



Caitlin Friedman AND Kimberly Yorio

# the girl's guide to being a boss

## (without being a bitch)

VALUABLE LESSONS, SMART SUGGESTIONS,  
AND TRUE STORIES FOR SUCCEEDING  
AS THE CHICK-IN-CHARGE



MORGAN ROAD BOOKS

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## office politics are a big fat drag

**NAVIGATING CLOSED DOORS, HUSHED WHISPERS, AND WATERCOOLER RUMORS**

We know. We thought we left this behavior behind in high school. We assumed we'd grown up and moved on from the backstabbing and gossip, but as we all know, those passed notes and ruined reputations were just a dress rehearsal for the big show.

*Glamour* magazine joined with [www.lawyers.com](http://www.lawyers.com) to conduct a poll that revealed that 75 percent of women say we're tougher on other females than we are on men in the workplace. Of all the social institutions we graduate into, the workplace can be the worst kind of incubator for mean-spirited, ugly, and jealous behavior, all of which culminates in the lowest form of politics.

It shouldn't be this way, and women managers can change the tone and culture in today's workplace. The era of the old boys' club is coming to an end. According to the Center for Women's Business Research, 28 percent of women now earn more than their husbands.

And women today represent 50 percent of the graduating classes in law schools, medical schools, and MBA programs.

In 2000, CNN executive Gail Evans wrote a groundbreaking, bestselling book, *Play Like a Man, Win Like a Woman: What Men Know About Success that Women Need to Learn*. In *Play Like a Man, Win Like a Woman*, Evans put forth her thesis: Women are not in star positions because they haven't yet learned how to play the game. She believed that the game of business is played on a field where males have been comfortable since they were very young. Evans wrote, "It's a game where winning is the obvious (and only) objective and where aggression, self-promotion, a tough skin, and an effective display of power are the signs of a winner. Women, on the other hand, enter the game disadvantaged, having been taught to be cooperative rather than competitive, to enjoy the process rather than simply the result, and to seek approval rather than assume success." In her book, Evans sets out to level the playing field by instructing women on how men play so that we can beat them at their own game.

Three short years later, Evans wrote a second bestselling book, *She Wins, You Win: The Most Important Strategies for Making Women More Powerful*, where she advises women to trump the old boys' network by playing a "girls' game." She realized that it's not about playing games like men. It's about winning as women, and doing it together. Her rule in this book: "Every time a woman succeeds in business, every other woman's chance of succeeding in business increases. Every time a woman fails in business, every other woman's chance of failure increases."

As Gail Evans's flip-flop demonstrates, in a very short time women's power and sheer numbers have changed the rules in the workplace, but make no mistake, the game is still on. And you had better know the rules. Playing politics takes time and energy away from accomplishing your goals and undermines the efforts of

both you and your team, but sometimes you just can't avoid the game.

## the world outside your office door: what office politics are and why they suck

Personality clashes. Interdepartmental competition. Sucking up to the boss. Gossiping. Acting one way with your team and another way with your management. These are just a few examples of office politics. According to the career-planning section of [www.about.com](http://www.about.com), office politics is an increasing problem, as evidenced by a 1998 study from Accountemps published in *Talent Scout*: "Eighteen percent of an administrator's time—more than nine weeks out of every year—is spent resolving conflicts among employees."

Managers and employees who are spending more time playing politics are spending less time on their jobs—impacting productivity and eventually the bottom line. Politics isn't just a big-company phenomenon. We've interviewed a number of people who worked in retail and restaurants (not to mention all of the postings we've seen on career advice Web sites and job complaint blogs) who've complained that the staff members who were "most friendly" with the bosses got the best shifts and schedules. "Bosses' pets" were held to a different standard than the other employees, and this created problems. It's impossible not to like some people more than others, but as a manager, your responsibility is to make sure that your team has the tools and the environment to get their work accomplished.

