



Dear Friends and Clients,

Last month I enjoyed spending time with four young women who graduated from college and joined the workforce two years ago. The women – who have been close friends since childhood – are on four distinctly different career paths. But while they are in different fields, they expressed similar concerns about their professional environments.

Although these four know how to sustain strong friendships with other women, each believes that she is treated badly, or at least not supported, by most of her senior female colleagues. In other words, the women not only say that are they not being mentored, but they believe that their careers may be blocked by other women.

Speaking of her colleagues, one said, “If I needed help, I’d never go to one of these women. I’d have a better chance going to a man.”

Since a keystone of my own career has been to build strong bridges with other women, I was troubled by the conversation. We have all had to deal with Mean Girls at the office, but is the situation now so much worse for younger women? Could it be related to the intense competition in this difficult job market?

I would love to hear your views about the state of woman-vs-woman workplace competition and bullying. Meanwhile, in this issue, I will offer some suggestions for dealing with it.

Warm Wishes, Bev

Bothered By Mean Girls?
Try These Survival Tips

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Are you a woman professional who finds that some of your female colleagues act like they resent your success? Or worse, are they blocking your progress? Or, do you dread going to work because of a workplace bully?

For decades women have been bumping into the occasional “Queen Bee,” who acts like she should be the only woman on her professional turf. And as women

continue to work their way into the higher reaches of the professional world, it is inevitable that some of them will treat each other badly. After all, they are people. And some people are more flawed than others.

The media are full of clichés where girls and women like the “Real Housewives” trash each other. And some human resource professionals are concerned that these cultural images are translating into aggression and oppression in the workplace.

It is difficult to generalize. Despite reports of widespread problems, there is contrary evidence. For example, a classic UCLA study suggested that while men tend to get into “fight or flight” mode in the midst of office stress, women may respond differently. It seems that the hormone oxytocin, released as part of women’s stress response, encourages bonding and nurturing. So when a woman is faced with crisis, her own chemistry might encourage her to calm down, nurture children and hang out with other women.

Among those exploring why some women oppress their female colleagues are Dr. Erika Holiday and Dr. Joan Rosenberg, who wrote “Mean Girls, Meaner Women: Understanding Why Women Backstab, Betray, and Trash-Talk Each Other and How to Heal.”

They theorize that both mean little girls and grown women who hurt other women may be suffering from self-hatred that is linked to rigid gender roles. Girls can develop low self-esteem when they are trapped by “double binds” that leave them no correct choice. For example, they may feel that they should comply with traditional female stereotypes and yet also must compete successfully with boys.

If you are troubled by Mean Girls at work, consider these strategies:

- * Develop self awareness. Noticing your hurt or angry feelings can help you to let them go. Consider keeping a journal in which you describe your emotions and explore choices for moving forward. Read about “Emotional Intelligence” and learn to better manage your own EI.

- * Reach out to other women. The best antidote to Mean Girl behavior may be solid friendships with other women. If there is nobody to turn to at the office, make it a top priority to cultivate women friends in other spheres of your life. You should be the one to take responsibility for staying in touch.

- * Break the cycle. Sometimes when women are hurt by women they respond by treating lower ranking females in ways that demean, exclude or devalue them. Wherever you are in the hierarchy, you can start change by looking for opportunities to support women. If there is nobody to mentor at work, consider Big Sister or other programs that will connect you with those who could use your

help. When you support other women, the sense of connection supports you in return.

* Don't let bullies defeat you. Most workplace bullies are men, but when women do engage in bullying behavior they tend to pick on other women. Of course, the first rule is to avoid bullies when you can. When that is not possible, don't let them get that charge that comes from hurting you. Meditation and other techniques can help you learn to stay calm and centered, which may frustrate the bully and cause her to move along to somebody more vulnerable.

Let us explore more ideas with you. In addition to providing executive coaching, Bev and her Clearways colleagues are available to speak about many issues related to your work life success. We' ll build a program to meet your needs. Learn more at www.ClearWaysConsulting.com or email to Bev directly.

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