

CHAPTER 1

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Cinderella

Picture Yourself at the Palace and Find a Fairy Godmentor

YES, WE'VE ALL READ *CINDERELLA*—BUT YOU SHOULDN'T DISMISS IT AS a fairy tale of interest only to children. This story has a lot to teach us in today's competitive, cutthroat business world. The new Cinderellas are under constant pressure, but that only builds their strength. They keep working, get right back up, and dust themselves off when they are put down. They make mistakes and are far from perfect. But they are the real heroines of the workplace.

Cinderella is the world's most popular and versatile fairy tale character. Her story has been told in hundreds of different ways all over the globe. Fairy tale folklorists put the number of versions anywhere from 340 to over 1,500! The first and still foremost Western literary version of *Cinderella* was published in 1697 by Charles Perrault, as part of his collection called *Contes de ma Mère L'Oye*, better known as *Tales of Mother Goose*. He introduced the detail of the glass slipper, the pumpkin turning into the coach, and the fairy godmother.

Chances are you know *Cinderella* by heart. But just in case you need a refresher, here is the classic version in a nutshell:

A young girl called Cinderella is cruelly mistreated by her stepmother and stepsisters, ridiculed and forced to act as a

lowly servant. Yet the girl maintains her sweet and hopeful spirit, working hard and dreaming of a better life. The prince, who is searching for a bride, invites all the maidens in the land to a grand ball. Cinderella's stepmother and stepsisters conspire to ensure that she cannot attend. However, a fairy godmother appears just in time to provide Cinderella with a magic coach, a gown, and a pair of glass slippers.

At the ball, the prince falls in love with Cinderella at first sight. But she is in a hurry to return home before the magic dissipates at midnight, and rushes off before he learns her identity. In her flight, she leaves behind a glass slipper. The prince sends his emissary to find the mystery girl who fits the shoe. Many maidens try to squeeze into the slipper, including the stepsisters. But only Cinderella is a perfect fit, and so she becomes the prince's bride.

The Brothers Grimm published a grittier version of Cinderella from an oral folktale called “Aschenputtel” or “Ash Girl.” Instead of a fairy godmother, assistance comes from doves that nest in a tree Cinderella plants on her mother's grave. The slipper is gold, not glass, and the stepsisters go to gruesome lengths to fit into it—they cut off parts of their feet!

In 1950 Walt Disney released an animated film of the fairy tale that was a huge success, and the movie's graceful, singing heroine has become our most enduring image of Cinderella. With the advent of home video, the Disney film is more popular than ever, and the character has spun off into infinity, with character clothing, costumes, jewelry, housewares—even breakfast with the “real” Cinderella in Disneyworld's Magic Kingdom. In 2001 Disney hooked up Cinderella with other fairy tale princesses—Belle, Aurora, and Snow White—forming a quartet that's more popular than the Beatles, with merchandising sales of over \$1.5 billion a year!

But the story of Cinderella is *not*, and has never been, just for children. Ever since Perrault entertained the sophisticated aristo-

crats of Louis XIV's court with his telling of the story, people of all ages and background have delighted in *Cinderella* variations. The full-length ballet "Cinderella," with music by Prokofiev, premiered at the Bolshoi Ballet in 1945, and charmed an audience of stern Soviet officials. The Rodgers and Hammerstein teleplay, with its unforgettable score, entranced all ages. The literary world has seen an endless stream of adult treatments of *Cinderella*, including a poem by Sylvia Plath, Jungian critiques, and Freudian analyses.

How can one story continue to cut right through the cultural overload and intrigue people of all ages and eras? What is *Cinderella*'s secret?

The Alchemy of Transformation

At the heart of *Cinderella* is the belief in the possibility of transformation. Cinderella is transformed from downtrodden servant to princess, from lonely ash girl to beloved bride. She tells us that everyone, no matter how lowly and scorned, can be elevated. This is the message of *Cinderella* that keeps people captivated. And it applies to working women as well as fairy tale heroines.

