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Listen to, laugh with Big Sister

By Michelle Archer, Special for USA TODAY

If *The Big Sister's Guide to Work* were a song instead of a book, it'd be an infectious pop single with a catchy beat. Then one day, you'd accidentally pay attention to the lyrics and say, "That's SO true!"

With their cheeky new book, Marcelle Langan DiFalco and Jocelyn Greenky Herz have appointed themselves mentors to working women whose careers are just beginning or are just beginning to stagnate.

The Big Sister's Guide to the World of Work: The Inside Rules Every Working Girl Must Know

By Marcelle Langan DiFalco and Jocelyn Greenky Herz; Fireside, 288 pages, \$14

The authors acknowledge the "gazillion success guides out there telling women how to manage their careers." But when they were starting out and needed

guidance, "you couldn't have paid us enough to wade through one of those," they say. "It was clear that the lofty advice didn't address us, the Lost and Clueless."

Years later, they whipped up their own straight-shooting, wisecracking version.

Think of it as *Work and the City*, or what Carrie Bradshaw might write if she had to schlep to an office every day instead of plugging in her laptop wherever she and her Manolos felt like sashaying.

One of the benefits of being a little sister is to see an older sibling make blunders and, presumably, avoid falling into the same pickle. The authors cop to a few of their own gaffes — Langan DiFalco thought she was too smart for some of her first jobs and told everyone, giving the impression of being a stuck-up, chronic complainer. Greenky Herz once thought she was doing her boss a favor by straightening his tie before a meeting and got a hand slap and a terse, "Please don't ever touch me," response. But many of their examples are supplied by women who have sought advice from them over the years, collectively referred to as "The Girls Who Call Us." Among anecdotes:

- Trixie claimed \$20 on her expense report for a lunch with Alice, a co-worker. The guy in accounting then asks Alice when she went to lunch with Trixie, to which Alice

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replied, "Um, never."

- Blanche tried to impress some officemates with intimate stories from her wild weekend. "Two days later, every single man in the office was either gawking at her or whispering, 'Can you really do that?' "

- Gail had a fight with her boss and promptly instant-messaged a friend to say what a jerk her boss was. Instead of sending the IM to her friend, she goofed and sent it to the boss himself.

But the book is more than stories of bad decisions and the naive women who made them. Each provocatively named chapter deals with some element of "how to succeed in business without ever crying" (one of the book's subtitles). The chapter dubbed "Harder a Little to the Left ... Now Up ... Ahhhhhh" deals with back scratching, or the art of doing favors for the right people to advance your own cause.

Langan DiFalco and Greenky Herz don't tell you what to wear or what hours to work, but they do stress the importance of blending into the organization's culture. Don't dress like a "New York City sexy mama" if everyone else is clad in conservative blazers, and don't waltz in at 10 a.m. if everyone else has already put in a few hours by then — even if you work late the night before.

Another chapter tackles networking, a term the authors find distasteful, especially when used as a verb. Better, the big sisters say, to consider it chatting — a nice, meaningless conversation that creates a sweet hum between two people. And humming, not the classified ads or job agencies, leads to dream jobs.

At two words, "Who to Trust?" may be the shortest chapter you'll ever read. Can you guess? "No one."

The Big Sisters also capably cover navigating office politics, interviewing, dealing with your own behaviors that might be unflattering, and handling your boss.

As annoying as it might be for a little sister to admit it, sometimes your big sister knows what she's talking about. In this case, pay attention.

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