

You're *Not* One of the Guys: Ten Lessons on Interacting Socially with Your Male Colleagues

By Roxanne Rivera

We all want to fit in. Women who work in male-dominated industries are no exception. I've seen it time and time again: women in MDIs trying to behave like their male colleagues so that they won't be treated any differently. But while you may be able to fool yourself into thinking you can be "just one of the guys," you'll never be able to fool the guys in your industry into believing it. They will always recognize you as the woman in the group. To be successful, it's important that you embrace your uniqueness as a woman in your field rather than deny its reality.

To survive and thrive in a male-dominated industry you don't have to become one of the guys. The men in your industry will never want you to be one of them. In fact, they will resent it if you try. What you *can* do, however, is to be accepted as a woman who can *occasionally* "act like one of the guys." And it's true that being able to interact socially with the men in your industry will play a role in determining your level of success.

Men do a lot of business in social settings. Whether playing golf, having cocktails, or going out to lunch, sometimes more deals get done on the golf course than in the office. It is not a bad thing to occasionally join the guys for a cocktail after work. Men love it and like to know that you are a good sport and fun to be around. Men love the energy that women can bring to a group. But there are a few rules that you must follow when hanging out with the guys:

1. Wait to be invited. Do not ever invite yourself along with the guys. If they are going to allow you to "sit at their table," it will have been after much discussion amongst themselves. Hanging out with the guys will be more successful for you if you are there because they want you to be there. Never force yourself into the group.

2. Set your boundaries. If you decide to "go out with the guys" for a drink, decide that you are going to leave at a certain time, and then do so. My rule of thumb is "never stay for more than two drinks." You never want to overstay your welcome. Leaving after a certain period of time shows the guys that you appreciate the time you spend with them, and it allows you to stay completely professional in the social setting with them.

3. Always buy a round. This puts you on a level playing field. But do so very early: the first or second round. Remember, you have a time limit and are leaving after two drinks. Again, this is a great way to show that you appreciate the time you are spending with them. It also gives men permission to abandon the age-old practice of footing the bill when women are part of a group.

4. Never pay more attention to one of the men more than the others. Of course working with men we all have our favorites: the ones who are easier to talk to, or the ones who are better looking, for example. But, you must treat them all the same, or there will be talk. Gossip is not the exclusive domain of women you know. Guys do it, too.

5. Listen more than you talk. Women, God love us, tend to talk quite a bit (some might even say too much) in social situations. These men are not your girlfriends. You are there to build rapport and gather information, not to tell them about yourself. Let them do the talking, and it will save you from talking yourself into a conversation that the men don't want to be a part of.

6. Never tell a joke or funny story unless you know it will get a laugh. Men are not women and will not laugh just to be polite. You don't want to create an awkward moment that the men will associate with spending time with you. And remember: never tell a joke that is crude or in poor taste.

7. Don't talk poorly of your spouse or significant other. When the conversation veers into the realm of "personal life," talking about your children and pets is more than acceptable—but *never* speak badly about your spouse or significant other in front of a man. And vice versa. If a man starts to tell you how his wife doesn't understand him, recognize this as a red flag. Simply end the conversation as politely as possible. If you allow him to continue or if you continue talking badly about your spouse, you are violating your boundaries.

8. Never talk about one man in your office to another man. Men are not like women. Men will defend no matter what. Typically there is a history between male colleagues, and history beats rapport every time. Also you don't want to perpetuate the stereotype that women are gossip queens.

9. Be direct. Men are very direct when they speak. Men compartmentalize. They are also linear thinkers, not conceptual thinkers as women are, so they get to the point right away. Men will respect you if you can be direct in return. One of the wonderful things that I learned from men was to be direct. Sometimes I find myself getting very frustrated with women and wanting them to just "get to the point." If a man speaks directly to you, he is not being rude. He is not criticizing your intelligence. He is simply trying to accomplish the task. That's all. No hidden agenda, no ulterior motive.

10. Laugh and the world laughs with you. A good sense of humor has never done anyone wrong. And for women in male-dominated industries it is a must. A good sense of humor will further endear you to your male colleagues. Creating and sharing inside jokes helps coworkers feel closer, and the ability to laugh at yourself helps you to be seen as a

good sport. There are funny situations everyday in the workplace, and our ability to see the humor in those situations sits well with our male coworkers. Having a sense of humor means having a good attitude and not taking life so seriously—a lesson we could all stand to learn.

These lessons will help you successfully form social relationships with the men you work with and, at the same time, help you better learn to do business with them. It is nice for the men you work with to feel at ease with you, comfortable in your presence, and not like they have to walk on eggshells around you because you are a woman. But keep in mind on those occasions when you are working on being “one of the guys,” how great it is to be a woman. Enjoy being a woman. And know that as a woman you have your own kind of power in the workplace.