



THE FABULOUS GIRL'S GUIDE TO LIFE

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About the Book

The Fabulous Girl is smart, sophisticated and sexy. With her wit and charm, she always seems to know just what to say and do. Yet she understands that despite the best-laid plans, life can - and often does - spin out of control.

The Fabulous Girl's Guide to Life shows you how to cope with grace when under pressure. It addresses every aspect of a Fabulous Girl's life in a playful, practical tone including career, socializing, entertaining, family, friendships and sex. There is invaluable advice for those jubilant highs as well as those testing lows, such as how to manage a boy binge, how to be a tactful boss, how to recover from a faux pas, and how to remain poised after discovering your lover in the arms of another. And woven throughout the book is the fictional story of the Fabulous Girl herself.

The Fabulous Girl's Guide to Life is the ultimate survival guide for the extremes of modern life, a must-have for sophisticated and stylish women everywhere.

Contents

Cover
About the Book
Title
Dedication
Acknowledgements

INTRODUCTION

THE WORKPLACE

'What did you do to your hair? It looks good . . .'
Fabulous Girl as Big Girl
Fabulous Workspace
The People in Your Workspace
Bad Business
The Work
Sex in the Workplace
FG as Her Own Spin Doctor
The Business Trip
Down and Out
'Why didn't you tell me . . .'

SOCIETY

'I had done the party circuit when I had been a . . .'
Society
Your Reputation
The Art of Conversation
Jealousy
How to Spot a Social Climber Without Suspecting
Everyone
Fabulous Girl as Bad Girl
Fabulous Girl Private Moments (Or What *Should Be*
Private)

The Party
Fabulous Girl on the Lam
The party had thinned out . . .

MONEY
'I really want to have breakfast in the hotel! . . .'
Money
The Rich FG
The Poor FG
Losing It All
The bills kept coming . . .

FRIENDSHIP
'What can I get you ladies to drink . . .'
Friends
Meow
Competition Among FGs
When Good Friends Get It All
Don't Demote the Dumped
Your Friends and Their Bad Ideas
Health Issues
The Taker
The Down-on-Her-Luck Friend
When Other Friends Are Feuding
When You're the Loser
The Pryer
Men
I don't always agree with Missy's tactics . . .

SEX AND COURTSHIP
Dudley had a field day with the Bingo incident . . .
Sex and Courtship
Sex, Sex, Sex
Courtship
The Men
Eleanor seemed to be accepting that being pregnant . . .

COUPLEDOM

Nice had been avoiding me - headaches, work . . .

Coupledome

Keeping It Up

That Long-Distance Feeling

A Moveable Beast

You Do What?

Weathering a Crisis in Your Partner's Life

Break Up and Make Up

Cheating Bastard

Ex Marks the Spot

Other People's Breakups

Other Women

I was halfway through an item on a new nightclub . . .

WEDDINGS AND DIVORCE

I don't know why people think that weddings are . . .

The State of Matrimony and Acrimony

The Proposal: Giving Ultimatums

The Prenup

The Invitation List

Elovements

Should You Inform Your Exes?

Fractured Families and Your Wedding

Speeches

Sex at the Wedding

The Surprise Wedding

Calling Off a Wedding at the Last Minute

Fabulous Girl as Friend of the Bride

Second Marriages

Divorce

Once our dance was finished, I told Nice that . . .

HOME AND FAMILY

It's really not that Missy is impossible to live with . . .

Home Sweet Home

Family

*I sat alone at the table for a bit trying to catch my
breath . . .*

ENTERTAINING

I called it a housewarming party, but . . .

Entertaining

How to Prepare Yourself for . . .

Last-Minute Entertaining

How to Build a Guest List

Wine

Dinner Parties with Vegetarians and Vegans

Pot-luck

Fake Dinner-Party Invites

Odd Girl Out

Duelling Hosts

How to Host the Famous

When the Hostess Gets Sick in the Middle of the Party

Food Poisoning

If You Hate the Food

If Someone Catches on Fire or Chops Off a Finger . . .

