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# *Hey you!*

**W**e often think we will be successful if we do everything perfectly. If we do what our parents did, what we learned at school or what we are asked to do. If we do everything according to the 'rules'.

We constantly adapt our behaviour, consciously and unconsciously, to suit our surroundings. We consider a particular home environment ideal because we grew up in that environment. We adapt to fit the culture at a company so that we will earn the appreciation of our colleagues. We copy the behaviour of people who have been successful in the hope of being just as successful ourselves. We follow their rules.

But these rules, both written and unwritten, were made in a different era. We are lucky we live in a fast-changing world, one that is becoming more diverse and inclusive. A world that looks a lot different from the one our parents and grandparents were born into.

This new world calls for new rules. Rules that no longer work for only one half of the population. That leave room for the individual and embrace diversity instead of rejecting it. These rules haven't been made yet, so it's up to you to make them. And that presents an enormous opportunity! One we will be glad to help you with.

The title of this book was inspired by an interview with the singer and entertainer Jennifer Lopez in Rolling Stone in 2022. The article was titled 'How Jennifer Lopez broke all the rules to get to the top'. And Jennifer Lopez wasn't the only one. The most successful managers and

leaders in the world owe much of their success to breaking the rules, not following them. Silicon Valley was built on disruption and non-conformism.

Here's another example from the music industry in which Nancy enjoyed a long career and from which she still draws inspiration: in 2017, Rihanna demonstrated that she was smarter than most CEOs by earning one hundred million dollars in only forty days through the launch of an inclusive make-up line for every skin colour. She managed to harness the power of diversity by making a lot of women very happy. Inclusion instead of exclusion.

It takes courage to break the rules. The courage to take a step forward and offer your opinion. Or to question the opinions of others. To change the culture at your company. Or to switch companies when the culture doesn't fit you. To do things you have never done before. Or things no woman has ever done before you.

You don't do these things just for yourself but also for everyone who will come after you. In 2022, Nancy's company, BrandedU, and the organisations WOMEN Inc. and The Family were responsible for the social media campaign My Name is Peter, which drew attention to the fact that there were more CEOs in the Netherlands called Peter than there were female CEOs of companies listed on the stock exchange. In 2024, only 4% of all Dutch CEOs were women, despite the gender quota that was introduced on 1 January 2022. It's high time we started breaking some rules!

Making new rules requires knowledge. Knowledge about who you are and what you want. And what you don't want. You will need to set new boundaries for yourself and ensure that no one crosses them. To know your strengths and not be afraid to show them. To display your insecurities and ask for help when you need it. You can't break the rules on your own but you can take the first step.

It isn't easy to break old rules. After all, we all have a desire to belong. In this book we help you, as a future leader, to make yourself seen and heard. We show you how to make your own rules and shape your career in your own unique manner. We give you the self-confidence you need to step into the limelight.

We won't be doing this alone but together with a collection of

women at the top who have contributed to this book. Women with different backgrounds and nationalities. Each one with their own story and the willingness to show that there are many ways of reaching the top. These women are giving you the opportunity to stand on their shoulders.

*Believe in yourself,  
Ingrid & Nancy*



*Part 1*

*How to get there*





## *Rule 1*

# *Women are too emotional*

**H**elen Hüpscher-Bakker is a KLM captain who flies a Boeing 737. To be accepted into the pilot training programme, you must first undergo a comprehensive selection process. The psychological test is an important part of that process. 'It takes two years to become a pilot and the training is very intensive. Having the right personality is perhaps the most important requirement. You have to be able to deal with stress and perform under extreme pressure.'

Helen recently experienced a situation in which her ability to deal with stress was once again put to the test. In freezing conditions, her aircraft slipped off the taxiway and ended up in deep snow. All the passengers had to disembark. Helen managed to keep everyone calm. 'I said, "I'm the captain and I accept full responsibility. I'm going to walk down through the cabin now and you can ask me anything you like, say whatever you want to say to me, and I fully understand that some of you may be angry."'

It had long been thought that men and women processed emotions in different ways and that women are more likely to be overwhelmed by their emotions and quicker to laugh, cry or become angry, for instance. This assumption has affected the credibility of women on the work

floor, as a direct link was drawn between people's ability to control their emotions and their capabilities in a business environment.

Today, women still find themselves having to do all they can not to lend any credence to this idea, resulting in anecdotes that always go down well at parties, primarily because every woman can identify with them. Like the time you escaped to the bathroom to cry so that no one at work would see that you couldn't cope anymore, because crying at work is a sign of weakness, or so we've been told and no one wants to be seen as weak, even under circumstances that are less stressful than those Helen Hüpscher-Bakker has to deal with.

### **It must be that time of the month**

Despite this persistent assumption, everyone knows that men can be emotional, too. It's just that they tend to show their emotions differently. We have all had to deal with a male manager who has a reputation for frequent outbursts of anger. A study<sup>1</sup> carried out by the University of Michigan confirmed that there is no difference between the sexes when it comes to emotional stability. The study involved recording the emotions of 142 men and women over a period of 75 days. The women were separated into four different groups. Over the course of the study, the women in the first group didn't use any contraception, while those in the three other groups used various kinds of oral contraceptives.

Not only did the researchers find little or no difference between the men and women but also between the different groups of women. Mood swings were equally prevalent across all four groups. This immediately gave short shrift to the overstated role of hormones. For a long time, 'It must be that time of the month' or 'She just needs to get laid' was how men often reacted when a woman reacted emotionally. They even used to say it out loud.

Being able to control your emotions doesn't mean they don't exist. Helen Hüpscher-Bakker: 'After we had slipped off the runway, I heard someone say over the radio: "Captain, what do you want to do? What do you want to do?" Our job at that moment is to solve the problem. You can't just close your laptop and decide to come back to it later. You

need to take a deep breath and reset yourself. I said to the co-pilot: “Breathe in, breathe out. We’re going to deal with this.”

