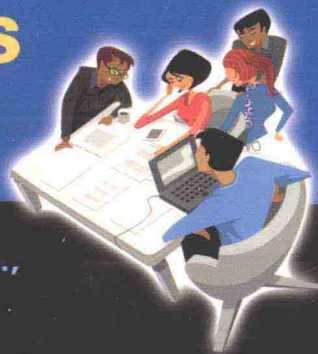


Includes proven strategies
you can use to come out
ahead in any conflict

THE Office SURVIVAL Guide

Surefire Techniques
for Dealing with
Challenging People
and Situations



Marilyn Puder-York, Ph.D.,
with Andrea Thompson

The Office Survival Guide

**Surefire Techniques for Dealing with
Challenging People and Situations**

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with
Andrea Thompson**

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PRAISE FOR *THE OFFICE SURVIVAL GUIDE*

“Street smarts and corporate savvy in one professional. A rare find.”

—Walter B. Wriston, late Chairman and CEO, Citicorp

“Every employee wants to know what are the secrets to getting ahead. Marilyn Puder-York nails it with practical, how-to tips, ideas and solutions. This should be a MUST read whether you are 26 or 46.”

—Cathleen Black, President of Hearst Magazines

“I found this book to be right on target. Marilyn Puder-York understands the complex problems that employees face in difficult work situations. Everyone working in an organization should read this book.”

—Arun Sinha, Chief Marketing Officer, Pitney Bowes

“Marilyn Puder-York has made an extremely positive impact on our ability to retain talented people in our organization. Her book extends her considerable talents to a broader audience and will no doubt help retain talent in many organizations.”

—Douglas Stern, President/CEO, United Media

“At last! Marilyn Puder-York has put her wisdom in writing. With *The Office Survival Guide*, you will gain the crucial insights and advice you need to manage yourself and others. Marilyn has worked with the Five O’Clock Club clients for years and has always received rave reviews for her crisp understanding and personable advice. What can be more important to your career success than learning how to manage your boss, peers and subordinates? Marilyn shows you how.”

—Kate Wendleton, President, The Five O’Clock Club

“Marilyn Puder-York shares her 30 years of experience as a psychologist and executive coach in a wonderfully readable and applicable approach to surviving in the modern office. Whether you’re the boss, middle management, or the newest assistant, you’ll benefit from her wisdom and understanding of how to manage the trickiest workplace situations.”

—Dorothy W. Cantor, Psy.D., former president, American Psychological Association, and author of *What Do You Want To Do When You Grow Up?*

“This book is like Dr. Marilyn Puder-York herself—warm, wise, down-to-earth, practical and eminently useful. She cuts through psychological jargon to lead leaders through their pasts to a more powerful grasp of the present they operate in. Anyone who aspires to be an effective leader can benefit from the tools she provides.”

—Amanda Bennett, Executive Vice President
and Editor, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*,
and Pulitzer Prize winning editor and author

“Marilyn Puder-York is at ease with her subject. This thoughtful, easy-to-read book will help so many people cope more effectively with tough work situations. I recommend it highly!”

—Marc Porter, President, Christie’s Americas

“This book is awesome and a gem! It is smart reading for all levels of employees in any organization.”

—J. Charles Cardona, Vice Chairman, Dreyfus Corporation

“A real find!! Sound and powerful advice for surviving office difficulties. Required reading for employees everywhere.”

—Maggie Gagliardi, Senior Vice President,
Human Resources, American Express Company

“In her eminently readable book, Marilyn Puder-York captures the wisdom she imparts to her corporate clients every day. Her sound and practical advice is right on and very useful in today’s business environment.”

—Tom Bernardin, CEO, Leo Burnett Worldwide, Inc.

“I believe it is critically important for all parties (employees and bosses) in today’s pressured business environment to feel that they share responsibility for creating a constructive, healthy workplace and to have the tools to manage themselves and others around them. This is a ‘must read’ for anyone who shares this perspective; and it is especially critical for HR practitioners who must deal with these issues personally, plus have the responsibility for coaching everyone involved.”

—Jean M. Broom, Senior Vice President, ITOCHU
International, Inc., Board Member of the HR Planning Society,
and Co-President of the NY HR Planning Society

“*The Office Survival Guide* provides a unique menu of solutions to understand as well as navigate the challenges of difficult people and situations at work.”

—Phebe Farrow Port, Vice President, Corporate Management Strategies, The Estée Lauder Companies

“Marilyn Puder-York skillfully tackles the complicated topics by presenting the psychological aspects of individual behavior and the political aspects of the work environment in a manner that is understandable and useable. Read this book and you will function more powerfully!”

—Marie C. Wilson, President, The White House Project/Women’s Leadership Fund and author, *Closing the Leadership Gap*

To the two loves of my life—my husband, Christopher C. York, and my daughter, Sarah Jaclyn York.

