

SUMMARY

NICE GIRLS DON'T GET THE CORNER OFFICE

LOIS P. FRANKEL



Summary of “Nice Girls Don’t Get the Corner Office” by Lois P. Frankel

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Learn about the unconscious mistakes women make that sabotage their careers

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Introduction

Before you begin reading, here's your first tip: Don't read this book until you've learned how to use it to your advantage. You see, women tend to be overly critical of themselves, so if you jump into reading without preparing yourself, you might make the mistake of thinking everything applies to you. In fact, you're probably doing better than you think. "Changing behavior is much easier if you can understand where it comes from and what purpose it serves." First, don't just assume that you aren't where you want to be in your career because you are incompetent or stupid. Instead, you're simply behaving in the way society has taught you. Whether you are from Jakarta, Oslo, Prague, Frankfurt, Wellington, or Detroit, women across all cultures make the same set of unique mistakes at work. Dr. Frankel knows these mistakes and she has witnessed women correct them. As a result, these women have taken paths in their careers they never thought possible. So why is it that women make these mistakes? Well, one reason is that we've been taught that acting like a girl isn't a bad thing. You see, girls get taken care of differently than boys. They aren't expected to fend for themselves and they are made of "sugar and spice and everything nice." Men want to protect girls. Kind of like a pet, girls are simply nice to have around. However, being a girl is easier than being a woman. Women must take control of their destiny; meanwhile, their choices are limited by a defined scope of expectations. Even worse, when you do try to act outside that scope, you get mislabelled as "bitchy" or you hear something like, "You're so cute when you're angry," or even, "Are you PMSing?" Eleanor Roosevelt once said, "No one can make you feel inferior without your consent." It's time to stop consenting. Stop colluding. And quit being a girl!

Inequality in the Workplace

In terms of history, women's rights are considered modern-day privileges. In fact, it wasn't until the end of World War I that women were even allowed to vote! Furthermore, as late as 1977, women married in West Germany were unable to sign work contracts without the approval of their husbands. Since then, Western countries have strived to gain equal rights and have been successful in creating gender-equal societies. Despite the progress, women still struggle to gain equal rights in the business world.

The biggest indifference comes in terms of payment. For example, Hispanic women in the United States make only 59 percent of what Hispanic men make for the same job. Caucasian women make out a bit better at 77 percent compared to their male counterparts. Of course, inequality still exists and begins as soon as women graduate college and enter the workforce. In fact, in their first year out of college, female graduates earn 8 percent less than male graduates. Of course, this isn't just a problem in the United States. All over the world women are less likely to hold well-paid, influential positions. In fact, only 8 percent of top executives worldwide are women. And there are only 20 female heads of state in the world. But why is this? To explain further, let's take a look at the case of Susan.

Susan, a procurement manager for a Fortune 100 oil company, was frustrated after being with the firm for over twelve years and seeing her male colleagues move up further and faster than she did. These men began employment at the same time as Susan, yet they were the ones getting promoted, not Susan. Of course, she recognized the gender bias but she never considered how *she* contributed to the plateau of her career. Susan was a woman with long blond hair, a diminutive figure, and deep blue eyes. She spoke with a delicate Southern accent and had an alluring way of cocking her head and smiling when listening to others. She was a delightful person and people loved being around her.

When Susan spoke, she used equivocating phrases like “Perhaps we should consider...,” “Maybe it’s because...,” and “What if we...” These behaviors allow Susan to present ideas that are unoffensive; however, they don’t exactly make her *executive material*. Dr. Frankel was surprised to learn that Susan had nearly twenty years’ experience in the field of procurement but she nor anyone else would ever know that because of Susan’s unconscious behaviors. You see, Susan bought into the stereotype of being a girl. Her management and peers all commented on how Susan was a delight to work with but no one seriously considered her for more serious positions or highly-influential projects. In other words, Susan acted like a girl so she was treated like one.

Susan also had an upbringing that many women can relate to. She was the youngest of four and she was the only girl. She was the apple of her Daddy’s eye and always protected by her brothers. She learned that being a girl was a good thing and she used it to her advantage. She relied on stereotypically feminine behaviors - she was a delight as a student, the friend that everyone wanted, and the cheerleader that everyone admired. As a result, Susan was rewarded for her behaviors and all her needs were met. However, these behaviors are also the same ones sabotaging her career. Susan never thought about behaving differently or thought about how her behavior could bring her closer to her dream of being promoted to a vice president position.