Okay, let's get real for a minute. No one is saying that you'll meet Prince Charming and be transformed into a princess and go to live in a castle. (And after reading about the travails of Princess Diana and Fergie, maybe it's just as well.) But you *can* create a realistic and highly satisfying transformation in your work life.

There are as many different ways to transform your work life as there are versions of *Cinderella*—or more. "Women demand a greater sense of fulfillment from our jobs than men do," says Gail Evans, retired executive vice president of CNN and author of *Play Like a Man, Win Like a Woman*. "The standard male-oriented rewards—money, power, prestige—don't necessarily have the same sway with us."

Most of us would like to make more money. But it's not (necessarily) the sole motivation. Some women seek power and an impressive job title, while others aren't comfortable with the high

level of pressure and stress that accompany upper-echelon positions. Although this book is called *From Cinderella to CEO*, I am *not* implying that every woman should aim to become a chief executive officer. I am, however, encouraging you to *think* like a CEO in whatever position you hold. And to envision a transformation that suits your own values, goals, and reality.

Some women want excitement in their careers, others stability. Some crave freedom, others prefer structure. Many women seek work that makes a meaningful contribution to the world. Others value a chance to express their creativity. Everyone has a different vision of success. What's yours? You'll need a strong image of how your career transformation will look before you turn the pumpkin into the coach and get there. And no one can create this picture of work fulfillment for you. It depends on your particular balance of values, talents, and desires.

Picture Yourself at the Palace—Step 1
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Answer these questions to create a clear image of how you want to transform your career.

1. How much money do I need to earn to maintain my desired standard of living?
2. What have I always wanted to do? What's holding me back?
3. Where would I like to work (i.e., at home, in another city, close by)?
4. Am I willing to further my education to be considered for a higher-paid position?
5. Do I like to supervise people? A few or many? Do I feel comfortable in a position of power?

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6. Do I like a lot of direction regarding my tasks and projects or do I prefer to work independently?
7. Do I like working in a large, medium, or small company?
8. How important is job security to me? What level of financial risk can I afford?
9. How important is it to me to make the world a better place through my work?
10. How can I help others in a way that is also fulfilling to me, and doesn't sacrifice my dignity or standard of living?

Real-Life Cinderellas

Examples of transformation are all around us. Some real-life Cinderellas are wealthy and world-famous, but others are women you know or even work with every day.

The person who asks to take on a little more responsibility each month, until she gradually works her way into a position of authority and becomes a manager and a mentor for those who come behind her...The innovator who introduces a new concept to the company and keeps pursuing it until the higher-ups listen... The risk-taker who takes the plunge and starts her own business because she has an idea that she believes in...The woman who gets through a difficult situation with a boss, keeps reaching her goals and driving revenue no matter what the company politics may be...They are all Cinderellas.

Christine Duffy started as a project group manager with McGettigan Partners in 1982. Maritz Travel bought McGettigan a few years back and Christine rose to be the CEO of the combined company, which is a global leader in meeting, event, and incentive travel services. "A lot of my rise in the organization was because I was very ambitious," she says. "I was always the one to take on more. I became the one you could give a difficult task to and turn

it around. Don't wait for people to suggest you do something," Christine advises. "You have to be responsible for what happens. Get up the nerve to go to your boss and say 'I'd like to take on this project or I think I can make a positive contribution to the company by doing X,Y,Z.' Also, don't wait to be recognized for your abilities. Often being polite and waiting to be recognized is a detriment to women. Ask yourself, 'How do I promote myself?' As Tom Peters says, 'Promote your brand.' Everybody else is!"

Susan Braun is president and CEO of The Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation, a global leader in the fight against breast cancer through its support of innovative research and community-based outreach programs. "One of the most important parts of being a CEO is seeing the big picture," says Susan. "For women at all levels of business, I encourage them to regularly step back and review how their work contributes to the goals of the organization. Equally important is vision. We all need to envision the end we have in mind, whether it's to create a new business opportunity or cure cancer. If we can see it, we can make it happen."

