



shaunti
feldhahn

Bestselling author of *For Women Only*



what you need to know about
how men think at work

for
women
only

in the
Workplace

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CHAPTER 1

“It’s Not Personal; It’s Business”

Welcome to Two Different Worlds

One theme running through the romantic comedy *You’ve Got Mail* is just how differently men and women view the concept “It’s not personal; it’s business.” In the movie, Joe Fox (played by Tom Hanks) owns a massive Barnes & Noble–like bookstore chain that opens an outlet near a beloved children’s bookshop run by Kathleen Kelly (Meg Ryan). Kathleen is unable to match their discount prices and tries valiantly to hang on, but eventually goes out of business. Joe discovers that the woman he’s been ruthlessly competing with in business is also the anonymous woman he’s fallen in love with online, the woman to whom he had given business advice such as, “Fight to the death” and “You’re at war. It’s not personal; it’s business.”

Later, he starts to apologize for putting her out of business, saying, “It wasn’t personal—”

Kathleen interrupts: “What is that supposed to mean? I’m so sick of that. All that means is that it wasn’t personal to *you*. But it was personal to me. It’s personal to a lot of people. What is so wrong with being personal anyway?”

That short exchange captures a common source of friction I heard many times as I interviewed men and women about how each views their working life.

Many women tend to have a holistic view of the world, one where personal, family, and work matters are all viewed as part of the big picture called life.

As a result, women tend to have the same feelings and perspectives in different areas of their lives. When we are feeling attacked, underappreciated, or disappointed at work, and someone says, “It’s not personal,” that doesn’t ring true to us. *Well, it’s sure personal to me.*

Men, on the other hand, tend to have a very different view. It is as if they exist in two different worlds: Work World and Personal World. For a man, the two are utterly distinct and function by different rules: it is as if they are governed by different natural laws. So every morning when a man heads to work, he feels as if he physically leaves behind one world with one set of innate rules, crosses an emotional bridge, and enters a totally different world with a different set of rules and expectations. This experience tends to be as true for men in a ministry as men in the marketplace.

To women, the compartmentalization that results can come across as impersonal or lacking in compassion. Yet many of the godly men I spoke to said they could care about others and still feel work is a very different world.

In a man’s mind, it is as if there are two different worlds: Work World and Personal World.

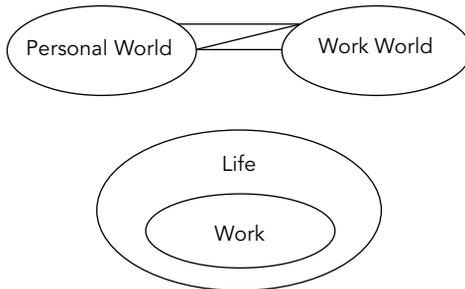
Richard, president of a financial advisory group working with many ministries, captures that male experience:

Business becomes its own box. The man presses the button for the tenth floor, and when he walks off the elevator, he’s now in Business. Everything about the rest of the world gets suspended. It’s not personal, not relational, not religious, not civic: it’s business. When he says,

“It’s not personal; it’s business,” he means that. It’s like, “Don’t you get it? I’ve crossed the bridge to the business world, and until I cross the bridge back home, this is where I am. There are rules here, written and unwritten, that govern this world.” The idea of the business world is a construct men have learned to embrace. It may be a fiction of their mind, but to them it’s very real.

The graphic below is an attempt to capture this difference visually:

TWO DIFFERENT WORLDS:



Because of these two very different ways of looking at the world, a phrase like “It’s not personal; it’s business” tends to mean something different to men than women realize—or than we mean when we say the same thing. For instance, women might use that phrase to mean, “I know this situation [layoff or missed promotion] is personally difficult, but please realize this is not about you. I care about you personally, but this decision had to be made for purely business reasons.” Men, on the other hand, usually mean, “You and I are not in Personal World now. We are in Work World. So we are handling this by the rules of Work World, and that is how you should perceive it. You shouldn’t even have the same feelings as in Personal World.”

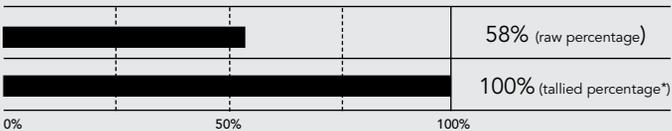
While this rigid distinction loosens somewhat in ministries and

faith-influenced settings, it never goes away entirely. On my survey, six in ten men said the working world simply functions by different rules. I was surprised the number wasn’t higher, given men’s overwhelming agreement with the question in my interviews, so I cross-tabbed this theoretical question with several that provided workplace examples. I discovered that once men were confronted with real-life scenarios, every single man did expect the working world to operate differently from the personal world.¹

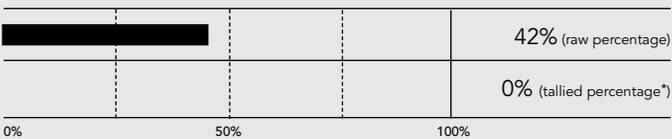
Stop and think for a moment about your view of working life and personal life. Which statement best describes your view?*

(Choose one answer.)

a. Things operate differently at work than they do in your personal life. You can adhere to the same values or personality in each place (for example, being honest, or compassionate), but the expectations and culture of each are simply different, so you adjust to each.



b. The way work life and personal life operate are not that different, so you can operate pretty much the same in both arenas.



