



# CHAPTER 1

FROM THE KITCHEN TO THE CORNER OFFICE

## MOMMY MANAGEMENT TRAINING

**S**urviving the “Mommy Management Training Program” is not for the faint of heart. It is a training program that expects its manager to deliver immediately. It’s the kind of program that doesn’t give you a lot of time to learn how; it forces you to learn on the job...while trying not to screw it up too badly.

Since I have never actually seen them written down, I thought I would provide you with the “Mommy Management Training Program” rules. As I have come to know them, they are:

1. No sick days
2. No holidays
3. On-call 24/7
4. No training manual
5. Here’s the baby...good luck!

The lessons that have come from my stint in the “Mommy Management Training Program” have helped to position me for success as the CEO of a management consulting firm, and I believe those skills translate into insights for success in many different kinds of jobs.

As women, we have been leading groups of people for years. Some of the most dynamic leaders I’ve been exposed to have come from unlikely sources. They are women who, if you ask them, “Are you a leader?” might not know what you’re talking about. These women have limited work experience outside the home but the greatest work ethic I’ve ever observed. They are the greatest managers, negotiators and salespeople I’ve ever met. We all know these women. They are our mothers, our sisters, our grandmothers, our mothers-in-law and even our daughters. They are dynamic leaders because motherhood and the nurturing of families is truly the greatest management training program any woman could experience.

Now, actually being a mom is helpful but not required. Having a mother or a mother-figure play a prominent role in your life

gives you the working model off of which to jump to have a successful career. Think about the skills demonstrated over the years as women successfully groomed their *home teams*: their children, spouse, in-laws, parents, and siblings. Those same skills guarantee success in the workplace, too.

Years ago, it was common for the matriarch to not only manage her immediate family but also her extended family as well. Times may have changed since then and the “nuclear” family has shrunk in size, but the lessons from those old-fashioned kitchens remain relevant in modern culture — especially in the workplace. Today’s woman needs to draw on the wisdom of the dynamic “kitchen” leaders of the past in order to find success now and in the future, and this is the book that will guide them to that success through its stories and exercises.



### *Lipstick Leadership*

*“[There is] one thing that stands out in my mind that Mom used to say to us years ago (and still would today given the chance...I find myself using this and passing it on to my kids all the time, too!). You know how you wake up on a cold winter day with a sore throat from the heat and a stuffy nose and just basically feeling rotten? Mom used to always say: “Get up and get moving and you’ll feel fine.” I would never believe it at*

*that moment because I was sure I was dying from the flu, but sure enough, I'd get up, get in the shower and by the time I'm driving to work, I feel mostly fine.*

*Thanks to Mom's advice, I've made it to work more days than not and now I say it to my kids all the time. I sometimes wonder if Mom hadn't said that to me so many years ago on such a regular basis, if as a working person today, would I just give in to my sore throat, call in sick and go back to sleep? My employer should call my mom and thank her! I have a few employees I'd like to give Mom's number to, too!!"*

~ Kathryn Gaddis, Recreation Superintendent,  
Ocean City Park and Recreation

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## GRAB A CUP OF COFFEE

When I think of my mother Mimi's kitchen, I remember a playful but productive atmosphere where everyone had a job to do. During the holiday preparations, you would enter the kitchen and find a cloud of flour dust hovering in the air, mixing with the sounds of chatter and laughter and the most amazing smells. The aroma of the kitchen was a strange yet tantalizing blend of apple

pie, chicken soup, tomato sauce and cooking meat — staples in our holiday meals. Looking over at the counter, you would see my sisters making salad and appetizers, cookies and mashed potatoes. And you would find me making the wonderful bread my Aunt Jennie was famous for. On the floor level, you would notice our helpers, the grandchildren, each with a special project of their own — usually a scaled down version of whatever their mom was working on. Being in the kitchen, we were always surrounded by a communal atmosphere full of banter as we put final touches on the meal for our families to enjoy.