Dinner Is Ruined

She Went Out with Him?

Who to Invite?

Coupledom

One Last Piece of Advice

The party broke up once the firemen arrived . . .

FABULOUS GIRL EPILOGUE

'I'd love it if you'd come over to my place later . . .'

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To Meredyth

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Introduction

Two wise women once said that manners make you sexy. Oh, yeah, that was us. In our first book, *The Fabulous Girl's Guide to Decorum*, we set out to create a primer for women who crave both civility and style. We wanted to declare that far from making you a retiring bore, manners will make you a better and more socially desirable person.

In our own lives, there were so many women of great charm, wit and decorum that we wanted to celebrate the type: the Fabulous Girl. FG to her friends. She's that stylish, witty and caring friend you rely on to make parties more fun and disappointments less painful. She is not interested in the road of bad behaviour, which is so much more travelled. She chooses to set off down another path, that of civility. The FG knows how to get the most out of life while still remaining a caring part of her society.

But it's hard. Everyday we all encounter countless acts of selfishness and bad behaviour. Whether it's a friend who is always late, a mate who forgets to introduce you at parties, the stranger who cuts you off on the road or a colleague who takes credit for your work, etiquette is at an all-time

low. The erosion of etiquette and civility over the past several decades is regrettable. At a time when we so desperately need civility, we find an intense focus on personal satisfaction in its place. Although bad manners are not appealing, they are increasingly common. And who wants to be common?

Not the FG. Rather than become cynical as a result of the rude old world she lives in, she rallies to the cause of decorum. The Fabulous Girl is passionate. She may be well mannered, but she is never mild mannered. Her zest for life is one of her most charming attributes. It also means she finds herself in extreme situations. Despite the best-laid plans (or because of the best-laid plans), sometimes life spins out of control. An FG does not live to avoid these sorts of adventures. In love and work and in her friendships, the FG throws herself in deep – which can bring her big success as well as, sometimes, big disappointments. The FG knows that her word to live by is ‘decorum,’ not ‘doormat,’ so she tackles these ups and downs with equal vigour. She defines for herself what it means to have it all, and she looks for balance among the jumble of responsibilities and relationships that make up her life. An FG never shies away from this challenge. She knows that these adventures are the very fabric of her great big life.

The Fabulous Girl's Guide to Life is geared toward this very Fabulous Girl. The one who uses her style and social decorum to cope with life's inevitable rollercoaster ride. We can all behave beautifully when things are going our way, can't we? But an FG wants to maintain her grace even under extreme circumstances. Some crises and turning points will come as a result of her evolving life – big jobs, big relationships – and some crazy and uncomfortable moments – cash windfalls, getting fired, discovering a philandering spouse – will arise in ways that are beyond her control. These are the moments that really count – when it's hard, when you'd rather be selfish or rude than extend yourself

for another person, when you just feel like stamping your little foot - and they are true tests of character. But it is this ability to behave with grace under pressure, as well as her style, manners and wit, that sets the Fabulous Girl apart and, yes, makes her sexy.

CHAPTER ONE



The Workplace



'What did you do to your hair? It looks good.' Cheryl, a senior editor at *Smack!* Magazine, squealed at me as she ran past my desk. Despite the backhanded compliment, I had to admit that I was having an unusually good hair day. Normally my hair misbehaves a few times a week, generally when I have a can't-miss cocktail party to attend. But that day my tresses looked fab. I chose to take my good hair as an omen for the rest of the day.

I loved my job as associate editor for the magazine. *Smack!* is known in the rag trade as a general-interest magazine, but I'd been hired to give it specific interest: young and hip. In other words, it was my job to tell our middle-aged readership about what the pretty young things were drinking and shopping for, where they went to listen to music and get their hair done. I'd been at it for over a year. And while I was happy, I was beginning to want to move my work in another direction - upwards, that is - but unfortunately I couldn't yet grasp exactly where up was.

Whack! Something walloped my desk with a mighty slap.

'Do you read Dudley's page?'