* When cross-tabbed with answers about real-world examples. See note 1 for details.

The men were clear that it is the operating rules of the environment that change, not a person’s personality or values. In their minds, they are the same individual with the same temperament and values in each world. But the environment has changed around them, and so they adapt to the rules governing that environment.

A good analogy would be as if in one world they are playing the game of paintball, while in the other world they play poker. The player is the same person, with the same values—for example, “one should never cheat”—but (in the man’s mind) it is as if there really are two completely different games with completely different rules.

For us to be most effective—and, frankly, to be able to catch any incorrect perceptions of us—we need to know what our male colleagues, employees, bosses, and customers see as “the rules” of Work World, and just how deeply those expectations are embedded in the male psyche.

As noted, I am not suggesting that a man’s expectations and perceptions are right or wrong, or that women necessarily need to change the way they work to adapt to them. But it is in our best interest to understand what they are. I also think it’s important to understand the inner wiring in a man that leads to those expectations in the first place.

A MAN’S INNER WIRING

Men’s beliefs at work seem to arise from three facts about how their brains have been created, and how they have related to other males since childhood.

1. The male brain naturally compartmentalizes

The male brain tends to find mental multitasking difficult and is set up to naturally compartmentalize emotions, thoughts, and sensory inputs—whereas the female brain is the other way around. That is a simple summary of a complex truth.

In our book *For Men Only*, my husband and I compared a woman’s thought life to a personal computer with multiple windows open at a time. Most women know what it’s like to be aware of,

thinking about, or actually doing many things at once, and can transition seamlessly back and forth between personal and work tasks. I love the example of the Proverbs 31 woman, who is running a business, caring for her home, managing her servants, making clothes, and helping the poor—seemingly all at once!

Neuroscientists have discovered that anyone’s ability to multitask like this depends in large part on the amount and type of connectivity along the corpus callosum, the main superhighway between the left and right hemispheres of the brain. A 1999 *Journal of Neuroscience* study demonstrated that the influence of estrogen gives women far more of that connectivity, and thus a great ability and predisposition to think about and do many things at once.² The downside to being able to manage all those open windows simultaneously, however, is that most women (81 percent according to our survey) have a hard time closing down thoughts that nag them.

Most men, by contrast, find it exhausting just to think about all those multiple windows. A man’s thought life is more like a computer with one window open at a time. He works on it, closes it, then opens another, and usually has no trouble closing out thoughts that bother him.

You may have noticed that tendency for a man to tell his wife, “Just don’t think about it.” That advice may seem easy to him but feels impossible for her, and there is a biological reason for it: he is far more predisposed to compartmentalize, and better at it. Brain scientists have discovered that a person’s tendency to compartmentalize stems from fewer connections within their corpus callosum superhighway, as well as its unique makeup. According to researcher Rita Carter and neuropsychologist Christopher Frith in *Mapping the Mind*, the corpus callosum is 25 percent smaller in men than in women.³ Further, a team of Israeli fetal researchers found that the in-utero influence of testosterone decreases the growth of nerve connections between the hemispheres, making mental multitasking much more difficult for men.⁴

But what men gain from their brain structure is a superior ability to compartmentalize and deeply process various functions and thoughts without being distracted.

Add to this what neuropsychiatrists at the University of Pennsylvania found: Within the corpus callosum, men have far more gray matter (where thinking and functioning occur) than women, who have far more of the connecting white matter used to send those thoughts from one area of gray matter to the next. As a result, men's thoughts are more isolated, less interconnected, and more compartmentalized. As Dr. Raquel E. Gur explained in the 1999 study, this promotes men's extreme ability to concentrate within any one mode of thinking or functioning without being distracted by a connection to another type of thought.⁵

Men's tendency to segregate personal and work is something they do automatically without thinking about it, in part due to their brain structure.

In other words, men's tendency to segregate "personal" from "work" is something they do automatically without thinking about it—both because their brains are structured for it, and because their brains aren't structured to bounce thoughts back and forth between worlds easily. And as you'll see, that affects almost everything about how men think, feel, and process information.

Many women have noticed one direct outcome of this. Unlike women, once men cross the bridge into Work World, it is as if Personal World vanishes into the mist during the workday. One Christian businessman I know is a very empathetic guy, yet as he put it, "While I'm sitting here at work, I have to almost go into a different world in my mind even to tell you my daughters' names."