Women Are Rarely Taught to Play the Game

When you win a game of Monopoly, how do you feel? You might feel excited at first but as you keep playing, you keep winning and you're feelings begin to change. No longer are you excited; instead, you feel guilty. This is a common feeling among many women but is incredibly rare in men. So why is this? Unfortunately, women are not as trained to participate in competitions or competitive sports. In fact, it has only been in recent years that women started making progress in this field. As a result, women don't know the rules of the game in business. So not only do they not know how to play the game, more importantly, they don't know how to win.

You see, girls are raised to be sympathetic and physically attractive versus being successful and self-assertive. They've been taught at a young age that they will only succeed in life if they are well-liked by others so they are praised and rewarded for being polite; meanwhile, they are punished for being too aggressive. On the other hand, boys are expected to act aggressively and are more typically met with "Let boys be boys!" You can even see this in the way children's toys are designed to reflect gender roles and expectations. Take a look at Barbie, a doll that is both physically attractive and well-liked by others. On the contrary, boys' toys are geared towards fighting and competition with figurines like G.I. Joe.

As girls grow older, gender expectation doesn't stop. Women are expected to be feminine and passive for fear of being called "bitchy" or "bossy." I mean, imagine if a female politician celebrated her victory over her opponent by raising her fist and violently punching the air. How might the public react? These gender stereotypes only become more prevalent in the business world when women fail to play the game. The lack of competition instilled in young girls means they grow up believing life is not a game. You see, men understand that both life and business is a game. Like games, the business has winners and losers, so when women ignore the game, they unknowingly create an environment in which they lose.

Another mistake women make is that when they do play the game, they do so safely and within the boundaries. When they play within the narrow boundaries that society expects of them, they end up failing to look like independent self-starters. Additionally, women make the mistake of working too hard; they end up doing the work of others, even worse, they work without a break. “Promotions are rewards for getting the job done, not necessarily doing the job.” Oftentimes, women find themselves trying to be likable, so they take on the work of others. In the end, this does nothing to help women advance their careers; instead, they just look harried, nervous, and overworked. “If you’re concerned only with being liked, you will most likely miss the opportunity to be respected.”

Tools on How to Be a Leader

How often do you find yourself asking for the opinions of others? For example, say your partner asks you a simple question like, “Would you rather cook at home or go out to eat tonight?” You might react by saying, “Well, which would you rather do?” Unfortunately, this is a common trait in women. Overall, women have good intentions when responding in this way but, unfortunately, it stems from the stereotypical need to be liked. The need to be liked is a natural trait and can even be a good thing. But it shouldn’t stop you from taking risks and making hard decisions. Instead, you must find a balance between the need to be liked and the need to be respected.

Imagine that your boss is giving you the power to decide when to inform the company’s shareholders about an upcoming substantial loss. You can either inform them right away or wait until the extent of the loss has already happened. By asking your boss, “Well, what would you recommend?” puts your boss in the position of making the decision, not you. It tells her that you will simply do what she says, even worse, she will get the impression that you are unable to make such risky decisions. One of the biggest unconscious mistakes that women make is polling others before making a decision. This simply shows your peers that you don’t know how to be a leader.

The job of a leader is to take action quickly and decisively. In fact, taking too long to make a decision can be detrimental to your company in scenarios in which a quick decision must be made. Additionally, leaders are responsible for making decisions that are best for the company; regardless if it is a popular decision or not. Some other mistakes that women make for fear of not being liked are failing to ask questions because they think they’ll sound stupid. In reality, asking legitimate questions shows that you are ensuring your understanding, which is a sign of confidence rather than ignorance. If you can’t decide on whether or not to ask a question, simply ask yourself, *“Will the answer apply to only me?”*

Lastly, women make the mistake of *helping*. Because women typically feel the need to be liked by others, they find themselves gaining external validation for their self-worth through acts of service. However, when you help others too much, you likely fail to make the transition from doer to leader. If you're too busy doing, then you don't have time to provide the vision, guidance, technical support, and oversight that is required of a leader. Additionally, there is a difference between being a helper and being used. So if you're working harder than anyone else and you're the leader, you are being used. Leaders lead while helpers stay stuck as employees.