My mother's talent for engaging "help" in the kitchen was not limited to just my family. I remember one afternoon when I was in high school. I had just finished my after-school practice for the varsity tennis team and walked into my mother's kitchen to find six of my best guy friends getting a lesson in making homemade pizza from my mother. My mother attracts people of all ages to her and to her table. When she sends a dinner invitation, there's never a "Sorry, I can't make it," reply because everyone knows they would be missing out on something very special.

So today I'm happy to invite YOU into my mother's kitchen to listen to the stories and lessons I've learned from my mother and from the many women sitting at her kitchen table. Welcome! Each amazing woman in my family and in my life has given me different tools to use at work, and each of the chapters in this book is dedicated to those lessons. I'm excited for you to meet:

- ◆ My mother Mimi, the expert in bringing a team together and motivating them;

- ◆ My Aunt Marie, an authority on organization and communication;
- ◆ My grandmother Mops, a role model for building confidence and timing;
- ◆ My sister-in-law Pat, a master at influencing from within an organization;
- ◆ My mother-in-law Marty, a pro at creating order from chaos;
- ◆ My Great Aunt Jennie, the most incredible mentor I've ever known;
- ◆ My children and husband, the surprising teachers who've helped in preparing me to be the CEO of the Cove Group, through my experience as a mother and wife.

By tapping into the wisdom of my mother and the female role models in my life on communication, creativity, rewarding exceptional behavior and leading teams, I have had a tremendous influence in the workplace. I've moved myself into positions of power and leadership.

It's an exhilarating time to be a woman and to be in a management role. Gone are the days where we have to act like a man in order to be successful in the workplace — and that's exciting to me! Now we can share our feminine perspective and be the leaders the world needs!

But from where do we draw the strength necessary to become powerful leaders? For me, the journey to discover that strength began with an unconventional final exam and the voices of my mother, aunts and grandmother whispering in my head.



## *Lipstick Leadership*

*“My mother ingrained in me the importance of a prompt, nicely-written thank you note. This habit, while simple, has served me well in business—mainly because so many people neglect to express their gratitude for things.”*

~ Rochelle Kopp, Managing Principal, Japan  
Intercultural Consulting

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## **JUMPING OFF THE BUILDING**

When I was in college I had a defining moment, a moment in time when I was able to see not only who I was, but who I could become — a leader — if I was brave enough to conquer my fears.

I was a business major, and as a freshman, I had a statistics class that met at 8:30 in the morning. I had a difficult time

getting to class because the freedom of college and the variety of options for activities at night kept me out late and made it a struggle to get up in the morning for class. After a few weeks of sleeping through my alarm and missing class, I turned to my skill as an analytical problem solver to remedy the situation. I knew I needed to do something before I ended up failing the class. You know, classes cost big money whether you pass or fail!

So I dropped the statistics class, and I picked up a class in leadership that, as luck would have it, was only a ten-week course that started three weeks after the semester began. Looking at the description, I thought I would be studying different leaders and leadership styles and maybe take a few tests and write a paper or two that drew conclusions about what made them strong. I could do that! And it met at 10:00 a.m. which was perfect! I knew I was making the right choice...what I didn't know was the class department letters **ROTC** meant **Reserve Officer Training Corp.!**

On the first day of class, I was bewildered to find that instead of meeting inside a regular building, the class convened in an unusual looking structure behind the buildings. A ROTC hut is what I quickly learned it was called. As I took my place at one of the tables, I noticed all of my classmates were boys, most of whom I'd never even seen before. I was a popular girl and had made friends with all sorts of people — where had these guys been hiding, I wondered.

When the instructor made his way to the front of the hut, that's when I *really* got nervous. He was dressed in a full military uniform! He introduced himself in a stern booming voice and demanded we call him "Captain." When he explained this was a Reserve Officer Training Corp. class, my stomach dropped into my shoes.

“This class is going to turn you boys into men,” Captain barked, obviously failing to notice the blond girl in the baby blue sweater seated before him. “We’re going to learn about leadership the military way. And don’t bother with fancy clothes for this class, just comfortable shoes and something you won’t mind getting muddy.”

*Boys into men...the military way...MUDDY?!*

What in the world had I gotten myself into?

