

## CHAPTER 12.

### LEAPFROGGING VILLAINS

Everyone's story has a villain. There are those who support you and those who try to pull you down. You will never be able to root out all of the villains in your life so learning how to leapfrog those villains is essential in becoming successful.

I wasn't in corporate America very long before I realized that not everyone was a good person. I was naïve and never imagined that people who didn't know me would try to hurt me or hold me back for no good reason. I learned quickly that villains in the real world don't wear witch hats or ride a broom. Some villains are sneaky and fly under the radar. They look like normal people. Some are meek and quiet; others are affable, but all of them are fake on some level. You have to keep your eyes open so you can spot those villains.

I encountered my first professional villain very early in my career. I had just graduated from college and had no idea what I wanted to do so I went to work in the wine business as a salesperson. I liked it and I was good at it. I was doing my job and trying to be the top salesperson in record time. I didn't realize that someone was out to get me. I heard from friends that Jenny, another salesperson, was bad-mouthing me to other employees in the company. Aside from a few brief encounters I didn't even know the woman so I had no idea why she had any ill will towards me. It didn't make sense so I decided to ignore her.

The more you elevate yourself and succeed, the bigger a target you become for potential villains. When I became the top salesperson on our team, Jenny became increasingly vocal in her disapproval of me. She was attempting to poison others with stories of why people shouldn't like me. She went so far as to go to leadership and tell them that I was a poor representative for the company.

Ignoring a villain can be a good first step, but I've learned that most villains need to be sent a much stronger message and be confronted head on. The Wicked Witch needed a bucket of water thrown on her to make her disappear. Ignoring her wasn't enough. When the situation with Jenny escalated, I needed to find my bucket of water.

I thought back to a lesson my former boyfriend Ned had taught me years earlier. Ned was police officer who, because of his job, had a habit of preparing for the worst-case scenario in

every situation. One thing he used to always warn me about was jogging outside alone. I loved to run, but Ned explained how I needed to pay attention to my surroundings so I could react in case of an emergency. It was important to run in neighborhoods that were populated and had lots of light. He also warned me about dogs. I thought he was kidding, but he had a point. What do you do if a dog gets loose and chases you down? You only have seconds to react. A lot of people try to run away and get hurt which is why Ned told me to do the opposite. He said to run at the dog and yell at the top of my lungs. It seemed crazy, but it made sense. The idea was that I needed to prove I was the dominant one. A few months later, I found myself in this exact situation when I was out running. A Rottweiler broke free from a nearby fence. The dog came barreling at me and looked like it wanted to tear me apart. I wanted to run, but I remembered what Ned told me so I started screaming and pointing my finger at the dog while running as fast as I could right at it. I got within feet of the dog when it suddenly began to whimper and turned back towards the house with its head between its legs. I couldn't believe it. Once I caught my breath I nearly fell over.

Jenny, my fellow salesperson, posed a much different threat than the dog, but I had to deal with her the same way – head on. My opportunity presented itself when she asked for a private meeting with me. I didn't want to take the meeting, but my boss encouraged me to meet with her and get it over with. Up until that point I had avoided her because the whole thing was ridiculous and annoying, but keeping my distance only allowed her to spread more ill will and grow in strength.

When I walked into the conference room, Jenny was sitting at the head of the table looking stoic and cold. I sat down across from her and she proceeded to explain how she felt there was tension between us. *Huh?* I didn't feel the tension. I just felt annoyed that she was bad-mouthing me, but I sat there and heard her out. She went on and on about what it takes to succeed in a man's world. She felt that the way I carried myself was not conducive to making it. I had to ask, "What do you mean?" She told me that the way I dressed was unacceptable and that I was bound to fail if I didn't dress more like her. Now, Jenny was ten years my senior and had an entirely different look and style than I did. She had a short bob and wore pants to work everyday. She wasn't someone who had much of a feminine side – at least she didn't show it at work. I on the other hand favored skirts and had long hair which I wore down every day. I very much embraced my femininity and the way I dressed gave me a sense of strength and

empowerment. It was a key step that helped me build confidence. I wasn't going to give it up because of that woman.

I had heard enough. It was time to throw my bucket of water. I told her that I was not her. While she may favor pants and short hair, I did not. I liked the way I dressed and the way I wore my hair was not a problem. It clearly wasn't a problem for anyone else since I had just been named the number one salesperson in the company. With a stern look, I asked her, "Is there anything else because I need to get back to work."

That was it. It wasn't an easy conversation for me to have, but she had been shut down. Slaying that villain made me feel stronger. A situation which had been uncomfortable was resolved. From that point on, she backed off and kept her distance. Speaking your mind and defending yourself may seem like a simple step, but it's a surprisingly effective one when you're in the right. Most villains like that aren't used to being confronted or called out for being wrong so doing so puts them in an uncomfortable position. Don't sit around and wait for someone else to do it for you. You are your own best advocate so it makes sense that you are the most qualified person to slay your own villain. Practice what you're going to say. Prepare answers for certain responses. If you stay calm, respectful and speak your mind, the message will be sent loud and clear.