Picture Yourself at the Palace—Step 2

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Use your answers to the questions to write a job description and summary of your ideal work life. Make it as detailed as possible. Include compensation range, hours, type of work, responsibilities, size of company, and so on.

Set yourself up for success, not failure, by developing a vision that it is *possible* to attain. Consider physical limitations, age considerations, and the limits of luck and talent. Also consider your own predilections and personality. For

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example, if you can't stand wearing a suit or working long hours, becoming an executive at a major corporation is unlikely. If you wither in the face of rejection, a career in the creative fields is problematic. But within the confines of your own abilities, there is always room to grow. There is always the possibility of transformation if you design a dream that can fit within the parameters of reality!

Of course, merely wishing that your dreams come true won't cut it in the real world. You're going to have to work hard to make it happen. Be persistent and think like a chess player. Accept your differences and imperfections.

Your imperfection can be the key to the palace. Embrace it, build on it, improve it, find others who appreciate it. Stay true to your dreams and ideals even when you're ridiculed, stifled, or overwhelmed with obstacles. Don't let your mistakes hold you back by dwelling on them.

And make sure to find someone with a magic wand to help you along!

Everyone Needs a Fairy Godmentor

One of the most enchanting qualities of fairy tales is how they illustrate that so many aspects of life remain constant over the centuries. Charles Perrault, who capped his versions of fairy tales with witty *moralités*, offers this insight at the end of his *Cinderella* story: "It is a great advantage to have intelligence, wit, common sense, courage, and good breeding. These and similar talents are gifts from Heaven. But even with these talents, you may fail to reach success, without a fairy godmother or godfather to help you on your way."

Substitute “mentor” for “godmother or godfather” in the last line of this 300-year-old advice and you have an invaluable lesson for getting ahead in today’s work world.

I cannot overemphasize the importance of a mentor, or a series of mentors. They have made all the difference in my career. And if you ask almost any successful person, you’ll usually find out that she or he was greatly helped by one or more mentors.

Mentoring is as old as civilization. Certainly one cavewoman showed the other how to keep the fire alive and get her fair share of the meat. In the *Odyssey*, Athena, the goddess of wisdom, takes on the form of a man named Mentor in order to give Odysseus advice and guide his son. (I guess the people in those days were so biased they wouldn’t take the advice of a female even if she was immortal.)

The modern definition of a mentor is “a wise, loyal advisor,” or a counselor, coach, or advocate. The person who receives help was once called a “protégé” but is now deemed a “mentee” in corporate-speak. The word sounds rather like an exotic animal, but in fact being a mentee is a crucial part of growing your career.

“It’s not what you know, it’s who you know,” is a cynical old expression—with a disconcerting element of truth. If you’re a woman in business you can change it to: “It’s what you know *and* who you know.” When you shine doing your work it’s always good to have someone to cheer you on. You have to be sharp, well-informed, and at the top of your game. But the reality is that *who* you know also matters, and a mentor gives you a tremendous advantage—if you’re willing to listen to your mentor!

Catalyst, the leading research and advisory organization that works to advance women in business, found that four out of five senior women executives emphasized the centrality of a mentor to their success. Sheila Wellington, the former president of Catalyst, points out in her book *Be Your Own Mentor*: “In my experience, the single most important reason why—among the equally talented—men tend to rise higher than women is that most men have mentors and most women do not. Mentors can show you the ropes. And pull strings.”

How Mentors Work Magic

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Mentors can:

1. Teach you specific job skills and procedures
2. See that you get credit for your ideas, efforts, and performance—very important in a mentor!
3. Offer insight into the organizational culture and protection from company politics
4. Provide a safe forum for discussing problems, and a non-threatening form of critique
5. Ensure that you are considered for important projects, committees, and teams
6. Support your bid for a raise, promotion, or desired flexible work arrangement
7. Help you keep things in perspective and maintain a sense of humor
8. Listen (if you listen to them, too)

The Many Faces of Mentors

Okay, you're convinced that you want and need a mentor. But who will it be? You might be surprised.