I walked down through the passengers asking them if they were okay. One woman asked me “But how are you doing?” I said “Thank you for asking but if I answer your question now I’m going to become very emotional.” It was only when the passengers were all sitting on the bus and on their way to the terminal that I gave my emotions free reign.’

## Rulebreaking thought

Various studies have shown that women are not more emotional than men. It’s high time that women started believing that they too can keep a cool head, just like Helen Hüpscher-Bakker.



### *Hysterical women*

‘Stop being so hysterical!’ The next step up from an emotional woman is a hysterical woman. The word ‘hysteria’ comes from the Ancient Greek *hystera*, which means uterus or womb, and it was probably first used by the Greek philosopher Hippocrates some time in the 5th century BC.

The initial belief was that hysteria was caused by the womb wandering around the body in search of sperm in order to fulfil its natural function as a sex organ. Yes, you read that correctly. In fact, when the vibrator was invented at the end of the 19th century it was regarded as a valid form of treatment for this condition.

Later, the idea that hysteria was linked to sexual gratification was abandoned and often replaced with committal to a mental institution. Up until the late 20th century, the term hysteria was used to describe a psychological condition or ‘mental illness’ found exclusively in women. The symptoms included grief, irritability, listlessness and depression. As a result, women were often quickly labelled as ‘hysterical’.

# Rule breaker

## HELEN HÜPSCHER-BAKKER

### CV

**BORN:** 1976

**NATIONALITY:** Dutch

**CURRENT POSITION:** Captain Boeing 737

**CAREER:** Began in 2004 as Second Officer on the Boeing 747-400. Promoted to First Officer on the Boeing 737 after three years and returned to the Boeing 747-400 as First Officer after seven years. Five years later she became Captain on the Boeing 737. Also held several ancillary positions, including Trainer crew safety and security and Safety investigator.



I've been flying a Boeing 737 as a captain for a number of years now. When I started out, four per cent of the pilots were women. Today it's somewhere between five and six per cent – still a very low percentage. It's still quite rare to travel on an airplane flown by a woman.

I was fourteen when I travelled on an airplane for the first time, on my own from London to Amsterdam. It was a short flight but it made an instant impression on me. I sat there with my mouth open looking all around me. Because I was still a minor, I was under the supervision of a steward. She told me that girls could become pilots, too. I knew immediately: this is what I'm going to do.

I changed the subjects I was studying – you need exact sciences, for example – and applied straight after leaving secondary school. I was rejected the first time, as I was eighteen and they thought I was too young. They said I should go to college and apply again after I graduated if I was still interested. So I studied Commercial Economics in Amsterdam instead.

In my third year, I went to visit a friend in Sweden. It was really windy and the pilot had to abort the landing and go around and try again. I wasn't even the

slightest bit scared and sat there the whole time with my nose pressed against the window, unlike the rest of the passengers. I thought: yeah, this is right up my street. I sent the application form again as soon as I got home. This time I was accepted and so I finished my studies in double-quick time.

### *Oh, the blonde? She's just giving it a try*

For a long time I didn't have much confidence in myself. One time, during my training, I was out with the rest of the class in a bar when one of the guys said "You'll waltz your way through the CPL" (CPL is short for Commercial Pilot License). I've never forgotten that remark, as in "Oh, the blonde? She's just giving it a try."

I once had to do a test in a simulator together with a male colleague. We were in the same class, so we knew each other. It was soon clear that the instructor was being much harder on me, perhaps because I was a woman. Afterwards, my colleague said to me, "Jesus, Helen, he was much tougher on you than he was on me." To which I replied "Yeah, I know."

Eventually, I started flying the Boeing 737 and that was when I began to have more faith in myself. I figured they'd never let me fly this airplane if they didn't think I could. Promotion is always granted on the basis of seniority. You can't just skip the queue if you want to achieve a more senior position in the cockpit. You have to wait your turn. And then you have to prove yourself and pass all the tests and exams as well.

The incident happened when it was dark and it was snowing heavily. My airplane slipped off the taxiway, we got stuck and couldn't move. There were 140 to 150 passengers on board. The conditions were terrible outside and I wanted to get the passengers off the plane as quickly as possible and into the warmth of the terminal.

I went down through the passengers asking them "Are you okay?" When the buses arrived I put on my safety vest and personally escorted everyone to their bus. I said to the purser, "Make sure they all hold onto the handrail when going down the steps so that no one falls." It was very windy and continued to snow hard. A Chinese passenger grabbed my hand, looked me in the eye and said "You did such a good job."

I don't know if others would have reacted the same way, whether another pilot would have walked down among the passengers and offered to assist them. In doing so, I stayed true to myself. You always have to be able to look yourself in the mirror. Things can always go wrong in life, even in an office job. And when things go wrong you should never try to run and hide.

Stuff like this happens. It's all part of life. At no time were we in any danger, so it was actually a very minor incident. But it was a big moment for me. Afterwards, however, for a split second I thought to myself, "Oh, I wish I was a guy and not the blonde who parked her plane all wrong."

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**Tip**

*Book: The Century of Women*

Suzanna Jansen's mother was one of many women who were admitted to a rest home in the previous century with 'inexplicable' complaints. These hysterical housewives were treated with full-fat milk, compulsory walks and, from the 1960s on, valium, sleeping pills and uppers. Drawing on her mother's experiences, in her book, *De omwenteling of de eeuw van de vrouw* (The Century of Women), Jansen describes how much women's lives have changed over the past one hundred years, from 'marital duty', which required that women never refused to have sex with their husband, to the fight for women's rights. The accompanying podcast *De eeuw van de vrouw* is also worth a listen.