



The world of sports is often thought of as a man's world. This was certainly the case when Linda Cohn became the first US female sports caster on a national radio network (WABC) in 1987. When Linda Cohn began with ESPN in 1992, it was a boy's club. There were no make-up artists, no dressing rooms, not even an outlet in the bathroom to plug a blow dryer into. A pioneer for women sportscasters, Linda Cohn has paved the way with a firm resolve to follow her passion for sports and 17 years later is still going strong on [Sports Center](#). Recently, Linda Cohn released her memoir, [Cohn-Head, A No Holds Barred Account of Breaking into the Boys Club](#). I was thrilled to have the opportunity to speak with Linda about her career and glean wisdom from her occupational experiences on a predominantly male playing field.

Tabitha: Linda, this issue of our magazine is going to focus on women in business. I couldn't think of a better person to talk to than a woman who wrote a book about breaking into the "boys club"! You have really broken down barriers in your field, and I think there will be a large portion of our female readership who can really relate to you...

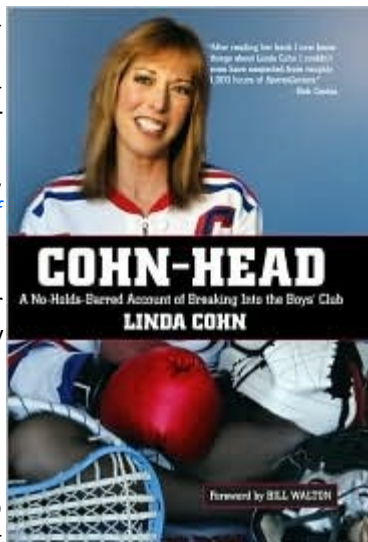
Linda: One of the reasons that I wrote the book was because of the [kind of] women you touch and you are connected with. I think there are a lot of women out there of all ages, who have been pioneers in their own field – and I think they can relate to what I dealt with (working with a lot of men and trying to still be a woman, etc.). That is something that I am proud of because I knew it would connect with people.

Tabitha: You really did write a book for everyone. Your sports fans, I know, love it... but I was surprised to find

so much life information in the book. I was surprised to see so much of your life laid out in the book, and am now passing it on to other women in my life. [Whether they are sports fans or not!]

Linda: Well, thank you, Tabitha for that... and that's one of the comments I got a lot from people when I was on the book tour. They said "Wow, I can't believe you opened up your life like that!" [Laughing] Well, guess what? It's a *memoir*, and isn't that what memoirs are all about?

It [the book] definitely connects with guys, and that whole kind of sporty thing and the obsession with teams...but I wanted to include my personal life because women are *always* struggling with career, family, husbands, no husbands, what do I want, am I being selfish, am I not being selfish, aren't I asking for what guys get all of the time...the satisfaction I get from being a mom...I don't want to give that up...sacrifice because of my children... These are the issues that women are looking for guidance with. Women aren't looking for that typical "talking head" on television that has had nannies all of their life... That is not someone that the everyday woman in business can relate to. I feel that is why I connect with them, because I never had a nanny. Just because I am on TV...doesn't mean that I fit the stereotype!



Tabitha: While we are talking about that struggle.... I was really surprised to find that you turned down your first offer from ESPN. After reading your book, it's obvious that your children are a priority for you. What advice do you have for women who are trying to build or maintain a career and balance that with family?

Linda: Well, Tabitha, that is a really good point, and as I look back, it was the right decision. What I tell young people and young women is that any decision they make – they have the power to *make it* the right decision. Meaning, for instance, when I made that decision [to turn down ESPN], was I disappointed? Yes! Did I cry? Yes! At that time, when I was in Seattle, I had to make a family decision.

So, I said to myself, "Ok, how can I use this situation? I am in Seattle, in my first TV sports job at a real commercial network (CBS), and I can hone my skills. *I can be better than ever.* I can become the best sports caster I can be by being in Seattle...and I can slow down my life." I was on this treadmill...it was like – "What else can I conquer, and how quickly can I do it?" Again, it

slowed me down. I make jokes about it, but I was able to have my daughter, my first child in Seattle, because I *fit it into my schedule*. [laughing] Isn't that crazy? Look at how much has changed for women in 18 years! Aren't women "fitting" child-bearing into their schedule now? Aren't they "fitting in" getting married? It's almost become a business relationship!



Tabitha: Times really have changed! What about in your field? Do you think women are getting more opportunities now in sportscasting? I know that some of the networks have cut down on it, but are we going to continue to see women on the sidelines, or are they going to be, like you, viewed as anchor material? Are they really getting more opportunities, and are they being hired for their looks?

