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Beating Men at Their Own Game

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Beating men at their own game

By DOROTHY STORCK

LONDON — I don't know what Ann Hopkins will decide to do, now that a Washington federal judge has ordered the accounting firm of Price Waterhouse to give her the partnership she missed seven years ago due to "sexual stereotyping."

If I were she, I'd stand pat in my new job at the World Bank, collect the damage award of \$400,000, and gloriate a little.

But then, I'm not as brave as Ann Hopkins.

Reading about the case, which was finally resolved this month after years of bouncing around the highest courts in the land, what strikes me is not so much the fact that she won — in a remarkable judgment guaranteed to shake the all-boys boardrooms throughout the land — but the fact that she sued the company in the first place.

Hopkins was passed over for promotion to partner seven years ago, without explanation, despite her outstanding record. She assumed, she has said, that Price Waterhouse had made "an absolutely irrational decision." So she took them to court.

Only later, in testimony, did she learn that some of the existing partners disliked her personal deportment; her "macho manner."

One wrote in a management assessment that she would "benefit from a course at a charm school."

With a flash of understated humor, the brisk, bespectacled mother of three admits that she has "a presence." She does, she says, "tend to be noticed."

Ann Hopkins is not a feminist. But she shook up the old boys in the boardroom when she decided to fight for her rights.

In other words, she uses the time-honored male tools of success — controlled aggression, ability to make swift decisions and unrelenting pursuit of objective. She neither simpers nor does she whinge.

And I notice suddenly that when I describe Ann Hopkins I take care to include the fact that she is "mother of three."

Would I, in describing a male executive, add that he is "father of three"? Probably not. Certainly not as key to his credentials.

This is all part of it. It seems to me that a woman still must produce her womanhood credentials in the space provided for "other" in order to be accepted with even surface ease in the business world of men.

Hopkins, who is 46 and therefore of an age to have marched in the middle ranks of feminism, has said in interviews that she is not a feminist.

"I have never given a thought to the woman's movement. I just kind of missed it. I am not a pioneer."

All the more remarkable, then, that she chose seven years ago to

move against the might of Price Waterhouse.

I marvel at the confidence of this woman, unshored by the sisterhood as she seems to have been, but nonetheless sure of her own value. I think not many of us would have had the guts.

In my own field of journalism there was Gloria Steinem, of course, in her early feminist manifestation, turning her reporting assignment as a Playboy bunny into an expose of sexism.

There were the valiant women of the New York Times fighting a sex discrimination suit in the 1970s which they eventually won but which put many of them in a reporting purdah for evermore.

And there was Christine Craft, the TV newswoman, who fought in the courts against having her image plucked and pummeled into bimbohood for the sake of the ratings. Craft won her case and was awarded \$500,000. But a judge later overturned the verdict.

When I led a revolt in the '60s on my Chicago newspaper over the types of assignments women reporters were getting — balls, banquets and babies, always the politician's wife, never the politician himself — I was banished from all assignments for a punishment period. The word was that I, a former military officer, was "pushy" and probably a man-hater to boot. I'm sure the verdict around the water-cooler was that I would benefit from a course at a charm school.

The risks of rebellion in the workplace can be severe for anyone, but I have to think this is especially true for a woman. Despite recent gains (Price Waterhouse now has 27 women partners — out of 900), too often we are still allowed in on sufferance or forced quotas.

"The problems of stereotyping are still very great," Hopkins says now as she ponders whether to rejoin Price Waterhouse.

If she does go back, the judge in the case has warned the company executives not to retaliate for her action in suing the firm.

Well, we all know how that one goes. Nothing overt. Just the whispers, the nods and the winks. The permanent if invisible label of "troublemaker."

Hopkins says she is "not afraid of getting into a snake pit." Clearly not. This is a woman in 12-league boots.

Whatever she chooses to do, who who have been bitten in the past — we who find ourselves terminally wary of snakes — can do naught but salute her.

Dorothy Storck's column appears on Tuesdays.

WORTH REPEATING . . .

The importance and nonimportance of parenting

Every great villain, cowardly assassin, brutal rapist and heartless thief was somebody's child. Are their fathers and mothers to blame? Did they do something they shouldn't have, or fail to do what they should have at a formative moment? . . . There is ample evidence that consistently uncaring, cruel and exploitive parenting increases the likelihood of producing uncaring, cruel, exploitive adult children . . . But the correlation is hardly perfect and, as important as parenting is, we can't explain all outcomes in terms of the decisions and acts of mothers and fathers.

Many people of great character have emerged from classically poor childhood experiences and some rather despicable people have come out of theoretically model homes. . . . Still, there is no denying that what parents do and do not do is important. And while the results are not always predictable, thoughtful efforts to inculcate positive values and habits in our children increase the likelihood that they will adopt those values and carry them into adulthood. More importantly, we owe it to our kids and society to try.

— Michael Josephson, *Ethics: Easier Said Than Done* (Josephson Institute for the Advancement of Ethics), February 1990

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