

# PLAY LIKE A MAN, WIN LIKE A WOMAN

What Men Know About Success  
That Women Need to Learn

*Gail Evans*



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*What Men Know About Success  
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BY  
GAIL EVANS

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## PREFACE

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WHEN IT COMES TO ROLE MODELS, I WAS LUCKY. I grew up believing a woman could do anything—conviction inherited from my mother. On the surface, my mother seemed like a conventional woman, a suburban housewife who tended to her home and husband's career. But all the while she was sending me the message that a woman is responsible for her own life, and that she should live it to the fullest.

My mother certainly did. Even while taking excellent care of her own family, she helped care for an “adopted” younger brother and sister from a local institution for juvenile delinquents, she taught at the Jewish Guild for the Blind, and as a volunteer Red Cross ambulance driver, she drove physically and mentally disabled veterans to picnics and ball games.

The manager of a chain of millinery stores in the 1920s, my mother gave up her career for marriage. But she never surrendered her drive or her belief in herself. Throughout my life she gave me two sets of instructions: I must be a good and proper woman and I could be anyone I wished.

I took that advice to heart. After leaving college in 1963, I began a successful career in politics, working on Capitol Hill and at the White House. But when I married, like my mother and most women of the time, I abandoned my career for my husband's. We moved to Atlanta and then to the Soviet Union. After returning to Georgia, where I raised my three children, I began doing freelance research and public relations for international corporations. In 1980, I joined CNN, which was beginning operations.

Eventually I got the opportunity to create the first central booking department for a network (booking means finding the experts who appear on television). When CNN International was created, my responsibilities were extended to that network as well. In 1987, I was made a vice president; two years later I created *CNN&Co*, the first television talk show to feature women discussing the major issues of the day rather than simply “women's issues.” After a promotion to senior vice president, I co-developed *TalkBackLive*, the first interactive television news program, and in 1996 I was instrumental in creating *Burden of Proof*, the first daily legal talk show on network television.

Along the way, like my mother, I have tried to give my time to others. In 1997, the same year I was made executive vice president of CNN, President Clinton appointed me to the Commission on White House Fellows. I'm a member of the Committee of 200, the International Women's Forum, the Citizens Review Panel of the Juvenile Court of Atlanta, and have taught a seminar on gender issues in business at Atlanta's Emory University Business School. And I serve on the board of several universities and not-for-profit organizations.

I also have a daughter and two daughters-in-law, as well as a granddaughter, all of whom I hope will feel as optimistic about being a woman as my mother and I have felt.

If they do, they are lucky. Over the last two decades I have met thousands of women who have told me they feel lost in a workplace where the men generally rule and the women generally follow. I have always tried to give these women my best advice, and I've always

hoped that somewhere I would encounter a group that didn't need what I had to say.

Then I was invited to address the female students and alumnae at Harvard Business School. I thought here, if anywhere, is the place where women have conquered the workplace.

I was wrong. The Harvard women had learned their academic lessons well and risen to high positions, but they felt isolated. They still complained that they often felt lost in the male-oriented workplace, and weren't sure how to cope.

So I decided to write down the gist of all the talks my mother had given me, and all I have passed along to my own daughter and daughters-in-law, as well as all the hundreds of speeches I have made to groups of women around the country. Although television is the great medium of the day, I feel the best way to pass along history is through the printed word. Personally, I believe that I'm only as good as what I have taken away from the last book I've read.

What I want you to take away from this book is the ability to work in an office atmosphere where you don't say, "I didn't get what I deserved today because, as a woman, I didn't know how to play the game."

My greatest desire is that someday we will eliminate the conversation about inequality between women and men at work, so that when we come to the workplace as peers, how well we do our jobs will be all that matters.



# INTRODUCTION

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NOT LONG AGO, I SPOKE AT A SMALL CONFERENCE of successful businesswomen. Afterwards came the deluge, as one woman after another came up to me and asked for advice.

It always happens at these events. I speak, I listen, I hear the same words over and over — “baffled,” “angry,” “lost,” “trapped,” “stuck,” “overwhelmed” — as each woman tells me she feels that she’s gotten only so far in business and can’t get any further.

One of the women at the conference told me she’s a vice president at the Fortune 500 company where she’s been working for two decades. In the last four years she has been given two new lofty-sounding titles, but no more power. She thinks she has hit a wall.

“Have you made it clear what you want?” I asked. “Have you taken any action?”

“No,” she said.

Like so many women, she doesn’t understand that when you have an ongoing serious complaint, you don’t simply, meekly, live with it. You try to change it.

I told her that she needed to take action.

“What kind of action?” she asked.

“Anything,” I said. “One action will lead to another. Talk to the CEO. Job hunt. Anything. Just do *something!*”

She sighed. “I don’t understand. They know what a good job I am doing. Why don’t they just reward me for it?”

With that attitude, she is losing the game.

If you don’t read the directions manual when you start a game, you won’t know how to proceed. You open the box, and in front of you are the board, markers, and dice, but you don’t have a clue. If you’re playing by yourself, you can improvise, but you may get it wrong. If you’re playing with others, you can always follow their lead. But while they’re focused on winning, you have to keep asking yourself if you’re getting it right.