To the memories of two great business leaders who possessed character and humanity—the late Walter B. Wriston and the late William I. Spencer. Together, they fostered a corporate environment in which the talented not only survived, but flourished.

Preface

The Office Survival Guide is going to show you how to get along a lot better with just about anybody in your organization. It is going to outline ways you can handle the most unpleasant, worrisome, crazy-making job situations you're likely to face—what I call the top 10 trickiest workplace events—and come out with your sanity and integrity intact, not to mention your job. We will be talking about triggers and “blind spots,” which are the personal, highly individual reactions in the office that can all too easily *stop* you from getting along better with anybody and dealing successfully with those tough situations.

We all have them, blind spots. Let me tell you a little about my background, my experience, and how I came to write this book. It has something to do with my own blind spots.

As a Ph.D. clinical psychologist, I migrated from the beginning of my career in mental health services to the world of business. For close to 30 years, most recently as an executive coach hired by some of the top Fortune 500 companies, I have helped hard-working, talented individuals deal with their internal issues and their reactions to work, and find the best accommodation between the two.

Before opening my own practice, I applied my skills working in city government, in the nonprofit sector, on Wall Street as a private practitioner counseling executives, and for 10 years as corporate vice president and head of the internal employee assistance program in a Fortune 100 financial company. During my tenure at that company, our in-house efforts expanded to provide not only support with health and mental health issues, including drug and alcohol counseling, but stress management, family/worklife balance counseling,

preretirement preparation, and executive coaching. I supervised a staff; we consulted with more than 1,000 people a year.

As a corporate employee, I observed how individual behavior is shaped by the impact of an organization on personal dynamics. I saw men and women doing themselves real damage by reacting unwisely or inappropriately to one or another workplace event. I came to understand this intimately, not abstractly. In fact, the process that I lead my clients through today, and that I am going to present to you in the following chapters, developed in large part from the insight I gained—painfully at the time—into my own blind spots. A bit of personal history:

My family background included growing up as an only child with a widowed mother who needed (and wanted) a great deal of emotional and practical support from me—I was assigned the role of “rescuing” her in a very real sense. So, early on, I came to believe that adults often required my help. Several teachers along the way, in addition, tended to confide in me about school issues and seek my advice, adding to my perception that authority figures turned to me at critical junctures. This, then, was the dynamic I brought into corporate life heading up a large employee assistance program. My self-esteem was closely attached to my ability to solve problems and rescue people in adverse situations.

There came a day when I was informed that, for budgetary and other reasons, I had to abolish my department. This was a business decision, wise or not, that obviously my superiors had the power to make. They were not asking me to behave unethically; they were saying, dismantle what you developed because it no longer fits corporate plans. I didn’t see things that way. Here’s what I saw instead: These awful people are taking away my role as a rescuer and are destroying my “family;” I will fight them! This was my blind spot. My response was one of anger; I rebelled; I jumped into action, arguing all the reasons I believed they were making a huge mistake. To a large degree, my unwise responses made it necessary for me to leave the company.

By reacting emotionally to a business decision that I didn't agree with, I did myself damage. Had I been able to control my emotions, appreciate the fact that I was dealing not with a mother or father or family but with a corporation, a political entity, I almost surely would have been able to negotiate a happier outcome to a tricky situation.

But here is the positive fallout: My painful experience turned out to be a powerful turning point, one that taught me crucial lessons. I might even say that as a professional, it was the best thing to happen to me. If I had had the kind of support system that *The Office Survival Guide* will offer you, I would not have allowed my blind spots to cloud my judgment and shape my actions.

An added personal note: On September 11, 2001, I was the resident of a building directly across the street from the World Trade Center and witnessed the events of that day firsthand. To a very large degree, that experience served as a catalyst and an impetus to my writing this book. I felt newly motivated to act on the suggestions I had been hearing from many of my colleagues and clients over the years, to share some of my insight and wisdom with more people and in a broader way. I found myself rising to the level of making a commitment to write, because I believed many people need help and support, especially during an extended era of increased anxiety.

A word about what *The Office Survival Guide* is not and won't do:

A number of factors can have an impact on how people respond to situations in day-to-day office life, including an individual's gender, race, culture, and socialization. Many academic studies have explored those factors, but I am not addressing such issues here. This isn't intended to be a research-based survey of organizational development or a textbook on clinical psychology in the workplace. It is a practical, straightforward, anecdotal guide to managing mental well-being and tough job situations. The strategies and understanding that I'm trying to communicate come from, yes, my training as a psychologist, but

more importantly, from my streetwise experience talking and listening to hundreds of employees over many years.

That experience has taught me, frankly, that the real behaviors of real people on the job don't always match what the studies sometimes suggest. For example, I have found that often women react the way men are "supposed to" react, and vice versa. What I'm presenting here are general rules that I believe apply to every person, regardless of gender and cultural differences. They derive from my observations as I have helped individuals survive and thrive in their jobs, sometimes under enormous stress.