There stood John Bradley, *Smack!*'s editor-in-chief, the big boss, with a wad of rolled-up newspaper in his hand. I wondered if he was now going to swat me on the nose with it.

'He's funny. Your writing should be more like his. You know, chatty.'

'But he's a gossip columnist.'

'And?'

‘And I’m not.’ I tried not to sound annoyed, but lately Bradley seemed to find fault in whatever I did or didn’t do.

‘Well, if you’d rather have dull copy. Did you dye your hair?’

‘No, it’s just a good—’

Bradley hurried away leaving the offending paper on my desk. Dudley’s gossip column ran in a national newspaper. Since being on the job, I’d become an observer of sorts. Being out many nights a week gave me lots of opportunity to people watch. I’d met Dudley on many occasions and he was not what you’d call gentlemanly. I wasn’t really on his radar – he would barely say hello to me. And now there was Dudley’s sucky face sneering at me.

Truth be told, I hated his column. It was brash, tacky and rude. He was not the sort of gossip columnist who lived to suck up to local celebrities, he was the kind of creep who wormed his way into parties thrown by the well-known only to turn around and mock their choice of wine or fashion sense in his next column. But like the dutiful worker bee, I read Dudley’s words, most of it meaningless drivel. Meaningless, that is, until I got to the last paragraph, which was horrifying: ‘TV producer Bingo Jones was all hot and bothered with local celeb news babe Mel (first name only please) at last night’s opening of the so-hip-it-hurts eaterie Spanks. If Bingo’s regular chica, mag art director Eleanor Brown, had eye-spied the duo giving each other a good tongue lashing, it would have been spanks all right.’

Now, I’ve never been a fan of Bingo. He was an ill-mannered lout, the kind of guy who took mobile calls at dinner parties, was rude to waitresses and, worse, was a terrible boyfriend. I knew this last fact to be utterly true because Bingo was in a long-term relationship, off and on, off and on, with my best friend Eleanor. And the fact that Bingo was now a confirmed cheating bastard (during a supposed ‘on’ moment) really riled me. As did Eleanor’s public humiliation at the keyboard of Dudley.

My first reaction? Poor Eleanor! My second – I would never stoop to those depths in my writing! Bradley would have to find another writer to dish the dirt. The fact that I wanted to keep my job, however, prevented me from marching into his office to tell him so. I was hoping he'd just forget the entire conversation and continue with his latest idea for making over *Smack!*, which was more sex and gardening.

But first and foremost, I had to reach Eleanor. She would need her friends. I called her work, her home and her mobile. No answer. Which meant one thing: Eleanor had read Dudley's column. There was only one other person who might have known her whereabouts, our other best friend, Missy. I dialled.

'She's here.'

I must admit Missy's revelation caught me off guard. Sure, we're all equally close, but I was mystified as to why Eleanor would choose refuge in the suburbs over me. Why was Missy her first call?

Let me explain something: Missy lived on the outskirts of the city. In a very big house, 3500 square feet, 60-foot lot with a four-car garage. But Missy didn't drive. Her husband, Joe, had struck it super rich and Missy was still adjusting to her new-found wealth. This was becoming a bit of an issue with me. Along with the fatter wallet came a fatter head. In any case, it had taken a lot of effort for Eleanor to get to Missy. I was a mere bike ride away.

'Eleanor doesn't want to talk right now. Can she call you later?' sighed Missy.

I hung up the phone, still unsure of why Eleanor didn't want to talk to me and further irked by Missy's tone.

'Did you change your hair?'

The question shook me out of my pondering. I contemplated shaving my head. A few more of my colleagues hovered around my desk.

'Just a good hair day.'

Bradley hustled over with his coat on. 'We're all going to lunch, want to join us?'

I was dumbfounded. I mean, never once since my first *Smack!* day had I been invited to one of Bradley's lunch things. Naturally, I couldn't say no, no matter how ticked I still was at the Dudley incident - perhaps I was finally being let into the inner circle of senior editors. Don't get me wrong, people have been nice to me, but seeing as I'm so junior, the so-called real journalists had kind of kept their distance from me. I knew that they considered my pages the necessary but shallow fluff that kept advertisers happy. My out-and-about pages and the fashion and decor pages were the fluffy ghetto of the magazine. But then, an invitation to lunch. This was serious. We all headed out to Bradley's regular café. Although my mind kept obsessing about Eleanor, I tried to fit in with the group.