Whether that game is croquet, Monopoly, field hockey, or football, you have to understand the directions first. So why play the game of business any differently? Business is as much a game as any other board, individual, or team sports game. Consider all the metaphors like teamwork, making the right moves, playing your cards close to your chest, picking the best players for your team, rolling the dice, making a preemptive bid, raising the ante, finding the right captain, getting the team into position, hitting a home run.

The bottom line: When it comes to business, most women are at a disadvantage. We’re forced to guess, to improvise, to bluff (which is not something we’re always good at—see [Chapter 5: Toot Your Own Horn](#)). This is why so few of us play the game well, and even fewer find it fulfilling.

And what about men? They don’t read directions manuals, you say. True. They don’t need to. The male mind invented the concept of directions. It wasn’t that they deliberately ignored women, or disliked what women had to say. Rather, as business culture developed, few women were around to help. Men wrote all the rules because they wrote alone.

Women have made great strides in the last century. But that progress hasn't always been smooth, nor has it been straight ahead. Sometimes it's even retrogressed. During the labor shortage in World War II, for example, women were called in to perform men's jobs, and they did well. But when the war was over, Rosie the Riveter was sent home, and women had to wait decades for another chance.

The best you can say is that we've seen a kind of creeping incrementalism. Large numbers of women dot the current workplace, but like trees on a mountain, you'll see fewer and fewer of them as you climb higher in the executive landscape, until you reach a kind of timber line where you'll find about as many women as you'll find magnolias.

*Fortune* magazine recently ran a cover story on the 50 most powerful women in America. Nothing wrong with that. What I found worrisome was that the positions these women occupied—group presidents, vice presidents, founders of their own businesses—were not comparable to what a similar group of men would have held. All the men would have been CEO of large companies.

Women now account for over 46 percent of the total U.S. labor force, up from 29.6 percent in 1950. But as of 1999, only 11.9 of the 11,681 corporate officers in America's top 500 companies were women. In 1998 it was 11.2. If this pace continues, the number of women on top corporate boards won't equal the number of men until the year 2064.

Last year only 3.3 percent of these companies' top earners were women, with 98 women holding positions of the highest rank in corporate America, versus 1,202 men. And 496 out of 500 *Fortune* companies had male CEOs. Many of America's favorite companies—General Electric, Exxon, Compaq—have no women officers at all.

And even when women do make it to the top, we don't make as much money. Compensation for the top-paid female officers ranges from \$210,001 to \$4.96 million, whereas men earn from \$220,660 to \$31.29 million. All in all, top female executives earn on average 68 cents for every dollar a male executive earns.

The reality in today's business landscape: A woman is most likely to occupy a position of power when she started, or inherited, her own business. We're not going through the ranks and making it to the boss's office, and that's where the power lies in corporate America.

What can—and should—a woman do? The answer would be easy if men and women were born with similar instincts and were similarly socialized. But that isn't the case. In fact, the general thinking among biogeneticists is that the social skills of males and females are inherently different. After that, according to the sociologists, they're raised in ways that accentuate that difference.

Let me tell you about my three children, two boys and a girl, whom I was committed to raising in a thoroughly nonsexist environment. Starting from day one, I could spot gender-based disparities among them. For instance, the way in which my sons and daughters nurse. My two boys behaved alike. They sucked until their stomachs were full, they burped, filled their diapers, and promptly went to sleep. It was a quick, effortless transaction. End of story.

My daughter gave a different performance. She sucked a little, she closed her eyes, then she'd touch, reach out, feel, suck, rest, try to open her eyes, burble, suck, touch, and so on. It was clear from the earliest moment that she was interested in some kind of social relationship with me. She wanted to know who I was and where she was. The boys just

wanted to get their fill.

Nurture also has a say in gender distinctions. While teaching a course on gender issues in business at Emory University's Goizueta Business School, I asked my students about the games they played as children. What was the object of the game, how many other children participated, what lessons did they take away from them, and so on?

As usual, the sharpest young man was the first to raise his hand. "I always hung around with at least a half dozen other boys," he said. "We played games like pickup baseball, soccer, street hockey." He added, "The silliest question you asked was about the object of the game. We played to win. What else is there?"

"Oh, my God," interrupted a young woman. She explained how she usually played with one, or maybe two, other girls at a time, rather than a large group, and that they were always more concerned with building a friendship than with winning. Then she told us a story about playing a game of jacks with two friends at camp. When one of the girls was about to win, they all made up new rules so they wouldn't have to stop. "The object was to keep the game going as long as possible," she said. "And we wanted everyone to win."

The point is not that one of these perspectives is better than the other but that, from early childhood on, boys and girls play with different sets of rules. And because men created the rules in the game of business, and because women are only now trying to be effective competitors, we will prosper only when we are familiar with those rules.

None of this is to say that men are doing a bad, or a good, job. The business world is male dominated. That is not a criticism nor a condemnation—it's a reality. Most of the time the male advantage isn't due to conscious discrimination against women. Like most people, men prefer to surround themselves with others who make them feel at ease. The relationship between men and women in business is not so different from that between a Caucasian Christian and an Indian Sikh, or an army general and a pacifist. Like attracts like. Differences create discomfort.