One of my mentors at Wyndham, Dave Johnson, was younger than I and looked more like a prince than a godmother. *And* we had a somewhat rocky start. Our first encounter was at a company sales retreat during my first six months at the company. The sales and operations divisions were playing a soccer game as a team-building exercise. We marketing executives were the referees. I called the ball “out” during the game when it really *was* out—a good call, I might add! But Dave, a very competitive guy, really “got in my face” for making the call. Sweaty guys started gathering around and peering down at me, all gruff and “p.o.’ed” at me, shoving each other. It was like being in a real live call dispute you’d see on TV, and I was the ref.

Then the CEO came around in a golf cart and said, “Hey Cary, you need to lighten up on your calls.” Well, I was mortified and freaked out as well, but I stayed amazingly calm. And I got back in Dave’s face by keeping my cool and walking away. Dave noticed my reaction and I won his respect that day. He saw that I wasn’t easily intimidated and could hold my own in a tough game. Later that day we laughed about it and he learned I have a sense of humor. And when he became a boss, he decided that I was well worth mentoring.

When you’re looking for a mentor, don’t limit yourself by expecting your mentor to be a woman. Female mentors can be wonderful, but are often in short supply. Women in senior positions at corporations are a minority and are often overburdened with mentoring requests. Be open-minded and look for a person who’s interested and available to you. This person can be within your company or outside it. There are many different types of mentoring relationships, each with its distinct advantages.

The Mentor Boss

These are the most common mentoring relationships since they evolve naturally in the course of business. There are sometimes limitations, particularly in a large corporation, where your immediate report might not have enough leverage to boost your visibility with senior people. You might also find it hard to be entirely honest with your boss about troubling issues. But with the right personality mix and range of opportunities, a mentor/boss can be optimal, providing you a chance to hone your skills on a daily basis and graduate to bigger projects quickly.

If you’re in a larger organization, having a senior boss as a mentor sometimes defers advantages over having your immediate report in that role. First, someone higher up may have more clout in supporting your projects and more venues to increase your visibility. Secondly, in case your boss is unfair—doesn’t give you credit for your ideas, undermines your efforts, or holds you

back—you have somewhere to turn. But beware that you always have to carefully weigh the pros and cons of going outside the chain of authority.

Formal Mentoring Programs

If you have an opportunity to participate in a formal program in your corporation or organization, it's usually worth a try. Not all formal mentors are a good fit and these relationships often don't go as far as ones that develop naturally. They tend to be goal-oriented and limited in scope, lacking the personal connection that makes some mentoring relationships so magical. But formal mentorships can still be a solid way to learn and network. And these programs are being developed and improved by corporations continually.

Multiple Mentors

In 1997, I started a Women's Advisory Board for Wyndham. I had the freedom to hand-pick women from whom I wanted to learn in order to do my job better and benefit Wyndham. Each member of the advisory board is a mentor of sorts, and hearing from these women who are outside the company and free from internal politics has been a tremendous learning opportunity and source of support—and not just for me but for other women and men in the company.

Now, you may not be at a point in your career where you have a chance to create your own board, or even to serve on one. But you can get in touch with multiple mentors by becoming an active member of a professional organization (see suggestions in the "Resources" section).

Peer Mentoring

Leslie Grossman is cofounder of the Women's Leadership Exchange with Andrea March. Their group holds conferences

around the country, reaching thousands of women business owners in the million-dollars-plus revenue level. Leslie talks about the value of peer mentoring and how it can evolve: “My first real experience with mentoring was peer-to-peer mentoring as part of an organized, all-female leads group at New York University. Even after that group disbanded we stayed connected. Later one of the women from the original group informally mentored me through the dot-com crash by generously sharing her survival strategies.”

