

# Why we should bin "Career Tips for Women"

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## In Brief:

- The internet is full of well-intentioned "career tips for women."
- However, these tips often fall short because they treat gender as the root cause.
- A well-known psychological model sheds light on what is actually going on.

When a woman wants to climb the career ladder and thrive in a male-dominated field, she might seek advice from self-declared experts on the Internet or self-help books where people claim to know exactly how women can break the glass ceiling;

She should make herself more "visible," take on more responsibility. Use fewer soft phrases. Stop apologizing so much.

One female "expert" even claimed that a woman should display more status symbols such as a shiny new Rolex or drive to work in a flashy sports car. She definitely shouldn't play the "assistant" in everyday office life, but rather start delegating more.



However, this little “best of” list of overused career tips for women shouldn’t actually say “for women” as the real reason why people might not advance in their career can be explained by one particular personality trait rather than gender.

### Focusing on Personality

In psychology, there’s a well-established model called the Big Five personality traits. It’s been validated over the past 20 years in more than 3,000 studies.

The model describes five traits that every person possesses to some measurable degree. These traits are considered stable and consistent across cultures. You could think of the Big Five as “the colors of being human.”

#### Here they are:

1. Openness to experience
2. Conscientiousness
3. Extraversion
4. Agreeableness
5. Neuroticism (or emotional in-/stability)

A handy acronym for the model is **OCEAN**.

The one trait that most “career tips for women” are evidently targeting to change is **Agreeableness**.

### The Trait of Agreeableness

People who score high on agreeableness tend to show more empathy, compassion, and understanding across situations.

They’re quicker to trust others, more helpful, and often assume the world will treat them kindly in return.

A typical scenario where agreeableness is visible as a personality trait is during salary negotiations or when asked about nice-to-have French language skills during an interview. When the latter takes place, a “disagreeable” person, typically male, might say “yes, I speak French fluently, I had it at school” whereas a more “agreeable” person, often female, will say “I hardly speak French, we only had it at school”.

Indeed it is well-documented that on average, women do score higher in agreeableness than men.

However, it would be a mistake to stereotype this trait based on gender as there are plenty of agreeable men and plenty of disagreeable women out there.

### **Is Agreeableness a Career Killer?**

It is clear that people of all genders who score high in Agreeableness, who can be described as overly agreeable, can be more easily taken advantage of.

They get overlooked more often and they are quicker to give in. In some cases, colleagues can even take credit for the work of their more agreeable counterparts because the latter won't speak up to keep the peace.

So metaphorically speaking, overly agreeable individuals simply don't make much of a splash in the shark tank of the career world. They're easy prey. Like a peacemaker stepping into a boxing ring.

### **When Agreeableness Holds You Back**

Sound familiar? Is your over-agreeableness slowing down your career?

Then it might be time to start developing an awareness of your overly agreeable traits and look into why you feel like you can't speak up at times and why you can't be more assertive/confident at work. Creating a sense of when being too agreeable might do more harm than good, might well be the first step towards boosting your career.

But let us not forget: a healthy score on Agreeableness also has many upsides. Perhaps your warm, empathetic personality is exactly the reason why people enjoy working with you - and why you've already had great success in your career.

### **About the Author**

Lucas Zehnder has been placing and coaching professionals and executives at all levels since 2012, gaining insight into the job market's inner workings. He studied social psychology in Zurich (MSc University of Zurich, 2011) and has been a Senior Consultant since August 2020 and a Partner since February 2024 at Rockstar Recruiting, a DeepTech recruiting agency in Switzerland.

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