

LEADING WOMEN

WORKPLACE REBELLION: LOTTE JEFFS ON FRANCESCA GINO'S NEW BOOK, REBEL TALENT: WHY IT PAYS TO BREAK THE RULES IN WORK AND IN LIFE

Is following the rules holding you back at work? According to a new book, we should all conform less and challenge more

Lotte Jeffs | Sunday April 29 2018, 12.01am, The Sunday Times

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Are you the kind of rebel who puts aubergines through as onions at the self-service checkout? Do you never read the book-club book, but go for the wine? Did you leave your partner with the kids at half-term while you took a soul-searching minibreak at Soho Farmhouse? We all like to think we're a little bit rebellious, but let's face it, compared with the real rebels, the people on the front line of activism, protesting against inequality and risking their lives for justice, our micro rebellions are pretty silly.

That doesn't make them meaningless. In fact, Francesca Gino, the youngest woman to have achieved the rank of full professor at Harvard Business School, thinks rebels are the saviour of the modern workplace. Her new book, *Rebel Talent: Why It Pays to Break the Rules in Work and Life*, is, in terms of zeitgeisty, 'Have you read it?' buzz and cultural impact, set to do for business what Marie Kondo did for sock drawers.

Gino, 40, a behavioural scientist, lives with her husband and three young children in Cambridge, Massachusetts. With her latest research, she argues that when we mindlessly follow well-accepted rules and norms in business, rather than constructively rebel against them, we become less happy and successful. It's a philosophy women, in particular, will take a lot from, given our much-documented propensity for being conscientious rather than bullishly confident at work. Gino was inspired by her work experience with the chef of the three-Michelin-starred Osteria Francescana, Massimo Bottura, known for his philosophy of break, transform, create. (His most famous dish is 'Oops! I dropped the lemon tart', a deconstructed dessert inspired by a genuine accident.) Watching Bottura at work for a case study got Gino thinking about how rebels who go against convention and do things their own way, from Napoleon to Mark Zuckerberg, can achieve unprecedented success. They may be harder to manage; try getting Mr Bonaparte to fill out a performance review; but their passion, drive, creativity and curiosity raise organisations to a new level.

This is probably a good time to announce that, according to Gino's theory, I am a rebel. In fact, I am the executive equivalent of the Fonz. Three months ago, I started a job as a creative director at the advertising agency Ogilvy & Mather, when I have never worked in advertising before. Prior to this pivot, I was a journalist for 15 years. On the phone from her office at Harvard, Gino says my career move is classic rebel behaviour. In a thick Italian accent, she tells me the core elements of rebel talent are novelty, curiosity, perspective, diversity and authenticity, and it seems I tick all five.

First up, novelty. Starting a new job, in an industry I know little about, is scary. Will people think I'm a fraud? Will I be able actually to do the work? Will I even like it? Gino reassures me: 'Outsiders have an advantage over experts. They are less rooted in and defensive of existing viewpoints.' Last week, three months into my job; and feeling supported by my colleagues and confident enough to make mistakes; I tried out one of Gino's rebel top tips and led from the trenches. She writes: 'Rebels know where the action is, and that's where they want to be; not up in a tower or secluded in a corner office. Rebel leaders are comrades, friends and fellow enthusiasts.' So rather than offering feedback on the creative team's TV ad scripts from a cool distance, I tried writing one myself. It was hard! But it gave me a fresh perspective on the craft and an appreciation for the people who are good at it. Even in an industry where you have worked your way to the top, Gino says a good rebel talent is to go back to the 'shop floor'; periodically and remind yourself of the challenges there.

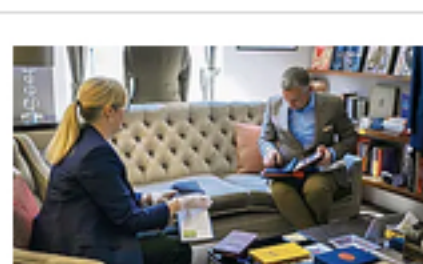
You don't have to be new to a job to be curious, which is the second commandment of workplace rebellion. Everywhere I've worked, I've tried to learn something from someone in a totally different department. And the people I've approached are always happy to share their knowledge. If you're only aware of what you and the people you sit next to do in your company, you'll miss the bigger picture.

Although Gino's theory is centred on rebelling at work, many of her tips help with life outside the office, too. I realised when reading the book that my wedding last summer was a rebel wedding. We refused to follow convention and threw in some surprises, such as my partner's brothers walking her down the aisle instead of her parents, and a bouquet toss for all the single men.

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'Rebels understand that different perspectives can lead us away from stale assumptions, towards deeper, more powerful thinking,' Gino says. Many businesses could benefit from breaking out of their own industry echo chamber by employing people from different backgrounds and listening to their views. This is why diversity features so highly as an element of rebel talent. Being confident in your own difference and valuing the power of diverse voices in a room is something Gino insists on: 'It changes the way we think,' she says.

As a gay female and mum-to-be, I'm far more aware of my otherness in the advertising industry than I was working in a much smaller team of women and gay men at a fashion magazine. This leads me to Gino's final rebel element: authenticity. She says: 'We all hesitate before making ourselves vulnerable, fearful of being judged by others. Opening up wins trust. Revealing our deepest emotions takes courage, which inspires emulation and adoration.' I've always been honest about myself at work and I've encouraged my team to do the same and talk openly about issues and emotions in the office. I don't agree that we should have a work persona and a home persona; the people I know who are happiest in their life and work show up authentically in both. 'Vulnerability helps us create stronger connections with others,' Gino says. 'Part of freedom is expressing oneself honestly.'

She says that rebels are willing to stand naked in front of others. I wouldn't go quite that far, but then, like all good rebels, I know I have a lot to learn.

[Rebel Talent: Why It Pays to Break the Rules in Work and Life](#) by Francesca Gino (PanMacMillan £14.99) is out on Thursday

HOW TO BE MORE REBEL


- **Make it new** Suggest making that weekly afternoon meeting in the conference room an early morning catch-up with coffee in the canteen — even small adjustments can change the mood of a meeting and its results. 'At their core, rebels are engaged. They have abundant energy and mental agility,' says Gino.
- **Say 'yes and ...'** 'Rebels embrace tension and conflict,' but you'll be more effective if you're positive and sensitive to others when you're being challenging. Try 'plussing': when someone says something you disagree with, you say, 'Yes and ...' — building on, rather than shooting down, others' opinions. Gino calls this 'constructive dissent'.
- **Disagree at any level** Gino claims that 'feeling powerful leads us to take more risks and express stronger emotions', but even the least senior team member can be a rebel if they want. An intern who asks why something is the way it is may uncover what's holding a business, team or process back.
- **Reveal and reflect** Try having more meaningful chats with your colleagues rather than fleeting small talk. Take a bit longer to ask what someone did at the weekend, listen to their answer and ask a follow-up question before offering an insight about yourself. Authentic relationships lead to better work.





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