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Success
Secrets
Bosses
Never Tell
You*

* BUT SHOULD

No one knows better about making it big than Cathie Black, president of Hearst Magazines—Cosmo’s publisher. In her new book, *Basic Black: The Essential Guide for Getting Ahead at Work (and in Life)*, she shares her awesome tips for a kick-ass career.



1 Playing It Safe Can Backfire

Most people see taking risks as opening themselves up to unnecessary, maybe even dangerous chances. But the truth is, avoiding risks won’t keep you safe, nor will it guarantee a smooth ride at work or in life.

In fact, the opposite is often true. It’s like the monkey parable: A



You’re nuts if you think avoiding risks is smart.

monkey sees a nut in a hole and reaches in to grab it. Once he’s closed his fist around it, he can’t get his hand back out of the narrow opening. Now he’s stuck. He can’t free himself unless he lets go of the nut, but because he’s afraid to lose it, he won’t let go.

Trying to avoid risks is like clinging to that nut. You may think you’re playing it safe by holding on to what you have, but in reality, you’re just hindering your own progress.

2 Failing = Success

The consequences of failure—just like the potential consequences of taking risks—are almost never as terrible as they seem. Just about any-



Hey, every career has its ups and downs.

one you can think of who’s a huge success has overcome failure to get where they are today—think of Michael Jordan, who was

cut from his high school team, or J.K. Rowling, who was turned down by a

number of publishers before one decided to take a chance on her manuscript about a young wizard named Harry Potter.

3 Heed the Two-Step Rule

Anyone can go the extra mile. Try to make a habit of taking the next step or two beyond what you’ve been asked to do.

A couple years ago, an article in one of Hearst’s magazines, *House Beautiful*, misidentified the legendary Estée Lauder chairman, Leonard Lauder.

Argh! It was an innocent mistake but an incredibly stupid one, and



Your secret weapon for doing damage control

once I was told about it, I knew we needed to fess up immediately. It was a Friday before a holiday weekend. I got on the phone to Leonard’s office and learned from his assistant that he and his wife, Evelyn, were traveling in France. Hearing my desperation, the assistant gave me the number of his hotel in Paris.

“Leonard, I’m sorry,” I said. “And most of all, I’m embarrassed.” Leonard laughed and told me all was forgiven. And as he later told an interviewer for a magazine article profiling me, he was pleased I’d gone to the trouble of tracking him down to apologize.

4 Give Up Control... Sometimes

In any office environment, there are many factors you can’t control—the

trickiest of which are often interpersonal. People get on each other’s nerves, step on each other’s toes, vie for each other’s jobs, and sometimes, at the other end of the spectrum, get inappropriately involved with each



It’s a wild world out there. Don’t try to restrain it.

other. At one point much earlier in my career, I had a boss who was having an affair with a subordinate of his, an awkward situation that made all our lives more complicated. It would have been easy to get upset about the situation, but to what end? The only thing you can do is accept what you can’t change and work around it. That allows you to have a modicum of power over it.

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5 Show Your Ignorance

The act of asking is one of the most important elements of success. All too often, people fear that asking questions reveals ignorance, yet the opposite is true. The root of the word *ignorance*, after all, is



You aren’t supposed to know everything.

ignore. The minute you ask about something, you’ve taken a step to-

ward understanding it. On the other hand, if you just ignore the fact that you don't know, believe me, you won't get away with that for long.

6 If You Think You Know the Answer, Check Again

There's an old saying among journalists: "If your mother says she loves you, check it." And in fact, you can be sure that the minute you take something for granted, it won't be what you thought it was.

Take my name, for example. When I was in junior high, a skinny, awkward preteen with big dreams, I decided I wanted to be different. So one day, I changed the spelling of my name from Cathy to Cathie. Silly, I know...but what can I say?

I can't tell you how many times over the years I've received letters addressed to Cathy Black or Kathy Black or Kathleen Black. It seems like a little deal, but it's a big deal to me...and it's the quickest way to lower my opinion of the letter writer.

7 Sometimes You Have to Boss Your Boss

When I watched the movie *The Devil Wears Prada*, one scene that stuck in my head was when the assistant, Andy, stood behind her boss Miranda's shoulder at a party, whispering the names of guests as they approached. Smooth as satin, Miranda greeted each person, coming off as an attentive and caring hostess rather than the frosty, bored snob she really was. There's no quicker, easier way to earn your boss's respect and gratitude than helping her look good.



Take notes from Andy.

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Your Burning Work Questions Answered

Here, Cathie Black lends career-related advice to a few of our readers.



Q: I recently landed my first job. Now I'm looking toward my first promotion. When can I expect to move from entry level to midlevel? —Kathleen, 22

A: Wait a minute! How about concentrating on doing the job you were hired to do and making sure that you are doing it really, really well? Ambition and drive are very important attributes, but experience is also essential. Have a conversation with your boss about her goals for you. When you have achieved the goals you have both agreed upon, have another meeting with your boss, and express your desire to grow within the company.



Q: I work with a lot of men. I wear skirts often but find stockings to be uncomfortable. Is it appropriate to go without them? —Christine, 31

A: It depends on what is acceptable in your industry. For example, bare legs may be de rigueur in the worlds of fashion, beauty, advertising, and publishing, but at a very formal law firm, they could be seen as inappropriate. You never want to feel uncomfortable or make anyone else uncomfortable with your appearance at work, so look around. If your coworkers skip the stockings, you can too. If they wear them religiously, toe the line or invest in a fabulous pants suit!



