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B is for Brave, Bold, and Bossy

B is next on the list in 'The ABCs of Work and Life' by Katie Mehnert.

Earlier this year Sheryl Sandberg, COO of Facebook and the Girl Scouts, an American organization dedicated to advancing girls launched the Ban Bossy campaign. I really applaud Sheryl and all she's doing to get the conversation out there. *But as a Western woman, I disagree with her assessment of bossy.*

As a bossy woman I think we shouldn't ban it, rather "bring it".

B is for brave, bold and bossy. To be a bossy woman it takes bravery and the ability to step out of your comfort zone to be bold. If I had a quarter for every time someone has called me "bossy", *I'd be worth as much as Sheryl.*

For me bossy is the net effect of two very powerful dynamics: **being brave, and being bold.**

Bravery is about mustering the courage to act and being bold is about being imaginative and going beyond what conventional action might lend. So when you combine brave and bold, you get different, and yes in women *you get bossy.*

Bravery is the first step. Safe is easy and bravery is hell.

Yes, I said that and even wrote it. You have to go to hell first though, to get to heaven.

I attribute my bravery to my first job. I worked for a top direct marketing firm with blue chip clients. Within a year I and ~100 others were let go due to layoffs. Ultimately the postal service was investigating the company for fraud. What a blessing in disguise! Unemployed and saddled with school debt, I ventured to get a new role, after crying my eyes out thinking how unfair it was and how it "happened to me".

After pulling my head out of my "whine"



Katie's daughter Ally braves the bumper cars at a recent celebration for a friend.

glass, I spent 8 years consulting, delivering projects, and getting to see a myriad of different work environments before landing in an energy giant. That one single experience opened my mind to being nimble when it came to my career. I took the attitude that staying in one place forever wasn't what grew you.

You grow by taking risks and leaving your comfort zone.

A few years ago, I left a comfortable spot at Shell to challenge myself in a senior leadership role in BP. It was something I knew I needed to do and it was the hardest decision I had faced in my career. I had to leave people I knew very well and jump from a place of comfort into the unknown. The unknown wasn't just new, but terribly unpopular.

People thought I was crazy. At one point, I was branded a traitor. Deep down, though, I knew the assignment was a meaningful way to apply my safety experience in one of the largest industry turnarounds, so I took it.

People think that big jobs, titles and paychecks are glamorous.

It was hard work. I felt lonely at times and sometimes wondered why I dared to leave. I dared because I wanted to stretch, to grow, to try something bigger than myself. It tested me. No longer was it good enough to be competent and well liked.

I had to step up and lead. I had to take tough decisions and stand firm on what I believed and knew was the right thing to do. And I did. And I grew. **Looking back, I'm so glad I chose hell over heaven.**

The point is it's in times of bravery we find out what we are made of. We push ourselves and become better. We learn about who matters and what matters most.

If you get the chance to be brave, go for it. Safe is B for boring.

When I was seven, I broke my leg skating. My parents didn't believe anything was wrong. I had a slight flair for the dramatics so my leg went undiagnosed for a few weeks. *It's okay Mom and Dad I forgive you, and so do my newfound Asian friends!*

I was put in a cast and laid up to heal. The skating incident was truly my fault. I didn't lace up my skates, fell and broke my leg. And because sitting wasn't who I was at 7 (nor is it now at 38), I managed to corral my sisters and neighborhood friends to sell cards we created to collect money to fund my medical expenses. It wasn't that my parents needed the money; it was that we found a creative way to channel the energy.

The point is when we are bold we are able to take ordinary situations and make them different. And when you can bring people *with you*, your bold factor multiplies. So, does your bossiness!

I'm not trying to be *braggadocios* but I'm proud of these moments. It's taken me almost 30 years to recognize they are worthy of such. I want to encourage you to reflect on about the times you've been brave and bold and openly admit and embrace *your inner bossy.*

You have it. You just need to find it and bring it.

3 Steps:

1. Be brave. Take the not-so-easy path. If you're feeling good, then you are in a safe zone. Repeat after me: Safe is easy. Bravery is hell. Break open and find something new to do. Try a new role, work for a different company, or reach out to that person you've wanted to know. If you don't try, you'll only regret not doing something. Life is too short!

2. Be bold. Add color to your life and work. Try to position yourself to think differently about the role you are in or the position you've been given. Being bold doesn't take much but thinking differently is hard. Doing the same stuff is easy. Be bold. You've got this. You just have to practice it over and over to make it a habit.

3. Don't know how to do 1 or 2? Surround yourself with the "bossy". Create a village around you that's different from you. Hint: When you do that, you're technically doing 1 and 2. Imagine that. Read what brave, bold women and men do. Study the "greats". I read Einstein, Steve Jobs, Ronald Reagan, and a handful of authors. *Follow people who just seem a tad bit crazy.*

Make no mistake. I am not encouraging arrogance. A bossy woman is one who is embraces herself. She isn't afraid to try new things, do the unconventional and



toot her own horn. And she sure has the confidence to stand on her values and beliefs and fights for what's right.

So Sheryl, let's prepare our girls and women to be the very bossy women they can.

We won't be liked by all and we certainly won't be popular, but...

Women who behave seldom make history.

I'm curious about what you think. Being brave, bold and bossy are very Western traits. What is your definition of brave? bold? bossy? I'm interested in hearing your thoughts.

Katie Mehnert (pictured) is a global talent development and change executive with 17 years of helping people and companies get curious, connect, share, grow and perform better. She has recently been appointed CEO of Pink Petro www.pinkpetro.com Prior to her latest venture, Katie was a Director with BP, joining after the Deepwater Horizon incident and worked in various leadership roles worldwide with Shell. She's a dynamic speaker and author having been featured in LinkedIn, CEO.com, Business Insider, and Yahoo. As a work-in-progress marathon runner, wife and working mom, you can follow her musings on balancing it all on her blog at www.katiemehnert.com, or email her at katie@katiemehnert.com