After class I raced back to my room to review my options. Unfortunately, the final date to drop classes and still receive a refund had just passed. If I tried to drop the class now, not only would I lose money, I would be short on credits for the semester, and I couldn’t afford either. So whether I liked it or not, I was stuck with the Captain and military training once a week for an entire semester.

I showed up at the next class still hopeful: “Maybe it won’t be so bad...” I thought. At 10 a.m. sharp — or 0:10:00 hundred hours — the Captain strolled into the ROTC hut, wasted no time on pleasantries, and ordered us to follow him outside. He led us to the wooded area at the end of campus and simply said, “Five mile run. Ready...GO!” and we took off, sprinting through the mud. Even though I was in good shape, soon I was gulping down air like it was going out of style, but I refused to slow down and show my all-male classmates I couldn’t compete with them.

The following weeks of class were just as grueling as I feared they’d be, but I held my own and pushed past the pain and fear. We ran those five miles often, and when we weren’t running, there were plenty of other ways the Captain — or “Captain Evil” as I secretly referred to him — could torture us.

He took us to the rifle range where we learned to shoot guns. I would stand there holding one, swaying back and forth — they were so heavy a gust of wind could've knocked me over. I called on all of my strength to hoist the gun up to eye level, and just before I pulled the trigger, I'd have to squeeze my eyes shut and turn my head away! The recoil nearly knocked me on my rear more than once and always left me with a sore shoulder. I thought I just wasn't cut out for gunplay until Captain taught us about supine shooting: lying on your stomach with the gun propped on the ground. I was great at **that!** In fact, I was the best in my class!

Captain also took us to the obstacle course many times. He proved he wasn't entirely evil when he didn't make us complete it on our introduction to it. Instead, he divided the course among a few classes. Each class we would tackle another aspect of it: running through tires, swinging on a rope over a mud pit, and climbing up a fifteen foot wall. After we'd gone through each piece separately, the following class he made us go through the entire thing and timed us — and this was after our five mile run!

A few classes into the semester, I began wondering about my grade. How can you really assign a letter grade to running or shooting? Every class I would ask him: "How are we going to get graded?" He flashed his evil grin — the same one I'd seen before he ordered us to run and climb and swing — and said, "Wait until the final. The final will determine your grade."

When I arrived at the ROTC hut on the day of the final, there was a note on the door. "Cadets: Report to the top floor of the Science Building for your final exam." Finally! We would be sitting in a real classroom and taking a real test. I exhaled in

relief. I knew I could ace an essay or two describing this very unique educational experience that was ROTC Leadership 101!

I headed over to the Science Building and climbed the stairs to the very top. I opened the door and...felt a warm breeze. I was on the roof! Surely I made a mistake, I thought, and then I saw the rest of my class and Captain. In his hands were ropes and harnesses, and he explained our final exam was jumping off the building!!!

“You have two options,” he roared. “Jump off the building and rappel down the side, and you get an A for the class. Don’t jump off the building, and you FAIL. Any questions? No. Good. Who’s up first?” The boys eagerly lined up, and they were excited and laughing. I stood there weighing my options. It would certainly seem like an easy decision: jump and get an A or don’t and get an F and have wasted an entire semester playing with guns and guys. However, I am afraid of heights; severely afraid of heights...sometime even high heels freak me out! How could I jump off a ten story building??

I decided there must be some other way. As the boys jumped off the side of the building, I approached the Captain. I put on my most miserable face and said, “Captain? I don’t think I can jump because I’m very afraid of heights. What if I wrote an essay instead?” He stared me down and yelled, “I told you, cadet, you have only two options and writing an essay isn’t one of them! Now get over there and *jump off this building!*”

After trying unsuccessfully to reason with him, I have to confess I pulled out every shameful girl trick I could think of to get out of jumping. First I tried crying. Most men can’t resist a crying woman, but Captain was unmoved. He screamed at me again, “Get over there and jump off this building, cadet!!” I tried

begging next, "Please, Captain. I'm so scared, and I just can't do it. Please don't make me, please!" His loud response was the same.