Informal peer mentors don’t always come through professional organizations. Sometimes they come from unexpected places. Jane Blalock is the owner of a multi-million-dollar company and president of the LPGA’s Senior Women’s Golf Tour. And she found her mentor through the mailman! “When I started my business it was a woman who helped me, an outplacement person,” she says. “The mailman in my office building knew that this other woman was a golfer, and she had an office in the same building, so he said I should meet her. For a year we met once a week for lunch. And she was a perfect business coach to help me.”

The Five-Minute Mentor, or Mini-Mentor

Long-term mentoring relationships are the most fruitful, but they can be supplemented with “mini-mentoring.” Perhaps you meet someone at a professional conference and have a chance to ask her some questions at the hotel pool. Or you have an opportunity to talk to a senior person in your organization about a specific project or problem. A person can be your mentor for five minutes and it can make a difference. With one sentence of advice I literally changed my life!

Early in my career, when I worked for Peabody Hotels, I was walking down the hallway one day with a general manager for whom I had great respect. He said: “You know, Cary, you can do anything you want in life.” No one had ever said that to me (at least when I was ready to hear it) and the comment made a huge impression.

Soon after, I started my own PR firm, and although there was no financial credit available to women at the time who were starting businesses, I just went ahead and did it—without any fear or looking back. The words of the general manager during that spontaneous mini-mentoring session stayed in my mind and gave me a huge boost of confidence.

Family Mentors

Many successful women credit family influences when they are asked about mentors. “My motivation comes from values and ethics that were passed on to me by my parents, grandparents, and others who have chosen to mentor and coach me throughout my life,” says Georgette “Gigi” Dixon, senior vice president and manager of national relationships for Wachovia Bank. “Women have served as sources of strength, wisdom, knowledge, perseverance and economic independence through generations in my family.”

Your Mentor Possibilities
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Write down a list of possible mentors who can help you. Group the candidates into these categories to organize your search:

- Bosses/supervisors
- Peers in your company
- Matches from formal mentoring programs within your company
- Participants in an outside professional development or peer support groups
- Five-minute mentors who might provide “mini-mentoring”
- Family members or friends
- Organizations (see “Resources” section)

Next to each name, write down a first step you’ll take to cultivate the mentoring relationship.

You might begin by writing an exploratory e-mail or speaking to someone informally. Maybe you can join a new organization, or volunteer for a committee to get to know a potential mentor. In the case of a mentor/boss, the development of your mentoring relationship is likely to entail more gradual tactics.

How to Attract a Fairy Godmentor

How do you attract a mentor when everyone is so busy and overloaded?

Here's the number one rule of attraction: *Earn* a mentor through your actions.

Remember that Cinderella didn't shirk from her duties, even when they were beneath her station. In the Grimm tale she is obliged to "carry water, light the fire, cook, and wash." In Perrault's story she has to scrub Madam's chamber (including, presumably, the chamberpot) and still be on call to iron her sisters' petticoats. Yet she does it all, and does it well. This establishes her as a person of fine character, deserving of the help of a fairy godmother.

In the workplace, you can't be a drudge or a doormat. You have a right to complain in an appropriate forum if you are required to do tasks outside of your job description on a daily basis, particularly if they interfere with priorities. But you still have to pay your dues, especially if you want to earn the interest of a mentor. Be part of the team and don't always try to be a lone ranger who does no wrong. Real-life Cinderellas are never perfect (and neither are fairy-tale heroines).

Ways to Win a Mentor

Show that you're willing to work hard. The harsh reality of the modern workplace is that it takes a commitment on your part. The people who walk (or run) out the door promptly at 5:00 (at least the first year) are not the ones who attract positive attention

from higher-ups. Running into the CEO, CMO, or COO in the elevator after five is a great way to strike up a mini-mentoring conversation and eventually get ahead.

