

The Communications Doctor Offers Remedies For 11 Things That Hurt Women's Career Success

Nursing has always been a field dominated by women. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human services, 94 percent of the nation's nurses are women. In order to succeed at work, it is important to be conscious of behaviors. Here are eleven common behaviors women often engage in that prevent their success. While this list is geared towards women, it will also serve as a useful tool for the male nurse.

• We don't ask . . . therefore we don't get

While men in the workplace often step up to the plate and ask for what they want, female colleagues frequently sit on the bench only to watch and fall behind in the game. Women let promotions, raises and better benefits slip through their hands because they never ask for them. You'll never score a homerun if you don't step up to the plate and ask for the pitch. Men are more likely to be assertive and direct with higher-ups. Therefore, they are more likely to get what they want than women. When women do decide to ask, they often ask the wrong people. Many women will seek assurance from friends and colleagues before asking. If your name is on the roster, don't hesitate to play the game.

• We procrastinate

When women step up to the plate, often times it's too late. Not only does procrastination create unnecessary stress, it also puts you behind in the game. Many women and men experience what is termed "approach-avoidance" behavior. This is when you know what has to be done but you avoid it. Or, you get stuck in analysis paralysis, where you calculate every outcome before moving forward. Procrastination may seem like an innocent habit, however knowledge without action can lead to depression. Don't be a bench warmer in the workplace. Step up to bat now. The longer you avoid what needs to be done, the more it affects self-esteem, self-confidence and ultimately your success.

• We say "I'm sorry"

Unlike men, women have a tendency to overuse the phrase "I'm sorry" in the workplace. Not only do women say "I'm sorry" to apologize for what they've done, they also apologize for other people's actions as well. Don't bath yourself in other people's dirty water. Also know that when you apologize your word choice is critical. Rather than saying "I'm sorry" consider action words such as "I regret," "I apologize for" or "forgive me for" which are more direct and meaningful. Save the "I'm sorry" for when you're shopping for a Hallmark card, not when you're in the workplace.

• We say "I'll try"

The difference between saying "I'll try" and "I will" can be the difference between failure and success. By saying "I'll try" you set the stage for procrastination. By saying "I will" you create a

mental commitment to yourself, which ensures you will achieve your goal. In addition, by telling others that you “will try,” you communicate a sense of doubt. “I will” communicates a sense of certainty.

- **We’re not selective with whom we spend our time**

Face it - sometimes you end up in the company of people who are more negative than positive. Ultimately, this reflects upon you. Our relationships are our base network. They need to be strong and encouraging. Most people have a tendency to stay in a relationship when the perceived benefits outweigh the perceived costs. Think about what happens when you get back less than you give. Don’t waste energy on relationships that are counterproductive. Find people who encourage you, challenge you and motivate you to succeed. Remember that sour grapes make for bad wine and a spoiled party.

- **We use non-verbals that don’t work**

Non-verbal communication conveys up to 90 percent of a message. By using strong and powerful non-verbals you can enhance your image and create the positively visible image you want. On average, women take up less space than men so it is important to claim your space. Rather than putting your hands in your lap, put them up on the desk. Rather than sitting along the wall at a meeting, sit at the table. If you have a desk at work, position it so you face the door and can easily greet those who walk in. Avoid using counterproductive non-verbals like eye rolling and fake smiles. People can misinterpret them or become distracted. It is also important to be direct with your non-verbals. By making eye contact, nodding your head and keeping an open posture you’ll make a positive impression.

- **We criticize ourselves**

Do you speak negatively about yourself? If so, it can hurt your self-esteem and impact the way people view you. Approximately 70 to 90 percent of the words our brain processes are unusable or negative. According to the Zeigarnik effect, people remember more negative events than positive ones. Therefore, when you talk negatively about yourself it sticks like a wad of gum on a shoe. If you can’t say something nice about yourself, don’t say anything at all.

- **We over-communicate**

Are you a talkaholic? Women use about 3,000 to 4,000 more words per day than our male counterparts. While communication is critical for success, too much talky-talky can be counterproductive. When you ramble, people become distracted and confused. You also can lose the idea you were trying to communicate. It is more important to be clear and concise with your communication. Why use more words than necessary?

- **We over-commit**

Many working women feel pressured to succeed at everything. However, remember that if you bite off a large chunk, you’re going to be chewing on it for a long time. You will put yourself in

a better position if you are successful at a few tasks rather than mediocre at many. Say no just as much as you say yes. When asked to take on a new task, take a step back and breathe! Evaluate your personal and professional schedule to find a comfortable balance.

- **We don't provide 3-step positive feedback**

What are you doing to create a “good old girl network?” It is important to remember how hard the journey was that brought you to where you are today. Don't get distracted with your own success and forget to say “thank you” to those who have guided you along the way. Realize that you have the ability to mentor others, so ask yourself, “Who can I help?” and then do it.

- **We don't toot our own horn.**

Positive impressions create positive results. Unknowingly, many working women quietly watch from backstage as their male colleagues take center stage. Go for the lead role. As a professional it's important to step out from behind the curtain and become more positively visible. Don't fixate on negative traits and previous failures. Let people know about your accomplishments, talents and strengths. Actively create the positive image you want people to see. Voice your talents in the workplace and you'll receive an encore.

Being conscious of your behaviors is the first step towards a positive change. Remember, improvement comes with time. When addressing these issues be patient with yourself. For more information about how to improve your communication skills visit Dr. Susanne Gaddis's Website at: www.TheCommunicationsDoctor.com.

Susanne Gaddis, PhD, known as the Communications Doctor, is an acknowledged communications expert who has been speaking and teaching the art of effective and positive communication since 1989. With a specialized expertise in healthcare communication, Susanne delivers workshops, seminars, and keynote presentations across the United States. For more information, or to book Dr. Gaddis for an upcoming conference or event call 919-933-3237 or visit: www.communicationsdoctor.com. Dr. Gaddis would like to acknowledge Carly Salvadore for help in researching and writing this article.

Statistic in the introduction was found at:

<http://bhpr.hrsa.gov/healthworkforce/reports/rnpopulation/preliminaryfindings.htm>