

# Chapter 1

If you only knew what nobody bothered to tell you\_.\_.\_.  
Useful Terms: What We Mean When We Say\_.\_.\_.  
Girlogic -What makes sense to us: play nice  
Guylogic What makes sense to them: win at all costs  
PMS -Political Misery Syndrome, a work-induced condition  
Nah-Nah-Nah-Nah-Goo-Goo -I've got a great gig and you don't

## O

Once upon a time, there was a bright, wide-eyed girl from Long  
\_Island named M, who was working as a potted plant outside some  
big mucky-muck advertising executive's office making  
approximately two cents per hour. Why would a college graduate  
(magna cum laude, thank you very much) be a secretary for a man  
who did so little he clearly didn't need one? The answer was  
obvious: it was all because she couldn't type.

All the "good" jobs for women—those fantastic opportunities  
listed in the New York Times—required 50 wpm on the typing test.

Around the same time, M's high school friend and two-time prom  
date Frank, who was walking around with a similarly useless liberal  
arts degree (OK, so it was from Harvard), didn't have to take a single  
typing test and, through a contact from his old neighborhood, got a  
job with an actual livable \$\$\$alary trading foreign debt at a big old  
bank. Frankie couldn't type either and had never so much as  
balanced a checkbook.

Hmmmmmm\_.\_.\_.

Meanwhile, there was a bright, blue-eyed girl from Buffalo named  
J who came to the Big City and also got a job at an advertising  
agency making two and one-half cents an hour. J, who could find a  
Q on a keyboard, was an assistant to a woman who mentored her in  
the ways of Madison Avenue—instructing J that her main objective  
was to keep the pencils sharpened at all times.

J moved to New York City to seek her fortune with her college  
boyfriend, Keith, and he, like M's friend Frank, got a job in foreign  
trading at a big old bank, making big-old-bank buck\$\$\$.

Double hmmmmmm.

Why would J, a college graduate, be working as an assistant for  
an obsessive-compulsive with a pencil fetish? Because unless you  
were Someone's Daughter, it seemed that the only jobs available  
right out of school were as Someone's Assistant.

## Surrendering to the Pink

In those first few years of working in those brain-optional “pink-collar-ghetto” jobs, each of us remembers thinking: “Oh my God, I can’t believe this is my life. I am nothing.”

Not only did we have nothing jobs (while it seemed that everyone else had interesting, exciting careers) making nothing \$\$\$, but our coworkers seemed stupid and petty, and the only time they paid attention to the fact that we were even alive was when we did something wrong or when our skirts were too short. To add insult to insanity, we were treated as if feeding paper into the fax machine was probably more responsibility than we could handle.

Things were Very Wrong.

What we really wanted was one of those “good” entry-level jobs, where you might actually learn something and get a smidgen of R-E-S-P-E-C-T. But those jobs, the ones with the word assistant at the beginning of the title rather than at the end, seemed to go either to those who knew someone’s father’s brother’s son’s boss or to the genetically challenged of our species, who happen to be missing fallopian tubes.

We were mortified. We thought we were losers. We couldn’t fathom why in the heck we’d gone deep into tuition debt and sat through four-plus years of communications classes simply so we could type tabs for hanging folders and feel dumber than doorbells. Ding-dong.

## Kate Hudson Never Had These Problems

What was the difference, we wondered, between us and Dawn the account exec, who was only a year or two older than us but making the big \$\$\$, wearing the designer clothes, and living a sassy single life in the doorman building, unlike the dumps we lived in with our neurotic, diet-obsessed roommates? And why oh why was it that Dawn didn’t seem to let anything ever get to her personally?

Did Dawn know something we didn’t? “Nah, couldn’t be,” we thought. It was less painful for us to assume that Dawn had a daddy who made her life easy, which, granted, was unfair of us, but occasionally absolutely accurate.

And as long as we were bitching, we also wondered why our male friends weren’t feeling as tortured as we were.

In the heat of those moments, we just couldn't figure it out. We thought that our lives would remain in the below-average category for all eternity because we didn't happen to have Ivy League upbringings, well-connected relatives, or the ability to use a urinal.