If you are an hourly employee and your company doesn't allow overtime, make the hours that you are at work really count. Remember, perception is reality. When you look like you're concentrating on your job, you're going to get more done. It is a given that the person you want to attract as a mentor is highly focused and hard-working. You must exhibit the same qualities if you want to appear deserving of a mentor's time and attention.

Don't complain unnecessarily. Unless something is highly unfair or inappropriate, don't complain. Remember the expression: "That's why they call it work." It's hard. And it will get harder as you advance, so get in the habit of not complaining. Nobody has the time or patience to mentor a complainer. This is tricky because in the corporate workplace "unfair" may be *de rigueur*. But you need to pick your battles wisely. If you run into a brick wall, develop a new strategy that will turn an unfair situation into a positive one.

Do what needs to be done, not just what you're told to do, and "manage up." Your supervisor is probably too busy to tell you everything that needs to be done. There are times (provided it's not overstepping the limits of your role) that it's good to go ahead and do more than you're asked. But point this out to your boss in an appropriate, effective manner; otherwise, it may be overlooked when it's time for a raise or promotion. Sometimes you can suggest to your boss what needs to be done. If you're juggling two bosses, help them develop a system to clarify your priorities.

Colin Rorrie, Jr., president and CEO of Meeting Professionals International, says, "I am a firm believer in women taking advantage of opportunities within their organizations to volunteer for assignments that may or may not be within their job, that will give them exposure and the opportunity to work with senior-level officers from whom they can gain perspectives that will help them frame their management style."

Demonstrate that you want to learn. Ask for advice—but don't overdo it because people are busy. Participate in training within the company when it's offered. Take outside courses. Read books about your field. Show that you're eager to learn and people will be inspired to teach you.

Alair Townsend, publisher of *Crain's New York Business* and former deputy mayor of the City of New York, says, "One thing I have found to be true: Even the busiest people like to be asked for advice and for help—assuming that the subjects are appropriate. Asking someone tells them their experience and opinions are valuable, that you respect their views, and that they are doing you a favor. And that is very flattering. Plus, most people want to be perceived as sensitive and helpful. So, within the bounds of reason and appropriateness, I believe you should feel comfortable approaching people—and asking for advice."

Nurture Your Mentor Relationships

Short-term mentoring relationships or mini-mentoring can be very beneficial. But longer-term mentors usually have the most impact. Here's how to keep a mentor interested and sustain the relationship.

Accept criticism professionally. Taking criticism is tough. You might want to cry. If possible, wait until you get home. Some believe crying is a show of compassion, but unfortunately, it's more accepted for men to cry in the workplace (although you'll rarely see this happen). When you're reacting to criticism, never get overly defensive. Women are especially prone to losing status when they get defensive. It's not fair, but it's the reality. Sure, you can explain your point of view, but know when not to push it. Timing is everything.

Bounce back and offer solutions. When you have setbacks, keep going. Show resilience. Keep finding alternatives. Be creative about finding solutions. Don't be afraid to show that you have a

brain and don't worry that your suggestions might be shot down. I know from my own experience that it's tough to be laughed at or gossiped about. It takes stamina. But if you believe in your work, and you're focused on your goals, you can do it. Be willing to risk failure, and you'll gain the attention and respect of potential mentors.

Strive to make your mentor look good. This is a big one. Longer-term mentoring is a give-and-take relationship. The mentor needs to get something out of it to remain actively engaged. The best way you can do this is by continuing to produce. Ultimately, mentoring relationships must produce a positive outcome and propel *both* people forward.

When you begin to produce significant results, the mentor relationship is likely to evolve. There might come a time when your mentor becomes more of a sounding board or a friend than an advisor. You might be promoted and become a peer of a mentor who was previously in a senior position. Or even get promoted *over* your mentor. And in a small business, you might become your mentor's associate or partner.

Bring Mentoring Full Circle

Once you've established your place in the palace, you can find many ways to do others a good turn. In a corporate setting, you can support your former mentor's projects and initiatives. If your mentor has her own business, share networking contacts and send her new clients. You can also become a mentor to other people and pass on the wisdom. Often the most dedicated mentors are those who had a pivotal mentor earlier in their careers.

