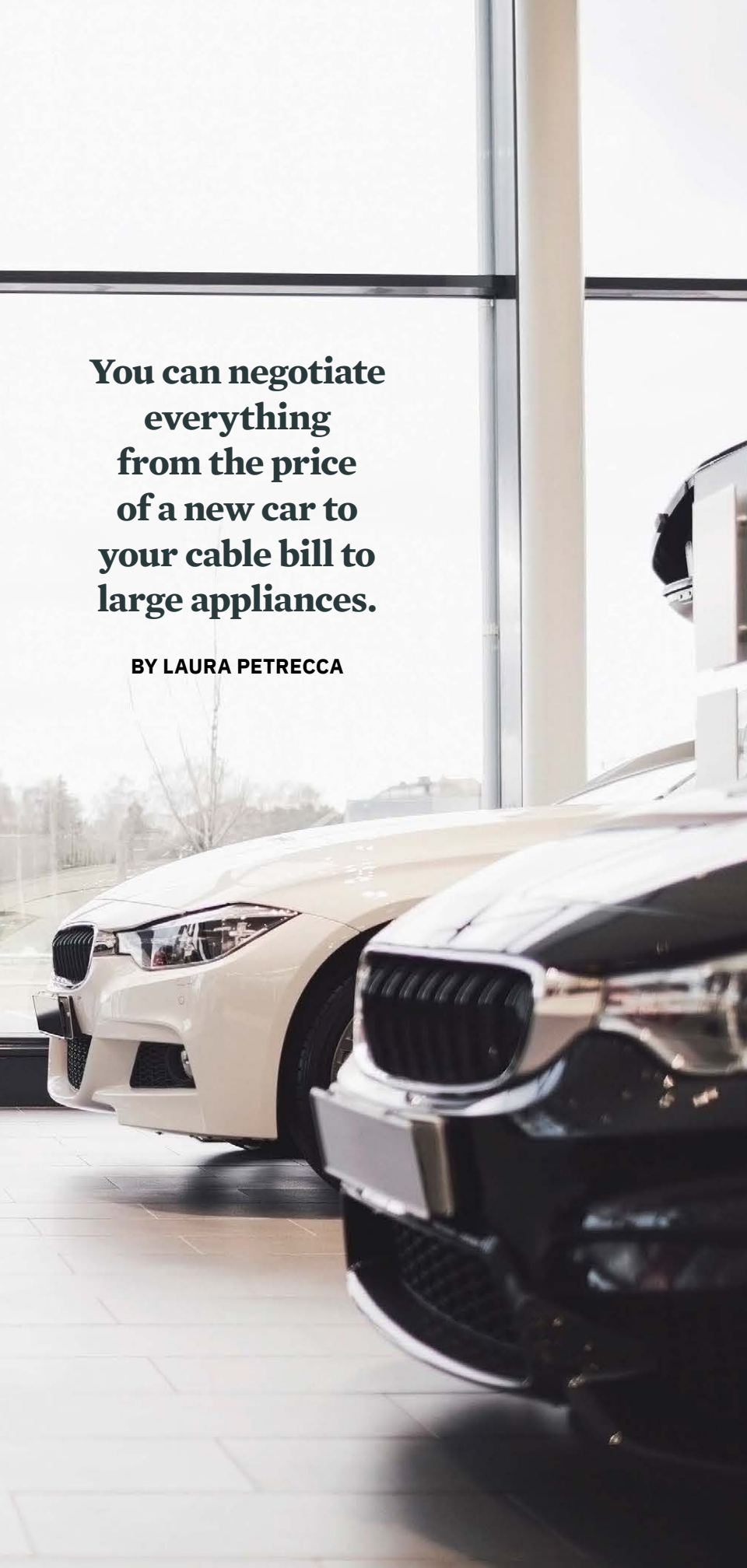


REWARDS

# WALK AWAY WITH THE BEST DEAL





**You can negotiate  
everything  
from the price  
of a new car to  
your cable bill to  
large appliances.**

**BY LAURA PETRECCA**

**K**IM Svoboda's knack for negotiation has saved her a bundle through the years. She has clinched deals on everything from cars and insurance policies to painting services and garage sale finds.

"I could give a whole long list of things I've negotiated on," says Svoboda, 49, of Cape Coral, Fla., whose technique combines creativity, patience and flexibility, along with attention to her budget. "It feels great to get a good deal."

As the cost of living continues to climb, negotiating is one of the most effective ways to lower your expenses. While it helps to have years of negotiating experience like Svoboda—who uses the practice in both her personal life and her professional life, creating large-scale partnerships and sponsorships—anyone can up their game. Here's how to get the best deal on everything from major purchases to everyday bills.

#### **NEW CARS**

Take some test-drives to determine the car and features you want. But don't do any immediate dealmaking on site, says Oren Weintraub, founder of Authority Auto, a car-buying consulting service that negotiates on a buyer's behalf.

Instead, call multiple dealers to get quotes. Ask for the internet sales department, which typically handles online inquiries and deals with customers who buy vehicles online, and give them specifics on the vehicle and features you want and how you'd like to pay. Let them know you're shopping around for the lowest price.

Once you get the quotes, you can use them as leverage to get the best deal on your desired vehicle from the dealership you prefer. For instance, you may want to buy from a specific

## Rewards

dealership because it has stellar customer service or provides perks such as free car washes or tire rotations.

Once you've established how much you'll pay for the car, focus on other areas, such as the price for a trade-in vehicle, if you have one, and the interest rate you'll get if you need to take out an auto loan. Go to Kelley Blue Book ([www.kbb.com](http://www.kbb.com)) or AutoNation ([www.autonation.com](http://www.autonation.com)) for estimates on trade-in values. For financing, check with local banks and credit unions to see whether they can provide a better deal than the one offered by the dealership.

