

How to Thrive as a Female in a Male Dominated Work Environment

Don't play the victim, play the game

- Don't defer your power.
 - In male dominated work environments, men still dictate the circles that form in terms of workplace bonding which we call the "boys clubs".
 - This can be frustrating for women as it is hard to relate to their male counterparts. When these circles also include their male bosses, which tends to happen at the c-suite level, they feel even further ostracized even if they are part of the c-suite as well. This causes feelings of frustration, irrelevance, and futility.
 - What happens is that women still stake their value on what these men think of her regardless of whether their opinions are valid or not. When we as women do this, we give our power to someone who is actually from a different planet ("Women are from Venus, Men are from Mars") to define our worth and success. We are not saying we should not care at all as these men could dictate our career path.
 - We need to take back the power they have over defining our self-worth. And we do this by redefining what success looks like and focus more on what brings us fulfillment. The key to this is on where we generate impact in our work...consumers/customers/clients. How they are reacting should be how we define success.
 - When our "why" is bigger than ourselves, we tend to be more brave in standing in our power. This helps to shift our mindset and perspective so that we can appropriately position our efforts. Yes, it can be harder to stand up for yourself than for others. Think of it this way, "if this happened to another women, what would I do?"
- Don't play the victim.
 - You have two choices, accept the reality and deal with it, or get out. Whatever you do, don't play the victim. This will take you down a dark path that can severely impact your mental and emotional health and potentially your career. It's always a choice. Sometimes the options aren't ideal, but it is a choice.
 - A few suggestions on how to deal with the male-dominated nature of the work environment without taking the victim mentality:
 - Don't take it personally. Remember, men are from Mars. Their language and social currency are totally different. They will say stupid things, insensitive things and act in manners that are totally incomprehensible to you being from Venus. If they act inappropriately, that needs to be addressed either by you, their boss or HR. Build your armor. DO NOT CRY in front of them. When the trigger starts, take a deep breath and actually SAY to yourself, THIS IS NOT PERSONAL.
 - Remember most of the posturing is due to ego. Ego comes from insecurity. This behavior is more about them and if the posturing is in direct reflection of you it is because they feel threatened. Recognize it for what it is and play the game.
 - Try and participate where it feels authentic to do so. You don't need to be "one of the guys", but if there is a happy hour, go. If there is an opportunity to get to know them better on a personal level, do that. But don't gravitate to the significant other group. Don't intentionally ostracize yourself.
 - Honor the rules of engagement. If you are in a meeting with a bunch of men who tend to talk all over each other, don't sit politely back and wait your turn. You may not get it.
 - Do your homework and know your stuff.
 - Become a force, not in competition with them, but be better than them. While they are posturing, use that time to make a plan and execute it.
- Play the game.
 - This is in recognizing that business is a game with defined rules. Failure to recognize this means you will struggle to achieve your goals and dreams for your career.
 - The biggest rule of operating in a male dominated work environment is you need to meet them where they are. You are not going to change centuries of programming by trying to go to battle. You need to operate from inside in order to navigate these waters and run your own agenda. So, what does this look like:
 - Dress appropriately. You don't have to dress like a man, but remember your visual appearance plays a role in your Personal Brand.
 - Engage with confidence. You can't appear timid, shy, uncertain. Stand-up straight, make eye-contact, talk in a confident voice. Develop a strong, assertive handshake.
 - When it is dished out, give it back. Guys tend to generate social connections with jabs, jokes, etc. These may come your way. Don't take it personally. Give it back in a way that is authentic to you. Appreciate this for what it is. If they are joking with you, it generally means you are in so embrace it.
 - Know your audience. Men tend to be more analytical while women tend to be more emotional. This isn't a hard and fast rule and it can vary based on industry. But just like you wouldn't take a knife to a gun fight, you don't go in with an impassioned emotional plea to a bunch of analytical thinkers. This is why objectivity and making a solid plan are so important. Do not give them any reason to say no.
 - Don't become the mom or caretaker.
 - Divide to conquer. Find a couple of men you can bond with and let them be your advocates to the broader group. But DON'T play them against each other.
- Raise other females.
 - Sometimes when women rise, instead of bringing up others behind us, we adopt the alpha female syndrome instead. This makes sense especially if we have agonized our way through it. We see it as a reward and because we had to grunt our way, we start thinking it should be a right of passage for all other females. But this doesn't do anything to help shift mindset and gender in male dominated environments.
 - If we are putting ourselves in the position of being one of the lone women in a male dominated environment, we have a responsibility to make it better for other women. This doesn't mean you are going to totally flip the culture all on your own, but with more females bonded with a supported network, you can hope to see shifts emerge.
 - How do you do this? Take leadership positions where you can influence the culture. Be part of the teams who are in charge of talent acquisition. Take new females under your wing. Make sure they feel supported. Make sure they have appropriate growth plans, coaches and mentors. They will need to go through their own trailblazing. Don't make them reblaze your trail.
 - Seek out the ones that see it the way you do, even if they are not in your company.
 - Only when we reach critical mass will we effect major change. There is power in numbers. Men have taught us that.

