



Nice Girls Don't Get the Corner Office

101 Unconscious Mistakes Women Make that Sabotage Their Careers

by Lois P. Frankel
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Take-Aways

- Without realizing it, many women behave more like obedient, subservient "girls" than like competent women leaders. This leads to 101 career mistakes.
- Behavior that won approval for you as a girl and a teen won't advance your career.
- You can avoid the strategic mistakes women habitually make in the business world.
- Pinpoint your "girlish" weak spots, but don't try to change them all.
- Many women avoid learning the unwritten rules of the workplace, but understanding that code is a survival skill.
- Women make conduct errors that affect their careers, for example, not asking for what they want, but hoping the boss will offer it.
- Women make incorrect assumptions, such as believing that being universally liked is more important than winning respect.
- Be conscious of how you "brand and market" yourself. Women often ignore this area.
- Women tend to make mistakes in speaking style, such as talking fast and too softly.
- Women make career-damaging appearance errors, such as smiling constantly and wearing clothes, makeup and hairstyles that clash with the jobs they want.

Rating (10 is best)

Overall	Applicability	Innovation	Style
9	10	8	8

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Relevance

What You Will Learn

In this Abstract, you will learn: 1) How to identify thoughts and behaviors you may not even be aware of that stem from learning to be traditionally feminine; 2) How those behaviors and attitudes keep you from advancing at work; and 3) How to change them.

Recommendation

Author, coach and psychotherapist Lois P. Frankel explains how traditionally feminine behavior undermines women's career growth. She makes you feel as comfortable as possible while teaching you about "girlish" behavior that holds you back at work. As soon as she describes a problem, she jumps in with doable solutions, some easy, some quite challenging or time-consuming. Frankel shares case histories and offers many applicable techniques. She uses humor deftly and warns the gung-ho not to change everything at once. Now the caveats: Frankel does not grapple with the insoluble problem that women who behave in more forceful, unfeminine ways are often disliked and rejected, a maddening *Catch 22* if you want to advance. She should warn that even smart tactics rarely help in a truly sexist workplace. She also needs to say that the wish to be liked isn't girlish, feminine or womanly; it is human. Contrary to platitude, other people can hurt and stigmatize you with their verbal abuse or harassment, no matter how strong you are. Still, although she hasn't unraveled every knot, Frankel comes a long way toward helping women diagnose – with a self-assessment checklist – and correct inadvertent mistakes that could be holding them back. *getAbstract.com* recommends her valuable counsel to women who want to become respected leaders.

Abstract

“Enjoy Being a Girl” Only Takes You So Far

Female socialization is one reason that women head fewer than a dozen of the U.S.'s biggest businesses. Society trains girls to fit a mold of traditional femininity that includes doing as you are told, working harder, complaining less and avoiding being a threat to anyone, ever. Following these rules becomes second nature to girls when parents, teachers and peers reward them for it and reject or punish them otherwise. By the time women enter the business world and want to move up, their feminine tendencies govern them, though they are so ingrained that women may not recognize their presence. These tendencies can lead to 101 (or more) common behaviors and beliefs that keep women from getting promotions, raises and respect.

Those women who get described as “self-defeating” are not trying to avoid success, but rather are continuing to follow powerful messages they learned early in life. They are conditioned to avoid the pain that came their way when they broke the rules. Adult women, too, are often demeaned or dismissed at work and at home for failing to be passive and compliant. This creates a dilemma for women who want to be accepted in business, where being a “good girl” means that no one will consider you for supervisory roles. The cure: first, recognize the feminine stereotypes. Consider which ones you fit and who rewarded you for following them. Don't feel embarrassed or overwhelmed, because almost all women fit a great many. Next, select several such traits as your initial targets for change.

“Women live according to the rules established by men.”

“When you find others resisting your efforts to be more direct and empowered, consider first that their responses are designed to keep you in a less powerful place.”

“Women are made to feel like they’re asking for too much when, in fact, they’re not.”

“Keep in mind that the accusations of being too pushy are designed to keep you quiet.”

