

# THE GUTSY GIRL Handbook

Your Manifesto for Success

**KATE WHITE**

GRAND CENTRAL  
Life & Style  
NEW YORK • BOSTON

## INTRODUCTION

---

I'm going to start off this book with a question for you. It's a pretty simple question, involving only an A or B answer, and yet your response can clue you in to something important about yourself. And, actually, it can do more than that. Understanding the reasons behind your answer could end up changing your whole career trajectory, making it possible for you earn a fatter salary, move ahead more quickly, attain the kind of leadership role in your company and field that you've dreamed about, and feel truly satisfied in your professional life.

Sound good? Okay, so here goes:

**When you were offered your current position (even if it's your *first* job) and were informed of the salary you'd be earning, how (roughly) did you respond? A or B?**

- A. "Thank you so much. I'd really love to join your company. When would you like me to start?"
- B. "Thank you so much. I'd really love to join your company. But based on my level of skill and experience and what I can bring to the position, I was looking for X amount."

If you answered B, congratulations. You took a gutsy approach to the discussion, treating it as a negotiation. And I bet it paid

## 2 Introduction

off for you. That's because in many cases, a company will initially offer you a lowball salary number, trying to cut the best deal possible as well as allow room for negotiation, which is often expected. Maybe you didn't receive the full amount you wanted, but there's a good chance you gained *something*. Studies show that those who ask for more money when they're being offered a job tend to increase their salaries.

And after asking for more, you hopefully went a step further, determining what perks could be attached to the position—like a signing bonus (more common than many people realize), tuition reimbursement for future studies, a company car, or extra time off. Employers often don't hand those out until you *ask* for them. (Ideally, you also made absolutely certain you were receiving the title, responsibilities, and resources you had anticipated.)

If you answered A, however, you *didn't* negotiate. Instead of being gutsy, you handled the salary discussion like a good girl. You accepted the first amount offered, which means you landed the job but missed the opportunity to end up with a higher salary and/or with valuable perks and/or even enhanced responsibilities.

### **Understanding the Good Girl Instinct**

“Hold on,” you may be thinking. “There was a totally legit reason I didn't press for more.” Such as:

- I didn't want to seem difficult or greedy and start off on the wrong foot.
- They'd mentioned their budget was tight and I wanted to be respectful of that.

- I'm still early in my career and I figured a few dollars more wasn't worth rocking the boat for.
- The offer was really good. Better than I'd expected.

All of those reasons sound valid and yet they're generally just excuses. They're your good girl instinct overriding the part of your brain that wants a better package and knows you deserve it. You may have been influenced by good girl messaging you heard over time from parents, teachers, and/or society in general. The idea of asking for more made you uncomfortable or concerned about the ramifications, so on some level you tried to justify your decision to accept the amount on the table.

I'm not trying to beat up on you. Plenty of women will answer A. But it's important to be aware of when your good girl instincts kick in and what they can cost you. And it's not just money. Being a good girl can prevent you from achieving the success that you not only yearn for *but are entitled to*.

### Take the Good Girl Quiz

Perhaps you're thinking that failing to negotiate was just a momentary loss of nerve and that in general you take a pretty gutsy approach to stuff. See how you respond to these questions.

#### Yes/No

- Was your last raise what you'd hoped for?
- Are you known, respected, and even envied for having a strong and unique set of professional skills?
- Has your boss responded "Wow" to one of your ideas in the last three weeks?

#### 4 Introduction

- Do you get the top assignments?
- Do you know how to pitch ideas in meetings so they're both acknowledged and green-lighted?
- Can you give a killer presentation?
- Are you adept at effectively confronting someone who tries to poach one of your ideas or projects?
- Would your boss consider you a change agent?
- Have you taken a risk lately that paid off big?
- Do you do a good job of not obsessing about issues (and people) at work, and when you do have cause to worry, are you able to keep any anxiety from showing?
- Have you been tapped to be included in special leadership training or mentorship programs in your company?
- Has your boss indicated that you're on the fast track in the department and a good candidate for promotion?
- Do you find your work stimulating and rewarding?

If you answered no to even a couple of these questions, your good girl instincts may be responsible. And those same instincts may be holding you back in bigger ways than you imagined.

Don't worry, you've come to the right place. This book will show you how to burn off those good girl instincts and take a far gutsier approach going forward—in all of the important areas of your career.

