

# The Chronology of a #GIRLBOSS

I'm bad, and that's good. I will never be good, and that's not bad. There's no one I'd rather be than me.

—*Wreck-It Ralph*



**1984:** I'm born in San Diego on Good Friday, which was also 4/20. Before you think this is some kind of omen, let me assure you that the only thing I smoke is my competition.

**1989:** I smear poop on the wall in kindergarten; perhaps my first true artistic expression.

**1993:** My fourth-grade teacher thinks something could be wrong with me. The list includes ADD and Tourette's syndrome.

**1994:** My dad takes me to Wal-Mart, where I ask a sales associate if they have "the Ren and Stimpy dolls that flatulate." This is evidence that I possess both a large vocabulary and a slightly twisted sense of humor.

**1997:** I fall in love with my first article of vintage clothing: a persimmon-red pair of disco pants. I secretly change into them in the bathroom of the roller rink.

**1999:** I land my first job, at a Subway. I get OCD on the BLT.

**2000:** I hate high school, and am sent to a psychiatrist who diagnoses me with depression and ADD. I try the white pills. I try the blue pills. I decide that if this is what it's going to take to like high school, forget it. I throw the pills away and decide to homeschool.

**2001:** My parents get divorced. I'm okay with it and take the opportunity to move out and be on my own. I choose an apartment in downtown Sacramento with a bunch of dude

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musicians. My room is a closet under the stairs, and my rent is \$60 a month.

**2002:** I hitchhike up and down the West Coast, finally landing in the Pacific Northwest. I pursue a life of dumpster diving (do not knock a free bagel until you've tried one) and petty thievery.

**2002:** I sell my first thing online. It's a stolen book.

**2003:** I am detained for shoplifting. I quit cold turkey.

**2005:** I leave my boyfriend in Portland and move to San Francisco, where I am fired from a high-end shoe store.

**2006:** I get a hernia, which means I need to get a job to get health insurance. I find one checking IDs in the lobby of an art school. I have a lot of time to kill, so I dick around on the Internet and open up an eBay shop called Nasty Gal Vintage.

**2014:** I am the CEO of a \$100-million-plus business with a fifty-thousand-square-foot office in Los Angeles, a distribution and fulfillment center in Kentucky, and three hundred and fifty employees.

(Insert the sound of a record screeching to a halt here.)

I'm leaving out some details here, obviously, but if I told you everything in the introduction, there'd be no need to read the rest of this book, and I want you to read the rest of

this book. But it's true: In about eight years, I went from a broke, anarchist "freegan" dead set on smashing the system to a millionaire businesswoman who today is as at home in the boardroom as she is in the dressing room. I never intended to be a role model, but there are parts of my story, and the lessons I've learned from it, that I want to share.

In the same way that for the past seven years people have projected themselves into the looks I've sold through Nasty Gal, I want you to be able to use #GIRLBOSS to project yourself into an awesome life where you can do whatever you want. This book will teach you how to learn from your own mistakes and from other people's (like mine). It will teach you when to quit and when to ask for more. It will teach you to ask questions and take nothing at face value, to know when to follow the rules and when to rewrite them. It will help you to identify your weaknesses and play to your strengths. It will show you that there's a certain amount of irony to life. For example, I started an online business so I could work from home . . . alone. Now I speak to more people in one workday than I used to in an entire month. But I'm not complaining.

This book will not teach you how to get rich quick, break into the fashion industry, or start a business. It is neither a feminist manifesto nor a memoir. I don't want to spend too much time dwelling on what I've already done because there is still so much to do. This book won't teach you how to get dressed in the morning. That book is coming—but only after you tell all of your friends to buy this one.

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While you're reading this, I have three pieces of advice that I want you to remember: Don't ever grow up. Don't become a bore. Don't ever let the Man get to you. Okay? Cool. Then let's do this.

#GIRLBOSS for life.



A #GIRLBOSS  
KNOWS WHEN  
TO THROW  
PUNCHES AND  
WHEN TO ROLL  
WITH THEM





1

So You Want to Be a  
#GIRLBOSS?

Life is short. Don't be lazy.

—Me



**S**o you want to be a #GIRLBOSS? I'm going to start by telling you two things. First: That's great! You've already taken the first step toward an awesome life by simply wanting one. Second: That's the only step that's going to be easy. See, here's the thing about being a #GIRLBOSS—it's not easy. It takes a lot of hard work to get there, and then once you arrive, it takes even more hard work to stay there. But then, who's scared of hard work? I sure as hell am not, and I'm sure you aren't either. Or, if you are, I'm sure this book will change your mind so that by the end of the last chapter you'll be practically screaming, "Where is some work!?! I want some work and I want to do it *now!*"

A #GIRLBOSS is someone who's in charge of her own life. She gets what she wants because she works for it. As a #GIRLBOSS, you take control and accept responsibility. You're a fighter—you know when to throw punches and when to roll with them. Sometimes you break the rules, sometimes you follow them, but always on your own terms. You know where you're going, but can't do it without having some fun along the way. You value honesty over perfection. You ask questions. You take your life seriously, but you don't take yourself too seriously. You're going to take over the world, and change it in the process. You're a badass.

## Why Should You Listen to Me?

Women make natural anarchists and revolutionaries.

—Kim Gordon

If there were rules to being a #GIRLBOSS—which there are not—one of them would be to question everything—including me. We're definitely starting off on the right foot here.