Another direct outcome of this compartmentalized brain wiring is a man's tendency to separate himself and his personal feelings

from the job. One executive brought up a perfect illustration of this by drawing upon an old Looney Tunes short cartoon. In the cartoon, Ralph Wolf and Sam Sheepdog walk to work, chatting personally (“Morning, Ralph!” “Morning, Sam!”), clock in, and take up their positions. When the work whistle blows, Ralph and Sam clash and fight each other intensely. Ralph’s job is to try to steal and eat the sheep, and Sam’s is to protect them. They try to blow up each other; they bash each other on the head until the lunch whistle blows. Then they stop in midbash, go companionably to share a meal, and after stretching and yawning, return to their positions with Sam’s hand clenched around Ralph’s throat. The executive I spoke with said this is precisely how men view life: they completely distinguish between personal and business, and one has little or no effect on the other. One man in the broadcasting industry gave me a real-world version of Ralph and Sam—a story I’ve heard, in essence, from many other men:

I used to work with a guy, Bob, at Network A. When one of the key players who had worked with Bob several years and was his good friend moved on to the CEO position at Network B, he brought along Bob to see if he could take a crack at transitioning to a new type of sales. A year later, this guy fired Bob because he wasn’t measuring up to expectations. Bob, wasn’t selling enough...he just couldn’t make the transition. Now, the thing is: Bob and the CEO continue to be the closest friends. They go on vacations together. I just saw Bob recently, and he and his wife had just come back from a visit to the CEO’s beach house in Florida.

I met this executive at a restaurant with his wife. She owns a thriving retail store herself and told me, “I’ve had to fire people

several times and been fired myself. I can't imagine still wanting to be close friends afterward. I don't know how he does it."

Her husband shrugged. "A lot of this has to do with an ability to compartmentalize, and that comes with experience. When you get higher up, you understand the mentality and understand the whole business process. When Carly Fiorina was fired from Hewlett-Packard, I don't think it was because the board didn't like her, and I'm sure she didn't take it personally. The more experienced you are, the more you compartmentalize."

In other words, this executive assumed that the more experienced you were in business, the more you would compartmentalize, and that the less you did so, the less businesslike you were. As I listened, I couldn't help but think, *I wonder what he would say if I told him compartmentalization has more to do with brain structure than with experience?*

2. The male brain becomes ultrafocused

A man's brain structure and hormone mix also give him a greater ability to become hyperfocused on whatever project is at hand. A few ramifications:

Everything else gets screened out—and that feels great. Most men I spoke with described the ability to go into this focused state as important for their productivity (which makes sense, given their relative difficulty with multitasking). Everything else gets screened out, and men describe going into that intense zone as providing the same sort of high as a postexercise endorphin rush.

The downside, though, is that a man can also miss or screen out things that shouldn't be overlooked. It may be an actual decision to screen out something the man thinks of as "personal feelings" or "extraneous," or it may be that he's so focused on Project A that he's missing the impact of that on Project B (or on Person B).

The chief financial officer (CFO) of a Fortune 500 manufacturer explained, “Men tend to look back and say, ‘Oh shoot, there were victims along the way.’ We can be oblivious to all the other things going on, but it’s not a lack of care. Not at all. You’re trained as a kid that winning is everything. Your competitive juices flow and you hurt the other guy, or yourself, and you don’t even notice.” That sort of miss-everything-else focus is not at all unusual for men. At times, what may look like male insensitivity or even callousness may actually be a simple function of brain anatomy.

Anything that interrupts a man’s natural focus is disproportionately disruptive. While being intensely focused feels great to a man and allows him to be productive, not being able to focus intensely on one thing feels not just unproductive, but disconcerting and incredibly frustrating. This was apparent when I showed two software executives, David and Gregg, the Personal/Work World graphic on page xx.

DAVID: I love my wife and daughter, but if either of them calls me during the day, it is a real distraction. I have to expend extra effort to get back into work mode, extra effort I wouldn’t otherwise have to spend. Men have limited capacity to deal with uninvited distractions, and I just lost some of my capacity right there.

GREGG: It’s not that with this intrusion you’ve lost the connection to the work world. That’s not it at all.

DAVID: It’s that there’s this other thought open in your mind that prevents you from being 100 percent efficient.

GREGG: Yesterday morning was a good example. My wife asked if I could run by the house over lunch and drop the dog at the vet.

She didn't think it was a big deal. It is over lunch, after all. But until that's resolved—"I got the dog and I'm back"—somewhere out there I know I'm going to have to take an hour and go get the dog. Just having that open thought in the back of my mind is disruptive.

3. Men strive to protect themselves from emotional pain

Men are far more sensitive to being hurt than most women realize. In many ways, a man's compartmentalizing of emotions and creating a tough facade, exists to cover a vulnerable interior that he feels a strong need to protect—especially since most men don't feel as natural or adept at handling their emotions as women.

One man I know, Eddie, had a tough time emotionally when his consulting contract with a good friend from church was terminated unexpectedly. He was a complete contrast to the story I told earlier about the broadcast salesman who continued to vacation with the boss who had fired him. A mutual friend explained,

Eddie really pours himself into things. He puts his heart out there. That is why most other guys set up this idea of these two different worlds, business and personal. What wounded Eddie was his level of expectation. His boss was a close friend before and during the whole contract. I'm guessing Eddie allowed himself to feel like it wasn't just business, it was personal. And that's when it hurts. If Eddie had been just an arm's-length consultant, he would have said, "It's business," and moved on.

