



Book Why Good Girls Don't Get Ahead but Gutsy Girls Do

9 Secrets Every Working Woman Must Know

Kate White
Warner Books, 1996

Recommendation

This is a guidebook for working women who believe that they are being held back in the workplace. A glass ceiling for women is not in place because of male management, according to Kate White. Rather, she maintains, women create their own glass ceiling because of their good-girl personalities. In nine steps, she details how a good girl can become a gutsy girl. Gutsy girls break through the glass ceiling and get what they want from the organization. This is an important book for any woman who wants to rise to upper management in a corporation. Men, too, can learn ways to be more aggressive at work. *BooksInShort* recommends this book for anyone who wants a strong dose of workplace reality.

Take-Aways

- To reach upper management in an organization, good girls must transform themselves into gutsy girls.
- A gutsy girl doesn't care if people like her.
- A gutsy girl learns how to say no without feeling guilty.
- The seeds of a good girl's personality are planted in early childhood, when a young woman watches her parents' behavior.
- To be an effective gutsy girl, you must have one clear goal for the future.
- The most important thing a gutsy girl does that a good girl doesn't is break the rules.
- A gutsy girl does only essential work critical to achieving her goal. She delegates any task that doesn't need her knowledge or expertise.
- A gutsy girl never hedges in a conversation and never says, "I don't know."
- A gutsy girl dresses, talks, and walks like a winner.
- To be an effective gutsy girl, you need to develop an ability to make immediate, instinctive decisions.

Summary

The Myth of the Good Girl

Good girls grow up with rules. They are told, "Be a good girl," and "Good girls don't do that." Every time a good girl obeys these rules, she receives positive feedback. This childhood reinforcement leads to clearly identifiable adult work behavior. If you are a good girl at work, you do what you are told, you try to make sure everyone likes you, and you take on as much work as possible. This behavior "undermines your career and prevents you from achieving maximum success." To grab the full range of opportunity, you must strip away your safe, good-girl behavior and become a gutsy girl. You will derive three benefits from this change in your work personality. First, career opportunities will open up dramatically because you are willing to act boldly. Second, you will have more personal time, because you will learn that it is okay to delegate, take shortcuts, and relax. Third, you will feel a sense of relief because the gutsy girl is no longer frozen inside of you. These two personality types have nine contrasting traits:

1. A good girl follows the rules; a gutsy girl breaks the rules - or makes her own.
2. A good girl tries to do everything; a gutsy girl has one clear goal for the future.
3. A good girl works her tail off; a gutsy girl does only what is essential.
4. A good girl wants everybody to like her; a gutsy girl doesn't worry about it.
5. A good girl keeps a low profile; a gutsy girl walks and talks like a winner.
6. A good girl waits to get raises and promotions; a gutsy girl asks for what she wants.
7. A good girl avoids confrontations; a gutsy girl faces trouble head-on.
8. A good girl worries about other people's opinions; a gutsy girl trusts her instincts.
9. A good girl never takes risks; a gutsy girl takes smart risks.

Trapped in the Good-Girl Role

To become a gutsy girl, you need to understand the origins of your good-girl habits and how those habits operate in your life. Dr Ron Taffel believes that good-girl habits are learned in childhood. "The seeds of the good girl are planted very early as a daughter observes the way the individuals in her home interact ...[and] absorbs the messages her parents send." A good girl sees her mother assume the primary role for managing her family's needs. When her father participates, he is helping out. Girls are told it is not nice to refuse an order from a parent or to show anger. Boys are admonished the same way, but more often it is done with a wink and a nod, signaling tacit approval of the behavior.

“The gutsy girl knows that the only way to guarantee that she'll earn the money she wants and deserves is to go after it aggressively.”

When a good girl goes to school, even well meaning teachers reinforce the pattern. Studies have shown that while girls score better on achievement tests, the educational experience encourages boys to develop a "public voice." Professor Carol Gilligan says this "silencing of girls" creates a tension between "caring for themselves and caring for others, between their understanding of the world and their awareness that it is not appropriate to speak or act on this understanding."

The Nine Strategies for Becoming a Gutsy Girl

By the time a good girl enters the work force, she has had more than twenty years of good-girl training. Unfortunately, her skill set is not appropriate for workplace career advancement - which requires using your public voice to broadcast fresh and creative ideas that make people notice your leadership abilities. Good girls lack an effective public voice. Rather, good girls become managers of other people's projects, because they are good making a team feel good and working hard. Gutsy girls do things differently, according to the following strategies.

First Strategy

A gutsy girl breaks the rules. "Every opportunity is a vacuum waiting for you to fill it with your own rules." In other words, it is better to ask forgiveness than to ask permission. In practice, a gutsy girl listens to what she is told to do and then turns it upside down, "so that the result is brilliantly bold and different." However, a gutsy girl never confuses gusto with gutsiness. Being an office whirlwind is a trait of a good girl following the rules, not of a gutsy girl breaking them. Variations on rule breaking include:

- Do something that no one has thought of or dared to do before.
- Do what you're supposed to do - but in a totally different way.
- Do something that isn't in your job description.