Judi Hampton, who had a stellar 17-year career at the Mobil Corporation before starting her own company, explains: "I was doing 'gopher' work when my boss, who was also my mentor, talked management into letting me try out to be a TV spokesperson. He was always there as an advisor, a cheerleader, a supporter.

My visibility went up one hundred percent and I became senior spokesperson to all media and director of consumer affairs at Mobil.” Judi went on to manage the Mentor in Engineering program for minorities at the Mobil Corporation. She later started her own training company, where she coaches and mini-mentors hundreds of people a year.

It’s very exciting when mentoring comes full circle. I can honestly say that creating a better environment for other women in business is the most rewarding part of my job. And remember, if you’re a true heroine, you’ll stick to *positive* payback and not waste your time plotting revenge.

Doing Well Is the Best Revenge

The original Perrault and Grimm versions of *Cinderella* don’t actually include the words “happily ever after.” Very few fairy tales do. Instead, the two classics finish with the stepsisters’ fate, although they tell two very different tales. The Perrault story ends by saying that Cinderella, “who was as good as she was beautiful,” took her sisters to live in the palace and married them to two great lords of the court. In the Grimm version the doves take matters into their own beaks and peck out the stepsisters’ eyes. Nonetheless, Cinderella is not the one who punishes the stepsisters. She’s too good to waste her time on revenge. And so are you.

If you want to tell someone off, write the miscreant a letter instead, with an important caveat—don’t send it. Put it in the shredder. If you have an enemy in the company, let him or her self-destruct. People who are really nasty usually do. If not, you can choose to *ignore* detractors. Nothing deflates people faster than acting as if you don’t care what they think or do. Focus on finding and cultivating supporters instead of dissipating your energy on revenge. Be professional and be forgiving. But don’t expect others to forgive. Some will harbor deep resentment—it’s a reality. But you can keep your head above the fray and set your sights high.

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Twenty-First Century *Cinderella*

Once upon a time, a bright and ambitious young woman went to work as an administrative assistant for a large corporation. Although it was an entry-level job, the VP who hired her promised that she would have an opportunity to advance in due course. But soon it became clear that the VP left everything to an evil department manager, who favored two other administrative assistants whom she had hired. The bright young woman was given the most tedious tasks to perform and spent so much time in the copy machine room that the toner was always rubbing off on her clothes and getting stuck under her fingernails. And so they called her Cinderella.

One day the CEO of the corporation sent an e-mail to all employees, inviting them to a grand meeting to be held in the ballroom of a lavish hotel. The CEO invited everyone to enter a contest by writing a speech on how the company could experience double-digit growth in the next decade. The winner was to present the speech at the meeting.

The two other admins took long lunches and left work early so that they could shop for designer suits and shoes to wear to the big event. They dumped their work on Cinderella to finish. Yet when Cinderella complained about their wicked ways to the department manager, the boss snapped: "You'd better exhibit more team loyalty next time. Now get back to your cubicle!"

So every evening after Cinderella had finished the selfish admins' work and her own she remained at her desk after hours, fine-tuning her submission for the corporate contest. No matter how undervalued and overworked she was right now, she could still picture herself at the podium. The nighttime security guard would shake his head in sympathy at the sight of Cinderella toiling far into the night.

The day of the grand meeting, Cinderella was planning to look for a new outfit at a sample sale during her lunch hour. But the department manager dropped a bombshell on her desk just before noon. "Take these notes and organize them into a formal report," she

ordered. "And have it on my desk by tomorrow morning or you'll pay in your performance review!"

Poor Cinderella had to work through lunchtime, and stay in the office after five, trying to compile the report. But the data was so convoluted that she couldn't make sense of it. Finally, she dropped her head on her desk, weeping in despair.