From a guy's perspective, it is totally self-protective to have these "it's business" rules, because once you make it personal, it hurts so much. Guys know we don't do personal things as well as we want. We know that with our

families, when personal issues come up, it’s complex and confusing, so business is almost a sanctuary or oasis away from those jumbled emotions. When we let the two worlds intersect, we not only impact the efficiency of the business but our ability to do it well and survive emotionally.

Doesn’t your perspective change when you realize men didn’t formulate or subscribe to the “it’s not personal” rules of Work World because they have no emotion? Men created the rules because emotion is often so hard for them to handle. No wonder that even in faith-based ventures that often place a higher value on nurture, men still tend to maintain separate work and personal expectations.

“From a guy’s perspective, it is totally self-protective to have these ‘it’s business’ rules, because once you make it personal, it hurts.”

THE UNWRITTEN RULES OF WORK WORLD

So what are those expectations? How do men think Work World functions? First, remember, these aren’t “tried and true tips for how business works best.” Men view these as the “natural laws” that are just as inescapable in business as the law of gravity is in the physical world. (And although I am focusing on the expectations instinctively shared by most men, experienced female readers may see that they share some of them as well.)

Each rule is based on one overriding principle: everything happening at work must advance the goals of the organization and one’s role within it as effectively as possible.

Now let's take a look at just four of the "unwritten rules" I heard most often (there are others, but many of them are covered in the chapters ahead).

1. You can't take things personally

In men's minds, you can take things personally in Personal World, but in Work World, whatever is going on is not about you—it's about the business. My core question in all my interviews and surveys was, essentially, "Is there anything that you've seen talented women do that undermines their effectiveness with men, simply because the women don't realize how it is being perceived?" One of the most common things I heard was, "Women sometimes take things too personally."

The CEO and COO of a well-known \$5.5 billion organization, leading thousands of employees, had a unique perspective on this. For years, the organization had no well-defined performance measures or employee-evaluation system. Marty, the CEO, had brought in a new chief operating officer to change that. The COO, Ronald, had come from another household-name company with an excellent system of performance measurement and review, and had spent the previous year applying it to the new environment. I interviewed Marty and Ronald together. When I asked them if there was anything women might do that undermines their effectiveness, they glanced at each other with raised eyebrows.

MARTY: It's probably most apparent to me in performance reviews.

This has been a real struggle for us, because we're trying to be nice, but we are putting some pretty strict performance metrics in place to measure what we do. It enables me to do a performance evaluation and quantify why I'm rating someone a certain way.

RONALD: The men have been a piece of cake, but we struggled with the women. When we tell employees they need to improve, the men just hear, “You did not do what we needed. What will you do to get better?” When we work with the women, we can have the same data in front of us, but they seem to hear, *We do not like you.*

MARTY: The men may say, “Well, I disagree with you about that.” Or, “That’s fine.” Then it’s over. It’s not that way with the women, even the senior women.

Behind the scenes, I heard many examples of what taking it personally looked like to a man. Here’s one example.

FROM THE OWNER OF AN ADVERTISING COMPANY

This week, I told one of my midlevel staff that she had to speed up. A lot of our deadlines are like dominoes, with everyone depending on everyone else meeting deadlines so all the moving parts mesh. Our staff members know they are measured by three things: how well they do on client visits, on the content of their projects, and turning things in on time. She was doing two of these three really well for how experienced she was.

I had to tell her that one of the three was below standard and we’d missed a client deadline because of her; and that client had specifically told us their deadlines were not negotiable. So when I spoke to her, I told her we had a single problem: You have to speed up.

But I could just tell that she was not hearing, “You need to speed up.” She was hearing, “You’ve failed, you’ve let me down, this isn’t working, I’m disappointed in you.” I’d said: “You need to speed up.”

Now, I could see this happening, and so I had to circle back around to tell her, “I need to be sure you know I’m only saying this one thing.” But I could tell she was wounded, and I couldn’t get her to focus and hear what I was saying. The moment she took it all personally, the meeting went out the window. I was trying to move to ongoing strategy, and I never got there. I was trying to get to the next step of saying, “Here are some ideas on speeding up,” but I never got there because in my view she took the whole thing personally.

She apparently cried after I left the room. And I had to tell the other partners, “I met with her, but she wasn’t able to hear what I was saying, and I don’t think it’s going to make any real difference.”

Of course, you might be wondering, *But how can you not take things personally?* I put that question to a banking executive, Niles, who had just had to fire a key female manager the day before I spoke with him. “Because it is about your work, not about who you are,” he answered. “It is not that I dislike you—you may be a wonderful person, have a great sense of humor, and be great to work with. But you have to recognize that the assignments you were given were not up to the standards set.”

