

Cecile Frot-Coutaz's Success Secret:

"I've always been willing to take risks. I think, 'What's the worst that can happen?'"



Cecile Frot-Coutaz:
Executive Producer, *American Idol*, and CEO, FremantleMedia, NA

by Leigh Henderson

You know about the television phenomenon *American Idol*. PINK takes its readers behind the scenes to meet a woman responsible in part for the show's success: executive producer Cecile Frot-Coutaz. From watching her idols on television as a child, she's navigated her way to the top of entertainment programming by taking on new challenges. Today, as CEO of FremantleMedia North America, Inc. (FMNA), she helps propel the company to the leading edge of global television production, with shows such as *American Idol* and *American Inventor*.

A native of France, Frot-Coutaz knew at age 16 she wanted to be part of the business world. Almost 40 and happily married with a 2½ year-old daughter, she takes time out to share her secrets for career success and personal happiness.

PINK: Who were your idols as a child?

CF-C: I was obsessed with French history, the dead royals – the kings, queens, princes. Also two really big male French stars because of their charisma, good looks, and great senses of humor.

PINK: You graduated from INSEAD, one of the world's leading graduate business schools. Did you have a global career strategy?

CF-C: I had no career strategy at all. I take opportunities as they come. I'm not afraid to make lateral moves. I could never answer the question, "What are you going to be doing in five years?"

PINK: What is the secret of your success at such a young age?

CF-C: When I graduated from business school, I could have stayed within my comfort zone

and gone into investment banking. Instead, I went with Pearson Television in London and met Greg Dyke who would become a mentor and later the head of BBC television.

PINK: What's your advice to women looking to advance their careers?

CF-C: Do the work yourself and get your hands dirty; that's the only way you can add value. Develop your instincts about what happens "on the ground" and don't depend on a business school education to teach you all that you'll need to know.

PINK: What will it take for more women to reach the ranks of C-level jobs at major corporations?

CF-C: Women are less political than men. Women are more balanced and not willing to make as many of the sacrifices it takes to succeed. Also, remember, you are a woman; don't try to be a man. Use the fact that you are different as a strength.

PINK: What's the most difficult decision you've ever made?

CF-C: I had a boyfriend in the U.S.; he and I had only seen each other for 12 weekend dates because of our schedules. I was living in London and had a great offer to remain in Europe. I decided to leave that offer on the table and take the huge risk to come to America. It paid off. That boyfriend is now my husband.

PINK: What's the most remarkable/crazy thing to ever happen in your career?

CF-C: *American Idol* has changed me. I feel incredibly lucky for the opportunity to be part of a once in a lifetime experience.

PINK: What would you like to say specifically to PINK readers?

CF-C: Don't forget to have children. Having my daughter is the best thing I ever did.

Leigh Henderson's Leadership Training Room is a management consultancy and leadership coaching firm. LeadershipTrainingRoom.com