Bitter? Party of two?

Hard Knock. Who's There? You.  
You Who? Precisely.

We couldn't possibly have known then what we know now. Why not? 'Cause nobody bothered to tell us. There wasn't anyone.

We had no savvy, smart-mouthed older sister to set us straight. Neither one of us had parents who worked for a real company (one orthodontist, three teachers). We had no mentors to tell us what we might be Doing Right and what we were definitely Doing Wrong.

But we know now. Boy, do we know. How did we learn? Ah, dear little sister, the ever-so-hard way—NOT a strategy we recommend. They say you have to be burned to learn, and let's just say we were torched like campfire marshmallows.

Now we know how it goes: it all starts with a handshake, a smile, and a "Welcome aboard." The next thing you know, you are sobbing in the ladies' room because you can't figure out why Sally in marketing Hates Your Guts and why Jeff in sales is Always Trying To Make You Look Bad. "What did I do?" you sob. "Why are they all sooo mean?"

Any of this sound familiar?

At some point in the beginning of your working life, it probably dawned on you that things were WAY harder than you thought they would be. But, you know, you're not alone. We too used to think it was just us, but over the years we've discovered that countless women (and, OK, a handful of guys)—even females pretty far up the food chain—suffer in many of the same ways.

What most of us didn't realize is that the instant we started working for any corporation, we were transported to an alternative reality on an alien planet known as Officepoliticus, where all the rules about fairness, achievement, success, and rewards are dramatically different from everything we were ever taught.

Yesterday All Your Troubles Were \_So Far  
Away\_...\_..

Over all those years you spent at school, you learned that if you did the work, you would get all the credit that was due you. The harder you worked, the more credit you got—maybe even bonus points.

Basically, if you did pretty much what you were supposed to do—no matter what you looked like, no matter how you dressed, no matter how fabulous or stinky your attitude, no matter what your gender or orientation, no matter if you asked a zillion questions or not one—you were promoted to the next grade and were eventually rewarded with a lovely diploma that even had your name spelled correctly. Mom and Pop threw a party and people mailed you money.

So far, so good. Then you got your first real job.

## It Starts with Those Painful Periods\_.\_.\_.

When you first arrive at a new job it can be truly perplexing because it all looks and feels so familiar—so innocent and tidy, with grown-ups going about their Business. When you get there, things seem normal enough. You think you understand what's going on.

Then you start to notice the weird stuff. The things that defy logic. Girlogic, that is. Ironically, the qualities that make us girls such great human beings can totally trip us up at work. We work hard. We try to play fair. Most of us try to make sure everyone feels good and equal. We try to make everyone happy because life is better when everyone is happy.

Problem is, for the most part, kill-the-guy-with-the-ball Guylogic still drives the prevailing system, and Guylogic is all about winning. And, frankly, most guys don't care as much as we do if they make a mess while trying to score points.

If your own sense of fairness is disrupted frequently enough, - you'll end up stupefied like we did, with an acute case of work--induced Political Misery Syndrome (PMS)—an epidemic disorder of the mind most frequently found in the female population of Officepoliticus.

## What Cramps Your Style

Women (and, OK, some men) develop Political Misery Syndrome because they are not aware that every single thing they do or don't do at work is being observed and interpreted.

Everything.

Just as it is with politicians on the campaign trail, everything you say (or don't say) in the office, how you say it, to whom you say it, whom you eat lunch with, who your friends are, how you deal with officemates, when you show up and when you leave, etc., can determine how you are treated, how quickly you are promoted, and how much license someone will take in hassling you.

Unfortunately, in the office, the most innocent of actions can be perceived as sinister or manipulative; the most manipulative maneuvers can be perceived as sincere and appropriate gestures. Most of The Girls Who Call Us completely resist any behavior that could possibly be construed as "political." Girlogic: "I'm just not a political person; I'm not manipulative. Why can't I just be myself?"

Answer: Because it's all political anyway.