Having spent years hearing how much a man’s identity is tied up in what he does and in his ability to provide for his family, I said I would have expected men to take it *more* personally if they were fired. Niles responded,

There is an element of taking it personally even for men. A little bit, because you are what your work is. But I have been fired, and I would then tell myself, *Well, I may not have given it my best effort, or, I was a square peg in a round*

hole and wasn't able to deliver up to expectations. After all, if I was hired by NASA to launch a rocket, regardless of how hard I tried, I wouldn't be able to do it. I didn't have the skill set or experience. There are any number of reasons why someone might receive a poor evaluation. For whatever reason, that person may be in over their head. As long as his boss doesn't get personal, critical, and mean, a man might go home and get upset when he talks to his wife, but he won't take it personally at work.

Niles's comment points out a common (and eye-opening) distinction: in a man's mind, you can be quite *upset* about the situation itself and *yet still not take it personally*.

That said, despite the men's overwhelming unanimity on this point, I believe men's assurance that they never take things personally sounds better in theory than it sometimes works in practice. As I'll describe in a later chapter, I have found that there are certain things men are more likely to take personally than women. Yet that doesn't negate the primary point that they expect people in the workplace to take nothing personally and look askance at those who do.

2. You become your position

Another unwritten rule is that a job holder is essentially seen as a temporary holder and custodian of his or her position—a position that, in most cases, exists independently of the person and will be there after they leave. The implications of this perception are that, as cold as it sounds, the function of the position is more mission critical to the organization than the person doing it, and the position holder is supposed to do what is best for the company rather than for the individual.

Most organizations understand that their greatest strength is their people and the passion and talent they bring to their work. Yet the fact remains that when group ABC needs a fundraising director or a programmer in the IT department, the group is trying to find the best person to fit a particular position or role, and that that position usually does exist independent of the person. As a result, when you walk through the company doors, you are, essentially, seen as a particular role as much as an individual.

One man I interviewed, whom I'll call Cole, is the founder and owner of a well-respected executive search firm that places C-level executives with Fortune 500 companies. He makes this distinction between himself and his job:

I have fired a lot of people over the years. I'm a very empathetic person, and firing is always emotionally disconcerting to me, but it's one of the things I have to do. I often picture myself sitting in another chair as a third party, directing a play. It is not Cole firing Shaunti. It is the president firing a vice president. It is the director firing a manager. If you've got a role, you've got to play the role, like a doctor has to remove a tumor or a dentist has to pull a tooth. They've got bad jobs today. My job today is a bad job. I have to terminate somebody and I am not going to enjoy it. But that is my job. So when I say it is "just business," it does not mean I do not care about you. The dentist undoubtedly cares about the person whose tooth is failing. The doctor cares about the person whose tumor needs to be removed. But they do not let their concern for that person overshadow their responsibility. If you are failing in your role, my job is to confront you in a way that either beneficially resolves your failure to perform, or removes you so your failure does not create a broad-spread failure of the organization.

The ability men have to see themselves as separate from their business role is another key reason why they are able to take things less personally at work. Their personal identity is still tied to their job, but they can choose to see challenges or criticism as more about their position and less about them.

“So when I say it is ‘just business,’ it does not mean I do not care about you. A worker cannot let his concern for a person overshadow his responsibility.”

Of course, there are times when a person’s expectations and those for his or her position collide. Then the expectation of the working world is for employees to fill the role to the best of their ability, rather than do what they personally prefer or even think best. In other words, if you have to choose, you subordinate your preferences to your position—and boss.

Here’s an example from my own experience. At the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, my job involved detailed analysis into the facts—as far as I needed to go to get the truth. Working with Japanese banks that (like many international institutions) didn’t have the same standards for disclosure often put me in the position of being a kind of financial detective, trying to uncover and fit together facts that others would prefer to stay hidden. I often had short deadlines and would work around the clock to do as much analysis as I felt was needed to understand what was going on and properly brief senior officials.

Later, however, when I moved to Atlanta and began working as an independent analyst for a consulting company, I found myself clashing with my employer. I was doing the same sort of work but now was billing hours on projects that would earn my employer a

fixed fee. My boss kept asking me to cut down my hours for a certain type of report. I responded, “If I’m going to do it right, it will take at least twenty-five hours to do this type of analysis.”

Finally he said, “You’re not hearing me. I’ve bid a certain amount for this project. That is what the client will pay me, no matter how much time you take. If you keep billing me twenty-five hours for these reports, I’m going to lose money employing you. You may think what you’re doing can’t be done in under twenty-five hours, but I’m asking you to do a different type of analysis: the seventeen-hour version.”

That’s an example of how what I thought best as an experienced specialist clashed with my position, which was, when it came right down to it, to make money for the company, not lose it.