'We have to get that piece on John Daly in before next week.'

'Who's John Daly?'

Bradley looked at me like I had asked him how to spell my own name.

'Um, he's probably going to be elected mayor,' said Cheryl.

'Oh, that John Daly!' I lied.

For the rest of the walk to lunch I tried not to feel excluded from the conversation, but I was afraid to say anything else. I was positive that they were questioning Bradley's judgment in hiring me, let alone inviting me. I consoled myself with the knowledge that I was at the very least charming and I vowed to be bright and witty at lunch.

Arriving at the restaurant we were led to a large round table and began to fan out. I walked around the entire circumference and ended up sandwiched between Cheryl and the arts writer, Marshall, with big boss Bradley straight across from me.

We ordered. I assumed Bradley was picking up the tab and so went for a slightly larger lunch than I would normally have. Besides, half the table were eating steak so my salmon wasn't the end of the world. But still, I was too intimidated to speak.

'I was thinking of giving the movie roundup piece to Stella,' Marshall announced.

Bradley simply nodded. There was only one film critic in town named Stella, Stella DuBois, and I thought she was dreadful. She hated everything she saw, and her writing was grossly self-indulgent. Every review she wrote somehow came back to her and some formative experience in her life. Finally, a topic I could get in on.

'No, you're not giving work to that hack?'

Marshall just looked at me in disbelief. I took this as a sign that few people challenged him, but I was aiming to prove I could hold my own in this merry group. I'd show Bradley I was no dummy.

'I mean she hates everything, but has no critical eye. I read that she once tried to make a film but her script was so bad no one would touch it. She's just a frustrated filmmaker who takes her own disappointment out on the real artists. And don't get me started on her writing!'

I had never seen people so silent. Cheryl and Marshall smiled meekly. Everyone else stared down at their plates. Everyone except Bradley.

'She happens to be my wife,' Bradley announced, not looking up at me as he stabbed his steak and tore it apart.

I wanted to quietly swallow my own head. How had I not known this? I mean, sure, Bradley kept to himself, and I was hardly his confidante, but no one had ever mentioned Stella and Bradley in the same sentence. I had a vague memory of seeing Stella at the Christmas party, but she had drunk too much and left early.

'I'm so sorry, I had no idea.'

‘They like to keep their personal lives private. You couldn’t have known, only industry types would know.’ Marshall tried to make me feel better, but I was stung by the implication that I wasn’t even in the same industry as the rest of them. It didn’t really matter what I said now, my stiletto was in my big mouth and deep down I knew my days at *Smack!* were numbered. There would be no upward mobility for me. I finished my salmon in silence.

Back at my desk, I listened to my voice mail, trying to recover from the lunch debacle by being busy, too busy to listen to my colleagues’ whispered comments. Most of my messages were from PR people pushing products that were of no interest to me. I dubbed these annoying phone calls, ‘sevens,’ the number I pressed on my phone’s keypad to erase them. This was also true of mean and nasty reader calls. ‘What do you know about a good bar? I read your piece on Dino’s last month and you suck. It’s the best place. My brother-in-law owns it so I know it’s good. I think you should be standing under a cliff during an avalanche.’ Definitely a seven. But not a single call from Eleanor. I looked at the clock: 4:57 P.M. I was so glad it was quitting time. Despite my sunny outlook at 9 A.M., I was feeling deflated. I looked in my compact mirror, even my hair had become limp. So much for having a good hair day.

Fabulous Girl as Big Girl

Finally, after years of Jill Jobs, those ‘nowhere jobs’ most of us start out with, the FG has made it. She’s got to where she wants to be, or at least a lot closer than that temp job was. The Fabulous Girl with a career has to navigate a whole new professional landscape. Work is still one of her highest priorities and where she spends most of her time and mental energy. But if she’s lucky, she’s spending it doing

something she loves. As a wise FG once said, 'Find a job you love and you'll never work a day in your life.'