There is no denying that our society has created a division of labor between men and women, and historically one sex has tended to supervise certain tasks, and therefore write the rules. Recently, however, that division is becoming muddled, as both sexes are thinking about expanding the traditional boundaries, whether at work or at home.

For instance, some men are now staying home to raise children. The way we nurture our children in our culture is a female-determined system—these directions were written by women. It might turn out to be excellent for our children, however, if men have more of an impact on how kids are raised. We might have healthier children—just as we may have healthier corporations if women were to play a bigger role in them. The more heterogeneous there is at the table, the more likely we are to discover better solutions for everyone.

In the pages that follow you will find pointers to help you create your own personal directions manual for success. To become a player in the world of business, you have to know the prevailing rules that men play by—not because you must follow them word for word, but because you need to understand the playing field even if you eventually choose to make up your own game. It is not a level playing field if you don't know what to do on it.

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## THE OBJECT OF THE GAME



*Action is the antidote to despair.*

JOAN BAEZ, FOLK SINGER AND ACTIVIST

AS THE YOUNG MAN IN MY BUSINESS CLASS ASKED, isn't the object of the game to win?

But what is winning? Does it mean being the most powerful CEO? Does it mean being the one with the biggest bank account? Or is it the person who's the most feared?

For me, the object of the game is simply to feel great about what you do. That's the most important directive of all—because that's how you end up feeling fulfilled, and that's how you win.

I know for a fact that I have been successful because I've always loved my jobs. And believe me, these haven't all been well-paid positions in glamour industries—I've done everything from run the addressograph machine to fetch the coffee. But no matter what I've done, I've always been able to enjoy myself doing it.

For instance, when my kids were little, I took several years off to take care of them. To earn a little income along the way, I found a part-time job as a sales representative for a clothing company at Atlanta's semiannual merchandise mart. I then created a game out of seeing how much I could sell to stores even if they didn't need the line. I couldn't have done this forever, but while it lasted, it was fun. And I bought all my children's clothes (as well as mine) wholesale.

Similarly, not everything I've done on Capitol Hill or at CNN sounded exciting when it was originally proposed. But I've usually managed to make it so. For example, at one point my boss announced that I was going to revamp CNN's intern program. This came at a time when two of my children were already in college, and the last thing I wanted was to worry about other college-age kids. But I made the job challenging by taking on more responsibility than had been offered, which turned out to involve recruitment and talent development. I gave my job so much visibility that when the new vice president of that area was announced, she was told to report to me.

So the ultimate winner in the game of business is not necessarily the person with the most power or the most money or the most fame. Rather, it's the person who loves his or her work. I know many miserable people with important titles. But I don't know anyone who loves her job who's miserable. It's that simple.

There's more: If you can love your business life, you'll be playing the game the way that guys do. They don't run out on the football field or stride into an important meeting wishing they were elsewhere. They are enthusiastic, eager to have an opportunity to satisfy their competitive urges.

Loving what you do is self-empowering. It makes you more brilliant, it gives you the ability to become a visionary, it helps you become the best businesswoman you can be. You

improve your chances of rising to the top.

For some men, of course, loving the game is synonymous with material success. It's a basic cause-and-effect paradigm: If they get to the top and they get rich, they love it.

Women aren't as likely to love success as an isolated entity. We want to love our entire life. And that's fine. Unlike men, we don't tend to compartmentalize the various aspects of daily existence (see [Chapter 5: Think Small](#)). So it's hard to feel upbeat when we take a job that isn't intrinsically interesting—even if we see the possibility of success somewhere down the road.

Why do women have such a hard time understanding the importance of loving our work? My sense is that in our society, women are raised to feel comfortable in the role of nurturer—the ones who make things better for everyone else. We don't get permission along the way to love ourselves, or to love what we do, outside of our caretaker's role. Only in the last few decades have we learned that we can be the center of our own lives. And that means we, too, can start loving our jobs with the same enthusiasm as those guys who rush out onto the sports field and into the boardroom.

When you have a new baby, changing her diapers isn't drudgery, because it's not the diaper you're changing, it's the baby. You want to do everything you can for her. But when she's three years old, the focus shifts to the diaper, not the baby; so you toilet train her.

Likewise, in an office, you can teach yourself to do any job you're given and be okay with it. But ultimately, if you don't feel good about your job, you'll just be going through the motions, which means that you're turning off that button that I call possibility.

You can't play any game well if you don't enjoy playing it.

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## FOUR GROUND RULES



*I feel there is something unexplored about woman that only a woman can explore.*

GEORGIA O'KEEFFE, ARTIST

A FEW YEARS AGO I ASKED THE STUDENTS IN MY business course at Emory to interview successful executives, both men and women. Their assignment was to uncover the qualities of good leaders and write up a report.

The assignment wasn't intended to be a gender discussion by any means, but it was hard not to notice that the words both the students and the executives used to describe men differed from the words they applied to the women.

Some of the most common terms describing male executives were: "quarterback," "absolute winner," "aggression," "boastfulness," "the desire to win," "holding power," "tough-skinned," "having fun," "part of a dog-eat-dog world."