In my interviews with men, I heard dozens of examples of men becoming exasperated with an employee—almost always a female employee—who wouldn’t stop arguing over something she found important. Men were puzzled and frustrated as to why these employees couldn’t simply register their opinion and analysis about why something should be otherwise, then accept and faithfully implement their boss’s decision, even if it differed from their preferences. Kevin, a national human resources director for a major consulting firm, said, “Men have these issues and concerns too, obviously, but they tend to be able to overlook them when they need to. Women tend to have more difficulty looking past small issues. If their point of view is not the one that the team decides to pursue, they may have a harder time accepting that and moving on. They tend to let smaller issues bother them and get in the way of accomplishing the bigger goal.”

Now, what Kevin sees as a difficulty in looking past small issues may actually be the relative inability to close those mental “windows” that are bothering her—and the reason they are bothering her is often because she sees an unresolved issue that could come

back to haunt the group or company. When I asked men how a woman should handle such a situation, by far the most common answer was probably not what we want to hear.

One man representatively suggested, “Document concerns in a short, clear e-mail to be sure you’ve been heard correctly. Then you need to explicitly say, ‘but you’re the boss,’ and let it go. He has heard you, considered your point of view, and made a different judgment call. You may disagree with it, but it is his call to make, and you’ll only hurt yourself by implying he’s being stupid.”

3. You don’t make business decisions based on personal factors

One rule that men feel governs business isn’t always perfectly followed by either gender: when you are at work, you do not make decisions based on factors considered personal, such as how you feel about someone, circumstances outside Work World, or your emotional response to a particular person or situation. Jackson, who ran a start-up company, described the premise this way:

When I’m in business mode, I’m not operating out of the emotional sensibilities that I would be operating from in my personal life. I may be ticked off at you, but I can separate that for the good of the enterprise. Or I may think you’re the best person around, but I can’t let that feeling, which belongs on the personal side, dictate what I deem best for business. In personal life, personal feelings matter. In business life, personal feelings shouldn’t be a consideration, except to the degree that they affect business. My employees are very loyal, and people seem to like working for me, so I hope I’m not an ogre. Still, I’ve got a family to provide for, so I’m not here to win a

popularity contest. If anyone's feelings are going to get hurt, it's not going to be my wife's because we're on food stamps. Now if being liked helps my job, I'm all for it. Otherwise, if by trying to be everyone's best friend it hurts my job or my business, that's gotta change.

"In business life, personal feelings shouldn't be a consideration, except to the degree that they affect business."

Now, I've viewed some men as breaking this rule. I've experienced the good ol' boy network at work, been frustrated by being left out of ostensibly personal outings where work was discussed, and known of business contracts awarded and decisions based on what looked like outside personal relationships.

To help me understand this apparent contradiction (and others), I set up a day-long focus group of six experienced businessmen and two high-level women. All the men were unanimous in insisting that what I perceived as inconsistencies in men's actions and behavior weren't so at all. There are times, they said, when factors that seem personal are in fact best for the business.

For example, if a man gives a subcontract to a golf buddy instead of conducting an open bid, it is because the easy option of employing someone he knows and trusts allows more time and resources to be spent on more critical priorities. As one man put it, not making decisions based on personal factors doesn't mean "you always do a systematic study of every conceivable option to choose the best one." Men agreed that if anyone did allow a personal factor to trump a business purpose, they would definitely be viewed as nonbusinesslike and as breaking a core business expectation.

Similarly, I was confused by a seeming contradiction on the

positive side. Many men I interviewed talked about the importance of considering employee feelings and morale, which seemed, to me, to be what men would otherwise describe as Personal World behavior. In one case, I heard about a Christian business owner who had recently treated a key employee kindly when her son was sick, even though she missed a critical deadline. He explained it this way:

What I did was a strategy of sound business. I do care about her as a person, but my interest at work is that she’s valuable and I need to keep her happy, motivated, and productive so our shared goals can be achieved. The guy who screams at her has similarly made a business decision. In my opinion, he has a flawed strategy that is likely to be counterproductive. But neither approach is personal. It’s all about business, executed with different strategies.

If I treated someone unkindly, it would be because I was having a bad day, not because it was a business decision. And then it *would* be personal, it *would* be operating according to rules of the personal world, where you let your emotions get the better of you. It would be wrong and regrettable, not just because it goes against a value I have of treating people well, but because it is letting personal circumstances impact what is best for business.

4. Emotions in the workplace have to be related to the business

Men brought up the subject of emotions in nearly every interview. It is so central that I’ve devoted the entire next chapter to it. In men’s perceived rules of the workplace, it is expected that people show certain emotions only when they are related to the business

(and then only infrequently). One man I met, Douglass, is a great Christian guy who is also in charge of an internationally known corporate-sponsorship group. Even though he seemed to be an exception in not minding certain emotions, he commented about what emotions will always be viewed as inappropriate at work:

Even in a tough environment, I have seen women tear up and even some cry, and it has been totally fine because it has been appropriate. If anything, in a right setting it can cause a man to think, *Oh man, what have I done?* and wake up to the fact he's not handling something right. One time we had to fire a woman here, and when we told her, she teared up and had a rough time with it, but that was totally appropriate. She's losing her job. I don't expect her to be a robot. When it is not appropriate, ever, is when a woman cries in the workplace over something that does not have anything do with what is going on, like when a deal is falling apart and it has nothing to do with us. Honestly, some women tend to take things personally that should not be taken personally.