Q: I just started working at a new job in a laid-back place and noticed that a lot of my coworkers listen to their iPods while they do their work. Is it okay for me to do this if other people are? —Megan, 19

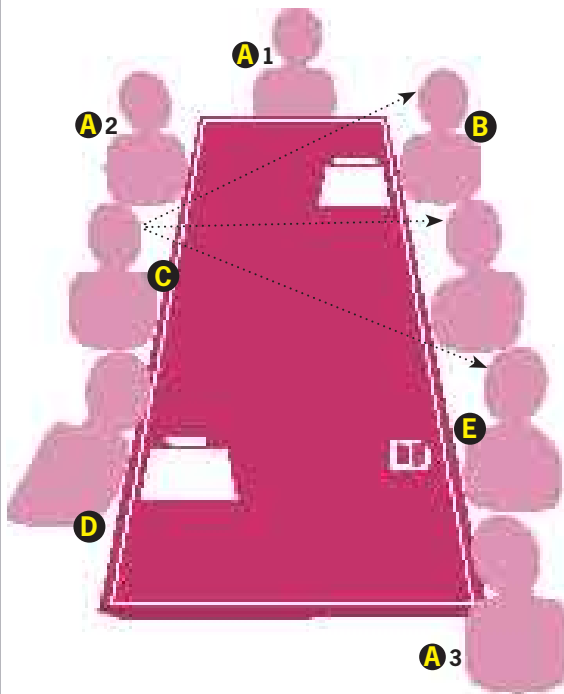
A: It is always a good idea to take cues from colleagues if it is clear that their behavior is acceptable to management. Some people find it easier to concentrate if outside "office noise" is blocked by listening to an iPod. Personally, I would encourage you not to work with earphones. If you are in the early stages of your career, it is important to keep your eyes—and ears—open to everything. You'll be surprised at how much you can learn just by being alert and engaged by the world around you.



Q: I'm content in my job, but I feel like I could probably be doing more to be successful. What's the best way to really shine? —Jessica, 31

A: When you start off your question with "I am content," it makes me think you are possibly becoming complacent in your work. Are you bored? If so, then it is time to reassess your goals. But if you feel that you still have more to contribute and if you are still engaged and happy at your current company, rather than looking for opportunities elsewhere, I recommend a conversation with your boss and the HR department to map out a plan for your future growth.

CATHIE BLACK'S MEETING GAME PLAN



Every group session is a chance for you to shine—if you know your way around the conference room.

A 1 Never sit at the head of the table unless you are the person who called the meeting. **2** Sit next to the person leading the meeting or somewhere at the middle of the conference table. **3** Avoid sitting at the far corners, where it is difficult to be seen or heard.

B Always have a pen and pad of paper to take notes, and try to get the agenda in advance so you can do some research and have relevant thoughts and opinions to contribute to the discussion. If you are leading the meeting, create an agenda and place one in front of each attendee, even if you sent it out in advance. It will keep people focused.

C When presenting, look at the attendees, not at your notes. In other words, know your material inside and out. Occasionally, look from one attendee to another when emphasizing a point. Eye contact is critical to keeping people's attention. Be brief, entertaining, and most of all, informative.

D While you should always sit up straight—it conveys confidence—lean forward when making a point. When someone else is speaking, look at them, except while you are taking notes.

E Don't use your BlackBerry or take cell phone calls. And never, ever yawn!

8 Have a No-Surprises Policy

Never surprise your boss. If you have bad news, tell it. If you have good news, share it. For one thing, no one likes to feel out of the loop. And for another, hiding a crisis from someone who needs to know virtually guarantees the problem will be compounded. Think of your boss as a small woodland animal—make no startling moves or strange gestures. Do the work to make things easy on him or her.



Like a tiny creature, your boss is easily scared.

Gates to female trailblazers like eBay's Meg Whitman to Internet wunderkinds like Google cofounders Sergey Brin and Larry Page, who refused to believe that a little startup couldn't take on the biggest, richest companies in cyberspace. All these people trusted their ideas and themselves enough to know which rules they could break. You can do the same.



Don't live and die by other people's rules.

10 It's Not PC, But Looks Count

The way you present yourself makes a huge difference in how people perceive you, and not just in a superficial way. People make judgments about your abilities, self-confidence, and savvy based in part on what you choose to wear and how you choose to carry yourself.

When I was just out of college and looking for my first job, I wrangled an interview at Condé Nast, then one of the biggest magazine-publishing companies in New York. I dressed in a nice, conservative suit and felt pretty good about how I looked—right up to the moment I stepped into the elevator at the Condé Nast building.

I immediately felt the penetrating gazes of half a dozen fashionably dressed young women as they looked me up and down, several of them clutching their Louis Vuitton bags. Suddenly, I felt like a complete hayseed. I couldn't help but be self-conscious—exactly the opposite of how you want to feel going into an interview—and all because I hadn't given enough thought that morning to how I should dress. The experience taught me a lesson I never forgot. ■



Your résumé's great, but people notice this too.