



Working in a male-dominated industry has never been an issue for me. As a multilingual Asian woman in the world of commercial finance, being female and a minority has in fact contributed to my success. Why? Whenever you can set yourself apart from the crowd, it is an absolute plus. If you are the only woman in a room full of men and you handle yourself professionally and intelligently, you have an advantage. In a male-dominated industry, here's how you can succeed, not just survive.

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Get involved in a program that will empower you. Look for events and networking functions that cater to women. As a member of the Board of Directors for the New Jersey Turnaround Management Association (NJTMA), I've hosted a women-only event for several years. It's called Golf 101 and it teaches participants golfing rules and etiquette. Golf is an important business tool and some women aren't comfortable signing up for regular outings. Golf 101 attendees don't just learn how to play golf—they discover how to conduct business while on the fairway and greens. This year, I've opened the Golf 101 event (scheduled to take place on October 6) to men because a significant number expressed interest.

Understand how men and women communicate differently. Women will ask questions to develop closeness and nurture a relationship. Men, on the other hand, are very goal- and action-oriented; they like to fix problems. They'll answer a question forthright without sugar-coating it. Women tend to take it personally if a man doesn't word his response nicely. Don't fall into this trap.

Body contact can cause misunderstandings. Some men are touchy-feely, but don't mean anything by it. If they can't read your body language that you are uncomfortable, simply move away from that individual.

Men like to talk about sports, cars, money, business and politics. Women are more likely to talk about home life, children, relationships, fashion and feelings. Women who can discuss topics that interest men will have more success in connecting with them. Building a relationship means learning what the other person's passions are and how you can help one another going forward.

Read nonverbal cues. If they look at their watches, you'd better change the topic fast or finish up. On the other hand, if they lean in while they're listening, you've captured their interest.

Network with patience. Think of networking as farming rather than hunting: you need to spend time to plant the seeds, nurture them, and water them, so that they will blossom. Too many people use the hunting method—once in a while you catch some prey, but it may also die. Farming always ensures a crop. Look to see how you can help someone else. They will recognize your efforts and try to reciprocate. When I network and “work a room,” I make it a practice to connect people whenever possible.

Keep a positive attitude. Working with men can be a pleasure. Some women may have had a negative experience with one male counterpart along the way. Do not generalize—not all men are alike.

Be proactive about retention. More and more companies are recognizing the lack of women in the industry. Standards are evolving and improving for women. Companies have begun to implement task forces designed to recruit women and address diversity issues to attract more women. Get involved in this process, if you can. In addition, as a prospective employee, seek out companies with flexible policies that allow women to balance careers and motherhood.

Believe that success is not based on gender. Success is based on character, integrity, knowledge and skills. Leverage your skill sets to the fullest. Dare to be different. You will be remembered for your uniqueness. In a product business, product differentiation is always important. When it comes to networking and relationship-building, differentiating yourself will mean greater success. Never feel intimidated or inferior. Being a woman in a male-dominated industry can be a very rewarding experience. All you need is a positive attitude. **TSL**

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