Even if you have a track record of making bold moves, this book has lots to offer you. Despite how much the world has changed for women, society still sets up plenty of barriers to success, and it's critical to repeatedly remind yourself how essential it is to let your gutsy side rule.

## What's So Damn Bad about Being Good?

Is there really such a downside to being a good girl? Don't nice girls actually finish first in the end? Well, if there is anything I've learned building my personal brand, working in media for decades, and running a top women's magazine for fourteen years, it's that good girls don't get ahead.

They don't get the big promotions. They don't get the corner office. And they don't make six-figure salaries. (At least in most cases they don't.)

Why not?

Because good girls hold back, convinced they're not ready. They undersell themselves in all sorts of situations. They worry about not being liked. They don't ask for what they want. And they're afraid to take risks and break the rules.

The big prizes go to *gutsy* women. Women who don't worry about being perfect or 100 percent ready or liked by everyone. Who own their ambition and excellence. Who ask for what they want. Who take risks and dare to break the rules.

Don't get me wrong. I'm not saying that being gutsy instead of good is the same as being bad. I'm not encouraging you to cheat on your T&E, undermine a colleague, or lie to get ahead. I'm also not suggesting you be brash, rude, or reckless. Rather, this book is about simply taking a bolder, grittier, gutsier approach in your quest for career success.

Twenty-three years ago, I wrote a book called *Why Good Girls Don't Get Ahead but Gutsy Girls Do*. In it I laid out nine strategies that I believed could help women override their good girl tendencies and go after what they wanted in a big way. Those strategies were based not only on what I'd gleaned during my media career, but also on the experiences of many successful women from

different fields whom I'd either met along the way or interviewed for the book. There was even a section called, yup . . . "Lean In."

Part of what inspired me to write the book was realizing how much becoming gutsier had helped my own career. I'd always had gutsy instincts. In fact, my senior year in college, I'd won *Glamour* magazine's "Top Ten College Women" contest in part by ignoring the contest rules. Anyone entering was told to write an essay about her goals for the future, and in an attempt to stand out from the pack, I wrote provocatively about why I had *no* goals (well, I did, of course, and I eventually spelled that out after the catchy beginning). It was one of my first realizations that going against the grain could pay off. But early in my career, I began to tamp down some of those instincts, worried how people in the work world would respond. It took time for me to see that being good only gets you so far and that acting gutsy *always* pays off in the end. I wanted to share what I'd learned with other women.

The book, I'm happy to say, became a bestseller and a bible for many working women. Hundreds of them wrote to me about how much the book had changed their professional lives—or on occasion they even approached me in person. One of the best moments for me was when I was shopping in a Williams-Sonoma one afternoon and a woman in her thirties whom I'd never met walked up to me and said, "Thanks for the \$40,000 raise." Boy, did *that* make my week.

As much as I loved the response, I honestly thought the book would have a short shelf life. In fact, the last paragraph read: *And though I know my publisher won't like this, I hope this book is totally obsolete by the time my daughter launches her career.* And it seemed I had good reason to believe that. The world was changing, women were changing, and I was pretty sure that in two decades, there'd be no need for a book on how to be gutsier.

Well, my daughter is now twenty-eight, and though women have made incredible advances, we still face plenty of hurdles. Consider these discouraging stats:

- A recent analysis by Earnest of more than 18,000 jobs across a variety of industries found that “women earn a median of 92 cents on the dollar compared to men. But when women enter *management*, or any role that involves a supervisory capacity over people or teams, they earn just 83 cents for every dollar earned by their male peers.”
- According to data compiled by the nonprofit Catalyst, while women accounted for 44 percent of all employees at S&P 500 companies, just 25 percent of executive or senior-level official or managerial positions were held by women. Females held only 9.5 percent of top earning jobs, and only 4.2 percent of CEO positions.
- And though Beyoncé may sing about how girls “run the world,” as of this writing, her line of fragrances is made and marketed by a company with only one woman on its executive team and one woman on its board—and they were added recently.

But it’s more than just stats that are a concern. When I speak around the country at companies and conferences, I have the chance to chat afterward with women in a wide variety of fields at many different levels of achievement. Many tell me they love what they’re doing and are incredibly validated by their careers, but at the same time they may feel frustrated or even stymied.

It may be because of the culture they work in. They encounter roadblocks and bias (sometimes unconscious, sometimes not), particularly if the field is still male dominated. Did you



watch the videos of Senator Kamala Harris of California being rudely interrupted and chastised by a couple of male colleagues during two 2017 Senate hearings? I don't think there's a woman in the world who hasn't at some point been interrupted, talked over, shushed, or chided by a male colleague.