Terry Bragg runs a company called Peacemakers Training in Salt Lake City and works with organizations to create a workplace where people want to work, and with managers who want their people to work together better. In a 2004 article for *Occupational Hazards*

magazine, he offered "Nine Strategies for Successfully Playing Office Politics":

1. Be nice to everyone. Don't believe the "nice guys finish last" stuff. In office politics, nice guys build supportive relationships with other people. Bulldozers and sharks make enemies, and enemies make your life miserable by resisting and sabotaging you. Be sincerely nice to everyone, not just the people you think can help you. People resent phoniness.
2. Be a team player. A team player is someone who helps the team achieve its goals and helps other people achieve their goals. Be a star by making other people look good, rather than taking credit for other people's achievements.
3. Don't whine and complain. Develop a reputation for being a problem solver. Anybody can complain about a problem, but really valuable employees are those who prevent or solve problems. Although the squeaky wheel may get oiled, its coworkers resent the whiny employee.
4. Be visible. You can't win office politics by hiding. You must be involved and others need to perceive you as a valuable contributor at work. Get involved in solving important and highly visible problems at work. In the age of downsizing, many employees are shocked to learn that they lost their jobs because upper management didn't know what they were contributing to their organization. You not only have to do good work; others must give you credit for your good work and perceive you as a good worker.
5. Help your boss succeed. This is part of being a team player. It is also a smart strategy because your boss is a major player in your promotability and in how upper management perceives you and your work. If you have a positive relationship with your boss, your boss is more likely to support your career and help you advance. Now some of you are reeling in disgust because you hate your boss.

Well, get over it. You will have a more difficult time winning office politics if you openly declare war on your boss or antagonize your boss. Remember, he probably has kept his job and power base because he knows a few things about playing office politics. You don't have to suck up to your boss, but you must nurture your relationship with your boss. If you disagree with your boss, do it privately. Be very careful about embarrassing your boss in public or in front of your boss's superiors or staff. You don't want your boss trying to get even with you.

6. Be loyal. Avoid backbiting and backstabbing. Coworkers will support you if they believe that you will be there to support them. To get loyalty, show your loyalty.
7. Be good at what you do. Develop your expertise and competence. Show up on time and work hard for your full shift. To survive in the workplace, you need to do good work. If others perceive you as a slacker or a poor worker, they will not support you. They will also resent your getting promoted before them.
8. Mind your manners. Be polite and courteous. Avoid being sarcastic or putting other people down. Err on the side of being gracious.
9. Make other people look good. We already mentioned this concerning being a team player, but it bears repeating. People will support you when they believe that you make them look good. They will resent you if they believe you take credit for the work they do. Give credit to others. Sincerely compliment others. Help people look important and successful in front of the people who are important to them.

## good witch or big bitch?

### IT'S NOT ALWAYS FAIR: SOME BITCHES GET TO THE TOP

Jane and Sarah are two of the most kick-ass saleswomen in Chicago working for one of the hottest companies in the industry. They regularly exceed their sales goals and are loved by customers and other departments alike. Unfortunately, they are miserable and with good reason. They work for a big bitch boss—a boss who routinely breaks every rule in this book.

- She routinely eavesdrops on their conversations and berates them about the content. God forbid they are on a personal call, she will walk out of her office and into theirs, standing in front of them tapping her foot until they hang up.
- She requires Jane and Sarah to blind-copy her on all e-mails with outside customers so she knows exactly what they are saying. It's distrustful and disrespectful, and makes them second guess everything they say.
- She screams. Regularly and for no apparent reason.
- She takes credit for their accomplishments with senior management, and often with them in a meeting bearing witness.
- She places blame when things go wrong and never accepts responsibility.
- She is absolutely out of control when it comes to budgeting and managing costs, without ever considering the big picture. She will regularly fly off the handle if a budget line needs to be increased, even if another line is reduced to cancel out the overage.
- She will override their opinion in front of customers, their assistants, outside consultants, messengers, pretty much anyone in the universe, other than her own management, of course.
- Two excellent (reliable, smart, and friendly) department assistants sit outside Jane and Sarah's supervisor's office. She

doesn't like their phone manner, they are much too friendly. She e-mails Jane and Sarah to ask them to be less friendly on the phone. "They don't need to be so sweet, it wastes time."

Jane and Sarah's supervisor was recently promoted and given more responsibility. In addition to all of those things they listed above, their manager is a master of politics. She has an uncanny knack for survival and has put her own needs and goals above all else, and so far it's been working for her. Her management has chosen to look the other way because the department continues to produce. We believe her bad boss behavior will catch up with her. We just hope it's soon enough for Jane and Sarah.

