

# Congratulations!

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You are about to become very wise!

This book is about two very good things: (a) sex and (b) the workplace. Unfortunately, when the two are combined, you can find yourself in deep trouble with angry co-workers, furious bosses, and sexual harassment charges. You don't need your career to come to a screeching halt over some misstep that could be avoided by a bit of reading.

If you are a movie fan, you remember the classic detective films of the 1950s. Flirting was rampant and female employees were routinely referred to as dames by Bogart or Mitchum, and when they did call their secretaries by names like names like "dollface", "sweet thing", or "darlin'", the dames loved it. At the same time, many companies in the real world employed only single women, and fired them if they became married. There was no question that men were in charge, and women had to either enjoy a subservient position or leave the company.

The last 30 years have seen enormous changes. Among senior executives, the number of women has increased 500 per cent, and no one calls his female boss "dollface" anymore. In fact, no one jokes with or touches *anyone* for any reason, for fear of creating a "hostile work environment" and being sued for sexual harassment. Times have certainly changed ... or have they? .

In 2002, a survey in *Mademoiselle* magazine revealed that 72 percent of workers admit to flirting with co-workers. About 36 percent had dated a co-worker, and 11 percent were asked out by the boss. Twenty percent said a superior had touched them against their will, and three percent said they had been threatened with retaliation for not submitting to a harasser. About 47 percent, who were harassed, either quit or just ignored it.

Clearly, today's workplace is a very complex interpersonal environment. Women are breaking into executive ranks, and are not always sure how to act. Men are still trying to figure out how to work with women as equals, which "may help to explain why men sometimes deal with their female colleagues in such a clumsy way; and - yes -sometimes in a sexist, patronizing way" [Berkowitz 73]. Each gender seems to have a different style of communication, and knowing what to expect would make the adjustment process easier.

Navigating this confusing environment is what this book is about. We cannot anticipate all the situations you might encounter, and certainly do not have all the answers. But we think that we have a handle on a number of them, and we hope that our ideas and insights make sense to you.

There have been entire books written about "dressing for success," but we will try to put it all in a page or two. The basic rule is that what is great at a bar or a party is not very businesslike, unless you are in the sex industry.

Women: please do not wear tank tops, cleavage enhancing blouses, or mini skirts. We understand your desire to get noticed, but a wardrobe that is too tight or too short is distracting to both males (who begin to let their minds wander) and females (who are wondering what you are trying to prove).

Men: you have fewer choices regarding dress, so this section focuses on women. But please remember that button-down is always in, sans-a-belt slacks are always a bad idea, and that you are not a GQ Model.

### **Scenario**

Andrea, the new Assistant Vice President, is the last to scurry into the conference room to present her findings. Dressed in what she thinks is a professional outfit (a black button down top, matching skirt, hose, and heels), she walks with confidence. The silence is broken however, with the clearing of throats, smirks, raised eyebrows, and uncomfortable body shifts, as the assembled group observes her tight unbuttoned top and short skirt. The audience, predominantly men, loses their ability to focus upon the presentation, and concentrates solely upon her appearance. The effectiveness of the presentation becomes lost as both the men and the women in the room fail to regard her as a serious person.

### **What it means**

Women have the innate ability to grab attention, manipulate the situation, and stamp almost any impression upon the male population. Despite what most women may tell you, they usually know *exactly* what they are doing. Men know this intellectually, but often do not think with their brains and fall into the trap every time. "The effect a woman can create by careful attention to her physical appearance is something else that he respects: If he were a woman, he would make maximum use of that advantage" [Elgin 3].

The wardrobe you chose is will serve as your first impression every time. Remember that both men and women will scrutinize you. In one experiment, young women applying for a position in a doctor's office wore revealing outfits to appear more attractive and therefore nail the position. "When they discovered that the physician interviewing them was female, they became uncomfortable, and during the interviews tugged at the necks of their blouses and hems of their skirts, trying to cover themselves up" [Tannen 271, 9].

Popular "makeover programs" on television point out that one can dress to appear to be the mother figure, the mistress, or the wife, depending which message one desires to send. More than ever, people are likely to ask: What are her motives for wearing makeup, accessories, hairstyles, piercings, clothing, or perfume [Dimitrius 51]? Each decision carries a hidden meaning [Tannen 109, 9], and there is an important balance between making use of this advantage and appearing professional [Elgin 19].

### **The Rule to use**

Remember that most of you do not work in the industries of sex, drugs, or rock and roll. Wear classic clothing versatile enough to transition from everyday life to professional settings. Once you choose an outfit and leave for work, you cannot dress up from there, so start with a look high enough that you can dress down. Flexibility is a virtue.

### **Problem Identified**

Ladies, many of you know what we're talking about here. Some men are completely incapable of maintaining eye contact during a conversation. Somehow the muscles in their eyes just can't seem to tear themselves away from staring just slightly south of the shoulders and north of the belly button. Often this behavior is so blatant, it is almost as if they think women have ears in their cleavage. News flash ... women's ears are in the same place that men's ears happen to be.

If you saw the movie, "Bridget Jones' Diary", then you may remember Bridget referring to her boss, Mr. Fitzherbert, as "Mr. Tits-Pervert", since he could never speak to her without his eyes firmly planted on her chest. He didn't even know her real name. Some men may not even know that they are doing this, and some men feel that "if they are out there, then they are fair game for ogling." Of course, men who think this way aren't using their brains to think with anyway.

### **Scenario**

Although Lisa doesn't wear tight clothing or low cut blouses to the office, it never fails that every interaction with Bob in Accounting results in an uncomfortable exchange. Bob just can't seem to address Lisa without his eyes fixating on her chest. This makes Lisa feel like a piece of meat, and she tries to find any excuse not to go into the Accounting Office. This not only affects Lisa's work and state of mind while trying to do her job, but Bob's actions have earned him the reputation as a total pervert with the women in the office.

### **Solutions & Consequences**

The fact is that women have breasts, and some are bigger than others. Unless all women wear oversized potato sacks to the office, men are going to have to try a little harder to avoid staring at them outright. Guys, we know the beauty and feminine attributes of a woman can be distracting, but it is never, repeat never, acceptable to stare down at or speak into the cleavage of a female co-worker. So, unless you are a bra designer speaking to a fitting model, or a breast enhancement surgeon speaking to a patient, please maintain eye contact and a professional demeanor at all times.

### **The Rule to Use**

Men, keep your eyes off of the breasts. Women, don't wear anything too low cut or revealing, especially if you were blessed, or cursed, with mammoth mammaries.