“While she was getting coffee, fetching Magic Markers, and making copies, several of the men on the team were providing the real leadership the group needed.”

“Being nurturing and kind is not mutually exclusive of being protective of your time.”

“How You Play the Game”

You may feel that it is unfeminine to recognize that your workplace has unwritten rules that men are likely to understand better than you do. You may even feel it is disingenuous to engage in covert perceptions, but you must if you want to advance. In fact, once you know the unwritten rules, you may find that some traditionally feminine skills – being supportive, working well with others and attending to what people say – can be invaluable tools, especially when you determine how to use the coded rules to get where you want to go. So:

- Choose someone who can help you spot the unacknowledged rules, someone who has learned to use them well. Watch what happens when others break the rules.
- Learn recreational games that help you practice using strategies.
- Don't hesitate to ask your boss to spell out a rule, such as telling you explicitly what goals you are supposed to achieve for a particular project.
- If your manager criticizes your work, see what you might learn from those comments, but do not become more tentative and submissive.
- Don't assume that if you overwork, do work for others, accept low-profile assignments, never give your opinion, take no breaks and put your personal life on the back burner, that you will ever be noticed, appreciated or promoted.

How to Override Your Conditioning

Take concrete steps to overcome those elements of traditional feminine conditioning that are holding you back. To begin, take these measures:

- Ask questions. If people demean you for doing so, don't let them convince you that you were silly or wrong.
- Remember the difference between accepting responsibility for a problem in a mature, dignified way and excessively blaming yourself.
- Assisting others is fine; being taken advantage of is not. It's not helpful to lose sight of your own needs so that everyone else comes first. When others make mistakes, be willing to help occasionally, but don't assume the job of cleaning up after them.
- If others blame you all the time, calmly point that out and propose that, together, you should discuss how to minimize errors.
- Don't reveal information about your personal life, but don't be so secretive that people feel you are cold and distant.
- To grapple with important issues, recognize your power, set aside your intense fear of upsetting people and do not assume that you are less informed than anyone else.
- Don't ask for others' opinions unless it is essential to have them.
- Find ways to confront tricky situations without seeming tough. For example, start a troublesome discussion by acknowledging that what you are about to say is difficult.
- Don't flirt too much.
- Don't get known as someone who will always bring coffee or run low-level errands.
- Never let anyone push you around or intimidate you.
- Endless patience is associated with femininity but not with leadership.
- If someone tries to overpower you, cut through their bluster by saying you understand they are upset. Suggest working together to look for ways to solve the problem.
- Learn to handle your finances so you have enough money to quit an intolerable job.
- If you feel your employer or co-workers mistreat you because you are a woman, check for other possible causes. Why? Because – unfair as it is – filing a sex discrimination or harassment complaint can brand you as a troublemaker. Once you start,

“You don’t take a perk because you want it, or think you deserve it. You take it because it manages the impressions others have of you – and those you have of yourself.”

“Completely, totally and permanently erase the phrase ‘Oh, it was nothing’ from your vocabulary.”

“Every time you give away an idea, you give away a little of your self-respect.”

“If you acquire the training needed to move out of a stereotypical role and it fails to yield results, consider the possibility you’ve been ‘typed’ and might need to seek a new organization.”

the process takes on a life of its own. If you do file, get others to file with you or to support you as you go through the outcome.

- Remember that women often cry when they are angry, especially when they feel helpless to change upsetting conditions. So when you feel like crying, ask yourself, "What is the real cause of my anger?" Look for chances to change the cause. If you want to cry or you burst into tears when you are with someone, say you would like a little time to consider what they have said, excuse yourself and leave the room fast.