You don't have to like it, but you do have to live with it. What counts in the office has virtually nothing to do with the truth; what matters is the perception of the truth. Your personal reality is about as relevant as your shoe size. Until you recognize this fact, you are at risk for a case of Political Misery Syndrome that all the Midol in the world can't fix.

To see if you currently suffer from work-induced PMS, see if you have any (or all, God forbid) of the top ten symptoms:

1. Confusion. You lack perspective; all events are relatively equal in terms of their importance in your mind. Every single project or misunderstanding is a big fat hairy crisis, and you are too befuddled to see any humor in anything.

2. Oversensitivity. You allow office conflicts and slights to hurt you, stress you out, and adversely influence your behavior.

3. Obsessiveness & compulsiveness. You feel undervalued, so you work harder and harder, which makes you feel even more taken advantage of, undercompensated, and overworked.

4. Paranoia. You feel like you are being excluded. More days than not, you are afraid that you will get fired.

5. Boringness. Your primary topic of conversation, no matter what time of day or who your audience is, is your job.

6. Bitterness. You spend tons of time enumerating the countless reasons all the stuff you really want from your career is completely unattainable, and then get resentful when you see others achieve the exact wish you had in mind.

7. Major rage. You stew in a cauldron of negativity, looking for people to blame, sue, and be mad at. Your primary office skill becomes creating dramas and dragging others into them.

8. Denial. You ignore the fact that you think your job sucks, you make no plans, live exclusively for the moment, spend all your money on shoes and Champagne instead of paying your phone bill, and hope that somehow it will all magically straighten itself out down the road.

9. Relationship trashing. You drive away your boyfriend and other significant people with nonstop bitching about your sorry situation. J did this, more than once.

10. Stupidity. You crash your car—just about total it—on the way to work, and still go and put in a full day anyway. M actually did this, but once was enough.

## The Story of Oh\_.\_.\_.

There is only one remedy for Political Misery Syndrome—and no, - it's not shopping. The one, repeat, one cure for chronic acute PMS (don't blink; you'll miss it) is:

Options.

Options are oxygen.

Without options, your company becomes your life-support system. You live in a state of paralyzed fear that your boss will pull the plug and that you don't have enough skills to get another job - that's as good, or any job. So you work harder, become paranoid, joyless.

## Taking Stock of Your Options

Most of the women we know think that Options are a luxury they just can't afford. We call this the Girl Option Paradox (GOP): women love when Options are offered to us, hence our great devotion to shoe shopping, yet because most of us are hard-wired to value commitment, many of us feel obligated to stay in the bad relationship that is our job. Girlogic: spending time creating Options seems like "cheating."

It's different for most men. Some ancient directive from the Divine Boss drives guys to sow seeds hither and yon, constantly laying the groundwork for a more attractive position. Our Guy Spies tell us that pondering possible Exit Strategies begins before they take on any commitment. Guylogic: not having Options is not an option.

For women, though, monogamy is our default mode. If you have PMS or are potentially at risk for it, which, btw, we think almost all women are, the first thing we need to do is get in there and change the power management settings on your control panel.

Here's our tech support:

Step 1: Write down your new mantra. "I must have Options; they are an absolute necessity for the life and health of my career and for my sanity." Repeat daily.

Step 2: You have to learn how to get them. The rest of this book will tell you everything you need to know. You will soon discover that Options are one of the most luxurious things in the world to have.

Step 3: You have to make the time to create Options. You'll have to learn to be more selfish (yes, the S word!). If you are like most women, multitasking your head off, the things you need to do for yourself are usually at the bottom of the priority pile—if they make the list at all. We'll fix that right up for you in Chapter 11, —"Y-O-U: The Ultimate Planning Machine."

Honey, you have to believe that you, and you alone, can manufacture good Options for yourself, and not let anyone convince you that you can't. People in your life—well-meaning and otherwise—might try to brainwash you into believing that you have no Options. Why? Because if you had choices, you might change, and people really don't like it when others change anything more significant than their underwear. Really. It drives them completely mental.

