

"Because I'm young, clients will often introduce me to their colleagues as 'the girl from Palm Beach Media,'" says Rita Johnson, 30. "I'm not the 'girl' from Palm Beach Media,

I'm the *president* of Palm Beach Media."

We sometimes take things too personally.

Bear in mind that we tend to have a subtler approach and may interpret a little good-natured ribbing as a put-down. "Men tend to be a lot more 'in your face' in their confrontational style," says Joanne Cini, a broadcasting veteran and author of *Kingmaker: Be the One Your Company Wants to Keep... On Your Terms* (Prentice Hall, 2004). "Jabbing and teasing each other is all part of the game, but it can seem a little aggressive, and women might interpret it as hostile." We may need a bit of a thicker skin, but go easy on us as we acquire it.

We are good with money.

Women business owners prove this. Between 1997 and 2006, the number of majority women-owned businesses increased from 5.4 million to 7.7 million, a 42 percent jump. What's more, the bankruptcy rate for women-owned companies is far less than that for companies owned by men. "Women-owned businesses traditionally have a harder time getting financing than businesses run by men, so women are often much more diligent and proactive with money because it's either their own money or money lent by friends or relatives," Judy B. Rosener, Ph.D., says.

We're collaborative, not clueless.

When women ask your opinion, it's not a sign of incompetence. One of our strengths is our inclusive style. "Men tend not to ask questions because they don't want to look like they don't know the answer to a problem," says John Gray, author of *Mars and Venus in the Workplace* (HarperCollins, 2001). Women are more likely to ask for input, which shouldn't be seen as a sign of weakness or insecurity, he says.

What's more, collaboration works. A recent study of top-performing executives found that a social, participatory management style that brings others into decision-making is one of the leading indicators of success. Women tend to do this naturally, says Kim Bishop, senior partner at the recruiting firm Korn/Ferry International and author of the study. A man, however, will usually make a decision on his own, then make a definitive pronouncement.

"Like a lot of women, I'll let people see how I work through a process and invite their input," says Deli, owner of a Harley-Davidson dealership in Orlando, Fla. "You're going to hear my decision at the end of the day, and you're going to know how I came to that conclusion."

And while men often focus on proving that they're right, women are primarily concerned with outcomes. "We're accustomed to dealing with situations like 'three kids, two cookies — let's make it work,'" says Rosener, professor emerita at the Paul Merage School of Business at the University of California, Irvine.

Listen to us. You'll be glad you did.

Ignoring or dismissing what we have to say is one of our biggest complaints. Worse, it can negatively impact the bottom line. Just ask Jill Ker Conway, former president of Smith College and the sole female director at Nike in the early 1990s. When Conway suggested Nike start a clothing division for women, the reaction was, "You want us to make pink shoes?" Conway persevered and finally got her way a year later. Now Nike's women's division accounts for a major chunk of the company's net profit.

At least Conway finally got through — and got credit. So often women make suggestions that go completely unnoticed. "Then when a man steps in and says the same thing — louder and with bigger body language — suddenly it's a great idea," says Stephanie Henley, partner and co-president of Beasley & Henley Interior Design in Winter Park, Fla. Lemming agrees: "I have never been intimidated by being the only woman in a meeting, yet after I'd make a point or try to move a conversation in a different direction, the men often go right back to what they were talking about before," she says.

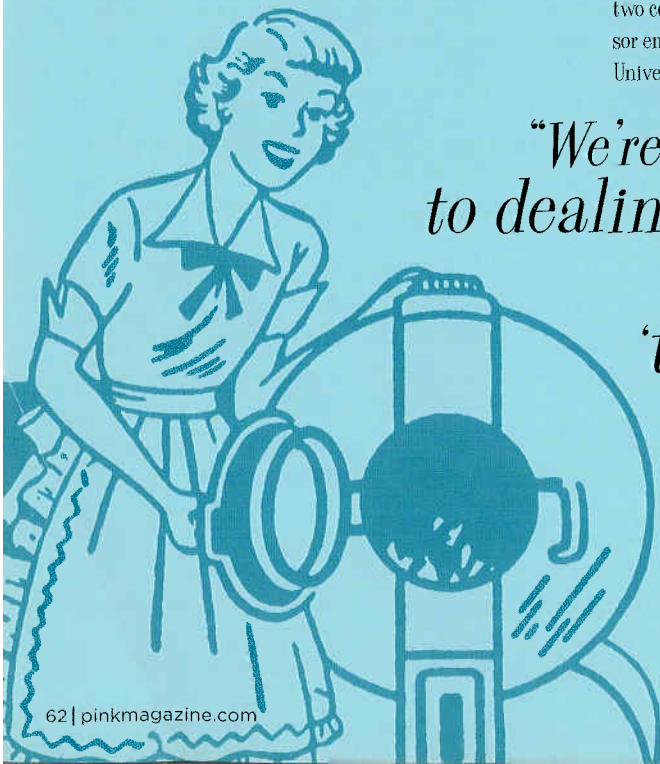
Remember — we're your best customer.

If you don't believe us, reread that story about Nike above. As a dominant force in the marketplace, we can provide invaluable inside information. Women buy or influence the sale of 85 percent of consumer goods sold in the United States. The percentage is even higher for food and household items. We also buy up to 80 percent of health and home-related products, 65 percent of cars and other auto products, and 57 percent of consumer electronics.

Best Buy has seen the light. The consumer electronics chain has stepped up its efforts to hire more women salespeople and has doubled the number of female employees in its home theater division so women shoppers will be more comfortable. The reason? The company knows women buy more technology than men, spending \$55 billion of the \$96 billion spent annually. Best Buy's Julie Gilbert says part of the goal is to make sure the outlets don't look like boy-toy stores. "It's going to dramatically increase sales," Gilbert says. "Women have the dollars." ❧

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JUDY B. ROSENER Ph.D.



Thank You
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