Amy Poehler was new to SNL and we were all crowded into the seventeenth-floor writers’ room, waiting for the Wednesday read-through to start. There were always a lot of noisy “comedy bits” going on in that room. Amy was in the middle of some such nonsense with Seth Meyers across the table, and she did something vulgar as a joke. I can’t remember what it was exactly, except it was dirty and loud and “unladylike.”

Jimmy Fallon, who was arguably the star of the show at the time, turned to her and in a faux-squeamish voice said, “Stop that! It’s not cute! I don’t like it.”

Amy dropped what she was doing, went black in the eyes for a second, and wheeled around on him. “I don’t fucking care if you like it.” Jimmy was visibly startled. Amy went right back to enjoying her ridiculous bit. (I should make it clear that Jimmy and Amy are very good friends and there was never any real beef between them. Insert penis joke here.)
With that exchange, a cosmic shift took place. Amy made it clear that she wasn’t there to be cute. She wasn’t there to play wives and girlfriends in the boys’ scenes. She was there to do what she wanted to do and she did not fucking care if you like it.

I was so happy. Weirdly, I remember thinking, “My friend is here! My friend is here!” Even though things had been going great for me at the show, with Amy there, I felt less alone.

I think of this whenever someone says to me, “Jerry Lewis says women aren’t funny,” or “Christopher Hitchens says women aren’t funny,” or “Rick Fenderman says women aren’t funny…. Do you have anything to say to that?”

Yes. We don’t fucking care if you like it.

I don’t say it out loud, of course, because Jerry Lewis is a great philanthropist, Hitchens is very sick, and the third guy I made up.

Unless one of these men is my boss, which none of them is, it’s irrelevant. My hat goes off to them. It is an impressively arrogant move to conclude that just because you don’t like something, it is empirically not good. I don’t like Chinese food, but I don’t write articles trying to prove it doesn’t exist.

So my unsolicited advice to women in the workplace is this. When faced with sexism or ageism or lookism or even really aggressive Buddhism, ask yourself the following question: “Is this person in between me and what I want to do?” If the answer is no, ignore it and move on. Your energy is better used doing your work and outpacing people that way. Then, when you’re in charge, don’t hire the people who were jerky to you.

If the answer is yes, you have a more difficult road ahead of you. I suggest you model your strategy after the old Sesame Street film piece “Over! Under! Through!” (If you’re under forty you might not remember this film. It taught the concepts of “over,” “under,” and “through” by filming toddlers crawling around an abandoned construction site. They don’t show it anymore because someone has since realized that’s nuts.)

If your boss is a jerk, try to find someone above or around your boss who is not a jerk.* If you’re lucky, your workplace will have a neutral proving ground—like the rifle range or the car sales total board or the SNL read-through. If so, focus on that.

Again, don’t waste your energy trying to educate or change opinions. Go “Over! Under! Through!” and opinions will change organically when you’re the boss. Or they won’t. Who cares?

Do your thing and don’t care if they like it.

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* Is there such a thing as an all-jerk workplace? Yes. I would flat-out avoid working with Wall Street traders or the women who run the changing rooms at Filene’s Basement.
Negotiating Technique," which usually boils down to his saying: "They offered me more money and I told them to go f*** themselves.")

So Mr. Zucker was being forced to order a show that did not actually have its star in place. He paced around the room. Lorne calmly assured him it would all work out; Alec would eventually sign his contract. Then Lorne waved his hand gently in front of Zucker's face and said, "These are not the droids you're looking for." He didn't, but he might as well have.

"We're really going out on a limb for you here," Jeff Zucker said, wagging his finger at me begrudgingly. "You're picked up." And then, in a most unfortunate Freudian slip, I said, "You're welcome" instead of "Thank you." And that was the glorious becoming of what would go on to be the 102nd most popular show on television.*

My Bossypants Managerial Techniques

I'll admit that as a female producer I have a tacit "no hot-heads" policy. For years, to be considered a genius at comedy, people had to be "dangerous" and "unpredictable." I have met some very dangerous, erratic, funny people over the years, people I admire, but I don't want to work with them every day. Go do your own show, tough guys, and I will gladly watch it from the safety of my home. I hire the most talented of the people who are the least likely to throw a punch in the workplace. If this is contributing to the Demasculinization of America, I say hold a telethon and let me know how it goes. I don't ever want to get punched in the face over a joke—or even screamed at.

These were those gentle people:

Jack Burditt—a TV veteran who had worked on every show from Mad About You to Frasier to DAG. A handsome, soft-spoken, Gary Cooper type, I don't think Jack said a word the first four weeks. When he finally spoke, it was during a mundane conversation in the writers' room about crappy summer jobs we'd had as teenagers. Jack laughed as he told how at eighteen he was operating the roller-coaster at Magic Mountain and how one night, there was a riot in the park after a disco concert and six people got stabbed. One guy bled out in front of him. Then he turned in a thoughtful and hilarious 30 Rock script that showed he was more than just a former carnie who had watched a man die. A couple months later he spoke again to tell us

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* Not the 102nd most popular television show of all time. The 102nd most popular television show of 2006.