In the early days of her career, a young woman's burdens are most likely to be boredom and frustration. She may feel stuck with tasks that she feels are beneath her abilities. As her work life takes off she'll have different pressures: keeping up a level of performance she has established for herself, the added responsibilities of her seniority. Even an FG at the top of her professional game can have a Bad Hair Day or a Fat Day. And while the FG thinks these are prime reasons to call in sick, her boss probably won't. But for truly bad days, the FG may have to pull out all the tools in her decorum arsenal or else risk turning into the angry, bitter, depressed type she shrinks from.

Fabulous Work Space

TEAMWORK

Assembly lines aren't exclusive to factories churning out widgets. In past decades the standard office environment consisted of row upon row of uniform desks and chairs situated in one large room. If that seems barbaric to the Fabulous Girl aesthetic, consider the current equivalent for cost-cutters in the corporate world - the open-plan workspace. Here the 'cubicle dwellers' sit at their desks toiling away at their jobs. Love them or hate them, the little cubes are here to stay. For the FG stuck in cube country, however, there are ways of coping with grace.

Privacy

You really don't have any, do you? Staunch supporters of cube country suggest that what the cubicles lack in privacy they make up for in team building. Collaboration, it seems,

is easier when you don't have to waste precious seconds picking up a phone or strolling to someone else's office to speak with them. Hey, we thought that's what boardrooms and luncheons were for. Apparently it is downright inspiring to have colleagues overhear your sales pitch or see what your presentation looks like on your computer screen so they can give you their two pennies' worth without your needing to ask. How convenient. However, what all cube-country residents need to understand is that just because you don't have any privacy doesn't mean you shouldn't respect the illusion of it. Don't give your opinion on your colleagues' work unless you're asked for it; they may not be ready to share their work yet and may resent you butting in. Likewise for personal problems. If you hear Sue fighting with her boyfriend, you cannot say, 'So sorry you're having problems, do you need to talk about it?' Pretend you heard nothing! Sue will confide if and when she wants to.

Did you hear that?

A voice that is obviously speaking quietly is one that wants to avoid detection. Take this as a sign to distract yourself with something else, say, your own work. And while no one really wants to hear you whisper sweet nothings to your accountant, sometimes it cannot be helped. If a call is very private then it's time to take your mobile to the car park or use a boardroom phone instead.

Why shout? No matter how eager you are to express your enthusiasm to a new client over the phone, raised voices are very distracting to your colleagues in cube country. If you sense colleagues stuffing cotton into their ears, turning up their desk radios or sneering at you, then take these hints to pipe down.

Other distractions

As you might with a noisy neighbour, sometimes you may have to address a colleague's habits in order to carry on with your own work. If you are slaving over this month's bottom line but your cube buddies spend all day talking about Saturday night plans, then feel free to bring it up with them. Chances are, they weren't aware that you could hear them and this reminder will embarrass them enough to keep it down - and they may also be a bit worried that you'll squeal to the boss about their work ethic. Either way, the problem should be solved. Music is nice, but not everyone will appreciate your love of opera or Eminem. Really, boom boxes and radios shouldn't be played without headphones.

Desk hovering

Just because there aren't any doors on the darn things doesn't mean it's all open concept all the time. If your teammate is on the phone or eating her lunch, you cannot just stand there in her tiny space waiting for her to finish so that you can talk to her. Come back when she's free. At best, stick a Post-it down to inform her of what you need and she'll find you when it's a better time.