## girl's guide to gossip

In this book, we've interviewed experts about each subject we cover. We've included real-life stories from ourselves and others. Kim is the world's living expert on workplace gossip—she's excelled at it, been burned by it, used it to her advantage, and almost been fired for it on a few occasions early in her career. She was never a malicious gossip, but she has the gift. She remembers people, faces, and places and has an uncanny ability to put the pieces of a story together even when nobody tells her anything. She can listen and participate in a number of different conversations at the same time, and as an operator in the days before voice-mail, she would routinely answer the phones of thirty different people, getting to know each of their stories: who their friends and lovers were, what they liked for lunch, when they went to hair or personal fitness appointments, who their shrink was, and on and on. She was friendly and chatty and occasionally passed along inappropriate information. Now she's a repentant gossip and here's her hard-learned *Girl's Guide to Workplace Gossip*:

- **Keep it to yourself.** It's not easy, but when you learn a new piece of information, don't share it with anyone.
- **Satisfy the urge with celebrities.** Our favorite way to blow off steam and share gossip is to talk about celebrities—let's face it, their stories are always more exciting than your coworkers' or bosses' will ever be.
- **Set some boundaries and stick to them.** You don't need to share every detail of your personal life. If you don't know what we're talking about, review chapter 4's section on setting boundaries.
- **Sharing positive news doesn't give you a free pass.** Remember, it is not your story to tell. If a member of your team or your boss tells you they are pregnant, it is not information for you to pass along.
- **If someone tells you something, assume that they don't want you to tell someone else.**
- **Being trustworthy can be your biggest asset.** If you are a trusted member of an organization, you will be given more responsibility, more information, and more power.
- **Don't ever use names in public.** For this one we have to credit Caitlin's husband, Andrew. You just never know who you're sitting next to in a restaurant, on an airplane, or at your child's soccer game.
- **Information is currency, but you don't have to treat it that way.**
- **If you overhear some information, don't pass it along.** Remember, it may not even be true.
- **Avoid negative talk.** Complaining doesn't make things better and it usually makes it worse.
- **If you have an idea how to improve something, share it.** Creating positive buzz can be very beneficial to an organization.
- **If you do plan on passing something along, whatever you do, do not write it down (no e-mail!).** Ever. Pick up the phone. We try not to subscribe to the "CYA" manual; however, in this case we

must. When you write something down, there is no denying that you said it. Written words and e-mails can be passed along and can never be denied. Trust us. Cover your ass by not committing gossip to paper.

- **If your role in the company puts you in contact with confidential personnel or financial information, keep it to yourself.** For so many reasons. You can hurt people and the company, and you will be fired for breaking confidentiality.

## don't date: it's the law

We find that women fall into two camps when it comes to workplace dating: those who do and those who don't. Our Marines from chapter 2 were a good example. Courtney had a policy against dating Marines; Angela dated a Marine (not in her chain of command) and wound up marrying him. Caitlin was an office dater. As a matter of fact, she too married her boss from a previous job. However, if she were to do it all over again, she probably would try to avoid workplace dating. Not only did she have to find another job to continue her relationship; when her team found out, she became an instant pariah. Being a pariah is bad, but being the subject of a lawsuit is certainly worse.

In a ruling that significantly expands the law on sexual harassment in the workplace in 2005, California's Supreme Court ruled that workers can sue when a colleague who is sleeping with the boss is shown repeated preferential treatment.

According to the *New York Times*, "Unions and lawyers who represent workers rejoiced, claiming a victory for a group some of them call 'the unloved.' Phil Horowitz, chairman of the California Employment Lawyers Association, said employees can no longer be 'treated as second-class citizens because they're not putting out.'"

Lawmakers in other states are looking at this ruling and considering recommending similar legislation. Think twice before dating

a colleague, and it's probably better to just avoid dating the boss, especially if he's married. You'd think this is common sense, yet it happens all of the time. It's also important to remember that society's acceptance of women dating in the workplace or cheating on their husbands is a lot lower. If a woman is going to try to date the boss, she had better be sure that it's going to be worth it. Suzy Wetlaufer may have gotten former CEO Jack Welch to leave his wife and marry her, but she also lost her job and had to weather being trashed in the newspapers and on television for months.

