Joan Williams and Rachel Dempsey clearly and vividly detail the double standards and the dead ends that so many women face in the workplace. Fortunately, the authors also provide easy-to-follow strategies to counter these scenarios. This book can help women claim their seat at the table and lean in to their careers.

—Sheryl Sandberg, author of Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead
What Works for Women at Work
FOUR PATTERNS WORKING WOMEN NEED TO KNOW
Joan C. Williams and Rachel Dempsey
Foreword by Anne-Marie Slaughter

An essential resource for any working woman, What Works for Women at Work is a comprehensive and insightful guide for mastering office politics as a woman. Authored by Joan C. Williams, one of the nation’s most-cited experts on women and work, and her daughter, writer Rachel Dempsey, this unique book offers a multi-generational perspective into the realities of today’s workplace. Often women receive messages that they have only themselves to blame for failing to get ahead—Negotiate more! Stop being such a witch! What Works for Women at Work tells women it’s not their fault. The simple fact is that office politics often benefit men over women.

Based on interviews with 127 successful working women, over half of them women of color, What Works for Women at Work presents a toolkit for getting ahead in today’s workplace. Distilling over 35 years of research, Williams and Dempsey offer four crisp patterns that affect working women: Prove-It-Again!, the Tightrope, the Maternal Wall, and the Tug of War. Each represents different challenges and requires different strategies—which is why women need to be savvier than men to survive and thrive in high-powered careers.

Williams and Dempsey’s analysis of working women is nuanced and in-depth, going far beyond the traditional cookie-cutter, one-size-fits-all approaches of most career guides for women. Throughout the book, they weave real-life anecdotes from the women they interviewed, along with quick kernels of advice like “New Girl Action Plan,” ways to “Take Care of Yourself”, and even “Comeback Lines” for dealing with sexual harassment and other difficult situations.

The worst part of writing an advice book is having to give advice. We think there are certain things you need to know to understand what’s going on in your career. We think it’s not useful to ignore gender bias, and we think too much of the advice out there puts the blame squarely on women’s shoulders without acknowledging that what works for a man may not work for a woman.

At the same time, we want to make it clear that there is no single answer to how to succeed as a woman in the professional world. In case this was somehow still ambiguous, both Rachel and Joan are women. But no woman is only a woman. We’re both white. And middle-class. And American. And straight. And able-bodied. All those things affect our outlook. /This concept is known as intersectionality.

We spoke not only with women of color and white women. We also spoke with straight women and lesbians. Women born in the United States and women from abroad. Older women, younger women; women in business and law and politics and science and journalism. Bringing all of these experiences together is an ambitious undertaking, and we’ve done our best to include a diversity of voices without losing sight of the common themes that run through women’s experiences.

The result of these 127 interviews isn’t so much a road map as a “Choose Your Own Adventure.” Chances are good that some parts of the book are going to speak to you more than others. Chances are also good that some parts will drive you nuts. That’s okay. The debates that we had as a group during our New Girls’ Network meetings have been impassioned and eye-opening, and we hope that debate continues moving forward.

As a result of our diversity, every New Girl breaks some rules and follows others, and it’s up to you to decide on your own approach. What we’re doing is teaching you the rules so you won’t be caught off guard. As late Texas Representative Barbara Jordan, a leader in the civil rights movement and the first black woman from the South to serve in Congress, said: “If you’re going to play the game properly, you’d better know every rule.” If you decide to break them after that, you’ll be doing it consciously. All we have to say about that is — go for it!

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For more information about What Works for Women at Work visit www.newgirlsnets.com

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