Because people are filling a role or a position that is separate from them personally, men think that even intense conflicts should never carry over beyond the issue at hand. Think Ralph Wolf and Sam Sheepdog. A majority of men I spoke with brought up this issue as something they perceived women handling very differently from men. One finance manager pointed to my diagram about Personal World and Work World and said something I've heard dozens of times: "I've been in meetings where I had heated disagreements with guys, and later that day, we're having a beer and talking about the game. Men went back to the personal side of the bridge. If a woman was heated, it would be much more difficult to go bowling later."

THE PERSONAL COST OF GETTING IT WRONG

Now it’s time to ask the obvious but fairly daunting question: what happens when a woman brings Personal World rules to Work World?

In my interviews, it seemed as if men mentally placed everyone they worked with in one of two camps: those who remember which world they are in and operate accordingly, and those who don’t appear to remember they are in Work World and operate as if in Personal World. If the men saw someone operating within the rules of Work World, they viewed that person more positively. Colleagues, regardless of gender, appearing to operate by practices that belonged in Personal World were viewed more negatively.

Most men I surveyed felt that they rarely mixed up their worlds, where women did so regularly. (Not that most women did so, but that most of those who did so were women.) It is worth noting that the rare man who was seen as taking things personally or getting emotional at work was viewed much more harshly than a woman doing the same thing.

So what do men think when they see a colleague operating by Personal World rules? The men tended to have one or more of the following perceptions, most of which, clearly, are misperceptions:

- **This person lacks self-confidence and self-esteem.**

Look at this telling quote from Norm, a finance executive:

It’s not just women who take things too personally. I have seen it in men every now and then too, and it sabotages their careers. It shows they lack self-confidence and self-esteem. Women who are successful have self-confidence enough to say, “This isn’t about me; it’s about the task we have to perform.” They realize it’s

actually about the other person and that person's perception: "So Bob didn't like this particular proposal. Well, a hundred other people might like it, but Bob is the boss, so I accept it and move on."

- **This person is emotional, insecure, and lacks self-control.** Men frequently associated those who took things personally and broke other Work World rules as being emotional. This has a host of negative repercussions discussed more in the next chapter. It also seemed insecure and defensive. As one man said, "It looks like this constant, 'I've got something to prove. I've got to show you I'm in charge' thing. It makes them look like it's not about taking actions to get their work done, but more about showing 'I've got the power!'"
- **This person is not a team player.** Over and over again, I heard men carefully suggest that women sometimes did not come across as team players. This puzzled me since, empirically, women tend to be more collaborative than independent. Finally, I realized the perception came from something as innocuous as not taking your personal self out of it. Norm, the finance executive quoted earlier, used a military analogy: "If you can get with the mission and take the hill and convince people to follow you, you'll be successful. But to do that, you have to take your whole personal self out of it. That is what boot camp does. Like the military, business needs to be a team sport to succeed."
- **This person is not mature, sophisticated, or business savvy.** Someone who doesn't adhere to the perceived natural laws of the working world isn't seen as business-like. For example, one senior partner at a worldwide

accounting and consulting firm cited an example about gossiping. Among men, he said, there’s an unwritten rule: if a man passes on unsubstantiated information, he says, “I don’t know if this is true, but you might want to look at it.” More likely, he says, “The man would go to the source and deal with something directly, while some women will talk around the office. It is not very business savvy to do that. It is human nature to think, *If I’ve got goodies, I want to share them*, but it is a sign of maturity when you don’t have to share.”

Not surprisingly, perceptions of an employee as more emotional, less secure, and naive could undermine or sidetrack a person’s effectiveness or career. Geoff, the Fortune 500 CMO, observed,

A woman who doesn’t understand how men think won’t necessarily get herself into a fix, but she’ll get herself into the neutral zone, and that’s not a good place to be. She won’t get into the club. If you’re thought to be high maintenance, if your behavior is not predictable, if someone’s not sure where you’ll come out or thinks you could cause a fuss, if you don’t get the silent code, if you’re not a team player—it all gets you into the neutral zone. You will not be sought out or you’ll be marginalized, even if you’re smart. This happens to women much more than men, simply because men tend to instinctively understand what they did that caused that perception and either self-correct or know they have to get out. A woman may still get good reviews—neutral or positive. She reads this as mixed signals. A guy wouldn’t. He would know he has to move.

I asked Geoff what women should look for, what danger signals should be heeded. He said,

It depends on the type of man giving the signals. It could be anything from a lack of warmth to never seeking your opinion to belittling. I saw one man solicit an opinion on a new advertisement. He asked several members of his team: “Bob? Julie? Penny?”

Penny said, “Use full color.”