So, you've ruled out workplace dating. You should probably rule out joking, too. When we asked our house counsel, employment attorney Laurie Malkin, how dangerous it is to even joke about sex, she gave us the long and frightening answer:

"It is *incredibly* dangerous. A workplace that includes sexual jokes can be a 'hostile environment' under federal, state, and local laws that prohibit sexual harassment. Although a single instance of a sexually related joke or innuendo does not, in itself, make an employer liable for sexual harassment, an environment that condones such conduct—particularly one in which managers or supervisors engage in such behavior—is begging for trouble.

"Women can be held liable for sexual harassment just as easily as men. Both women and men also can be held liable for same-sex harassment, so telling jokes among the 'girls' also may give rise to legal liability. Supervisors and corporate officers may, in many cases, be held *personally liable* for unlawful harassment and discrimination. This means that a plaintiff may be able to go after a person's own bank accounts, home, personal property, future wages, etc., if he or she prevails and wins money damages. Finally, keep in mind that even if a female manager wins the legal battle, she may have lost the war—few employers stand by their employees when they are found to have engaged in improper or illegal conduct. It also does little to help one's image and business relationships.

"The above warnings are not idle threats. The average jury verdict in a sexual harassment case is \$250,000, not including legal fees, court costs, and punitive damages. These additional amounts can more than double the cost. The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the agency that administers federal antidiscrimination laws, reports that allegations of sexual harassment by men is up dramatically—from 9.1 percent of all claims in 1992 to 15.1 percent in 2004. Add these two facts together, mix with old-fashioned greed and a national culture that loves a good scandal, and you have a recipe for disaster.

### MANAGING YOUR MANAGER

As an employee, when faced with highly political environment, you can do a few things to make life easier for yourself and with your supervisor. A number of the managers, when sharing their experiences, unknowingly shared their frustrations about their staff. Like communication, frustration is a two-way street. We've culled all of the frustrations, threw in our own, and came up with a list of things to help you be a better employee. If you honor your end of the bargain, we can guarantee you will be better managed.

- It's not about you. You are not the most important cog in the wheel and should not be the focus of everyone's attention. Consider your role and try to look at your manager's challenges in addition to your own.
- Get to know your boss's challenges and help solve them. If you become known as a problem-solver, your boss will give you more responsibility and better assignments, and quicker promotion.
- Make yourself useful. If you see something that needs to be

done, do it. An "It's Not My Job" attitude gets you nowhere with your management.

- Know your boss's schedule and try to work within it. For example, if you know that she has a weekly meeting with her management on a certain day, then communicate your accomplishments and challenges to her the day before.
- Be loyal. If your manager has treated you fairly and with support, you owe her some allegiance.
- A little initiative goes a long way. Every single manager we interviewed said they preferred employees who took chances and made mistakes to those who waited and regularly asked for instruction.
- Know the pecking order. If you're a new employee, chances are you're at the bottom of it. Don't worry, we've all been there.
- If you're unhappy, speak up. Be specific about the problems you're having and try to come to the conversation with some solutions.

## the high road less traveled

It's pretty boring, and it's never easy. However, the best advice we can offer you to be successful in office politics is to just take the high road. If everyone around you is being negative, keep your mouth shut. If someone shares a juicy piece of gossip with you, don't pass it along. If the office hours are flexible, and most people show up late, get in on time. Maintain friendly relationships with everyone, even if you can't stand them.

## the word

ELIZABETH SPIERS, NOVELIST AND FORMER  
EDITOR IN CHIEF, MEDIABISTRO.COM

As founding editor of Gawker.com, a weblog about "the darker Manhattan-centric themes: class warfare as recreational sport; pathological status obsession; and the complete, total, and wholly unapologetic embrace of decadence," she became a celeb herself. She was named one of *Women's Wear Daily's* "Ones to Watch" in October of 2004 and "Best Gossip" by the *Village Voice* ("Best of New York") in 2003. Gawker was named to *Entertainment Weekly's* 2003 "IT List," one of *Time* magazine's "Top 50 Websites" for 2003, a "Best Media Blog" (2003) by *Forbes*, and a "Best of Breed" online news site by the New York New Media Association.

