In the mid-1980s, the term “glass ceiling” began to be used to describe what was happening to career women—they could see the next level of the company, but couldn’t get there. With the 1987 publication of the book, *Breaking the Glass Ceiling: Can Women Reach the Top of America’s Largest Corporations?*, the term became a permanent part of the discussion of women in business.¹ The book explains the glass ceiling as “not simply a barrier for an individual, based on the person’s inability to handle a higher-level job. Rather, the glass ceiling applies to women as a group who are kept from advancing higher because they are women.”²

Supposedly written to help women, the book told us that the key to our success was to stay within a “narrow band of acceptable behavior.” We were told that we, as the women of the moment, had to dispel the belief that women could not be leaders, while not forfeiting “all traces of femininity,” something we were told would make us “too alien” to our male bosses. The book included a graphic of two overlapping “hoops” of behavior types, with a very narrow “acceptable band” of behaviors that fall in both hoops. The hoops are labeled “masculine or like men” and “feminine or unique to women.”³ The authors hint at how difficult it would be to even know what behaviors fall in the overlapped band, much less to stay within them—they then proceed to state that doing so is the most important thing that women can do to be successful in business.
At the time, the authors of *Breaking the Glass Ceiling* admitted that leadership and femininity were considered contradictory behaviors. Nonetheless, in 1987 and to a great extent today, women are told to “take risks, but be consistently outstanding; be tough, but don’t be macho; be ambitious, but don’t expect equal treatment; and take responsibility, but follow others’ advice.”

This observation by Nancy was made while she was describing a woman who had been a vice president at Comp Sales, several years before Nancy herself reached the executive level:

*I think there was a time when part of what women needed to do—right, wrong, or otherwise—to grow the idea of women in the workplace was to sort of get rid of their woman-ness, you know. And there was a time when women had to dress more like men, they had to tough things out like men do... they had to do all these things like men did, so that they would kind of fly below the radar screen.*

This is an excellent depiction of the women of my own era, those of us who entered the workforce in the late seventies, when we were very often the only female in a meeting or on a management team. In addition to *Breaking the Glass Ceiling*, books like *The Woman’s Dress for Success Book* and *Games Mother Never Taught You: Corporate Gamesmanship for Women* came out around that time with advice on how we could assimilate as much as possible into a world that was created by and for men.

Other women gave these examples of their workplace atmospheres that valued what are considered masculine traits:

Patricia, speaking of Big Box: *The culture was similar to the military. It was very command and control. The top four people in operations, the vice presidents, were all similar, they were either really tall or had a booming voice.*

Joyce, speaking of Insight: *So my boss, somewhere along the line, chose as the mascot for our division a rhino, to use for awards. They give you a bronze rhino. It was all this “don’t tell me you have obstacles in your way. You are a rhino, you blast through it.” It was very macho, very male.*

When women try to assimilate to this leadership image, there is an ill-defined line they cannot cross. Being too much like the