Just then an elegant woman carrying a garment bag entered the office. "I've been watching the way you keep on plugging when the going gets tough," she told Cinderella, "And I've decided that you deserve my support. I'm going to be your fairy godmentor, so to speak. I was the first woman to be named to the board of this corporation and I still wield a lot of influence."

"I only want to go to the company meeting, and have my submission chosen on its own merit," Cinderella said. "But now I'll never have time..."

"Think like a CEO. Concentrate on finding solutions," said the godmentor. "The security guard moonlights as a livery car driver and he's waiting outside to take you."

"But I have nothing to wear," said Cinderella.

"We'll take care of that. There's always a way if you're a change agent." The mentor took from the shopping bag a couture suit of the finest white wool, with silk lining and gold chains at the waistband. "This will be perfect for you. And I've always felt that accessories are the ideal way to show a little individuality while still maintaining an appropriate professional look." And she showed Cinderella a pair of fabulous plexiglass pumps.

Cinderella slipped them on. "Wow, you don't know how much trouble I usually have finding shoes that fit. I'm a size 10 narrow!" she said.

"No problem. Now get yourself changed and be on your way, my dear. But don't go out for drinks after the event. Be home by midnight so you can be well-rested and ready to work tomorrow by nine sharp."

The ballroom of the grand hotel was filled with a thousand employees, all dressed in their finest clothes and on their best behavior. After

the keynote address, the CEO of the corporation announced the winner of the contest. It was Cinderella! As if in a dream she floated up to the podium to give her speech. At the reception afterwards the CEO toasted Cinderella with a flute of champagne and told her: "You have some excellent ideas for the company. And you had real executive presence at the podium. I was impressed the minute I heard you." Cinderella was invited to sit next to the CEO at the reception and was introduced to everyone as an up-and-coming talent.

The evening passed so quickly in a whirl of clever finger foods and networking that Cinderella almost missed her midnight deadline. When she noticed the time, she ran out of the ballroom so swiftly that one of her shoes fell off. Later, she realized she had not given the CEO her name or signed the speech because she was afraid of retaliation by her boss.

The next day an e-mail went out to all the employees of the corporation saying that the CEO was seeking to identify the employee who wrote the winning speech. And to prevent anyone from stealing the credit, the winner must prove her identity by fitting into a certain size 10 narrow shoe.

The two other administrative assistants in Cinderella's department went into a tizzy. One of them booked an emergency appointment with a plastic surgeon who specialized in foot surgery for women who wanted to heighten their arches to fit into stilettos. The other admin flexed and pointed her feet 500 times day to lengthen her instep. Cinderella just concentrated on doing her job.

When the VP made it down to their department the following week to see if anyone could fit into the plexiglass pump, the first admin was still swelling from surgery and didn't have a prayer. The other coworker was seized with a foot cramp, snapped at the VP, and burnt bridges. But Cinderella calmly slipped her extra-long foot into the striking yet sensible shoe. To seal the deal, she produced the second glass shoe from her padded laptop case, where she had put it for safekeeping.

Cinderella was immediately promoted to a growth position, where she was able to make her mark. One of her first projects was

to start a mentoring program that was open to all employees, including the chastened admins and the security guard/driver.

And over the years, Cinderella always displayed the plexiglass shoes on a credenza in her office as she worked her way up to CEO.

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Fairy Dust from Cinderella

- Behave as if you belong at the ball. Display the best qualities of a CEO, wherever you are in the hierarchy.
- Believe in the possibility of transforming your work life. Take inspiration from real-life Cinderella success stories.
- Picture yourself at the palace. Understand what success means to you and develop a detailed vision of your ideal work life.
- Earn a “fairy godmentor” through your actions. Cultivate the right attitude and work ethic to attract a series of significant mentors.
- Bring the magic full circle. Make your mentor look good. Then become a mentor yourself to someone deserving.
- Never diminish yourself by seeking revenge. Hold your head high and you’ll deserve to wear the crown.