

Doing What It Takes: Six Ways to Work Harder *and* Smarter Than Your Male Colleagues.

By Roxanne Rivera

Many women have asked me how they can get ahead working in a male-dominated industry and establish their credibility as an essential and valuable asset. I wish that the answer to this question were an easy one and that I could reply with the old clichés like “just do your best” and “hard work pays off.” How nice it would be if that were true! But the harsh reality is that doing an excellent job is simply not good enough for women competing with men.

Please don't misunderstand. The difficulty doesn't lie with women being *as smart* as men (we already are) but rather with women being *perceived* as equally intelligent, competent, and capable. When a woman enters a male-dominated industry, she will undoubtedly be held to a higher standard and will be more intensely scrutinized than her male colleagues. Not only do women have to compete with their male counterparts, but we also must strive to disprove a very unfair yet socially accepted stereotype.

Luckily, most women are more than equipped to fight back and earn our proper place in any workplace we choose. But the battle consists of much more than simply demanding fair treatment and respect. Women today can't just work harder, we must also work smarter! If you outwork *and* outsmart your male peers you will earn respect and status at your job. Ladies, here are six tips for working *smarter* and earning your place on the employee totem pole.

Pick Your Battles: Women have a need to closely examine every conflict that comes up in the workplace each day. It is very important to think about the possible outcomes that may unfold when and if you aggressively confront these conflicts. Ask yourself with each situation, “Am I willing to sacrifice my credibility just to prove this point?” I am not advising you to be a pushover and saying you can never raise your voice. Just remember that some minor issues are worth letting go so that you will be taken seriously when something important arises.

Do your research: Be meticulous when studying up on a new project or challenge at work. Think carefully about what you would like to accomplish and how you plan to

approach the goal at hand. Also take time to analyze the male coworkers you will be partnered with for any new projects. As a woman, you have the advantage here because women have an innate ability to understand what makes people tick. Use it! If you can figure out what drives your colleagues to listen, work, and communicate, accomplishing your goals will be that much easier.

Put adequate time into your prep work: It is vital that you set aside ample time to prepare for any projects, challenges, or proposals that may be assigned to you. Your end product will reflect the time you have put into it. Do not ever take any shortcuts, and your work ethic will shine through for your supervisor and fellow employees to see.

Set limits and structure your workday: Organizational skills are another valuable asset women naturally possess. (Ask any working mother!) Make full use of your superb ability to compartmentalize your day. When you follow a schedule and set time limits for projects, you will be amazed at the sheer volume of quality work you will produce.

Use your emotional intelligence: Emotional intelligence is a different way of being smart. Most women are naturally highly emotionally intuitive. Use this advantage to get ahead by getting along well with everyone, motivating stragglers, and promoting teamwork. Your natural empathy will shine through and you will be able to diffuse tense situations with your optimistic and graceful attitude.

Keep fear out of the way: It is, admittedly, terrifying to be the only woman in the office or on the oil rig. If you are one of the heroic few working in a male-dominated field you may always feel that tinge of fear. Learn to coexist with it. While you may never stomp this fear dead you definitely can and will get past it. When we step outside of our comfort zones, we learn something every time. If you are lucky enough to have a career that forces you to grow like this every single day, consider yourself lucky. You will soon have the heart of a warrior.

Believe me: consistent hard work, backed by clear thinking, and an unyielding commitment to excellence, *will* pay off. It seems to be a law of the Universe. When enough women begin to thrive in male-dominated industries, the battle for credibility and acceptance *will* become much easier. Women who go above and beyond the call of duty are pioneers. Be proud of that. Let it inspire you every day and bolster your courage and stamina as you fight the good fight.