

### PREOCCUPATIONS

SHAUNTI FELDHANH

# Cracking A Male Code Of Office Behavior

FOR the last nine years, I've been engaged in some of the most fascinating work a woman can do: talking to and surveying thousands of men to investigate what they think — and then writing books about it.

I enter into conversations with unsuspecting men sitting next to me on airplanes, on the subway and in coffee shops and give them a chance to share their innermost thoughts anonymously. My goal is to dig out the inner, unspoken perceptions that affect women every day in the workplace and at home.

Are you a talented professional woman who feels a bit stuck or frustrated at work? Maybe you simply don't understand your male co-workers and bosses — or they don't understand you.

When I share my findings with women's leadership groups, even the most astute professionals are often shocked at how much they don't know about their male co-workers — and how much this knowledge gap affects them.

You may be asking: Why must women be the ones to analyze — and perhaps change — their work behavior in light of what men think? Actually, it's vital for both sexes to understand what “the other half” is thinking. I have conducted both sides of this research when it comes to personal relationships.

But for the workplace, I started by researching how men think because more men hold executive jobs. Women who want to avoid hidden traps and break through the glass ceiling need to know how to shape the way men perceive them.

For example, one problem for women arises from the way men view personal feelings at work. The male brain has the enviable ability to essentially switch off emotions when desired — in part because it's hard for a man to think clearly in the face of emotion.

The expectation that people shut



Shaunti Feldhahn at home in Atlanta. Women may find it easier to break the glass ceiling, she says, if they can “shape the way men perceive them.”

down personal feelings at work has become one of men's subconscious, “unwritten rules.” When men see a worker taking criticism personally, seeming to push too hard for his or her ideas, or having a personality conflict, they automatically view that worker as less business-savvy and less experienced, or as someone who operates on emotion, not logic. (I was shocked to discover that most men view negative emotion as a signal that logic has ceased.)

All of those perceptions could be completely inaccurate, but still hold the worker back. And, unfortunately, I found men more likely to hold them about women than about other men.

Thankfully, those perceptions can also be managed. The science is clear, for example, that although the female brain isn't designed to compartmentalize personal feelings the same way a man's brain does, a woman can — if she chooses — force a calm demeanor when she is intended to feel defensive.

But the situation is more complex than that, as there is one area where men themselves tend to take things personally.

As a male executive told me, “I don't think women realize that men have self-doubt running through their veins.” And because a woman may not sense that insecurity, she can inadvertently hit that nerve and become someone whom the man wants to avoid, not promote.

So when we raise our hand in a meeting and ask directly, “Bob, why did you choose that pricing?” we are just asking for information. Bob, on the other hand, may be angrily thinking, “I can't believe she is challenging my judgment in front of my team.” I've found that men re-

spect people who purposefully avoid hitting that nerve by asking, instead, “Bob, help me understand the reason for that pricing.”

I recently talked with the male boss of a team made up mostly of women. When I asked whether he'd ever seen a talented woman do something he viewed as hurting her chances for advancement, he nodded — then chose his words carefully. While he said women should take things less personally and consider how men might view their approach, he added that some women take this too far — and try to be just like men.

“If it's not genuine for them, it's actually distracting,” he said.

**WOMEN** were once counseled to put on a hard-driving front — but that notion should have been scrapped along with our 1990s shoulder pads. The advice to be authentic, not artificial, has been nearly universal in my research. We'll be far more effective when we recognize, instead, that working with men is essentially like working with a foreign culture. You might choose to speak a different language at times, or to consider the unspoken perceptions of that culture, but you don't have to be a different person.

Despite the sometimes awkward subject matter, a vast majority of men I've interviewed have great good will toward women. Most are willing to talk to me in candid detail because they have seen these hidden obstacles affect their wives, daughters and co-workers and sincerely want to help women advance. And I have been encouraged to see that once we are aware of these obstacles, they can be overcome. □

### THE BOSS

# A Second Tour as C.E.O.



DAVID ULEVITCH

*C.E.O. of OpenDNS, a software company in San Francisco*

**AGE**  
29

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Ben Franklin

who suggested I start an even bigger company, so in 2005 I began OpenDNS, an alternative Internet domain name system. Every Internet service provider includes a domain name system service for its customers. In 2006, we introduced our product, which is independent of any I.S.P. We have an ad-supported service for individuals and a fee-based one for businesses.

By 2007, we were profitable, but the investor sat me down and said that although I had done a great job, a seasoned executive could take the company even further. In December 2008, he demoted me to chief technology officer and hired a new C.E.O. It hurt, but I tried to be optimistic and put on a

good face for employees. I'm an optimist, and I thought it might be a learning opportunity.

The new C.E.O. was a good guy but it was not a good fit and we parted ways a year later. During that year, I'd go to work and try to be chipper, but I didn't agree with the way some things were being done. My early investor wanted to sell his position in order to get liquidity, so I brought in new investors. They saw how passionate I was about the company and made me C.E.O. again in 2009.

When I led the company the first time, there were certain things I hadn't been doing so well, like long-term planning, focusing on customers and maintaining a sense of urgency. Stepping out of the C.E.O. seat let me see my failings more clearly. One thing I did upon my return was to build a management team. My first go-round, I thought I could do it all myself, but I learned better. I also sold EveryDNS in 2009.

My mother still sends a cake to the office for my birthday. Occasionally, I make waffles for breakfast for any employee who wants to talk to me. I make them around 8 a.m. as an incentive for people to show up early.

People often ask whether I consider myself successful. I don't yet, because there's so much more I want to accomplish. I put more pressure on myself than anyone else can. □

Shaunti Feldhahn is the author of “The Male Factor: the Unwritten Rules, Misperceptions, and Secret Beliefs of Men in the Workplace.” E-mail: preoccupations@nytimes.com.

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