Dress for Success

We often hear the adage, “Don’t judge a book by its cover,” and we like to think that we don’t judge people on the way they look. But research shows that 55 percent of your credibility comes from how you look. In fact, 38 percent of your credibility comes from how you sound and only 7 percent is based on what you say. This simply means that *looks matter*. Think about all the successful female politicians and the way they look. How would you describe the styles of Thatcher or Clinton? Does feminine come to mind? Probably not.

That’s because being *too feminine* can be detrimental to a woman’s career. For instance, let’s talk about smiling inappropriately. As a whole, girls are socialized to smile more than boys. As we age, we can see this stereotype in the business world as well. When men don’t smile, they are seen as important and taken seriously; meanwhile, when women don’t smile, people are concerned that something is wrong. Haven’t you heard women complain of men telling them to smile more? It’s embedded in our society for women to smile. Unfortunately, smiling can make women less authoritative and even distort the message they wish to convey. Women often smile when they are delivering a serious message, criticizing a person, and in situations of potential conflict. In these cases, a smile can be mistaken for several different meanings and make women seem insecure and insincere.

Not only do women have to be conscious of when they smile but they also need to be conscious of what they wear. Dr. Frankel advises abiding by the maxim, “Dress for the job you want, not the job you have.” In other words, if you’re going for that top-position, dress professionally. Women who style themselves in a feminine way are often viewed in a different, less professional way. In fact, women should also be wary of the number of accessories they put on. Accessories have the power to make whatever statement you want and can often convey a message that is communicated through your appearance alone. This can work in your favor but it can also detract from your credibility as well. For example, over-accessorizing can distract people

from listening to your message; instead, they might focus on the dangling bracelet around your wrist. Similar to accessories, makeup has the power to convey a particular message about your personality. People notice it. Therefore, wearing too little makeup can diminish your credibility as much as wearing too much.

While what you wear is important, how you look is equally important too. For instance, when delivering an important message, think about your mannerisms. Do you deliver the message confidently with good posture? If you're like most women, you might find that you tilt your head. Tilting the head in conversation is used to soften the message, it is also used to either imply a question, signal that you're listening or encourage another person to respond. However, when you tilt your head when conveying a direct message, it can be interpreted as uncertainty or even a lack of commitment. So while you shouldn't stop tilting your head entirely, you should be aware of when you should and shouldn't.

Stop Thinking Like a Girl

As soon as you enter the world of business, it's time to check that little girl inside you at the door. No longer can you think the way you did as a young girl, and if you do, your career can quickly be sabotaged. For instance, women often view men in authoritative positions as father figures. If you view your boss in this way, you are hindering yourself from building an independent, objective relationship with him. You also put yourself in danger of reacting emotionally instead of truly listening to the message he is trying to convey.

Similarly, women are taught as little girls to provide favors. As a result, women tend to ignore the *quid pro quo* of relationships. Every business relationship involves *quid pro quo* - that is something that is exchanged for something else in return. Oftentimes, women give up favors easily because they are trying to become well-liked or even improve their boss' mood. They do this and expect nothing in return. Therefore, you must identify the *quid pro quo* in each relationship at work. Begin asking yourself, "What do I have that others need or want?" Each time you give someone what they need, deposit a *figurative chip* into your account. The goal is to have more in your account than you need.

Thinking like a little girl can also mean that you try and strive for perfection. When we aren't perfect, we engage in negative self-talk and doubt our own knowledge and intuition. Over time, we begin to interpret that self-doubt as fact, causing us to second-guess our judgments and doubt our expertise. For example, say you are negotiating with someone you believe to be smarter and more well-informed than you. If you believe that, you are likely to be prematurely won over. Therefore, it's important to stay aware and pay attention to this type of thinking. That way, you'll avoid the trap of self-doubt and make better decisions as a result.

Finally, women fall into the trap of obediently following instructions. As little girls, we were taught to be nice and polite. As a result, we grow up obe-

diently following what we are told to do. Therefore, if you want to be a person that gets ahead, you'll have to learn how to balance the tactical with the strategic. People add value to their work, not by simply following orders but by thinking and planning, which is what you want to be known for. This also means that you should avoid taking full responsibility for a project. Just because it was assigned to you doesn't mean you have to be the *only* one to do it. Learn to delegate and take initiative.

