, ask your boss for an honest assessment of what areas you are strong in and what areas you are lacking.

Focus the conversation on how you can better perform your job, while also pointing out the successes you have achieved.

“It may be there is a gap between how you view yourself versus how the organization views you,” says Lelemsis. “Maybe your boss is simply not aware of what you have done or accomplished, so this could be an opportunity to communicate some of those successes.”

Vernon agreed.

“I don’t recommend going in to a supervisor with a sense that you’re underpaid and try to negotiate from there,” she said. “That’s starting from a weak negotiating place. Merely pointing to another person’s pay will not inspire your supervisor to increase your pay. Sell yourself and the value you bring to the company. That could be a more successful tactic.”



I think that one of the important points that comes out of this dialogue is that many employees do not understand the how and why of their pay. Organizations with fully open compensation structures (which doesn’t necessarily work in every organization) tend to have more discussions regarding their compensation philosophy, why a position is in a certain pay grade, how they apply the minimum, midpoint, and maximum of each pay range and why the employee is paid where they are in the range.

If you as manager are not having that type of pay discussion periodically with your employees (most likely done at review time), just assume they have questions regarding whether they’re being paid fairly and mindfully. Even if they don’t agree with the reasoning behind their pay, at least the method behind the madness isn’t a secret. For this discussion to be more motivating, tie it into a career planning discussion and what skills, experiences and results they need to achieve to move up the pay range/structure.

## About Arlene Vernon

Arlene has provided HR consulting and management training services to over 300 organizations since starting HRx, Inc. in 1992.

If you’re seeking a hands-on, practical HRxpert to assist your organization with employee relations,

policy development, strategic HR activities or fun/doable management training, call on Arlene – Your HRxpert.

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