

Ask the Good Girls

GOOD TO GREAT

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I'm a good girl and I know it. At work I do whatever I'm asked. How do I change?

Dear Reader,

Being a good, supportive, reliable employee and colleague is not a bad thing. My guess is that you are a team player that listens well, puts in above average effort and meets deadlines. Those attributes are all worth money. If you want others to value them, you've first got to value them in yourself.

The downside of being a "good girl" is that you might not be speaking up on your own behalf when you need something (fewer assignments, say, or more money), or when you disagree with some corporate decision. Wait for others to figure out what you need or to reward your good work and it will never happen; advocating for yourself is part of everyone's job description.

Sharing your observations, especially critical ones, will build your confidence over time. It is also useful to your employer. So long as you express yourself in a collegial and confident manner, you will be adding value to any discussion. I've yet to meet a good girl who didn't have many great ideas.

SLANDER SCARE DEAR GOOD GIRLS,

I was hired as a project engineer. I received two raises during my first six months on the job. The owner of the company had nothing but high praise for me, and often I received chocolates or flowers from customers.

At the end of six months, the owner hired a relative as the new office manager and among her duties were hiring and firing. I liked her very much. One day after I put in long hours and had recently worked weekends on inventory, she came to me in tears and said, "You are great at what you do, but I have to let you go." I asked her why but she had no answer.

I am so upset I can't put a close to this. I have to find a new job. I'm worried about what the owner will say if called for a reference. Can they legally slander me and keep me from another prospective job?

Dear Reader,

If called, chances are your former employer will limit what he says out of fear of a lawsuit for libel, slander or defamation.

Sticking to basic information - confirming your dates of employment and position - "is standard across many industries," says Chuck Krugel, a Chicago-based employment attorney with an informational blog, charlesakrugel.blogspot.com.

"Many employers want to say as little as possible." Unfortunately, since there is no harm in giving a glowing reference, not volunteering anything more than basic facts may be interpreted negatively. "Silence in itself sends a message that the employee wasn't good or was just average," Krugel says.

One way to head off a negative impression is to anticipate your former boss's tight-lipped approach by telling a prospective employer not to expect much. "Say, 'I know their policy is not to give out anything more than basic information,'" Krugel suggests.

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