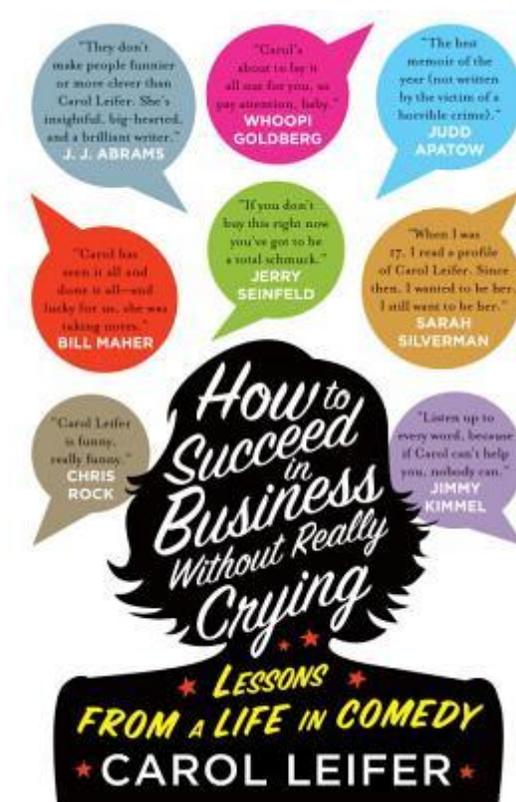


Carol Leifer's advice on the show business life

By [Erika Staron](#) April 7, 2014



"Comedians are warriors," **Carol Leifer** notes in her new book, *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Crying*, which is exactly how I would describe the author herself. A champion of comedy who's successfully navigated both stand-up comedy and TV writing, her dynamic career and unwavering conviction are the things that career counseling are made of. What I'm saying is, Leifer is my sensei, or Yoda as she prefers. As a TV writing, wanna-be-comedian (yes, I realize that's backward), I balk in the face of any sort of spotlight or situation where I am addressing more than two people at a time. In those times, when the funny completely drains from my body and the flop sweat starts pooling around my ankles, I am thrilled to now have a handbook of quotable guidelines to see me through. Who needs a life coach when you have Carol Leifer?



I will admit that while I have the best intentions of being a bibliophile, I am pretty excited when a book is divided into short essays that can hold my ADHD-addled brain. In her book, each chapter starts with a story about her time on the club circuit, through her tenure as the only woman on the *SNL* writing staff, writing for *Seinfeld* and co-creating *The Ellen Show*, to opening for **The Beach Boys**, **Frank Sinatra** and landing herself on *Celebrity Apprentice*. Divided into three parts, from handling yourself while hunting for gainful employment and maintaining your sanity while advancing your career to keeping your footing once you finally find said gainful employment, Leifer weaves the hilarious anecdotes into life lessons. Part memoir, part guide to life, *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Crying* offers tips and tricks for getting ahead, finding your way, and opening doors in whatever profession you choose.

As someone whose comedic aspirations started in her late-twenties, I agree with Leifer's sentiment in her introduction, that "This book you're holding is the book I wish I'd had when I started out in my career." While a lot of the content is tailored for a younger audience, including interview hygiene and etiquette, her advice translates to any age, and any profession. "Whether you've just embarked on the career you've always wanted or are already snarled in the struggle for success, I hope you find some useful counsel here." From mental health ("I highly encourage you to go to therapy.") to spinning classes ("learn to love to sweat"), being hired to being fired, Leifer opens up her life experiences for all to learn from.

Leifer with longtime partner Lori Wolf

Leifer attributes her comedic chops to her Jewish upbringing and her father, Seymour. She reminisces about growing up in a pro-comedy household, family nights watching *The Ed Sullivan Show* and being able to recite the entirety of **Mel Brooks'** *The 2000 Year Old Man* record. In fact, her parents were the first to encourage her to drop out of college to follow her stand-up comedy aspirations in NYC. "I didn't think about what it would be like as a woman to enter the male-dominated field of comedy. It just never entered my mind. I attribute it to my upbringing. As far back as I can remember, my mother in particular instilled in me a fierce confidence- an assurance that I could do or be anything I put my mind to. What sex I was never entered the equation."

Past coming out on the first page of chapter one and a few mentions of her partner, Lori, Liefer doesn't speak much about being a lesbian in the business. And while she claims to have suffered few roadblocks or barriers in regards to her gender or sexuality, not identifying with the rising population of queer TV writers and comedians, those that came after Ellen, seems like a missed opportunity. What she doesn't shy away from are other obligatory topics, like what Jerry Seinfeld is really like and what it's like to be a woman in a male-dominated business. Instead of complaining about a tougher road, Leifer approached it as a "tremendous advantage." Admitting that she was a part of "a business in which women are still a minority, by far, and are routinely paid less than men," and that she was often approached by writing rooms "specifically looking to hire

a women," she speaks to her philosophy of focusing on the benefits of being a female in the industry. From getting stage-time as the sole woman on line-ups to having an untapped perspective ("I'd learned as a stand-up comedian: to mine my own life—especially my life as a female"), she chose to gauge the lack of women in the field as a glass half-full opportunity encouraging readers to spin any challenges into "Wonder Woman powers."



What I took away from the book was something that Leifer said about looking at your career as a whole, "The key at those times is to see the long game. Because that, and not a single moment, is what ultimately defines the course of your career." One thing is for certain, Carol Leifer act has evolved into a remarkable career. She followed her dreams and, as she notes in her first chapter, found a job she loved, which never ends up feeling like work. Except that she does work for everything she's accomplished. Her fortitude is contagious and she makes the idea of following your passions seem much less daunting. As she notes, "that's the thing about passions; they tend to rule you."



How to Succeed in Business without Really Crying (Quirk Books) hits shelves on April 8.

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