

Book & Concept Review
Code Switching: How to Talk so Men Will Listen

By Dr. Nancy D. O'Reilly, Ph.D.
www.WomenSpeak.com

Men and women are different and we all know it. One of the most infuriating facts is our different styles of communicating with one another. The fact is we have different brains, so it stands to reason we have different ways of approaching the world and how we see things. It is also true many top minds have been trying to decode the differences. If we understood these differences, we would all be able to communicate more clearly and more effectively and wouldn't that be amazing. Think about the prospect: women and men actually understanding each other. This might mean there would be no more wars. Books, such as *War and Piece*, would no longer be required reading in English classes.

Okay, let's not go overboard. I think we are making headway, but it will take more books like *Code Switching: How to Talk so Men Will Listen*, written by Claire Damken Brown, Ph.D. and Audrey Nelson, Ph.D. This book helps explain that women are reared to be relationship experts and men are raised to build and be more concrete. Women are raised to nice and sweet and men are raised to rough and tough and competitive.

Doctors Brown and Nelson know the land in which they travel. Both have backgrounds working with Fortune 50 companies. They borrow the term, "code switching" from linguistics where it is utilized to describe what happens when you journey to a different country and adapt to its language and customs. They define "code switching" as "the ability to use your knowledge of two or more cultures or languages and switch between them, depending on your situation, to best communicate your message."

In business and often at home, there is sometimes no more different country for a woman than the realm of the male communication style. Basically, in the authors' terms, men are direct and goal oriented, while women are process or relationship oriented. In plain terms, the male model could be a solitary, noncommittal grunt or a brief yes or no with no explanation of why or wherefore or what next. The female, in contrast, wants the complete story with the beginning, middle and the end. The male is impatient with this method and begins to look with eyes glazed or just walks away or shuffles papers. The authors encourage flexibility in communication style, starting first with becoming aware of your style and that of the person you want to communicate with. Then they urge us to switch codes, when necessary, like we would in a foreign country. They do not label either style as good or bad, just as "different" and needing adjustments to correspond in effective ways. Most of their adjusting is directed toward women. As professional women themselves with backgrounds working in and with Fortune 50 companies, Drs. Brown and Nelson, describe ways that women can analyze and adjust

their communication. For example, men tend to speak in declarative sentences pitching the end of their sentences down, instead of up. Women, on the other hand, tend to soften declarations with a second sentence at the end, turning the declaration into a question. An example would be for a female manager to tell an employee that a report is due on Friday, then add, "Is that okay?" or just pitch the word "Friday" in a way as to ask by vocal pitch if that is okay.

Our styles are imbedded in us even before birth. The authors discuss how we talk to our babies while still in the womb if we know they are girls or boys. The expectations of society, our peers and our families all point us to certain behaviors and ways of communicating. Girls are groomed to be caretakers, negotiators and peacemakers. Boys are brought up to take control, provide and succeed. All of this is inherent in our communication styles. Women are cheerleaders, mommies and conciliators. Men are quarterbacks, bosses and responsible for the bottom line. When these expectations and roles mesh with the workplace, they become a cultural force that keeps women in positions of assistants to their male bosses.

Drs. Brown and Nelson point out that even though 45 percent of women occupy the workplace, the upper management and CEO force remains very small. Only 15.4 percent of corporate officers in Fortune 500 companies are women. To increase these numbers, the authors infer that corporations need to address, not just diversity among employees, but communication differences between men and women. Another perceptive observation in "Code Switching" is the role of touch between women and men. Women are more likely to touch and be touched than men. And touch is directly related to power in the relationship. The one who touches and is touched is perceived as the less powerful person. While many women use touch as a way to show acceptance and support, this positive gesture may be producing unexpected negative results. Women are also warned about giving inconsistent messages. Dr. Nelson gave an excellent example in an interview with Linda Rendelman on [Business Women Connect.com](#) earlier this month. She verbally gave a very serious message to a fellow employee, saying, "I'm very upset about this," while giggling in a high voice. The tone completely contradicted the meaning of the words. Men frequently complain about women's inability to be direct and communicate what they mean. On the other hand, if a woman is direct and confronts a situation head-on, she's also labeled, "bossy" or worse.

The point of *Code Switching* is to help women bridge the credibility gap caused by ineffective communication. Success in business and in life is directly related to our ability to communicate effectively. The book's 20 chapters analyze many nuances of communication between the genders to show both men and women how they can succeed by becoming self-aware. Then it encourages them to show respect to the other gender by "speaking their language" to get what they want.

If you are not being heard in your workplace and your ideas are falling on deaf ears, then this book is for you. Read ways to deal with issues in the workplace and create new

ways to speak and be heard. Most of all learn how to stake out what is yours, how to get what you want from your job and know where your career is heading. Read and it will set you free. To learn more, check out www.codeswitching.biz.

The Authors:

Claire Damken Brown, Ph.D., founder and president of Damken Brown and Associates, Inc., is a savvy diversity expert who specializes in gender communication, equal opportunity strategies, sexual harassment prevention and cultural competency. With 25 years experience in Fortune 50 companies, she has co-authored two books and works diligently as an advocate for working women and a champion of people achieving their goals in a safe, harassment-free and inclusive workplace. See www.DamkenBrown.com. Hear Dr. Nancy's interview with Claire at www.WomenSpeak.com.

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