



*Go Ahead...*

**Brag!**

**W**e all know the scene: Some hot-shot with half your experience waltzes in and, through much chumming and politicking, lands the job you've been quietly plugging away for during the past year. Overnight, she gains your boss's confidence, eclipsing your hard work and loyalty. Worse, once she gets going, her work is actually good—and she's nice—so you can't even begrudge her the success.

What's the deal? Here you are playing fair but being left in the dust as others leap ahead on the strength of sheer moxie. And not just at work. How many times have you killed yourself making calls until midnight for a fund-raiser or licking envelopes for a PTA dinner dance, only to have the event's chairwoman, who's not yet lifted a carefully manicured finger, pose for the local newspaper and gush, "It's been a lot of work but very rewarding"? As much as you'd like to wring her neck, it's hard not to be awed by ... well, her balls.

Both of these women are onto something: the art of self-promotion. In the best instances, it's called managing your reputation. In the worst, plain old lying. Either way, if you expect everyone to play nice—and believe that your efforts will be recognized and rewarded without you having to be so bold as to point them out—you're in for disappointment.

#### **GOOD GIRLS DO BOAST**

Why is it that so many of us still can't blow our own horns? Outdated cultural messages are at least partly to blame. Growing up, most of us were taught that it was unladylike to draw attention to ourselves—that it was

egotistical and boastful. "The message of the 1950's was, Pretend you're stupid so the dumb guy will like you," says Betty Lehan Harragan, career counselor and author of *Games Mother Never Taught You*. Unfortunately, that message isn't entirely dead. In her landmark five-year study, Harvard University professor Carol Gilligan, Ph.D., found that as girls enter adolescence, they begin to submerge their personalities under the cultural mask of femininity. "Girls are afraid to speak up for themselves because they see that the women who do are often spoken about and ostracized," says Elizabeth DeBold, a member of the Harvard Project on Women's Psychology and Girls' Development who worked on Dr. Gilligan's study.

Is it any surprise then that even when we do shine, so many of us feel vaguely apologetic about it? My friend Linda was asked if she'd be interested in editing her town's newsletter. She wanted the job and knew she'd be good at it, though she'd have to brush up on her computer skills. But during the interview, instead of playing up her strong editorial experience, she found herself babbling about how her prospective employers could probably find someone who'd already used a Macintosh. They decided she was right.

Most men don't seem as hindered by such false modesty. They know that the key to success is visibility—even if that means turning the spotlight on themselves. Yet what's mere *strategy* to men too often becomes an issue of morality for us. "Women still perceive the word *self* as being wrong or wicked," says Donna Coulson, a management consultant in Red Bank, New Jersey. "But self-promotion is not being egotistical or boastful. It's letting people know you're around."

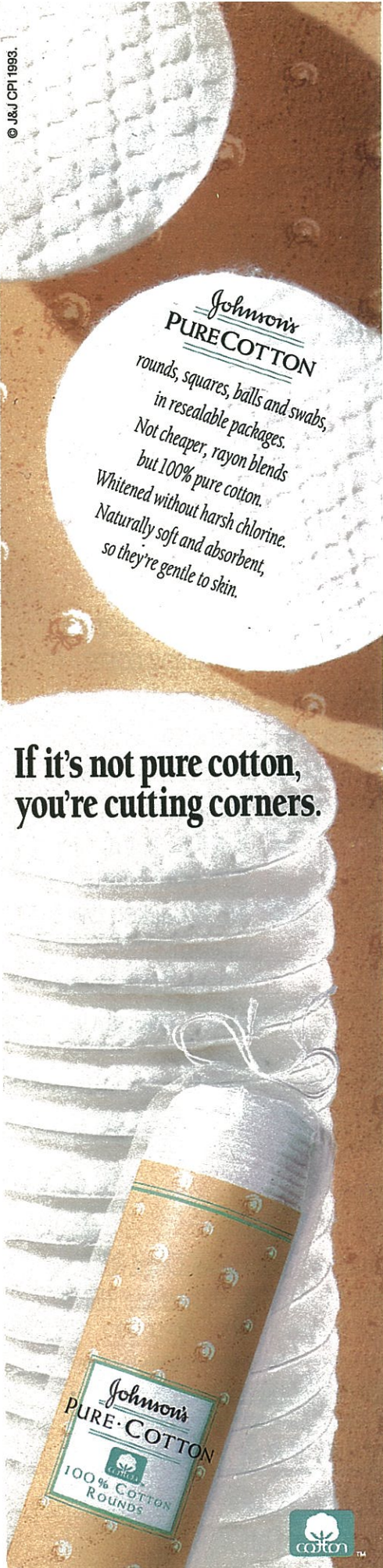
#### **SCAM ARTISTS AND SPIN DOCTORS**

No wonder self-promotion has gotten such a bad name—so many people do it poorly. On one hand, you've got users who think nothing of courting people, and then ditching them once their interests have been served. On the other, you've got blowhards who push the limits of fairness and truth. Sure, they often zoom to the top, but it's only a matter of time before they fall—to everyone's delight. Look at what happened to Leona Helmsley: The in-your-face hotel queen who once reportedly said, "Only the little people



