

Gaining confidence

by [Carol Howard Merritt](#)

January 15, 2016

I have been reading a lot about gaps recently. First, a couple of different outlets covered the [confidence gap](#) between men and women. In short, though women are often more skilled leaders, they undervalue themselves. They lack the confidence to negotiate better salaries or take the risks needed to catapult into upper spheres of leadership.

Which ignited some discussion: Is it a lack of confidence or does society simply undervalue women? Do women really just need to lean in?

Then, of course, the Bureau of Labor Statistics came out with [their analysis](#) of clergy and found that the gender gap in clergy is higher than it is in the business world.

We should be leading in social justice, and displaying a world as it ought to be. Instead, our sins are greater. And before I get comments that tell me that women have smaller churches or work part time, so they deserve to be paid less, let me just say, please stop. Of course, pastors with larger churches get paid more. And women have more part time positions and smaller churches. That is not an excuse for the problem. That *is* the problem.

Anyways, when it comes to the question, “Do we lean in, or blame society?” We don’t need a solution that addresses either/or. With many structural inequities, injustices, and cruelty, the answer is both/and. Do we feed the homeless, or advocate for a society that no longer produces so many homeless people? Do we protest the death of one young black man, or do we work to change the brutal policing system? Do we send the people in Flint bottled water, or do we fix the pipes? The answer to all of these is yes and yes.

The issue with the gender pay gap in churches can be so pernicious because it’s typically liberal denominations that hire women in the first place. And I have worked with liberals who are the last people who want to acknowledge the problem, since

we are often the worst offenders. It's easy for progressives to point fingers, as long as they are not aimed inward.

So, how to we overcome the confidence gap?

- **Negotiate.** Be prepared when entering a position. It's much harder to negotiate a raise than a starting salary. Get the data on how much pastors get paid in your area. Graph it. Note the inequities between men and women, white people and people of color. A good rule of thumb is that you should be paid at least 10% above the median salary. (You can adjust for education and experience, if needed.)

- **Compete.** Your worth as a human does not hinge on how much more you make than the other guy. But if you're like me and you tend to undervalue yourself, you need to make it your business to find out what the guy next to you is doing. Enter into a friendly competition and make it a game.

Is your colleague applying for a challenging job and you feel jealous? Then apply for it too. Is he writing a book and you know he has no business writing that book, because you know more about that subject? Then write a book. Is he getting a speaking honorarium that's four times higher than yours? Then raise your fees. Take the risks. The outcome does not mean you are better or less than he is. It's simply that you have taken the risks that keep you in the game.

- **Befriend your fears.** At this point, you might be sweating as you think about negotiating your salary or applying for a position. You're conjuring up all the ways that they will reject you. That's okay. Fear and failure are natural parts of this process, and our bodies have evolved to let us know when danger is ahead. When you hear the anxious whispers, you can tell your thoughts, "Thank you for letting me know I'm doing something scary. I appreciate the warning sign." And keep on going.