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Career Coaching

help for climbing the ladder

by Gail Sussman Miller



Face it: We spend most of our time at work, thinking about work or talking about it. Our occupations truly occupy our time. With that in mind, we went to Gail Sussman Miller, a Chicago-based career coach and owner of Inspired Choice, for her advice on dealing with networking nerves, answering to bosses and pursuing your dreams...

Networking is a part of my job, but I'm an introvert. Help! —Networker Hopeful

Dear Hopeful: You're not alone. I recommend a shift in your outlook instead of surgery! Networking is not only walking into a scheduled event with 200 strangers. Where do you do a good job of creating relationships in your life? Transfer this skill and your success to networking. Good connections start one-on-one and can happen anywhere in your life—playing sports, attending church or standing in the Starbucks line. Start to look at everyone you meet as an opportunity, be curious to see what you have in common. Be genuinely interested in others and they'll find you interesting. Offer to generously help others first. This makes it easier to ask for what you need without feeling like you're imposing. Once you demystify networking and realize it's simply making meaningful connections to help others while helping yourself, you'll increase your confidence and comfort level.

I like my boss but I get frustrated when he asks me each week what I'm working on. I think he's trying to be helpful, but I feel like he doesn't trust me. What can I say to him? —Independent Gal

Dear Independent: The solution to your discomfort is less likely about what to say to your boss and more about what to say to yourself. It's great that you noticed your reactions. Your instinct was to assume something negative and to blame. It's important to look at why this reaction happens, then neutralize the situation and choose a new response with a clearer head. Ask yourself: What's *really* true versus imagined about my boss's question? Does he really not trust me or does he need this information to do his job? Separate his need for information and your desire to be independent. Also, remember there's always someone to answer to, even if you own the company. Shift from reactive dread to proactive choice by offering your boss routine updates on your work before he asks, on your terms, addressing both your needs. Voila, empowerment!

For the past decade, I've wanted to create a networking group for professional women musicians. I'm frustrated that I keep putting this off. How can I make my dream a reality? —Stuck City

Dear Stuck: It's likely some panic or fear gets in the way, like 'I'm not good enough or smart enough.' F.E.A.R. can mean False Expectations Appearing Real. I suggest moving past the fear and unknowns by shifting your point of view. To begin, reconnect with your desire and intentions to start this group to rekindle the pilot light. Visualize the end product by picturing the women you want to help, standing in a room, smiling and waiting for what you have to offer. Work backwards from this vision to draft a list of needed action steps. Think of a successful big event like a wedding or concert that you helped create, then transfer to your new project the techniques you used to plan, prepare and execute that event. Ask for help and accountability. Now, take that first itty-bitty baby step! ■