## THE JUST-LIKE-THAT FACTOR

Even if you think that you don't need Options because you love, love, love your job, your boss, your commute, your colleagues, and the soap in the ladies' room, you still must be out there building up Options. Why? Because even if you don't want to be a career girl or climb any ladder whatsoever, you still need to protect yourself from

The Just-Like-That Factor.

The Just-Like-That Factor is responsible for the saddest cliché in working life today. Our girlfriend is going along, minding her own business, working at her job, giving up large hunks of her personal life and most of her emotional RAM in order to guarantee her job security, which, after years of devoted service, she believes she has achieved.

Then BAM! One day, for whatever reason, or no reason, she and her usual morning bagel are completely blindsided by the pink-slipped fairy and it's O-V-A-H. The job is gone, and our friend is left alone with not much more than the overtures of outrage from her unaffected office buddies and her big old Kate Spade full of resentments wadded up like so many used Kleenex.

- Just like that, the life you knew for the previous [insert number here] years is O-V-A-H.
- Just like that, you have to clear out your desk (or have it cleared out for you) and leave the building immediately. Your key, phone number, cell phone, and the email address everyone in the universe has used to contact you for years: gone.
- Just like that, the computer that has all of your personal stuff on it—not to mention a record of all the Internet sites you've ever visited—see ya.
- Just like that, you have no place to report to in the morning, and the people you used to chat with at work—and all your other friends, for that matter—don't have time to gab or commiserate with you: they're all too busy working. Buh-bye.
- Just like that, no matter what your financial obligations, the \_paychecks stop coming, and the future you were banking on—poof!
- Just like that, you find yourself in the psychological tailspin of your life, and suddenly what's happening on All My Children seems like critical information. All the issues that were life-and--death vital at work yesterday—vaporized.
- Just like that, it's O-V-A-H and you're O-U-T.

The Just-Like-That Factor is not just reserved for sinners, slackers, and sad sacks. Just because you've been on the job for fourteen years, show up early, work late, never take sick days, skip lunch, get the job done, and accrue obscene amounts of vacation time because you are too devoted to take it, you will not be exempt from The Just-Like-That Factor.

Getting laid off might have nothing to do with you, your devotion, or even the important work you do. You really just never know what those bean counters are doing all day, let alone what they are thinking, and honey, anyone can get canned faster than they can say: "What resumé?"

Don't believe it could possibly happen to you? Can you say "Enron"?

Think about it.

## You've Got a Friend...or Do You?

When you are trying to psych yourself up to explore your Options, be especially wary of your boss. There's a breed of bosses out there who love to make employees believe that they have no choices, because choice implies decision making, and decision making means power, and many bosses hate perceiving power anywhere but in the mirror.

When M worked at that advertising agency in New York, she didn't think she had any Options because her boss, Charlie, told her she didn't. M viewed Charlie more like a buddy than a boss (hint: never do this). He confided in her his shrink's ludicrous advice and regaled her with his dramatic adventures with devious dry cleaners. Charlie gave M a sense of security that he had her best interest at heart and convinced M that she was virtually unemployable anywhere else because, as he told her so often, she "had no real marketable skills."

It wasn't such a stretch for M to believe that, especially after the completely hideous time she'd had getting the lame job with Charlie to begin with. Not to mention that M was subject to the universal fear that "there are no jobs out there."

What M took way too long to figure out was that Charlie liked having her sitting outside his office. He liked the way she handled the important tasks of watering his plants, ordering his carefully prescribed lunches, and answering his phone—the two times a day

that it rang. He loved his office ornament and didn't want her to go anywhere. M didn't think there was anywhere to go. So she stayed far longer than was good for her.

You must keep your head up. If your boss tells you in any way, shape, or form that you have no skills and no potential and that you should consider yourself lucky to have any job, get out! A truly great boss will encourage you, help you devise a plan, and ensure that you develop the skills you need to get to the next level. If you wind up with one like Charlie, you'll go nowhere fast; you won't even get promoted within the company.

