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**Beyond the Boys' Club.  
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**REVIEW**

Many women working in science and engineering believe that gender is irrelevant to career progress. In this book Suzanne Doyle-Morris not only explains why gender is relevant but, more importantly, gives well-founded, practical advice on what women can do to succeed in male-dominated environments. Doyle-Morris did her Ph.D. at the University of Cambridge researching the experiences of successful women in male-dominated fields and now runs her own coaching business.

Her book is based on interviews with twenty-one women holding senior positions in areas that include IT, finance and academic science, as well as the anonymized experiences of her coaching clients. It is not intended primarily as an academic analysis, though it is rooted in rigorous research. Nor does it follow the well-worn track of ascribing the dearth of women in senior positions to women's failure to behave like men. Instead, Doyle-Morris explains the realities of the professional workplace and examines how women can use their strengths to succeed as women rather than as honorary men.



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Doyle-Morris acknowledges the very real difficulties associated with workplaces where the working practices have evolved in conditions where employees have support for their domestic responsibilities, freeing them up to devote their time and energy to their careers. She also briefly considers the lessons to be learnt from the Norwegian experience with quotas. The Norwegian government made it mandatory for companies listed on the Oslo Stock Exchange to have 40% female representation on their executive boards, resulting in the representation of women rising from 17% in 2005 to 36% in 2008.

However, the primary aim of the book is to tease out the common themes in the approaches and strategies of women who have succeeded in male-dominated environments. The themes that emerge are profile raising; working with key stake-holders; risk-taking; networking; mentoring; and, coaching.

Many women make the mistake of assuming that if they are performing well they will be noticed and promoted, failing to realise that to be promoted they need to stand out from all the other people who are performing well. In fact, to move to the next level it is necessary to convince others that you have the potential to perform at that level. As such, not only do you need to draw attention to your existing achievements, but also to convince others of your ability to perform at the next level. One of the major steps in the career of an academic scientist is the transition from being a post-doc on someone else's project to becoming an independent scientist working on your own project. It is essential for women scientists thinking of making this step to consider how to raise their profile as a potential independent scientist, not just in their current department or group but within their speciality as well. They will find lots of ideas in this book. The precise details of how women in consultancy or finance go about raising their profile may differ from those for women in academic science, but the principles are the same.

Another common mistake, made by some men as well as by many women, is to believe that engaging in office politics is beneath them. In fact the choice is not whether to engage in office politics or not, but how to engage: is your way results-oriented and respectful of others or egocentric and manipulative? As Doyle-Morris notes, the upside of participation in healthy politics is collaboration and enhanced teamwork.

An aspect often neglected by women scientists is the importance of image. After all, the results of your experiments, or the likelihood of your paper being accepted, are not dependent on what you wear. However, eventually the time comes when you have a job interview, an important presentation or a meeting with industrial collaborators where it is important to present an appropriate image. Many women scientists will find the practical recommendations in Chapter Seven, which spells out exactly how to go about building a professional wardrobe, very useful, especially those women in areas where there are few women in senior positions to emulate.

Risk-taking is inherent to a research career. If one knew in advance how a research project would work out it would not be research. Nevertheless, there will always be points at which an individual has the opportunity to try a new approach, develop an unconventional idea, or work in a new way, for example, in an unusual collaboration. Again, moving from a post-doc position to working as an independent scientist with your own group can be a big step requiring new, non-technical, skills. A particular difficulty for women is that the timing of this career step is often around the time they are thinking of starting a family.

Networking is vital to a career in science. It provides opportunities to build collaborations, find out about job opportunities and be exposed to different ways of thinking about problems, potentially leading to new research questions. For women scientists, networking with other women can also be very important as a way of exchanging information that may not be available within their, often male-dominated, professional network. Doyle-Morris has some excellent advice for anyone wanting to set up an internal women's network in their organisation, including making sure that the network has a senior champion indicating that the organisation takes women's careers seriously. Furthermore the network needs committed resources, both financial and of employees' time, rather than being regarded as an optional, voluntary activity. Women's networks not only give women an opportunity to exchange information, but also allow them to develop networking and leadership skills in a more congenial environment.

Mentoring is widely recognised as an important way of advancing careers. Many organisations endorse mentoring, even if practice does not always match the rhetoric. Important points made in this book are the need to find your own mentors, including mentors from outside your organisation, the need for a variety of mentors, including men, and the need to give something back both to your relationship with your mentor and by mentoring yourself.

As an executive coach herself, you would expect Doyle-Morris to be in favour of executive coaching. However, many of the women she interviewed for the book had found executive coaching an essential part of their career development. The chapter on coaching not only explores the benefits of coaching, but also explains how to find a good coach and how to make the most of the coaching relationship.

The book finishes with a list of career development resources.

In many respects there is nothing new in any of this. I have been a trainer for the Springboard<sup>1</sup> Personal Development Programme for Women, at the University of Cambridge since 2004 and as I read through the book I recognised many of the themes from the Springboard programme, especially raising your profile, presenting a positive image, networking and getting support. What is particularly useful about this book is the opportunity to see

these principles at work in the lives of women, who now hold senior positions, along with the very practical advice in the book. I would recommend this book to any women working in science, engineering and related areas and indeed anyone, male or female, who wants inspiration and practical advice to build a successful career while remaining true to their identity.

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<sup>1</sup> The Springboard Programme was developed by the Springboard Consultancy, [www.springboardconsultancy.com](http://www.springboardconsultancy.com) (accessed 5/11/09)