The People in Your Workspace

BOYS WILL BE BOYS

Some types of work environments are still dominated by men. The FG does not try to be 'one of the guys.' She relishes her femininity, and since she acts with grace the men around her will respond in kind. However, if you are the sole female in a workplace then you can expect the men to be on their guard. And that's just fine with an FG. She has no problem being a civilizing presence. Hopefully, the guys will take into account that an FG doesn't want to listen to

PMS jokes or constant sports talk (unless she's in a sporting field). If one or two gents seem to be behaving in an ungentlemanly fashion, the FG would initially much rather deal with the issue on her own, perhaps asking the guilty party to refrain from his off-colour humour or constant belching, with subtlety first: 'You really should stop eating that chilli everyday, Bob.' Fortunately, most men are acutely aware of the PC attitudes that permeate the modern workplace and will be hyper-aware of potential problems.

If the man or men do not co-operate after her polite request but continue in a loutish mode, the FG should stand her ground and give fair warning. Tell him or them explicitly to quit with the sexist comments or to remove the centrefold tacked up in the lunchroom. If this doesn't work, an FG will need to take it up with her manager. Of course, if bad behaviour turns into out-and-out harassment, then there are other, legal courses of action.

GIRLS! GIRLS! GIRLS!

Working with women can be great. There can be great bonding and fun in an all-female workplace. And someone in the office is going to have a tampon when you get surprised by your period. The FG thrives in estrogen-strong situations, being a girly-girl herself. However, she does occasionally experience a downside. Workplaces staffed entirely by women can have the double-edge sword of surplus sensitivity. This is great when you get dumped and your chick-mates understand why you're a wreck for two weeks. But the flip side is that feelings can easily be hurt within this feminine office. You may find that you need to - or think you need to - watch your tone of voice more carefully. This can be tiring and can make jobs take longer than they should. Gossip can also be more rampant with a female majority, and again this is unavoidable, for if you don't spend some

time gossiping then the other 'girls' will think you unfriendly. It's all about balance.

If an FG works in a predominantly female office where one or two men also work, the conversations need to be sensitive. That's right - male-sensitive. When women discuss bad dates or mean boyfriends, things can easily devolve into male bashing, which is very impolite. Conversely, trying to get them to explain why your boyfriend is a jerk is also not fair.

THE UNDERMINER

Great jobs are hard to come by. So when you have an awesome job, someone somewhere wants to take it away from you. It could be your assistant, or even a colleague with a similar job. But you notice that this person tries to 'help' you out with your projects when you don't even ask for assistance. The FG will spot underminers by these signs:

1. They offer to go to that meeting or industry event so you can take a much-needed night off.
2. You discuss how a task is to be done, but by the deadline they've done it an entirely different way without bothering to tell you until presentation time.
3. They've made contacts on your behalf but haven't passed them along to you.
4. They tell your boss how much they've done on your project because you're too busy.
5. They commit to helping you out but bail at the last minute knowing you don't have enough time to complete the job.

Once the Fabulous Girl has spotted an Underminer, she needs to take action. Since this person can no longer be trusted the FG needs to prevent her from being closely involved in the FG's work. She'll need to avoid working on

projects with the Underminer, but also avoid her at work-related social events. The Fabulous Girl should also be more aggressive in the presence of the Underminer, never allowing this person to take over a project or to represent the FG's work in a meeting. The one thing the FG wants to avoid is being seen as paranoid. This can be achieved by not running to the boss or other colleagues and spilling her guts and woes. She needs to handle the Underminer alone, like a lone sheriff in an old western film.

THE SUCK-UP

This person kisses your boss's arse at every opportunity, even if it means insulting or undermining colleagues. The Suck-Up will pass the buck on his own mistakes or tell the boss how he loves an idea but behind the boss's back tell you how stupid it is. The only solace for the Fabulous Girl is that chances are the boss knows a simpering sycophant when she sees one. The FG never falls for the charms of such a person, nor does she seek favour by acting in kind.