These were the words and phrases used about women: "cooperation," "social involvement," "teamwork," "respect for others," "uncompetitive," "willing to share power," "concern for the harmony of the group," "feeling that everyone can be a winner," "wanting to be liked by all," "caretaker."

In the course of every discussion I've ever had about men and women, certain themes seem to appear; fair or unfair, professors, students, businessmen, and businesswomen all share the same vocabulary.

The same broad categories of women as "social" and "cooperative," men as "aggressive" and "tough" hold true in this book. Whereas not all men learned to play football or chess or poker, and not all women played with dolls or ignored competitive games, the majority of men and women were socially acculturated according to their sex.

Now, I know many men never played competitive sports or games while they were young. Certainly some women are stronger and more competitive than any number of men. And I'm not suggesting you should dismiss this book if you're a woman who is more comfortable with rugby than with dolls. I was a high school athlete, making all—Westchester County (New York) hockey goalie.

For the most part, however, the women's game was and is different from the men's. This is because men and women are wired differently, and we are brought up differently.

And when we are adults, we work differently. It is important for women to understand these differences, because the more aware we are of them, the more possible it is to gain access to power. Ignorance is never bliss. You cannot know too much.

Following are four fundamental ground rules underlying the strategies you need to understand if you are going to play.

Playing any game means being faced with a variety of choices, and the game of business is no exception. You will do well only if you make your decisions from a position of power rather than a position of weakness.

Whenever I sit on panels I am always amazed at the wide variety of backgrounds among the women—they have seldom traveled the same straight and narrow path the men do. A woman's way has many more obstacles, mostly because we face this huge issue called family. I've never met a woman so alone that she didn't have an important personal relationship somewhere in her life, whether it's parents, sisters, brothers, or children. That means that many of us have gone back and forth between family obligations and careers, sometimes having to leave work, or change our hours, or take jobs in other cities.

Men generally don't feel that pull between staying home and advancing within the organization. So your career will be colored by a greater number of factors than his—your game board is more complicated.

Don't make your life more difficult by seeing yourself as a victim of this system. For instance, one of my closest friends has been with the same Boston-based conglomerate for 20 years. She's very successful, but she has reached the point where she's not going any further. She takes care of outreach seminars, she writes proposals, she organizes meetings, but the guys have taken her off the core line businesses. She complains that they don't appreciate her, that her boss is horrible, that her work is boring.

"Your kids are grown, you have money, your husband is prospering," I tell her. "If you're that miserable, get out."

She looks at me as if I've suggested she vacation on the moon. She accepted the role of being a victim years ago, and she's comfortable with it. In fact, she took on this role before anyone else in her company ascribed it to her, but now it's impossible for them to imagine her in any other way.

Too many of us tolerate the role of the passive, put-upon person, probably because it's the one most often taken by our primary role model—our mother. Remember when you used to get up late on a Saturday morning? Dad was calmly reading the paper, while Mom was complaining, "I've got tons to do so I'll drop you off at your ballet class on my way to the grocery shop because your father's parents are spending the weekend with us and I don't have anything for dinner."

How many of us ever heard her say: "If you need to get to your class, tell your father. Also tell him what you want for dinner, and remind him to pick up his parents so they can spend the weekend. I'm meeting a friend for lunch."

Women have tended to live in the complaint, to grumble to our friends and our daughters about it—but until relatively recently, we haven't taken action to fix it. Like women who remain in unhappy or abusive marriages, we are often more comfortable remaining with the devil we know, no matter how unpleasant or disagreeable, than making a proactive (and therefore potentially risky) change.

As I see it, women have two options: to structure our world around our own choices, or to let someone else make the choices for us.

In the 1980 Olympics, the U.S. hockey team was expected to lose to the Soviet team. But no one told this to the U.S. players, who were clear they were the best team in the world.

Eventually they said this to themselves enough times that other people began believing it to be true. By the night of the finals their conviction had become truth, and they won the gold medal.

If you want to take charge of your own business life, begin by sending out the equivalent message about yourself. Pick your goal and say it aloud to yourself. “I could manage this department. I would do an excellent job.”

Picture yourself actually doing the job. What would it feel like? What does it look like? Try to make your positive fantasies real. The first step to being successful is convincing yourself that you are successful.

## 2 | One Prize Doesn't Fit All

Have you heard the story about the couple who was seeing a marriage counselor to help save their disintegrating relationship? The husband says, “I don't understand—we have a great house, we have great kids, we have a great car—what do you want?” And the wife responds, “I just don't feel fulfilled.” The man looks exasperated; he has no idea what she means.

Women demand a greater sense of fulfillment from our jobs than men do. The standard male-oriented rewards—money, power, prestige—don't necessarily have the same sway with us.

Today women are learning to pay attention to our own needs, as well as everyone else's. This is helping us discover a new sense of freedom and independence in the workplace. Our jobs are not about our husbands or our children or our parents. Ideally, they are about us.