As the last boy jumped off the side, I tried playing the sick card. "I swear, Captain, if I have to stand on that ledge and jump, I'm going to faint...or-or I'll be sick! I'll be sick all over the place!" He shouted at me again and said, "It won't bother me if you get sick, cadet! The only people it'll bother are those boys down there are on the ground waiting for you to *jump off this building!*" I stole a glance at the door, wondering if I could possibly outrun him and speed down the stairs to the ground. He caught my look and yelled, "You can't outrun me, cadet, so don't even think about it!"

### **MAMA SAID!**

Finally, he and I were alone on the roof, him bellowing at me and me crying and pleading. I was out of options and just stood there helplessly. Then the Captain stopped in mid-scream. He looked at me with a thoughtful expression on his face, and to my surprise, he suddenly crouched down to my level and spoke to me a calm, gentle voice. "You can do this, cadet. I know you can do this. I believe in you. I've watched you hold your own against these boys. I know you can do this. You can push past this fear because you're strong."

When he finished speaking and we stood there in the quiet, his voice echoing in my brain, I started to hear other voices from my past.

My mother's voice: *Make it a game, Shelly. Pretend it's an adventure. You can do this!*

My Great Aunt Jennie's broken English: *Michelina, you already have everything you need inside to do this!*

My grandmother Mops' stern voice: *Bring your A-game. A woman can do this — look at all I've accomplished!*

And finally my Aunt Marie: *You know when to lead and how to follow. Follow the Captain, and he'll lead you to yourself.*

I looked into Captain Evil's not-so-evil eyes and saw he believed I could get past my fear; he believed in me. In the end, Captain Evil was Captain Empowerment! I took the harness and rope from his hands, hooked myself in, and stepped up onto the edge of the roof. I let my heels hang over the side, and when I looked down, I felt a flutter of nausea and the more powerful feeling of *I can do this*. The boys at the bottom looked up at me and started yelling out encouragement. I took a deep breath and *jumped off the building!*

To an onlooker it must've been quite a sight: a blond girl wearing hot pink corduroy pants hanging down the side of a building! I rappelled quickly, keeping my eyes on the wall in front of me and trying to follow the old adage: "Don't look down!" And then I felt my feet touch the solid ground. I unhooked myself and stood there, a little wobbly but amazed at what I had done. The feeling I had as I looked back up at the building was a feeling of power that has since been unmatched. I knew at that moment I could do anything. I knew whatever life would throw at me, I would have the strength to do what ever I needed to do to be successful. Pretty incredible that just jumping off that building could give me a moment of such clarity about who I am!

By being able to overcome my fear, I started to know I could trust myself. I had that defining moment in time where I got to

see everything I could be later on in my life; it was a picture drawn by the women who believed in me, triggered by a passionate instructor, and executed by the woman I was becoming.

I've drawn upon that experience repeatedly over the past twenty-seven years with knowledge that I have the tools to overcome fear. So when I'm afraid of the interview, the relationship, the new job, or the new client, I remember, *I jumped off a building.*



### *Lipstick Leadership*

*"My grandmother taught me that a woman can be powerful by her very presence, even when she's embroidering flowered tablecloths. Although my grandmother didn't have a corner office, she had her corner of the living room from which she exuded as much power as a top CEO!"*

~ Carole Lieberman, M.D., Beverly Hills psychiatrist/  
author/talk show host

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That knowledge helped me overcome a violent physical attack I survived because I was able to manage my fear. It helped me overcome the loss of my best friend in a plane crash. It helped me overcome major illness. It helped me overcome failing at certain aspects of my business early on. And it helps guide me on a daily basis as CEO of The Cove Group, Inc.

The ability to know you can get past the failures and you can get past the fear gives you a level of comfort in taking risks in your life you might not have taken. It has kept me from becoming complacent. The main reason I was able to jump off of that building is because of the lessons my mother, my grandmother, and my aunts taught me. I'm excited to share those lessons with you, but I'm more excited to get you thinking about the stories from your life. You may not have realized the women in your life who taught you valuable lessons can give you what you need to advance your career today!

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