"It's important to separate each item you're negotiating," says Weintraub. "You want to know the exact sales price of the car, the interest rate they're charging you, how much they're giving you for the trade-in, and the cost of accessories."

As you move along in the process, you're likely to have in-person discussions at the dealership. Be mentally prepared for some pressure, as the salesperson will likely attempt to sell you potential upgrades, extra warranties and insurance.

"There are a ton of products that they will bombard you with and try to get you to buy," says Weintraub.

If you feel confused or pressured, take a breather.

"Dealers are known for creating false urgency," Weintraub says. "Go have lunch or go home. Regroup and come back when you feel comfortable."

### TV AND INTERNET BILLS

As with car buying, it's crucial to get prices from a few competing cable and internet companies. You can check costs online or call local providers. A reliable resource for getting internet prices is BroadbandNow.com, says Ben Kurland, director of strategy and growth at Experian Consumer Services. Kurland is the cofounder of what is now called Experian BillFixers, which negotiates with providers on customers' behalf.



## A higher quote doesn't automatically mean better-quality service, and a lower price doesn't necessarily indicate shoddy work.

Jot down the quotes you receive and write out the key points you want to make to your provider. When you talk with customer service representatives, they'll have a script. You can use the same tactic by having your talking points at the ready.

Contact your provider by phone. You're apt to get a better deal than if you ask for a discount via e-mail or through an online chat, says Kurland. Once connected, press the prompt to cancel your service. "You'll likely be transferred to the retention agent or an escalation agent," Kurland says. "Their whole job is to give you a discount to keep you as a loyal customer."

Once you get an agent on the phone, be cordial. "A common mistake people make about negotiation is thinking that it has to be hard-charging and adversarial," Kurland adds. "If you are friendly and reasonable, you can get a lot further."

Don't agree to the agent's first offer—there's usually room for more concessions. "Say, 'I really appreciate it, but is there anything else you can do for me?'" Kurland says. "Almost never are they going to rescind that original offer, so you've got nothing to lose by asking."

Although you can get cash savings, providers are more inclined to offer service enhancements, such as faster internet speed or additional TV channels. If that suits your needs, focus on getting the most benefits that you can. Additionally, bundling services (by purchasing both broadband internet and cable TV, for example) with one provider can lead to more freebies and extra savings.

If your haggling feels fruitless or you can't establish a rapport with the representative, you have an easy out. Politely end the conversation, call back another time, and begin negotiations anew with a different agent.

## HOME RENOVATIONS AND REPAIRS

Contractor prices vary widely for the same service, so your best bet is to get three to five quotes, says Kevin Brasler, executive editor at the non-profit consumer advocacy group Consumers' Checkbook.

"The biggest mistake consumers make, especially for home repairs and renovations, is they don't think there are big price differences among local services," Brasler says. In reality, contractors are likely to provide a wide range of price quotes to install items such as heat pumps, air conditioners and furnaces, even if they're offering the same model from the same wholesaler.

Provide candidates with specifics on your project, giving details on what you need and your time frame so they can give you an accurate estimate. Let each potential contractor know you are soliciting multiple offers and looking for the best price.

Once you get the bids, don't assume there will be a correlation between price and quality, Brasler says. A higher quote doesn't automatically mean better-quality service, and a lower price doesn't necessarily indicate shoddy work. Whomever you choose should be licensed and insured and have positive online reviews or references.

As with haggling for other services, you can use different quotes as leverage in your price negotiations with a contractor. You can also offer perks in exchange for a lower price, such as putting down a deposit even if the contractor doesn't ask for one (or, if it does request a deposit, you can offer a larger one than required). You could also give workers extra time to get the job done or pay in cash, which enables the provider to avoid credit card processing fees.

When Svoboda and her longtime partner had their new Florida condo painted, they got a reasonable rate in exchange for giving the painter

80% of the total price up front and offering to pay with cash instead of a credit card. Plus, "we gave him flexibility, saying, 'You can come anytime over the next month,'" Svoboda says. "It worked out perfectly for all of us."

## MAJOR APPLIANCES

As the saying goes, if you don't ask, you don't get. A *Consumer Reports* survey found that less than one-fourth of those shopping for a major appliance tried to negotiate prices. Among those who didn't, more than one-fifth said it never occurred to them or that they didn't know they could do so.

only have one chance. I'm going to buy from the one that offers me the lowest price," says Brasler.

Although it can't hurt to haggle at national chains such as Home Depot and Lowe's, independent stores often have more flexibility on price. The *Consumer Reports* survey found that of the 32% of people who tried to get a better deal for a major appliance at an independent retailer, 64% were successful.

If you don't mind potential scratches or dents on your appliance, ask about getting the floor model at a discount. And if you have a special status, such as a senior or veteran, mention it.



Shoppers who successfully negotiated large-appliance prices at Best Buy and Lowe's saved a median of more than \$140, according to the survey. Those who successfully negotiated at Home Depot saved \$114, and shoppers at independent stores saved \$123.

As with other categories, the best way to start the negotiation process is to do some research. Once you pick the models that interest you, e-mail or call sales managers at local stores. "Say, 'I'm shopping around and contacting other stores. I'm asking them to give me their best price, and they

Also, expand your negotiations beyond price. Ask for free delivery, installation, or removal of your old appliance if those services are not already included. If you'd like to patronize a specific store—for instance, one where a salesperson gave you a good amount of their time—don't necessarily rule it out if you find a better deal somewhere else. Tell the salesperson at your preferred store about the better price and ask if the store can match it or come close. ■

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