But can we handle this change? Many of us aren't always clear about what we want from this thing called a career. We anguish over whether it will be a career at all, or just a job to provide supplementary income. We obsess about whether it will have any real meaning to us, or whether we are doing it solely to please our family. We have incessant internal discussions over where we are going, and the route never seems to be as direct as we thought.

We live in what I call divine discontent. The work is never quite right, the company isn't either. Now, this feeling can keep smart women on their toes, because it can make them strive a little harder. But even so, such needless turmoil eventually wastes energy.

For most men, the actual job content isn't crucial. The trappings of success, such as titles, prestige, and/or money can ameliorate the boring, unpleasant daily grind. Men reconcile doing work they don't like by getting high-profile rewards.

Consider the following: Over many years of public speaking I've often run into the CFO of a large manufacturing company who always tells the same story. Starting off in the accounting department, he slowly but surely worked his way up through one uninteresting position after another until finally, at the age of 60, he received his Glorious Reward and got the one job he'd always coveted. He is a smart and decent man. But every time I hear his speech, I shudder.

Unlike this male CFO, we women are much more likely to find an area in our companies that we find fascinating and remain there for years. We tend to ignore the stars, bells, and brass rings that men consider necessary markers of success. For us, the ultimate reward can simply be the ability to say: “I feel great about what I'm doing.”

Remember: Loving your job means you are the ultimate winner. But you must remain alert



to all potential pitfalls along the way. No matter what the game, if two players are looking at a different goal, the manner in which they advance with the ball will differ.

Let's say you and John Doe start work the same day at the same level. John enters Sales because he wants to be rich, and you enter Human Resources, because you're fascinated by interpersonal behavior. Fifteen years later, you look up to see that John is a vice president making \$250,000 a year, and you're a vice president making \$125,000. You think, "Did I do something wrong?"

No. And there's no reason to think you did—as long as you keep in mind that you and John Doe had different goals in mind. The rewards for being the vice president for human resources differ from those for being the vice president for strategic marketing. The title vice president doesn't have a salary attached to it. It depends on the perceived value of that job to the company.

When we choose to fulfill ourselves by what we do, rather than only what we make, we're not playing the game the way the guys are playing it. They are much more likely to be thinking about material success or power than fulfillment. Personally, I love the way women regard work, because our view is more holistic. But we must be aware that many times our decisions aren't going to be compatible with the male-dominated business culture, and if we go our own way, we may have consequences to pay.

If you opt not to play by men's rules, you have to be aware of the consequences. There are times when I've consciously decided to ignore the rules—but only when I was confident that I knew those rules inside and out, and understood that my male colleagues, finding my decision contrary, might lose faith in my ability to be a team player. You must be informed to take this path.

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### 3 | Work Isn't a Sorority

A NEW CD-ROM game, Starfire Soccer, calls itself the first sports game designed strictly "with girls in mind." What does the manufacturer mean by that? It's a game where relationships are as much a part of the action as kicking the ball into the net. To quote the packaging material: "Winning isn't just about the final score. It's about friendship and fun too."

The boys' games, however, are about winning. The friendship part doesn't come into play—at least, not while they're playing. Relationships take place when the game ends.

Simply put: Women enter the job arena with a stronger urge to form and maintain relationships than men do. Whether we are talking to the dry cleaner, the cashier, or the boss, we want to know a life story, we want to exchange feelings, we want to turn the other person into just that, a person, rather than the other party in a business transaction.

Study after study has shown that women are more likely than men to make, and keep, close friends. In this new age of business, where maintaining and servicing clients is so important, a woman's disposition to form strong relationships will work very much to her advantage. A talent for working with people means you can make them feel comfortable and earn their trust, and that you're probably a good listener. It's amazing how often people will tell us exactly what we need to know, if only we can hear it above our own internal dialogues.

Women's relationship skills may be our secret to greater success. I know one woman who has risen to the top of her male-dominated advertising company not only because of her professional talent, but because whenever a relationship problem arises between client and agency (or more often, between the major players at her firm), she's the one each person confides in. In essence she has become the great conciliator when the major players aren't talking to one another. Her unusual combination of skills makes her an invaluable part of the company's operation.

There are hazards, however, to having a relationship orientation. For instance, women often interpret basic information in personal terms. Say the boss is talking with you in the hallway and seems taken by your ideas for restructuring your department. Suddenly he excuses himself. You suspect he's changed his mind and doesn't like your ideas after all. Actually, he had to go to the bathroom.

I've watched women personalize the office to the point where they won't hire people they don't like—even if they are exactly right for the job. I've also seen women inflict a mortal wound on their own careers by refusing to cooperate with someone they have an aversion to. Your co-workers are not your friends or your family. You don't pick them and it doesn't matter whom you like or dislike. You simply have to work with them. Some of the most successful people I've known have refused to have any social contact at all with their co-workers.

The people you meet in business can be nice acquaintances, individuals you can have a good working relationship with, but the key word is "working."

Personalizing causes trouble. A guy running down the field with a football knows he has to make it to the goal line, and he'll run over anyone to get there. Just because the fullback is his friend doesn't mean he won't stick his cleats in the guy's leg—if he has to.