Although my suggestions are generic and applicable to anyone, they are pointed primarily toward those who work in organizations that employ more than five people and are somewhat hierarchal in nature—that is, an office environment that includes bosses, peers or coworkers, and subordinates. An entrepreneur, a consultant, or an individual contributor who's selling her expertise to multiple corporations might not find as much direct support or relevance.

I talk about the "top 10" trickiest workplace situations. In my experience, these are the dilemmas that pop up again and again. Other than loss of a job, they turn out to be the most significant and to trigger the most intense emotional reactions from the most people. However, my top 10 doesn't necessarily constitute an exhaustive list, and you might have other "bad day in the office" experiences to relate. It's an unlimited world of stressful situations out there! Even so, you'll find here a useful process to begin thinking about how to resolve your particular office difficulty, whatever it might be.

In the chapters that follow, I refer to John and Joe, Michelle and Amy, and others. They are composites I have constructed to give a voice and a face to the dynamics I am describing. In the course of coaching hundreds of individuals and hearing their stories about on-the-job problems, common themes have emerged and those have determined the shape of this book. However, names and specific details

in the scenarios I present do not correspond to real individuals with whom I've worked.

In my consulting practice, my job as an executive coach has been to mediate between two worlds: the external world of work and the inner world of my clients. I am there to help them respond to a unique environment in the most adaptive ways they can—accurately, ethically, and with full self-awareness. In *The Office Survival Guide*, I hope to do the same for you.

Acknowledgments

I want to thank Patricia Kitchen, the *Newsday* journalist, who very early on in my career understood and appreciated my two-step approach to helping people solve work problems. She encouraged me to write about my ideas. Until I met Lynn Goldberg one month after September 11, 2001, I had resisted Patricia's and my clients' urgings that I write a book. Lynn's encouragement, coming at such a crucial time, finally triggered the spark to initiate writing a book about my work. Thank you, Lynn.

It was only when I met my dedicated and talented cowriter Andrea Thompson that my raw book outline took professional form. Collaborating with Andrea on my book has been a complete joy. Our agent, the enthusiastic Stedman Mays, shepherded the proposal and successfully found our editor Donya Dickerson at McGraw-Hill. She has been consistently accessible for ongoing help throughout the process. I would also like to thank Keith Fox and his expert team of professionals at McGraw-Hill for their interest and support.

While working on the book, I had the support of advisors, colleagues, friends, and family. I especially want to thank Barbara Kater-sky and Carol Zacharias. Both took time out of their busy schedules to fact check certain sections of the book. For their ongoing support, I also want to thank Lauren Ashwell, Karen Banoff, Jean Broom, Irene Cohen, Kathy D'Amato, Katina Demetra, Janice Reals Ellig, Kim Eves, Leslie Freeman, Carol Glickman, Barri Hammer, Linda Kane, Ann McMahan, Wilfred Sessoms, and Heidi Steiger.

I want to acknowledge Kathy Wriston and Susan Spencer for

carrying forward the legacy of good business practices established by their husbands at Citicorp/Citibank.

Thank you, my Battery Park City (New York) and Old Greenwich (Connecticut) network of working moms who offered sanity checks during times of work/life balance challenges. I want to thank the staff at Gould, McCoy, Chadick, Ellig for consistently being supportive.

I also thank my husband and daughter. They are my safety net and the place I go for unconditional love. My husband has always been my personal mentor and greatest cheerleader, and my daughter is my greatest inspiration and joy. I thank my stepchildren, Susan and Langley Gace and Craig and Mikako York, for designating to me the role of Bubby to their children, a great privilege that I hold dear.

I thank all the Human Resource professionals, senior executives, and mental health professionals I have collaborated with through my career. Finally, I thank all the individual and corporate clients I have coached through my many years of practice. Much of the book has been based on their sharing of experiences. I thank them for sharpening my skills and expanding my knowledge and humanity.

Love to you all.

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1

About Tigers and Alley Cats

WORKPLACE TRIGGERS AND HOW TO NAME YOURS

Today's office is all too often not a cozy place. We work in fast-moving, highly politicized companies, where the most Machiavelian employee rather than the most talented just might get the promotion. We're forced to co-exist with others behaving badly (a threatening or impossible boss, an incompetent assistant, a super-competitive coworker). We need to adapt, and ever more quickly, to shakeups and changes.

Chances are, sooner or later you will come up against one or another of these nasty situations, if you're not in the middle of one already. When it happens, most people experience a degree of what I call reactive anxiety—a perfectly normal feeling of stress in response to an abnormal though common event. Some have a harder time than others, mainly because of ancient, highly personal vulnerabilities. For them, tricky situations can turn the workplace toxic.

Here's the good news. You can, absolutely, learn to weather