The Myth of the Nice Girl

Discussion Guide

The Myth of the Nice Girl Pushover
Ineffective Weak
Mediocre Pleaser
Bland Achieving a
Career You Love
Without Becoming
a Person You
Selfish Rude Hate
Abrasive Arrogant
Brash Fran Hauser

INTRODUCTION

In *The Myth of the Nice Girl,* Fran Hauser deconstructs the negative perception of "niceness" that many women struggle with in the business world. If women are nice, they are seen as weak and ineffective, but if they are tough, they are labeled a bitch.

Hauser proves that women don't have to sacrifice their values or hide their authentic personalities to be successful. Sharing a wealth of personal anecdotes and time-tested strategies, she shows women how to reclaim "nice" and sidestep regressive stereotypes about what a strong leader looks like. Her accessible advice and hard-won wisdom detail how to balance being empathetic with being decisive, how to rise above the double standards that can box you in, how to cultivate authentic confidence that projects throughout a room, and much more.

The Myth of the Nice Girl is a refreshing dose of forward-looking feminism that will resonate with smart, professional women who know what they want and are looking for real advice to take their career to the next level without losing themselves in the process.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. After reading *The Myth of the Nice Girl*, how would you define the word "nice"? Discuss what other meanings this word has and what you can do to reframe it.

2. When Fran Hauser states that "nice is your superpower," what does she mean?

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3. Share examples with the group from your own experience: when has being nice helped you in your own career? Can you think of examples when it has hurt you? Review these latter experiences and discuss what you might have done differently.

4. Fran Hauser writes, "I have come to learn that the strongest, most effective leaders are often also the nicest. They use their kindness to inspire their teams, to encourage others, and to create powerfully positive workplace environments in which their employees thrive because they're happy, engaged, and motivated." In what other ways does Fran discuss how being both strong and kind in the workplace go hand-in-hand? As a leader, how do you balance kindness and strength?

5. How has networking helped you in the past? What strategies do you use for networking? Share tips with each other about how to find a mentor, or how to reach out to people outside your industry, and what to ask once you have a meeting set up.

6. How do you say "no" while still staying nice? Review the Four Square Model and discuss how you might use it in your own lives. Pair up to put the Four Square midel into action and figure out ways you and your peers could hold each other accountable to your priorities.

7. What's the difference between being nice and being a people-pleaser?

8. What did you learn in *The Myth of the Nice Girl* about negotiating? Can you cite an example of when empathy has helped you in your own negotiations?

9. If you were to ask your boss for a raise right now, what would you say? Practice on the person next to you.

10. What is evidence-based confidence and what can you do to strengthen your own?

11. Now that you've read *The Myth of the Nice Girl*, how will you respond if someone at work tells you you're too nice?

12. How will this book change you as an employee and as a manager? What spoke to you most? What are your major takeaways?

ABOUT FRAN HAUSER

Fran Hauser is a long-time media executive, startup investor and celebrated champion of women and girls. She's held senior positions at some of the world's largest digital media businesses, including Time Inc.'s *People*, *InStyle*, and *Entertainment Weekly* as well as Moviefone and AOL. Now an angel investor who largely invests in female founders, Fran was named one of Refinery29's "6 Most Powerful Women in NYC's Tech Scene," and has been featured by CNBC, *Forbes*, Vogue.com, Ad Age, and more.

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A CONVERSATION WITH FRAN HAUSER

What inspired you to write this book?

I first started thinking about this book in 2009 when I was President of Digital at *People* magazine and the most commonly asked question I got from younger women was "How can you be so nice and still be successful?" I was spending a lot of time talking about this, and when I looked around to see if there were any resources on the topic all I found were books about how nice girls don't get the corner office. So there was definitely white space for a book like this. But then life got in the way, as it does. I had my first son in 2010, and my second in 2011 and my job kept getting bigger at Time Inc. So I shelved the book idea and started thinking about it again three years ago after I had left the big corporate job and was working for myself as a startup investor. And truthfully I am so happy that it turned out this way. The book is so much more relevant and timely now than it would have been 9 years ago, given everything that is going on in the world.

Many people can relate to the "nice girls don't get the corner office" stereotype. What experiences have led you to believe that this is not true?

First off, there is a lot of research that supports this. There are two pieces of research, in particular from Google and Harvard Business Review, that I find to be really compelling. When Google set out to study what makes the best-performing team, it found that the most effective teams showed respect for each other, creating psychologically safe environments where people feel comfortable being themselves. And this is Google, one of the biggest technology companies in the world—I wouldn't necessarily describe them as a touchy/feely sort of company.

And Harvard Business Review (HBR) found that, when deciding whom they'd want to work with, people value likability more than competence. Those whom HBR termed "lovable stars"—those who are both likeable and competent—have the exact combination of likeability and ambition that so many women are struggling to achieve. In my own career when I think about the people I recruited for my team or promoted, they had this combination.

When we were working on the book proposal, we asked 1,500 women if being nice has been helpful to them in their career, and 96% of them said yes. There are so many amazing women who are kind and have risen to the top of their careers, women like Mindy Grossman, the CEO of Weight Watchers, Susan Canavari, and Blake Lively.

You write a lot about the importance of trust in business. Why do you feel trust is so important?

If you're inauthentic, people won't trust you. And without trust, there is no relationship. Research shows that our instincts tell us to ask ourselves two questions when we first meet someone: "Can I trust this person?" and "Can I respect this person?" We look to a person's genuine warmth and competence to answer these two questions.

Interestingly, the first question—"Can I trust this person?"— is the more important one when it comes to how we evaluate others. In fact, we only evaluate someone's competence after a sense of trust has already been established. This means that if someone decides they can't trust you, either because you lack warmth or display inauthentic warmth, you won't get very far with them. Even worse, they'll view your attempts to come across as smart or competent as manipulative. They will resent your strength instead of respecting it.

On the other hand, according to the same study, if you come across as warm and trustworthy first and prove your competence later, people will admire your strength and evaluate you far more positively.

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I love your story about how you became determined to stop saying "sorry". Can you share the specific steps you took?

The journal of *Psychological Science* published a study that showed women do indeed apologize more frequently than men. Unfortunately, when we do this at work, it can make us seem like pushovers. When I realized that I was apologizing too much at work, I became determined to break this habit. I started by searching my sent emails for all mentions of the word "sorry" to get a better sense of when, how, and to whom I had been apologizing without realizing it. I soon found that I'd apologized for all sorts of things, like waiting more than a day to respond to an email ("Hi John, I'm sorry it's taken me so long to respond . . .").

Reading these emails, it was so clear to me that I had inadvertently been putting myself in a weak position by apologizing for these trivial things. Without realizing it, I had been making myself seem subservient. From that point on, I started rereading all of my emails before sending them specifically to make sure they didn't include unnecessary apologies. I also downloaded the brilliant "Just Not Sorry" Gmail plug-in, a Google Chrome extension that highlights phrases in your emails that may be undermining the real message you want to send.

It was also helpful for me to replace my automatic "sorry" with something else. When I sat down and thought about what I was trying to convey with the word "sorry," I realized that what I wanted to communicate was my gratitude and appreciation for the other person's time. So I started replacing "I'm sorry" with "Thank you." It's a simple tweak, but this dynamic truly changes everything. Saying "Thank you" is much stronger than "I'm sorry" and is much more aligned with what I was trying to express in the first place.

To receive more career advice from Fran Hauser, sign up for her newsletter at **franhauser.com** and follow Fran on Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram. Post about *The Myth of the Nice Girl* using **#nicegirlarmy** and connect with other career-focused women like yourself.