

Pillow Fights

My sons and their friends are eating afternoon snack around the kitchen table. It's an assortment of healthy fruit, like plums and grapes, miniature chocolate chip cookies and potato chips from an organic grocery store. I still say that cookies and chips are in the junk food category, no matter how Wild Oats markets it.

I overhear the comment from one of my son's friends, "7 minutes left."

I'm curious. "Until what?"

My son's other friend responds calmly. "Until he beats me up."

These are 9-year old boys. I'm not worried. But in response, I feel it's my motherly duty to provide a little caution. "I only have one rule. No one gets hurt. Can you abide by that rule?" No one answers. The boy who is targeted to be beat up in less than 7 minutes is looking slyly around the room. The next door neighbor kid puts out a trial balloon. "Is it okay if we kill each other?" I hear a comment that I can't help but smile at. "That would hurt someone. It would break my mom's heart."

After snack, I see what beating up looks like. The boys are armed with pillows. I thought pillow fights were confined to teenage girls at slumber parties. Maybe that was a 70's thing. There are comments about avoiding the TV area so that the new Game Cube doesn't get hit. I quickly lay down the rules of engagement—backyard or playroom. Stay out of the rest of the house where tumbling bodies and flying pillows could have an adverse effect. Okay, boys, have at it. They choose the backyard.

There are rules about using the patio for base to catch your breath and no ganging up on a single person. Other than that, it's a free for all. Their small bodies dance between pillows in mid-air. They remind me of a Lilliputian version of boxing, only there are no ropes, no screaming crowds, or sleazy managers in sight. The boys are clearly enjoying the feel of unleashed force that comes from swinging pillows at each other. They don't hesitate to strike in the head area or other bodily targets. There are ughs and oomphs and delights of laughter. Everyone is smiling while I

look on in horror. After five minutes, they are done, ready to go back inside to board games, Pokemon cards, and Legos.

I wonder, what would girls do? And is there something to be learned about how men play the game of business? Today's boys are tomorrow's men. If one were to extrapolate, here's what I would observe about men and business:

- Men don't take attacks personally. It's all part of the game.
- Men make sure that their toys never get hurt in the process of doing business. Mangle my reputation but leave my new PDA alone.
- Men don't pull punches. Find out the rules of the game and then play the game to its fullest. Go for the jugular. It's more fun.
- Men have a real need for releasing physical energy. Pacing, yelling, and pounding fists are only the tip of the iceberg of what most men need in their workday. Heated discussions would be better served with a couple of pillows and an empty conference room. Then the real conversation could begin.
- Men have short attention spans. Go full out until you get tired, then switch to something else.

There's probably more that I've taken in subconsciously, but I'm afraid to look. I hate to think that all men are like this. Or that my sons and their friends will be behaving in the business world in the same way they are at age nine. But I can't help but think that the makeup of a male explains some of the behavior that we see in our workplaces. Now only if I could observe some 9-year old girls.....

Copyright © 2006 by Carol Ross and Associates, LLC. , www.carolrossandassociates.com. Contact carol@carolrossandassociates.com for reprint permission. If you enjoyed this article, visit Carol's blog, www.blog.carolrossandassociates.com, and podcasts, www.liveactioncoaching.com, www.leadingwithawholenewmind.com, and www.consciousliving-leaving.com. Carol is an executive coach, organization development consultant, and writer with over 20 years experience in the telecommunications and energy industries. Carol specializes in helping clients get unstuck and into the flow of great work. She works her magic by bringing the power of the creative, intuitive right brain into a left-brained world. While her degrees in engineering from Northwestern University have served her well, it's been her life and work experiences that have moved her to do her best work. She is certified by The Coaches Training Institute and credentialed by the International Coach Federation.