Girls Are Taught to Be Quiet and Take Up Little Space

As mentioned in a previous chapter, how you sound makes up a large percentage of how people perceive you. Imagine two job candidates: one who projects their voice throughout the interview and another who sits there shyly and is hard to hear. Which one sounds more confident? Who will likely get the job? Unfortunately, many women find themselves speaking quietly which makes their message less effective. If ideas aren't communicated in a way that instills confidence and credibility, then those ideas fall on deaf ears.

Therefore, it's not just *what* you say but *how* you say it. It's your word choice, tone of voice, speed of speech, and how you organize your thoughts. Too often women disguise their statements as questions. For fear of sounding stupid, asking a question is a safe way of expressing ideas without being perceived as too pushy or too direct. Additionally, women use too many *qualifiers* and *minimizers* when they speak. Qualifiers are comments like, "Maybe it would be better if..." Their sole purpose is to simply soften and weaken the message. Likewise, minimizing words are those that diminish the importance or size of an achievement. For instance, saying "Oh, I'm *just* a teacher" or "I'm *just* a nurse" are ways women minimize their positions.

Women are also known for apologizing too often. They apologize for unintentional, non-egregious mistakes. And while apologizing is used to simply ease the tension and avoid conflict, it erodes both a woman's self-confidence and the confidence others have in her. It makes it seem as if she is taking fault for something that she shouldn't have to. But in addition to apologizing, women are also more likely to ask for permission. Each time a woman asks for permission, she is diminishing herself and reducing herself to the position of a child. Of course, asking permission has good intentions but is a trait that says "I'm not good at taking risks." Instead, identify and clarify the boundaries of your job and act accordingly.

Finally, in addition to being meek and mild, women are taught to take up as little space as possible. For example, they are taught to hold their arms close to their bodies, cross their legs at the knee, and avoid using big gestures. As a result, women are more often seen as insecure and submissive. You see, the use of space is one way we make a statement about how confident we are. So if you're giving a presentation, take up as much space as possible and use appropriate gestures. You'll find you look more confident and people will take you more seriously.

Find a Sponsor and Capitalize on Relationships

Oftentimes, women are less likely than men to capitalize on networking opportunities. For example, say you are at a bar chatting up a cute guy when he reveals that he's a hiring manager of a company you plan to apply to. Even better, he's an executive. Would you take advantage of this situation? In reality, many women won't. But if you want to stand out and make something of yourself, you need to learn how to network and capitalize on these chance encounters.

As mentioned previously, it's important to search for the *quid pro quo* in each relationship. How are you going to provide what someone needs and vice versa? In the business world, there is nothing shameful about thinking about relationships in this way; in fact, it's smart. You see, many highly-influential positions are typically given to people based on relationships and networks, not interviews. Therefore, the biggest mistake that women find themselves making when it comes to relationships is failing to seek out a sponsor. A sponsor acts as a mentor who can introduce you to others in the industry and use their influence to promote you to other businesses.

Research has shown that sponsorship is a great way to accelerate a person's career. Therefore, when you fail to secure one, you are severely hindering yourself and, ultimately, sabotaging your career. In fact, women have been known to get *fewer* promotions because of their lack of sponsors compared to their male counterparts who have secured one. In other words, when someone doesn't have a sponsor, they are less likely to get a highly-influential position.

So if you're going for that corner office, it's time to take action. Stop being quiet and speak up. Stop avoiding office politics and get involved. And lastly, secure a sponsor and watch your career take off in ways you never even imagined.

Final Summary

Girls are taught to be meek, mild, and non-competitive. They are expected to be nurturing, kind, and people pleasers. Unfortunately, all these ingrained stereotypes are setting women up for failure in the workplace. From a young age, women have been self-sabotaging themselves as they rely on what society expects of them, hindering their career in the process. They aren't taught how to play the game, which means they don't know how to win. It's time to go against the grain and make the necessary changes to excel in your career. With the necessary tools provided by Dr. Frankel, you can begin changing your behavior in the workplace to ensure that you are respected, listened to, and taken seriously. As you become aware of the behaviors that are sabotaging your career, you will begin to see a change in how people perceive you and how you perceive yourself. So stop simply going with the flow and trying to make everyone happy, make yourself happy by becoming a leader and securing that corner office.



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