Elizabeth was the editor in chief of mediabistro.com, a Web site whose mission is to "provide opportunities (both on- and off-line) for you to meet each other, share resources, become informed of job opportunities and interesting projects, improve your career skills, and showcase your work." She's also been a contributing writer and editor at *New York* magazine and a freelance writer for a number of publications, and her résumé even includes a stint as a buy-side financial analyst focusing on small-cap tech equities and early-stage venture capital. She's currently writing a novel. She's been at the forefront of new media, worked in traditional media, and even did a stint on Wall Street. Elizabeth shares some thoughts on blogging and office politics with us:

- People risk losing their jobs for blogging about work for the same reason people write about work generally: It takes up half of your waking life. It's hard not to write about work. People who do it in such a way that it might jeopardize their jobs are usually just telling themselves that it's not a big deal or their boss won't find it.



- Perhaps because I've generally been good with office politics, I don't think they're a "problem" to be solved. There are hierarchies in every aspect of life, and they're not going to go away, so best learn how to navigate them. Different kinds of workplaces have different kinds of problems. The things that made my life difficult when I was an equity analyst are not the same things that make my life difficult in the media industry.
- Working for Gawker was essentially the same as freelance writing. You're working from home and no one's really telling you what to do. Working in traditional media at *New York* magazine (though to be fair, I was also blogging for them) was like having a nine-to-five desk job, except that, being a magazine, it was less rigorous bureaucratically than, say, a consulting or finance job. It's a creative pursuit and much more easygoing, professionally. I actually liked the magazine environment better because being around other people was more stimulating than sitting on my couch all day with a laptop. There were other people I could learn from. Mediabistro is a job that's environmentally more like a dot-com, but my particular job is more similar to the magazine job than the Gawker job. I'm in the office all day, managing other people, assigning and editing stories, etc.
- The friend/editor boundaries are loose in my experience. I get together socially with many of my editors, past and present, and several of my bloggers and freelance writers have also become personal friends. You just have to be rigorous about setting boundaries, and if there's any sort of conflict you have to make sure they understand that you're doing your best to be sympathetic (and are probably more inclined to be, given your personal relationship), but you have your own job requirements. In situations where the personal relationship pre-dates your professional relationship, the general rule of thumb should be don't hire your friends unless you're capable of firing them, should that become necessary.

go ahead and blog: you may just get fired for it

We've established that you can be fired for dating your boss and coming in late. That seems pretty obvious compared to the new craze in fire-able offenses: blogging about your workplace. Only a few will be able to turn their blogs into six-figure book deals and movie options. So most likely, what worked for Jessica Cutler, author of *The Washingtonienne* and famous blogger who got fired from the mail room in the office of Senator Mike DeWine after sharing her experiences trading sex for money with high-profile Washington politicians, will not work for you. As she herself said when interviewed in the *Washington Post* when the scandal broke, "I was only blogging for, what, less than two weeks? Some people with blogs are never going to get famous, and they've been doing it for, like, over a year. I feel bad for them."

For those of you who are not blogging about being paid for sex by politicians but merely complaining that your boss and coworkers are lazy and irritating, take heed. You can and probably will be fired if someone from your workplace reads it. According to an article in *USA Today* in 2005, "Delta Air Lines, Google and other major companies are firing and disciplining employees for what they say about work on their blogs, which are personal sites that often contain a mix of frank commentary, freewheeling opinions and journaling."

Blogs are everywhere. According to a report this year by public relations firm Edelman and Intelliseek, a provider of business-intelligence solutions, about twenty thousand new blogs are created daily, and an estimated 10 million U.S. blogs will exist by the end of 2005. Together, these blogs link up to create what is known as a blogosphere, a collective Internet conversation that is one of the fastest-growing areas of new content on the Web.

Workplace blogging can be scary territory. Employees who cre-

ate blogs set up a direct way to communicate about their company with the public, because customers and clients can stumble across a blog when doing a seemingly harmless Google search. And isn't that kind of the point? You're not blogging for yourself—that could be done on the private hard drive of your computer—you're blogging so other people will read it. And if other people read about incompetence in your workplace, interoffice affairs, or new projects that you're working on, you can put your employer and yourself at risk.

Because blogging is so new, laws haven't been written concerning it yet and companies are just beginning to write their policies.

We recommend using common sense when blogging.

