



YOUR BEST SALARY IS COMPLETELY TRANSPARENT

GEN Z FINANCE EXPERT
HANNAH WILLIAMS EXPLAINS HOW
BROADCASTING YOUR PAYCHECK MAY
BOOST YOUR EARNING POTENTIAL.

BY JENNIFER
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ANNAH WILLIAMS

wants you to share your salary information with strangers.

She was just 24, earning \$90,000 a year (“More money than I had ever seen in my life!”) as a government contractor in Washington, D.C., when she realized that she was making almost \$25,000 less than the average salary for her position.

Williams had taken on more responsibilities at her job a few months prior. A colleague left the company, doubling her workload, and the company had no plans to replace him. Burned out and buried under work, she knew it was time to take action. She researched the market to discover what a job with her new scope of work would pay. Spoiler alert: *Way more*. When she brought her findings to her boss, he told her that she had to be with the company at least a year before she would even qualify for a raise. And, then, it couldn’t be more than a 3-5% increase. It was “a rude awakening” for Williams to discover that she was not being fairly compensated and that an accepted offer is often difficult, or impossible, to change.

Williams decided to look for a new job and negotiate her pay for the first time in her life. At her initial interview, a recruiter asked her what her salary requirements were. She was about to say \$105,000. That’s when she took a breath and asked, “What is your budget?” When the recruiter answered “\$115,000,” she realized that she had almost undercut herself by \$10,000 dollars.

“That was the moment... I was very much impacted by pay transparency,” says Williams, now 27. Williams loved the job and felt well compensated. “But I just couldn’t shake the experience and couldn’t move on from it,” she says.

Williams decided she wanted to help others get paid what they deserved. She began creating videos on her own personal TikTok account, sharing her experience, her salary, her negotiation techniques and how she found her market rate. Her videos went viral.

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A TIKTOK STAR IS BORN

"I just had this light bulb idea," she says. "Let me go out on the street and ask people how much they make—because people obviously want to know this—and what better way to show the value of transparency than by talking to strangers?"

She and her husband, James Daniels, filmed her first interview in Georgetown in northwest Washington, D.C., on April 16, 2022, and posted it later that night. By the next day, it had already gone viral. Three weeks later, she quit her job to pursue her new influencer career full time; her husband joined her one month later. Her channel, Salary Transparent Street, had 1.3 million followers at the time of publication, and she usually shares around five to six new videos a week.

Williams had tapped into an audience hungry for this shadowy information—knowledge that had been buried by corporate gatekeepers for ages: *Just how much were people actually getting paid?*

BREAKING A 'TABOO'

"Pay transparency is taboo because corporations have told us it is," she says. "I think it's a matter of working people being victimized by capitalism and corporate America because employees are the only ones who benefit from pay transparency."

In fact, women and minorities are positioned to benefit from pay transparency most of all. If you identify with any group who is affected by bias in any form, "you are probably gonna be affected by pay secrecy," Williams says. But, by openly discussing salaries, people become aware of pay gaps in their field based on gender, race, disability, age and other factors. This awareness can empower marginalized groups to better advocate for themselves and negotiate more effectively.

According to Williams, pay disparities on an institutional level are due to individuals deciding salaries, rather than companies establishing specific, predetermined pay structures that create a more even playing field. She believes that setting pay structures can provide more pay transparency and fairness. "I think a lot of corporations

see [calculating salaries] as 'Houdini Math,'" she says. "[But,] it's really just making sure that you understand what the pay bands are for different roles in your organization, from a high end to a low end."

Williams cites companies like the software company Buffer who are doing this well. A fully salary-transparent company since 2010, Buffer openly shares their formula for salaries and compensation directly on their website. However, for those companies who are slow to change, many local and state governments are passing laws to force them to adapt.

LEGISLATING PAY TRANSPARENCY

Currently, several states and jurisdictions have pay transparency laws. Williams cites California, Nevada, Washington and Colorado as leaders in the movement. Williams, herself, was asked to testify in support of new Washington, D.C., legislation for pay transparency, which was signed by Mayor Muriel Bowser in January. The law requires all employers to list the salary ranges in job descriptions, and they are prohibited from asking about employees' previous salary history. Williams testified on behalf of a similar law in Virginia.

Williams sees salary transparency as a nonpartisan issue. "[It's] not a left or right issue," she says. "It's a pro-worker issue." Williams' goal is to get as involved as possible with different legislation; she hopes to travel to some red states and lobby their representatives to see the value of legislation like this as a bilateral bill.

But, even if you live in a state without any pay transparency laws, Williams has created a valuable resource that can help you earn more. Together with her team, she launched a comprehensive salary database in July 2023, available for free on her Salary Transparent Street website, where you can search over 10,000 salaries—for positions ranging from nurse to IT director to accountant—in all 50 states.

CURRENTLY, SEVERAL STATES AND JURISDICTIONS HAVE PAY TRANSPARENCY LAWS. WILLIAMS CITES CALIFORNIA, NEVADA, WASHINGTON AND COLORADO AS LEADERS IN THE MOVEMENT.

Williams says the database is a way of taking their street interviews one step further, as they can "only be in so many places at once," she says. "Our database is really cool because it builds in the contextual factors needed to do correct market research." Data points include things such as years of experience, educational background, location, even industry and company size. All information is submitted completely anonymously to protect privacy.

"[The database] is our way of taking pay transparency to the next level and really turning our brand not just into a media platform," she says. "But into a technology that helps people with their market research.... Having confidence [in negotiation] comes from doing that market research.... It makes the negotiation 10 times easier because it lets you spot a good offer and a bad offer. Once you know how much you're worth, it's easier to negotiate within that range."

HOW TO GET WHAT YOU DESERVE IN YOUR NEXT NEGOTIATION

Here are Hannah Williams' top three tips for negotiating your best salary:

1. JUST DO IT.

Many job seekers are scared to negotiate. Anytime you are offered a salary, whether for a new job or a promotion, think of the first offer as a suggestion. If you accept the first offer, you are almost certainly leaving money on the table.

2. COME TO EVERY CONVERSATION PREPARED WITH MARKET RESEARCH.

Understand what your market rate is for your position and location. When it doubt, talk to others in your field and check out the database on Salary Transparent Street. Your market rate should have a \$20,000 range from the middle to the top. Giving yourself that wiggle room affords you space to negotiate.

3. START HIGH.

It's easier to work down from the top of your range than from the bottom. So, aim high.

BONUS: Don't focus solely on base salary. Smaller companies often have less money to work with, but they can often make that up with other benefits such as paid time off, 401(k) matching and a hybrid schedule. Get creative. ♦

DAVIS-FLYNN IS CONFIDENT ABOUT NEGOTIATING HER NEXT SALARY AND ASKING YOU ABOUT YOURS.

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