I am the founder, CEO, and creative director of Nasty Gal. I built this business on my own in just seven short years, and all before the age of thirty. I didn't come from money or prestigious schools, and I didn't have any adults telling me what to do along the way. I figured it out on my own. Nasty Gal has gotten a lot of press, but it's often spun like a fairy tale. Savvy ingénue with a rags-to-riches story? Check. Prince Charming? If we're talking about my investor, Danny Rimer of Index Ventures, then check. Lots of shoes? Check. And I don't mind—press is fine—but I'm wary of reinforcing the perception that all of this happened overnight, and that it happened to me. Don't get me wrong: I will be the first to admit that I have been fortunate in so many ways, but I must stress that none of this was an accident. It took years of living with dirty fingernails from digging through vintage, a few painful burns from steaming clothes, and many an aged Kleenex hiding in a coat pocket to get here.

Not too long ago, someone told me that I had an obligation to take Nasty Gal as far as I possibly could because I'm a

role model for girls who want to do cool stuff with their own lives. I'm still not sure how to feel about that, because for most of my life I didn't even believe in the concept of role models. I don't want to be put on a pedestal. Anyway, I'm way too ADD to stay up there: I'd rather be making messes, and making history while I'm at it. I don't want you to look up, #GIRLBOSS, because all that looking up can keep you down. The energy you'll expend focusing on someone else's life is better spent working on your own. Just be your own idol.

I'm telling my story to remind you that the straight and narrow is not the only path to success. As you'll see in the rest of this book, I didn't earn many accolades growing up. I've been a dropout, a nomad, a thief, a shitty student, and a lazy employee. I was always in trouble as a kid. From punching my best friend in the stomach when she dropped my Play-Doh (I was four) to getting ratted out for lighting hair-spray on fire at a family gathering (guilty), I was regularly the bad example. As a teen, I was angst on wheels, and as an adult, I'm essentially a young, half-Greek Larry David in heels—incapable of hiding discomfort, dissatisfaction, or doubt, inescapably myself and often honest to a fault.

I tried the obvious route of hourly jobs and community college, and it just never worked for me. I'd been told for so long that the path to success was paved with a series of boxes you checked off, starting with getting a degree and getting a job, and as I kept trying and failing at these, it sometimes seemed that I was destined for a life in the loser lane. But I always suspected that I was destined for, and that

I was capable of, something bigger. That something turned out to be Nasty Gal, but you know what? I didn't find Nasty Gal. I created it.

Abandon anything about your life and habits that might be holding you back. Learn to create your own opportunities. Know that there is no finish line; fortune favors action. Race balls-out toward the extraordinary life that you've always dreamed of, or still haven't had time to dream up. And prepare to have a hell of a lot of fun along the way.

This book is titled *#GIRLBOSS*.

Does that mean it's a feminist manifesto?

Oh God. I guess we have to talk about this.

*#GIRLBOSS* is a feminist book, and Nasty Gal is a feminist company in the sense that I encourage you, as a girl, to be who you want and do what you want. But I'm not here calling us "womyn" and blaming men for any of my struggles along the way.

I have never once in my life thought that being a girl was something that I had to overcome. My mom grew up doing the cooking and cleaning while her brothers got to enjoy their childhoods. In my mom's experience, being a girl was most definitely a disadvantage. Perhaps because both of my parents worked full-time, or because I had no siblings, I never witnessed this kind of favoritism. I know generations of women fought for the rights that I take for granted, and in other parts of the world a book like this would never see the light of day. I believe the best way to honor the past and future of women's rights is by getting shit done. Instead of

sitting around and talking about how much I care, I'm going to kick ass and prove it.

My first reaction to almost everything in life has been "no." For me to fully appreciate things I must first reject them. Call it stubborn, it's the only way I can make something mine—to invite it into my world rather than have it fall into my lap. At seventeen, I chose hairy legs over high heels and had a hygiene regimen that could best be described as "crust punk." I wore men's clothes that I bought from Wal-Mart. On the rare occasion a guy opened a door for me, I'd refuse, taking insult, like "I can open my own doors, thank you very much!" And let's be honest, that's not really being a feminist, that's just being rude.

I now know that letting someone open a door for me doesn't make me any less independent. And when I put on makeup, I'm not doing it to pander to antiquated patriarchal ideals of feminine beauty. I'm doing it because it makes me feel good. That's the spirit of Nasty Gal: We want you to dress for yourself, and know that it's not shallow to put effort into how you look. I'm telling you that you don't have to choose between smart and sexy. You can have both. You are both.

Is 2014 a new era of feminism where we don't have to talk about it? I don't know, but I want to pretend that it is. I'm not going to lie—it's insulting to be praised for being a woman with *no college degree*. But then, I'm aware that this is also to my advantage: I can show up to a meeting and blow people away just by being my street-educated self. I, along with countless other #GIRLBOSSes who are profiled in

this book, girls who are reading this book, and the girls who are yet to become a #GIRLBOSS will do it not by whining—but by fighting. You don't get taken seriously by asking someone to take you seriously. You've got to show up and own it. If this is a man's world, who cares? I'm still really glad to be a girl in it.

## The Red String Theory

I entered adulthood believing that capitalism was a scam, but I've instead found that it's a kind of alchemy. You combine hard work, creativity, and self-determination, and things start to happen. And once you start to understand that alchemy, or even just recognize it, you can begin to see the world in a different way.

However, I think I always saw the world in a different way. My mom says that when I was five, I got a red string and ran across the playground with it trailing after me. All of the other kids asked what it was, and I told them that it was a kite. Soon everyone had red strings, and we all ran together, our kites high in the sky.

If I, and this book, have anything to prove, it's that when you believe in yourself, other people will believe in you, too.



**“With my touch,  
a plus-size anorak  
became Comme Des  
Garçons and ski pants  
Balenciaga.”**