As little girls, too many of us were taught that in order to get what we want, we had to charm the other person, whether this was a friend, a teacher, or a parent. If you made Dad feel good, he'd acquiesce to your wishes. But in the office, you usually receive a "yes" because your proposal has merit, not because you do. The guy who gives you the green light may not even know you. We don't always understand how someone with whom we don't have a personal relationship can respect us. I know many men in positions of power who dislike each other intensely, but when they're sitting around the conference table, you'd think they were joined at the hip. Their personal feelings don't matter. They don't want to be liked. They want to win.

To change the way you do business, where and how do you start? Train—as in any other game. It may fly in the face of everything that seems natural, but the more you practice not taking it personally, the more natural it becomes. In other words, you get there by doing it.

Women must understand that we're playing in a world where our opponents have been taught to hide their emotions. Joe Friday from television's *Dragnet* never said, "Just the facts, ma'am." It was always, "Just the facts, ma'am." If all the Joe Fridays want only facts from you, you'll irritate them if you give them feelings.

#### 4 | You're Always a Mother, Daughter, Wife, or Mistress

I grew up with boys as friends, and so did my daughter. Society allows, and even smiles on

a young girl playing with a group of boys (if the boys will let her, that is).

For the most part, however, young males don't socialize enough with young females to accept them as close friends. And so it's rare, and seldom socially acceptable, to see a single boy playing with a group of girls.

When the time comes for that young boy who is now a man to mix with the opposite sex in the office, he is often at a loss. And when in doubt, he—like most people—stereotypes. Thus he tends to think of a woman co-worker as his mother, his daughter, his wife, or his mistress—even when she is very clearly none of the above.

Knowing this will help you understand male behavior patterns. If an older man has turned you into a Daughter, you can profit in innumerable ways—you'll be exposed to people and places that others won't see, and you'll be privy to conversations that will give you insight into how the business is run. Like any good father, Daddy will take care of you.

The downside? Men never think of their daughters as equals (much less their bosses). So after a few years of great opportunity, you become frustrated. And what do you do? You quit.

That's what I did when I was the Daughter, and it was one of the smartest moves of my career. I was sad to leave the job, but because it was clear I wasn't going to move up, I moved out—very, very carefully. Remember: It's important to maintain your father figure's support when leaving, because he can be a great help to you throughout your career, a mentor and counselor. Don't run away like a rebellious child. Convince him he made it possible for you to move on, and ask for his support.

The Wife is the hardest role. Here you can be accepted on the job as an equal (more or less). But you're also encumbered with all the baggage a guy brings to the office from his real-life marriage: If he's married to a nagging woman, and you inadvertently start using language that reminds him of her, he'll probably respond by shutting you down the same way he shuts her down at home.

For example, my friend Julie once saw a male colleague march into the boss's office twelve times in one day to ask questions about a new project, and the boss didn't bat an eye. But just the second time she requested some information, he yelled, "Leave me alone. You're relentless."

When Julie heard her boss say that word, one he normally used to describe his wife, she suddenly understood his mind-set and didn't personalize the confrontation. She knew that despite its downside, being a Wife has decided advantages. For example, the boss often cuts her off at meetings because he assumes he can tell what she's going to say. While this can be frustrating and even embarrassing, Julie knows that she'll have the opportunity to pass along whatever information she needs to convey at other times and places. In other words, she has the office equivalent of pillow talk—the boss speaks to her on his personal time. Her co-workers only have the formal meetings to get their ideas across.

Basically, when you find yourself someone's Wife, you create ways to make it work to your advantage, unless it becomes thoroughly oppressive, and then you get a divorce.

Mother is a traditional role. She's the secretary who's been at the company 37 years, the woman who's been city editor for three decades, the executive who's had the same title since 1975. She's the one who welcomes the new people into the company, who makes sure the new vice president's kids have applied to the right school, who knows the office rules inside

out. She probably invented half of them.

The bad part of being Mom is that mothers have covert power only. They get things done by innuendo and manipulation. The good part is: No boss can fire his mother. If you like the role, it's yours forever. Mothers languish safely until they retire.

As younger, more ambitious women have entered the workforce, the newer role for them is that of Mistress. Here you get to be a risk taker, you get to make decisions, you get to join the power structure. But you have to be very careful, because you're walking the tightrope of sexual tension. Very few of us know ourselves well enough not to get tripped up, and the consequences for your career may be especially severe if you're caught. You may lose your job as well as your reputation (see [Chapter 6: They Can Have Sex. You Can't](#)).

**TIP:** When you're with your husband, get used to the idea that as far as his colleagues are concerned, no matter who you are, you are Mrs. Husband. Many years ago I accompanied my then husband to a Fortune 500 company's annual meeting, where he was giving a keynote speech.

The company's CEO had invited us to sit at his table with the company's other officers and their wives. After introducing myself, I told him what I did for a living, and the CEO asked me how many children I had. I brought up an important issue concerning his business, and he answered by telling me that his wife and I were wearing the same color dress. From then on I played the retiring wife.

As the evening progressed, the men began discussing a case of insider trading. Because of its privileged content, this matter should not have been discussed in front of an outsider, let alone a journalist. I excused myself from the table.