The man totally ignored her, and said, “Bob, coming back to you...” This man was sending a clear signal. Anyone who knows what’s good for them will begin to avoid her. If he sends even stronger signals, subtly belittling Penny, saying, “When we want to get to that, we will,” he’s hoping she’ll get the hint and leave. The problem comes when she doesn’t. If she sees the signal, she should go to him and say, “You know, I’m interested in this other opportunity in the sales department. Can you help?” If he says, “Sure!” that’s her next signal. When you get the first signals that your opinion isn’t valued, there’s time to repair the damage or switch to a different position. Once you feel belittled, it’s time to leave the company. We had to coach one woman on my team because she was brilliant, fast, and highly effective, but she scared people. She read the signals early and was open to coaching and totally changed. Her new rankings shot through the roof, from below average to the top 1 percent.

SO WHAT’S A WOMAN TO DO?

Despite the many examples of women mixing the rules of Personal and Work Worlds, it was encouraging to hear from men many examples of female colleagues perfectly in tune with the expectations of the working world. It was also interesting to see the high degree

of gratitude and respect these women engendered. A national sales director named Louis said,

I have ten talented women working for me, and two of them do not let these things [taking things personally] become an issue. As a result, they are extraordinarily valuable to me. I always know what I’m going to get, and I can trust them completely. When women can both bring their skills to the table *and* eliminate the subconscious unknowns or discomfort many men have working with them—just from the unpredictability of it—they are viewed as among the most valuable employees.

Exactly how does a woman do this?

One of the simplest tools for managing men’s perceptions is to ask yourself, “Is this what a man would expect to encounter in Work World?” If the answer is no, men suggest, don’t let men hear it or see it, especially in secular workplaces, which have even less grace on this issue.

“The women who do not let these things become an issue are extraordinarily valuable to me. I always know what I’m going to get, and I can trust them completely.”

Some of the best advice I received early on in my career was from an older, wiser female friend who left a big company and began her own consulting practice. I was at her office late one Thursday afternoon, as we were getting ready to knock off work and head to a church musical rehearsal that night and all the next day. A fellow consultant called her to ask for input on a proposal. She told him,

“Frank, I’m heading out to a meeting now, and I’m in meetings all day tomorrow. I’ll look at this over the weekend and get back to you Monday.” As she put down the phone, she looked at me and said, “Just so you know: don’t ever tell a man in business that you can’t do something because of personal commitments. You’re in a meeting. He doesn’t need to know if that meeting is with your kids’ dentist. If he does, he starts to think this irrational thing that you allow personal life to interfere with work. Don’t even give him the opportunity to go there.”

Every office has its own culture, of course, but whenever you have a choice, it rarely hurts to err on the side of caution. It’s worth being aware of how something as simple as seeing a woman apply lipstick at her desk can yank a man back into Personal World.

■ Ask yourself, *“Is this what a man would expect to encounter in Work World?”*

Similarly, while we may not be able to actually eliminate the existence of personal feelings, and our brain structure makes compartmentalizing emotions difficult, we can probably learn to downplay or even hide our feelings enough that men don’t see them as part of the equation. Try to mentally separate yourself from your position, or force yourself to respond calmly when you feel yourself getting upset. Remind yourself, “It’s not about me; it’s about the other person and *their* perception.” Most of us need a place to vent at times. We can do that off site, back in Personal World.

Thankfully, men don’t expect us to be exactly like them. For if we are going to apply the perceived rules of the working world to our own work life, we need to do so in a way that works for us, can be sustained over the long term, and allows us to respect ourselves in the process. Geoff, the Fortune 500 CMO, advised,

It is so important for women to understand how men communicate, think, form clubs, and have their own language and expectations. For example, men are hunters. But don't try to break into their clubs and go hunting. Don't try to look like them, *but try to be perceived as compatible to them* [emphasis mine]. If five guys go to Bernie's Bar and you show up, it will look like you're trying too hard. If you happen to see them there, that's okay. But don't jump in with "How about those Packers?" Say, "I notice the *Wall Street Journal* said such-and-such." It's a good icebreaker. Give them a chance to see how good you are.

PERCEIVED AS EQUAL

It is important to emphasize why men expect both men and women to function according to the same rules at work. It is because they view the genders equally. Or to put it another way, men's frustration with women who don't function according to the natural laws of Work World stems in large part from an egalitarian view. Cole, the executive search founder, explained,

There was a time, even fifteen or twenty years ago, when men expected women to approach them differently than other men. There was this expectation, an old school viewpoint, that if a man was going to say something, he would say it one way and a woman would say it another way. Today, I do not expect a woman to treat me any differently than a man. I do not expect to be paternalistic toward a woman, and I do not expect her to defer to me. That's a good thing.

I do view that as a very good thing, and I hope you see it the same way. This doesn't mean that we will always view men's working-world expectations as correct. Regardless, if we can recognize and use these expectations as a means of influence, as a way to develop trust between equals, and as stepping stones to leadership, we can begin to change the culture. Once men see that their understanding of how to do business isn't, in fact, the only way of getting to a successful outcome, they too may become more adaptable.