THE INCOMPETENT

Bingo is an idiot. Everyone knows it, right? He's so obviously incompetent that it's difficult not to let your lack of respect for him show at work. But at an absolute minimum you must treat him - even behind his back - with decorum. Remember that someone hired him, and likely that person is your boss. Any slag you make against Bingo is an indirect slag against his superior. Many bosses are extremely defensive about the hires they make and will take personally any criticism of them. Most managers also have a lot of problems to solve each day, so don't make Bingo two problems. His incompetence is the first and most obvious hassle, but then your unhappiness about it becomes another. If you are in a

position where you must complain about Bingo to your boss or in front of your boss, be very careful. Stick to the facts and make no personal remarks: 'I found my job difficult this month since Bingo delivered his reports three weeks late. I was able to compensate for the lost time, but it wasn't an ideal situation.' It behooves you to go out of your way to seem reasonable and accommodating when dealing with the Incompetent, as you will come off as the star of the situation. You will also do much more to change your boss's opinion of Bingo.

THE PRYER

She's friendly, a great listener, and she seems very, very interested in your personal and work life. Every time she comes near you she has a salacious titbit about someone else in the office. Which means her prodding questioning about how much overtime you put in last month isn't so she can sympathize, it's ammo to take to the next person and say, 'She's just rancid about having to work all weekend, she really thinks she's doing more than anybody.' If you've been burned by the Pryer, or see her doing it with others, then you simply must keep quiet about your opinions, especially those concerning the job and company, and make it clear to her that you're not interested in the opinions of others when she tries to share.

THE TASKMASTER

We all need a bit of a kick now and again to meet deadlines. But somehow there is always one person who sets about in a manic fashion, driving everyone else so hard that the work actually suffers. Granted, some people respond well to added pressure or being spoken to like children, but the Fabulous Girl is not one of them. She doesn't see the need

to get spastic about a report that is due, she just does it. So when the Taskmaster rants and raves and tells the FG ten times that she has three days to complete her report, the FG just goes numb. It is counterproductive. The FG needs to calmly repeat to the TM that all is under control. When she sees the TM coming her way, she may cut her off at the pass by saying, 'Yes, I know it's due. Is there something else I can help you with?'

THE DISAPPROVING ASSISTANT

The qualities that make good leaders are not the same as those that make good administrators. Good leaders are usually people with vision – they are not necessarily good with details. It is often confusing for those who toil in support positions to work for leaders who are not good at coping with minutiae. In fact, an organized and efficient assistant can find her boss's haphazard way with schedules or paperwork extremely annoying. This classic role reversal can result in the assistant's developing a disapproving, tsk-tsking attitude toward her boss.

When an FG boss finds herself in this situation, she needs to address it. If an FG feels in any way guilty being in charge of someone else's time, it may be tempting to fall into this codependent relationship. It's sort of an 'I feel bad that I'm your boss, so let's both pretend that I'm incompetent without you' mode. This dangerous game can end up with the boss being pushed around by her assistant. An FG boss needs to make it clear that it does not matter a whit that she is bad about entering info into her electronic diary because that isn't her job and she is busy with the things that are. Remember, your assistant will often have more contact with the rest of the staff than you will, and so how she treats you and talks about you is important. When your whereabouts are enquired after and your assistant rolls her

eyes or sighs before answering, she is undermining your authority in the workplace.

An FG may feel uncomfortable about getting tough in this situation, but she must. She's worked hard to earn her position and the right to an assistant. She may need to pull back from a pals-y relationship with her assistant, be a bit more formal to right this imbalance.

Bad Business

DISAGREEMENTS WITH COLLEAGUES

If a colleague's suggestion doesn't sit right with you, say so immediately - especially if it affects you personally. Of course, you need to express your concern in a diplomatic and controlled way: no temper tantrums. But don't assume that speaking up puts you in conflict with your colleague. Know that you are just adding information to the discussion. If Bingo's pitch to create a new department at your office means that you and everyone else in the office will end up having to work Saturdays from now on, you need to pipe up. If your objections are ignored or dismissed without proper debate, take the person or your boss aside and make your point again. Go on the record if you feel passionate about it; send a memo to the interested parties. It's possible you won't alter the course of events, but your 'told you so' moment is assured if their plans fall. And let's face it - sometimes we love to say, or at least think, those three words.

BIG BOSS ERRORS

The situation is more sensitive if the bad idea comes down from the boss. Your only recourse is to present alternatives,