

# Evaluate communication style and avoid ‘gender traps’



## ON THE JOB

By Anita Bruzzese

Anyone who has been married or in a long-term relationship with the opposite sex might readily agree that men and women communicate differently.

Unfortunately, say the authors of a new book on managing your career, those differing communications styles at work can become “gender traps” that hurt your chances of assuming a leadership role on the job.

“While we as men and women should embrace and celebrate our differences, the truth is that sometimes there are misinterpretations of what we’re saying at work,” says Roz Usheroff.

Usheroff, in a book with Beth Banks Cohn called “Taking the

Leap,” says that a woman, for example, may become caught in the “superwoman trap” when she doesn’t create clear boundaries and tries to do everything herself. Instead, they say, women should “learn to say no and mean it.”

For a man, a communication problem may be the “Goliath trap,” where the man tries to gain support for his cause by portraying himself as the little guy against a big, bad foe. That’s a mistake, they say.

“You may have competitors, you may have colleagues who have different approaches or opinions that yours, but they are just that, not the ‘enemy.’ Labeling someone the ‘enemy’ dehumanizes them and has no place in business,” the authors say.

Usheroff notes that men and women should get input from others about their communication style to make sure they’re seen as leaders by others. “People may believe the way they are communicating is right, and not realize that there are people who resent

their behavior,” Usheroff says.

In the book they give examples of communication errors, and how women and men can improve. For women, they say:

- Being seen as the “good girl” can take likeability too far. While it’s OK to be approachable, you can’t make business decisions just so someone won’t be mad at you.

- Understand that sometimes no matter what you do, you will be unfairly labeled. As long as you assert yourself fairly and honestly, don’t worry about being called names.

For men, the authors say:

- Don’t constantly hide your feelings. Most people don’t want leaders who are emotionless because it makes them uncomfortable.

- You don’t always have to be right. In this case, someone always has to be a “loser” so the man can be a “winner.”

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