The Assumptions You Make

Some beliefs that worked in entry-level positions may block your advancement. Accordingly:

- Do not push yourself to do superhuman amounts of work, because people will expect you to meet that standard every time and will judge you harshly for any let-up.
- Asking for more time, resources or assistance if needed to do your assigned tasks will show that you are a realistic judge of what can be accomplished.
- Rather than doing what you're told, think about more efficient, quick or inexpensive ways to achieve the goal. Beware of internalizing the pressure others put on you. There is no need to work as though every task is an emergency.
- Assume you can do things others think you can't do. Tell yourself so until you believe it.
- Do not avoid meetings just because they are dull. That's where you can make contacts and show you have good ideas.
- If you believe you have no right to a life outside work, you'll be taken for granted, and you'll miss doing things you enjoy that keep you interesting and balanced.
- When you are offered a new job, ask what goes with it.
- Ask for space or resources that are offered to men in similar positions.
- If you ask for more space or resources and don't get them, remember that men are more likely than women to ask again. Don't assume a decision is final. Try again.
- If you're a perfectionist, allocate fewer hours on certain tasks so your unrealistic expectations don't eat all your time. Sometimes 80% is fine and 100% is unnecessary.

Create a Distinctive Identity

Figure out what makes you different. Make your unique features and abilities salient every chance you get. For instance:

- Teach people to associate your distinctiveness with your full name. Give your full name – no nicknames – when you introduce yourself, on your message machine, in your e-mail address and when you leave messages for others. In other words, be Katherine, don't be Katie.
- Instead of waiting to be thought of for promotions, tell your boss you would like higher-level assignments. Maybe the boss doesn't know you want a promotion.
- Forget modesty. Point out how your skills have been essential to solving specific problems or completing projects. When clients thank you, send copies to your boss.
- Take risks! Try to change jobs every three to five years unless you get more responsibility in your current organization.
- Never stop thinking about what job you want next; stay alert for new opportunities.
- When you make a suggestion, speak up so you can be heard. If someone proposes something you just mentioned, tactfully remind people that it was your concept, perhaps by saying you are glad the person liked your idea. One way to protect your ideas is to put them on paper.

“Always begin from a place of equality – regardless of the level of person with whom you are dealing.”

The Way You Speak

Your speaking style and your appearance have a tremendous impact upon onlookers’ perceptions about your believability. To speak in a way that can help you advance:

- Do not act as though others are better than you. When you have something to say, make a positive statement rather than expressing it as a query or with hesitation.
- Don't preface your statements with long explanations, qualifications or justifications.
- When possible, be brief, but don't rush your words and don't feel obliged to say everything you know on the subject.
- Tell people what you plan to do rather than asking if you may do it.
- Don't apologize for small mistakes. When you make a significant error, take charge by asking for specific feedback and showing you plan to make changes accordingly.
- In meetings, speak up early, even if only to ask a question or firmly endorse another person's proposal.

Your Appearance

Check your visual message from the perspective of career growth.

- Avoid constant smiling, tilting your head frequently or scrunching your body into the smallest possible space. These behaviors make you seem insecure and powerless.
- Choose makeup and a hairstyle that fit in your workplace.
- Always "dress for the job you want, not the job you have."
- Don't even think about putting on makeup or combing your hair in public.
- Sit, gesture and move in ways that show your involvement in what's going on.
- Maintain eye contact.

Where To Go from Here

Work with a self-assessment checklist. Based on your answers, decide what traits to tackle. Flag the changes you want to make first. Choose just a few of the 101 mistakes that hit home for you, and focus on overcoming those. It is much more important to choose the most crucial adjustments than to try to change a large number of things at once. When you change one thing, others often follow naturally. No one makes steady progress, so don't let a little backsliding defeat you.

If you decide to hire a coach to guide you, check out your choices before you hire. Ask what relevant training and experiences they have had, how long they've coached, what related professional groups they belong to, what they offer for their fees and what their specialty areas are. Make sure they have worked in the business world, because if they haven't, you may have to spend a lot of time educating them about the way things work in business.

“Reclaim...your power.”

About The Author

Lois P. Frankel, Ph.D., is president of Corporate Coaching International and specializes in workplace behavior, empowerment of women and career counseling. She has worked with executives and managers at *Fortune* 100 companies and is a frequent speaker. She is a licensed psychotherapist with a doctorate in counseling psychology and is author of *Overcoming Your Strengths* and *Nice Girls Don't Get Rich: 75 Avoidable Mistakes Women Make with Money*.