- Don't complain, slander, or otherwise disrespect people who you work with.
- Don't blog about your sex life, or your drinking habits, or recreational drug use. Many employers have "morals clauses," and if you break them, even on your personal time, you will be fired.
- Don't assume you're anonymous. The more salacious your blog, the more people who read will try and figure out who you are.
- Don't blog about the projects you are working on—this could be considered privileged information by your employer.

Of course, if you can't blog about any of the above, then there may be no reason to blog at all—which is the safest route.

## girl talk

FRANKE JAMES

Franke James describes herself as an artist/inventor/writer and a founder of [www.office-politics.com](http://www.office-politics.com). She has been developing new creative products, everything from games to cartoons, since 1997. She's designed lighthearted "psychological" and satirical Internet games. The office-politics site was conceived in 2000 as a place that people could turn to for information, advice, and entertainment about all things office politics. People love the free advice column, and she's received thousands of posts from all over the world and from all kinds of industries. To handle the volume, she's assembled a growing list of authors, executive coaches, and ethical experts. Her latest project is the Office-Politics® game. Franke shares her experiences with office politics with us.

### What is the most common dilemma you hear?

Nobody appreciates all the work I do.

### In the Office-Politics® game many of the situations you present are much more serious than office politics. You cover harassment and petty white-collar crime and a number of basic ethical situations. What parameters should be put on office politics vs. more serious offenses?

Office politics is about the ethical culture and values that everyone in the office shares (or doesn't share!). So, you have to ask yourself, What are the important values in my office? Do I fit in? Are openness and honesty encouraged, or are lying, cheating, and bribery the unspoken rule? Depending on who you are and what your values are, you are going to be a fish out of water in one office and swimming happily in the other. Obviously most offices are not that black and white; there is a huge scale, but it's the old slippery slope. Is lying okay when it's the executive secretary covering for the boss? Is lying okay when safety inspectors come to investigate a contamination problem because otherwise it will cause

mayhem with the stock price? Is paying bribes okay because that's the way business is run in this country? It goes on and on.

I see office politics as encompassing all ethical, behavioral, and moral issues encountered in the office environment. It's about human nature. Family politics and school politics share many of the same dynamics.

**Can you succeed in business without playing politics? If so, do you have any suggestions for women to minimize the political landscape?**

You can't escape office politics. But you can learn to play the game. Everyone has an agenda. Awareness makes all the difference. It's much better to understand how and why people are manipulating facts and/or events to bring about their desired outcome. Office politics are not a necessarily evil. They are a fact of life and everyone is better off learning how to deal with them—and how to use them to their advantage!

People need to be asking themselves questions all the time, such as, How do my needs differ from the company's needs? How are they in sync? How can achieving my career objectives benefit the company? Who do I need to sell my idea to within the company to make positive change happen? Whose agenda will block my idea? etc.

**How bad does a situation have to get before you bring it to the attention of your supervisor or human resources?**

Use your best judgment. Obviously if it's a petty matter (e.g., who got the better chair, better vacation dates, etc.), then you want to rise above it so you aren't branded as petty and small-minded.

But if it's illegal, or harassment—sexual or psychological—don't wait. Life is too short, and the price of stress too high to put up with a problem that's gnawing away at you or a coworker.

**What are you three absolute “must never dos” in the workplace for women?**

1. *Don't bitch about petty things.* Choose your battles so you don't come off looking like squabbling children. Many bosses

abdicate responsibility in deciding who is right and who is wrong. They are frequently impatient, and just as likely to fire the innocent as the guilty.

2. *Don't do anything you wouldn't want to see splashed across the front page of the newspaper.* It's old advice, but good, especially in this age of camera cell phones! Would Enron and Worldcom have had their respective meltdowns if the company culture was zero tolerance for dishonesty?

3. *Don't mix office and romance.* This is a tough one for many people. After all, we see our coworkers for more hours in the week than our spouses. If you do succumb to temptation, have a good exit plan.

**Are there strategies to adopt as managers to stop the politics before they can start?**

Managers should hire for attitude, not ability. You can train someone to learn a new skill, but it's awfully hard to change ingrained attitudes (hmmm, brainwashing might work, but it's iffy). Attitudes set the stage for the company culture. The manager's hires should reflect the ideal company culture. This helps create one big, happy family where people generally embrace the same values, honesty, truthfulness, diligence vs. lying, cheating, etc. That is true whether it's a good culture or a bad culture you want to build.