ILLUSTRATIONS BY ROLLIN MCGRILL

*Sometimes, blowing  
your own horn isn't  
obnoxious but essential.  
As long as you do  
it with style.* **by Eileen Moon**



Johnson's  
PURE COTTON  
rounds, squares, balls and swabs,  
in resealable packages.  
Not cheaper, rayon blends  
but 100% pure cotton.  
Whitened without harsh chlorine.  
Naturally soft and absorbent,  
so they're gentle to skin.

If it's not pure cotton,  
you're cutting corners.

Johnson's  
PURE COTTON  
100% COTTON  
ROUNDS



# Go Ahead, Brag

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DeLibero. She kept calling until finally they hired her for a job they were having a hard time filling. Today, she heads the third-largest public-transit system in the nation. "I tell everybody I'm the best transit official in the country," DeLibero says. "When I tell them I'm good, I can go back and show them what I've accomplished."

That kind of gutsy, up-front attitude has a way of persuading your superiors that you've got what it takes to make *them* look good—and to motivate others. "I don't think of it as arrogance unless I find there's nothing underneath it," says one hiring manager for a New York City investment-banking firm.

## HELP FOR THE FAINTHEARTED

I know a lot more doors would have been opened to me if I hadn't been so

### DON'T BE SO OBVIOUS!

There's nothing uglier than naked ambition and greed. Here, eight moves guaranteed to fail:

1. LYING ABOUT YOUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS. It's only a matter of time before you'll be found out.
2. CLAIMING TO KNOW SOMEONE YOU DON'T. All it takes is a phone call—or accidental encounter—to discern the true depth of your relationship.
3. BAD-MOUTHING OTHERS TO BUILD YOURSELF UP. Only the insecure believe success rides on others' failures.
4. BRIBING YOUR WAY TO YOUR GOAL. Gifts of wine, chocolate, or flowers will make you seem desperate. Where due, a thank-you note is all that's required.
5. HAVING FRIENDS PITCH FOR YOU. Connections may get you in the door, but they'll never make up for substance.
6. RELYING ON GIMMICKS. Video résumés and rhyming cover letters may create a lasting impression—but not the one you want.
7. SHOOTING TOO HIGH. Sure, you might make a great CEO, but if the job you're after is secretarial, keep your vision for the company to yourself.
8. USING YOUR KIDS. Even if your children do know his, playing on that fact will only make you appear ruthless.

timid about knocking. But it takes guts to put yourself out there. First, you need to understand what's holding you back, to confront and dismiss old messages about the correct rules of play. For in today's fast-paced and competitive world, good work alone won't guarantee raises, longevity doesn't necessarily lead to promotion, and we don't have the luxury of time to make lasting impressions. Indeed, those old virtues of patience and loyalty may now be misread as lack of ambition. "Others might presume that you hold no further aspirations because you haven't *expressed* those aspirations," says Jeffrey Sonnenfeld, founder and director of the Center for Leadership and Career Studies at Emory Business School in Atlanta.

Practice promoting yourself in the privacy of your home, perhaps with a good friend who'll give you honest feedback on your performance. If you're really shy, try this strategy: Think of a great self-promoter, then pretend you're that person. But don't overdo it. "I hate windbags," says Annemarie Cairns, founder of Cairns & Associates, a New York City public relations firm. "It's better to say that you have done a small project extremely well than to say that you've launched the *Queen Mary* single-handedly."

Whether it's on the job or off, the key is to focus on, and even document, the facts. What are your best skills and your most notable successes? How exactly did you contribute to a project? Then make sure that those who count are aware of them. Use tact and diplomacy. Act confident.

But get out there. As awkward as networking can be, it is necessary. Start small, and make just one new connection at the next PTA meeting or industry conference. When it comes to making contacts, more is not necessarily better: My daughter, Michelle, 23, was flattered by the chatty, news-filled postcard she received from a former college classmate until she realized he'd sent identical cards to everyone he knew. The moral? The more personal the approach, the more vividly—and positively—people remember you. "Every day you're being tested," says Dorothy Light, a vice president at The Prudential Insurance Company of America in Newark, New Jersey, "whether you know it's an exam or not."

Saying we're good at something will never be a substitute for being good at it. And no one ever said you had to blast your own horn. But a little toot never hurts. So just blow it. □