Sometimes the women I meet are frustrated because they're still not exactly sure how to play the game. They wonder how aggressively they should go after jobs or promotions (so that there's no risk of their actions backfiring), how to present themselves assertively to peers and subordinates without being seen as a bitch, and what tactics they need to use to break out of middle management. I recently spoke at a large corporation (one that's a household name) where women told me how management is constantly going on and on about all the opportunities there are for employees, but it never happens for any of *them*!

The women I speak with are eager for strategies that will help them get noticed, navigate office politics, come across effectively, earn a bigger paycheck, be seriously considered for the C-suite, and handle those moments when their hard-won confidence inexplicably gets up and leaves the building.

I've come to realize that women can still benefit from the strategies I presented in my book twenty-three years ago. In light of this, the publisher and I decided it was time to revise *Why Good Girls Don't Get Ahead but Gutsy Girls Do* for both a new generation of women and for former readers who would love a refresher course. It's now in a short handbook format, the perfect size for tucking into your bag or desk drawer.

These strategies are appropriate regardless of your age or professional level. They make sense even if you're a millennial who has entered the workplace with a healthy supply of confidence. "Millennials expect to do what they set out to do, and that's a good

thing,” says Jane Buckingham, CEO of the research and trend-spotting company Trendera and an expert on Gen X, Gen Y, and Gen Z. “Having a sense of entitlement makes you forward thinking and demanding and less likely to settle the way women might have done in the past. But underneath that energy and enthusiasm, there may be a lack of experience and skill, which can cause you to doubt yourself in key moments. You wonder, ‘How am I going to go up and *do* that?’ I often see millennials hesitate or clutch, particularly in the final ten seconds of a challenging situation.”

A friend of mine who recruits candidates in the worlds of finance and IT raises another point. “I see a wonderful level of gutsiness in young women today, but it isn’t always strategic. If you’re twenty-nine and suddenly managing a fifty-six-year-old guy, you can’t just be blindly gutsy. You have to handle things in a way that will get you the best results.”

This book will show you how to harness your gutsiness so that it’s always working *for* you.

Being gutsier isn’t going to fix all the problems you face in your career. It won’t stop men from trying to interrupt you in meetings or companies from trying to pay you less than your male counterparts, but it will provide you with strategies for confronting those situations. It will show you how to snag bigger raises, promotions, and opportunities; handle yourself well when the going gets tough; and thrive in your career. When you do something you love and are rewarded for it, it’s a very satisfying and often thrilling experience.

Here’s something funny I’ve never mentioned to anyone before. Writing the original *Gutsy Girl* book actually made *me* gutsier. The research clarified certain points for me and provided opportunities to hear terrific strategies from other women that I could borrow when necessary. Sometimes when I needed a

kick in the ass, I even went back and reread the book and made sure I was really adhering to the principles I espoused.

Shortly after the book was published, I landed the job as editor in chief of *Redbook* at the Hearst Corporation, and four years later management tapped me to become the editor in chief of *Cosmopolitan*. It was an incredibly exciting job but also very demanding, and to succeed, I relied on every one of the gutsy strategies I'd written about. During my tenure, I increased circulation by 30 percent and took *Cosmo* to number one on the newsstand, keeping it there until I resigned. I also oversaw the *Cosmo* website, *Cosmo* Books, and many other brand extensions.

As much as I loved my job, I made a decision to leave six years ago. I've always been a bit of an outdoor cat and I wanted, while I still had the chance, to try a more entrepreneurial life. That was a gutsy move, too, but I couldn't be happier. I write murder mysteries and thrillers and I speak on leadership and success around the country. Most of the year I live in New York City, but my husband and I spend each winter at our house in Uruguay. That's what I consider freedom at its best.

The nine gutsy girl principles paid off brilliantly for me and I know they will work for you as well. (Just FYI, I've modified and updated all of them.) Over time I think you'll see that they're more than just strategies. They're a manifesto for success that will transform your professional life and can even be used nicely in your personal life as well. Deciding to be gutsy and following through will make you stronger and more confident, and reinforce your instinct to be even gutsier going forward. You'll find it easier to be all that you can be and even reinvent yourself one day if you so desire, or stage the best possible comeback if you temporarily lose your way.

The rumble starts today. Right here, right now. Time to be gutsy as hell.