## With Friends Like That\_.\_.\_.

Other times, we think we have no Options because often the people we trust the most, the ones who are supposed to love and support us, are actually our Evil Network of Negativity. Instead of giving us a leg up and encouraging us to take risks, they push us down—in that ever-so-well-meaning way.

J was working at an ad agency in Boston as an assistant to Demi, an account exec, who, while only two years older, was snotty beyond her years. Demi would give J only menial tasks, would not lift a finger to train her in ways that could help J get promoted, and, worse still, spoke to J as condescendingly as Paris Hilton would to her chihuahua, Tinkerbelle.

Understandably, J wanted to quit. But she didn't. J had moved to Boston to be with the boyfriend (read: potential husband) and knew no one else. J's boyfriend and other friends made the situation and her misery even worse by constantly reminding her that she Had No Money.

J's Evil Network of Negativity said incredibly supportive things like: "Well, how would you live if you quit?" Or: "Where are you going to get the money to figure out your life?" People in her life played on her fears rather than giving her the confidence that she could succeed at something else somewhere else. They thought they were doing her a favor by being realistic for her. But it was no favor. She forced herself to stay in a job that was damaging her.

You've got to learn who is in your own Evil Network of Negativity. No matter how much you may love those you've identified as particularly unsupportive, you've got to cut them off from your decision-making process. So, for example, if you tell your parents

you want to be a preacher and they tell you you don't have a prayer, stop speaking to them about your career. If you don't have support and encouragement from someplace, those Options will be harder to come by than Manolo Blahnik stiletto boots at Payless.

## How Can Anything That Feels So \_Righteous Be So Wrong?

Political Misery Syndrome is not a condition you should ignore for long. It can do a number not only on your career but on your life as well.

During her Beantown stint, J's ego was out of control. Rather than spending her time at work looking for a way to leverage her lousy job into something at least less lousy, and instead of being mindful of the image she was projecting, she did, as many of us with work-induced Political Misery Syndrome do, All the Wrong Things. J couldn't see that she was threatening to Demi. J was skinny and wore her sexy New York clothes to work. In her relatively conservative Boston office, that got her plenty of attention—and it drove Demi (aka the person with the power), insane. J kept her desk a complete mess and acted as if she didn't care about anything, which only served to make Demi look more mature, more in control, and far better by comparison.

Meantime, while J was busy acting out all over the place—chain-smoking at her desk, coming in late, telling her personal saga to anyone who would listen—and being totally miserable 24/7, her relationship with Boston Boy crumbled like your first attempt at making piecrust. Coincidence? Hardly. Serious relationships can't survive, let alone thrive, in an environment of eternal misery and complaint.

Likewise, M's perceived lack of Options in those early years also gave her a raging case of PMS. M believed that she was way too good and way too smart for some of the early positions she held, and broadcast her opinion at every opportunity to people in and outside her office. The result: the perception M sent out was not that M was smart, sophisticated, and dee-lightful, but rather that she was a chronic complainer and stuck-up. No one wanted to listen to it. In defense of our rather brainless behavior in those first few jobs, however, no one had ever mentioned the importance of Options to

us. Instead, almost everyone we complained to said: “You have to Pay Your Dues—Nah-Nah-Nah-Nah-Goo-Goo.”

So we paid and we paid and we paid. What did we get for it? A worse case of PMS, not to mention broken relationships, sleep deficiency, and a wardrobe of outdated duds.

As far as we’re concerned, the nasty little phrase “Paying Your Dues” is a convenient way to dismiss griping entry-level people who are sick of being treated like a remnant of industrial carpeting. It’s so not helpful.

What would be truly helpful to women just starting out in the working world who feel miserable and/or useless because they can’t seem to get a job that they feel good about, and to women with a few years in the job market whose jobs have them more twisted up inside than pantyhose in the spin cycle and who can’t figure out why they are not getting anywhere no matter how hard they are working, would be to tell them that they do have power and they do have choices.

In fact, most women need to be told (and retold) that they have everything they need to succeed in their careers.

And that, dear, is what we are all about.