As I left, I handed the CEO my business card. I told him that although this evening I was simply an executive's wife, he needed to be more careful, for women are in the marketplace too. (The next morning he sent me two dozen roses, thanked me for my discretion, and vowed never to make the mistake again.)

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## PREPARING TO PLAY



*It had long since come to my attention that people of accomplishment rarely stay back and let things happen to them. They went out and happened to things.*

ELINOR SMITH, AVIATOR AND WRITER

### Learn the Playing Field

Suppose you're playing a game of chess. Would you use a backgammon board? No. But metaphorically, that's what many women do.

All games are played out on a structured field of action. If it's football, you're talking about a 100-yard-long field. If it's Chinese checkers, it's a board with a star pattern. Monopoly follows a one-way path along the perimeter of a square; a roller derby rink is round. Name the game—hopscotch, rugby, Scrabble—and you know the terrain.

The game of work is also played on a board or field, one that is traditionally shaped like a triangle or pyramid. At the bottom are the largest number of people; the farther up you go, the thinner the ranks, until you reach the very top, where there's only one person.

The advantage to a pyramidal structure is its clear line of authority, from bottom to top. Everyone knows who's calling the shots, and who isn't.

The downside is that it doesn't allow for much open and honest feedback. Compliance is rewarded over constructive criticism. Risk taking tends to be avoided. Yes-people tend to thrive.

The problem for most women is that we enter business with a different sense of the game board. We're more comfortable with the concept of a circle—the shape that represents the circle of friends we made as children. When we were playing house, we had long discussions with our friends about where to put each piece of furniture, which room to fill up first. We were all equal—in other words, there was no captain of the dollhouse.

Because everyone was free to talk with everyone else, the circle generated open communication. No one felt that she couldn't contribute or that her ideas wouldn't reach a sympathetic ear.

In the business world, however, the circle can be problematic. Too often the women who replicate these power and information circles are swamped with input. And because all the information can't be put to good use, unhappiness ensues. "The boss always claims that she wants to hear what I have to say," the standard complaint goes, "yet she never acts on it. Why does she bother to ask?"

But the primary issue for women isn't the advantages of a circle over a triangle, or vice versa. Just as when you play backgammon, you play on a backgammon board, if your company has a standard pyramidal structure, you play on a pyramid too.

Yes, we don't like to think of ourselves as mere pegs on some lifeless board. But men don't mind as much, and they don't mind marking you as a peg, either. They'll expect you to a

like a peg, too. Labels bring clarity. If you're a vice president, act like a vice president, ta like a vice president, do the work of a vice president. There are no relationship issues here. It's a game board issue. You're sitting at a certain level in the pyramid. Respond accordingly.

For instance, a woman I know at one of the large consumer goods companies had an excellent idea for a new product and spent a great deal of time developing it with her close colleagues. But the concept never flew. The reason? My friend didn't stop to think that at the top of her company was a small cadre of men who made all the final decisions. Instead of seeking their support, she relied only on her relationship circle, not understanding that she had to enlist one of those men at the top of the pyramid to own her idea, so that when trouble happened, she was covered. Basically, her idea didn't reach fruition because she lost sight of the fact that a good idea isn't more powerful than the structure that must approve it.

I've always felt the best paradigm for the game of business would be a circle superimposed on a pyramid. This would allow interaction to take place among all levels of personnel, but would also provide a clear sense of hierarchy.

Finding a way to use our relationship orientation is one of the perspectives I hope women will bring to the game. In the meantime, if you're working in a standard hierarchical framework, you can only think circular if you've been given the freedom to do so from the people above you in the hierarchy.

### **Check Out the Team Culture**

Up until a few months ago, Jane was a highly placed executive at a major media company. She had worked there for many years and was well regarded inside and outside the business. So when she quit to join the staff of a local not-for-profit organization, she surprised everyone—except those who knew her well, who were only surprised that it took her so long to leave.

Jane's issue: She held very strong political opinions, and her company's positions were generally antithetical to hers. Jane earned a good salary and wielded real power, but she always felt uncomfortable because she could never separate her inner beliefs from her company's outlook. Now she makes less money, but she's working for an organization she respects.

Many of us feel our company's values are as important as our jobs. Personally, I could not imagine working for a company I didn't believe in.

In the same way that men compartmentalize their work (see [Chapter 5: Think Small](#)), they compartmentalize their lives: This is my salary, this is my job, this is my family, this is my belief system.

Women care about the totality of the package. We want everything in our lives to feel right—not just the salary, or the power, or the prestige. If you are going to be successful, you must feel comfortable with the place you work. As you walk in the front door for the interview, recognize that you could be on the brink of your next relationship. You've had them with girlfriends, boyfriends, relatives, and so on. This company may be next.

Ask yourself questions about your potential employer: Does the company do something you can feel a connection with? Do I like its public image? Does it stand for something I can stand for too?

Many years ago, when I was making \$27,500 a year, I was offered a job as a producer on a Hollywood talk show. The salary: \$125,000 a year—and this was just the first conversation. I could barely fathom what a grand sum that was. But the show was tacky, and the more I thought about it, the less the money impressed me.