“As a good girl you might make a reliable manager - because you take care of your charges, follow rules, and work your tail off. But that's never going to make you a star.”

When Andrea Robinson assumed control of the Ultima II company, she did something no one had done before: she launched a product line that made women look like they were wearing no makeup at all. The marketing tag line for "The Nakeds" was, "Look Like Yourself, Only Better." People thought it would fail, but Robinson believed that women wanted to look good - not just made-up. "The Nakeds" product line was a major hit.

“Gutsiness, to me, doesn't mean acting tough or macho or using phrases like 'Let's hit them where it hurts,' or 'Are they ready to play ball yet?' It means trusting your instincts, going after what you want, and not being worried about what other people will think.”

How does a gutsy girl come up with her own rule-breaking idea?

- Fantasize about what turns you on.
- Ask yourself, "What are they really looking for?"
- Live by the phrase, "What more could I do?"
- Imagine the wackiest solution possible.
- Look at a problem while standing on your head.
- Steal a great idea from someone else.

“A gutsy girl, therefore, is always scouting, making contacts, and researching opportunities in her field - as well as other fields that pique her interest.”

How does a gutsy girl break the rules and not get burned? You can protect yourself five ways:

- Establish a track record of competence.
- Get the support of your boss - and anyone else necessary.
- Know the landscape.
- Repackage your idea in a less-threatening way, if necessary.
- Share the glory.

Second Strategy

A gutsy girl has one clear goal for the future. You must have a vision which "becomes the context for any kind of gutsy moves you make." Knowing where you are going as a gutsy girl requires one clear goal. Focusing on one clear goal is difficult for a good girl, because a good girl has been programmed to please everyone - to do it all. Write down your clear goal, which should be something you can attain within three or four steps. Once you write it down, refer to it frequently, to keep yourself on track.

Third Strategy

A gutsy girl only does the essential. Follow these three steps to doing only work that leads to achieving your goal.

- Discover the "double to-do list." In other words, feed items from your master to-do list - which details the steps to your one clear goal - to your daily to-do list, to stay focused on your ultimate objective.
- Make it snappy. Make decisions instantly. Adopt the motto that "speed is life."
- Give away the grunt work. Ruthlessly delegate routine tasks. Give away anything that does not require your expertise or knowledge.

Fourth Strategy

A gutsy girl doesn't worry whether people like her. She learns how to say no to people and not feel guilty. To accomplish this, you must get rid of the two pleasing traits of good girls - the smile and the head nod. Both of these actions send out body language that wants to be nice. At the same time you must learn what most guys already know - that work is not personal. Good girls take situations at work personally. Gutsy girls don't. Whether you are the boss or an employee, the secret to not worrying about pleasing others is having passion for your work. People respect passion in the workplace.

Fifth Strategy

A gutsy girl walks and talks like a winner. She looks and sounds like she deserves to be a member of the leadership club. How do you know that you're in? One clue is whether your boss' boss knows who you are. Or, you can ask yourself, "How often does my boss showcase my talents to higher management or to my industry?" If the answer is "Never," then you must use the following appearance guidelines.

- "Always dress as if you were in the job you aspire to."
- "Wear the clothes and accessories with the maximum style you can get away with in your company and field."
- Hire a personal shopper to accomplish these two guidelines if necessary.
- Be the boss of what your body language conveys. Dare to hold someone's gaze.

“A big part of giving up the pleaser role is learning how to say no.”

Be gutsy in your conversation. Always cut to the chase. Never start a statement with the phrase, "I don't know." Don't hedge your opinions. Use words that frame your statements in a good or positive manner.

Sixth Strategy

A gutsy girl asks for what she wants. Good girls make two fatal mistakes: they feel they shouldn't have to ask for anything - that their work stands for itself - and they think it is pushy and greedy to ask for what they want. They are wrong. People get what they ask for in life, and if they never ask for anything, they tend to get less than the people who do ask. Bosses like hungry employees, who tend to make bosses look good. However, the best thing you can ask for is more responsibility, not more money. More responsibility increases your area of expertise, which is something you can leverage.

The Seventh Strategy

A gutsy girl faces trouble head on - she knows that anyone in the organization can be a saboteur of her efforts, particularly someone incompetent on the job, or threatened by you. When you discover a saboteur in your midst, you must act swiftly. Any delay will critically affect your ability to function as a gutsy girl.

The Eighth Strategy

A gutsy girl trusts her instincts to make decisions. However, she also does her homework, so that she has enough information to trust her instinct. The best instincts are educated ones.

The Ninth Strategy

A gutsy girl takes smart risks. The four pointers to fearless risk-taking are:

- Rename the risk to establish control.
- Calculate how much you have to lose, and determine if you can live with it.
- Make your risk "smart" by doing your homework.
- Establish a safety net in your budget, or with your allies, to break the effect from a possible fall. However, remember that a gutsy girl never says to the wolves or the naysayers, "I'm not sure." If it is your risk, then it is your responsibility, for better or worse.

About the Author

Kate White is the editor-in-chief of *Redbook* magazine.
