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Financial
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Service
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Lottery
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Special Reports
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Ask the Good Girls: Victimized twice?

By ELIZABETH AUSTIN AND LESLIE WHITAKER, Knight Ridder/Tribune News Service

Dear Good Girls: I work in a convenience store. I was robbed last month when I was working by myself, and ever since everybody is looking at me like it was my fault. I feel like I got robbed twice, because after it happened, my boss cut my hours in half. Everyone in the store now thinks I had something to do with it. But just yesterday morning my boss was robbed, and nobody said anything to him except, "I'm sorry, I feel bad for you." What should I do?

Dear Reader: It's horrible to be a crime victim -- and doubly horrible to be unfairly suspected of being an accomplice. But don't assume your hours were cut because of the robbery. You may be a victim of the sagging economy, not your co-workers' suspicions.

For expert advice, we called Bradford L. Cole at Diogenes, a Connecticut investigative agency specializing in on-the-job crime. "Take a calm, rational approach," he says. Write down a short list of your concerns, then set up a formal meeting to discuss this problem with your boss.

"Try to keep emotions out of it," Cole says. "Be direct. Tell your boss, 'I work with these people, they're gossiping about this, and it's bothering me.'" After the meeting, write your boss a thank-you note, recapping the situation and listing any solutions he offered. (Keep a copy of the letter in your home files.)

Instead of pointing fingers at each other, you and your co-workers should ask your boss to bring in a community police officer for some safety advice, to help you protect yourselves from being victimized again.

Dear Good Girls: I've been working as an administrative assistant at a major film studio for 10 months. It's my first job out of college. During the job interview, they asked what salary level I was seeking. I blurted out, "\$28,000 to \$30,000." In retrospect, I realize this was a naive mistake, as I could have possibly received a higher offer. Anyhow, I was offered the job at \$28,000 a year.

I am starting to feel that I am greatly underpaid. I've checked online salary calculators for positions in this area, and I've found most assistants are paid \$7,000 to \$15,000 a year more. I don't want to leave this job, as there are many opportunities for growth, and I am highly satisfied with the work environment. However, I am barely getting by.

My annual review will be here soon. What can I do to show that I deserve a substantial raise, especially in our troubled economy?

Dear Reader: Your letter shows why you should NEVER name a salary figure during a job interview. Aim too high, and you may talk yourself right out of an offer. Too low, and you may start out underpaid and never catch up.

However, our friends in the industry say your salary may be a little low, but it's in the ballpark for someone with your qualifications in a notoriously stingy, highly competitive business. Online salary calculators can be great, but most give only generalized salary averages. It's apples and oranges; there's no point in comparing yourself to a bilingual secretary with six years' experience at an international bank.

To get more money in a tight economy, you need to prove you're worth it. So put together a formal presentation of all the great things you've done this year. And on the day after your salary review, open a "wonderfulness" file, and stick in a little note every time your boss compliments you. That way, you'll be well prepared for next year.

And once you're in the corner office, have your people call us -- we've got this great idea for a screenplay ...

Got a problem at work? We can help! Write to the Good Girls at eaustinattbi.com, or write to us at P.O. Box 5063, River Forest, IL 60305.

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