I knew that if I didn't love my job, my performance would be second rate. So I turned the offer down. Not that I don't have plenty of bad moments at CNN, but at the end of the day, no matter what has happened, I'm genuinely proud of what I do and what my company stands for. I can say that to a large audience, or to myself, and know it's true.

The company's culture is more important than the position itself. You'll be happier with an average job at a place you love than with the ideal job at a place you loathe.

You'll also be happier in a place where you can feel comfortable. We tend to take on roles in our jobs just as we take on roles in relationships. Think about who you're going to be. The black sheep? The younger sister? The unattached aunt? The carefree daughter? The trustworthy confidante? Generally, your nonwork relationships dictate who you become in the office.

Unlike in your real family, however, here you have choices. Examine a new company carefully. Ask yourself if it offers a relationship you'd enjoy. Are these people you'd like seeing day after day? Personally, I know if I went for an interview at an office where every woman was wearing a dark suit with a frilly white blouse and stiletto heels, I'd walk out the front door. That's not a uniform I feel comfortable around. Whatever makes these folks tick is only going to make me unhappy.

Likewise, I believe in an open-door policy at work, and I become angry when my colleagues shut their doors. To me, that's a management style that says, "We don't share." So if I walked down the hall and saw that everyone had shut themselves off, I'd walk out the exit.

Do you like your potential employer's office environment? Is it attractive? Could you feel comfortable there? Do people have private offices, or do they work in one great room? Is the building itself so unsightly you couldn't imagine walking into it five or more days a week? I know one major executive who turned down an important job because she couldn't face driving into the world's ugliest industrial compound every morning.

Even in these days of huge conglomerates, companies still have distinct personalities. If you work for General Electric, CEO Jack Welch and his values determine the corporate culture. At AT&T, Michael Armstrong does the same, as does Lou Gerstner at IBM. Oprah Winfrey does the same at Harpo Inc.; even small companies have personalities shaped by their CEOs.

Uncover that culture. Use your relationship skills. The person who interviews you probably has an assistant. Form a relationship with her. Since you'll probably be kept waiting for your interview, find out how the other women feel about the company, the job, the boss. Before a job applicant enters my office, my assistants always walk in the door with their thumbs up or down to let me know what they think.

The receptionist has a name. Use it. Take advantage of her attention. She'll probably offer you a beverage. Accept it. Most women don't, because they think the other woman will feel demeaned; most men do, because they know it's part of her job description, just as the water boy's job was exactly that—to get the water.

The receptionist brings you coffee, you thank her, and the opportunity for a relationship arises. I admit that it took me years to ask for that cup of coffee. Now, since I prefer tea, I do something else. When I'm offered coffee, I ask for hot water and tell the woman not to bother about the tea bags, because I carry them in my purse. That always makes for conversation—most often she's a tea drinker too, or her mother is. Instant relationship!

Walk through the corridors. Do people look happy? Are they friendly? Do they seem your type? Take a quick trip to the cafeteria or lounge, buy a cup of coffee, and listen. Are people complaining? Do they look miserable? Would you want to eat lunch with them?

Most of us put a great deal of time and attention into learning about the other important environments in our lives. If we're sending our child to school, we want to know everything about it—are the classrooms well-equipped, is there a good student-teacher ratio, does the school have a good reputation; we'll talk to a dozen other mothers. I know some women who'll spend months researching a possible vacation spot, and others who won't buy a house until they've practically camped out in it.

Your relationship with your workplace is one of the most important in your life. Make sure you do your homework.

### **Get Picked for the Team**

A short time ago a friend was telling me a story about her son, who was trying out for his high school basketball team. Because he's considerably shorter than his classmates, he arranged a basket shooting display for his coach to show that his skill compensated for his size. He had practiced on the garage hoop several hours a day for the better part of two years. The strategy worked. He landed a spot as a guard.

When he announced the good news to his family at the dinner table that night, his father was delighted. But his sister, looking at him with the disdain that only a younger sister can muster, said, "I'd never want to join any team that didn't already want me."

Carry this kind of experience over to the job interview. The typical guy, who knows what it's like to sit on the bench waiting to play, arrives prepared to sell himself. His every movement says, "Come on, coach, let me in the game."

Most women, on the other hand, spend a lifetime hoping to get noticed. We're taught that it's more polite to wait to be asked—to go out on a date, to get called on in class. (Not surprisingly, studies show that girls are twice as likely to raise their hands in class if boys aren't around.) We don't grow up learning how to sell ourselves the way men do.

But on a job interview, you have to sell. And you have to sell with whatever you've got. Even if it's your first job and all you can say for yourself is that you're a well-organized hardworking person, then do it. Let them see how accurate you are.

You're going to be bumping into male-female stereotypes all the way, so be alert. The first one to consider takes place before the interview starts: punctuality. Yes, men are as tardy as we are. But the cliché of the man who's late isn't so much a part of our culture as the constantly late woman, who's so overwhelmed with her life that she can't manage her time.

Don't expect to get away with a lie. I don't believe people who excuse their tardiness by saying they were in an accident. Why are they sitting in front of me without a smudge or worry on their face? Shouldn't they be at the hospital or the police station?



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