Linda: You know, most TV executives tend to pick the "safe choice"- and I think some of them are a little messed up. Because they think the average sports fan needs to see some kind of eye candy on the sidelines. I always make this joke – and I get a good laugh, but I believe it sincerely. I have more guy friends than girl-friends, and they know where to get their eye candy... and it's not on the sideline of a football game.

I always tell young women who want to get into the business to *please aim higher*. Yes, there are a handful of sideline reporters out there that I truly respect...but I believe they should be anchors. I tell young women to be *analysts*. Be someone with an opinion – because you are knowledgeable!

Is there still a long way to go, Tabitha? Absolutely, because the people in hiring positions are still predominantly male and still think that women can't have an opinion in sports.

...But there were a handful of men that gave me a chance. That took a chance on me throughout everything – from the man who put me on the men's hockey team in my high school to the men in my career – they

took a chance on me because they believed in me. Hopefully, we are making strides, and yes, compared to 20 years ago, men are giving women a chance. Now, men have to take it to the next level and say that women can be more than sideline reporters.

Tabitha: Well, let me ask you this: What do you think it was that those men in power saw in you? What do you think made them say, "Let's give Linda Cohn a chance. I believe in her."? What do you think it was that prompted them to even put their reputations on the line in some cases?

Linda: I think it will always come down to not being a phony, Tabitha. What they saw in me first and foremost was, "WOW! She really does love sports! This isn't something that she has just picked up because it's going to increase her chances to be on television." They saw that I had a *true sports passion*, I had the knowledge, and I knew how to write.

Tabitha: It's true. When people watch you, it's obvious that you have a drive and passion for what you do. Can you explain the role your passion has played in your continued success and how your fans relate to you through that passion?

Linda: That's a great question. I think I relate to the typical sports fan....*Why?* Because I *am* the typical sports fan. What is



a sports fan? A sports fan is very emotional. A sports fan [loves] a rollercoaster ride. I *love* being a sports fan. I can deal with the lows because the highs are *so fantastic!* I think that is why I connect with the viewer out there. That's why they sense that I am the real deal...and I'm not acting or a talking head. It's helped me in real life because I use that passion in everything that I do.

Tabitha: I checked out your website, linda.cohn.net (and cohnheadfans.com); and wow...What an amazing place for your fans to connect with you! Can you tell me a little bit about it?

Linda: I am very excited about it and I have Jeff and Don at AscendWorks to thank for it. I met with Jeff and Don and the gang there and told them about my vision. They created an amazing place where I felt I *could* connect to my fans...and that is what I so want to do. Because, you know, at ESPN, there is the "great" from being at ESPN, and there is that "not so great." And the "not so great" is that I'm an employee, and so I have to do what they tell me to do. Because they pay my salary, right? They tend to keep us all in a cave – unless for some reason they decide to let us out of the cave once in a blue moon. But I am not a person that belongs in a cave. I need an *outlet*. Yes, I host SportsCenter, but it's still kind of scripted, and it's still structured, and they frown upon me having an opinion. Because to them I am a host – I'm not an analyst. But guess what? I am opinionated. That's why this website, to me, was my avenue to share my opinions with my fans. My fans *also* have opinions – and that's why I love having an interactive website. It's not just about me saying "Blah blah blah", it's about *them* having a personality, having a venue to blog, having a place to send their pictures so everyone, all my members can see.

I have the iPhone, which is great, and I can do everything on my iPhone – the blog entries, Twitter, Facebook...even when I am here at the mall with my daughter on her 18th Birthday!

Tabitha: Tell her Happy Birthday, by the way!

Linda: I will...she's having a grand old time spending all of her mom's money!

Tabitha: [Laughing] Excellent! That's the only way to go! ...Let me ask you this...the message that I got out of your book, as a woman, was: "Pursue your dreams! Just go for it." What is your highest message to your daughter as she is looking to her future at 18?

Linda: That's the message.

Tabitha: That's it?

Linda: Yeah! Go after it! Just go after it. I mean, go after your dreams. The big mistake that a lot of people make is that they see the dollar signs early on in other positions and in other fields. I never want to look back and say I didn't try.

That was my big thing in my head. I don't want to look back and say that I didn't do what I can to get a break to be lucky. (That's one of the things I preach a lot – put yourself in a position to be lucky.)

And that's because you know, there was always a back-up plan. You know if I wasn't going to be a sportscaster, maybe I could be a PR person on one of my teams, or any sports team. That was my back up plan. Or if that didn't work, I might have done something else within a team, to be connected to sports in some way. So maybe you wouldn't have your dream job, but you have a different link that will get you to your dream or that will at least keep you connected to something that drives you – something that you are passionate about. That's my message, and that's what I tell my daughter, Sammy. Go for the sky, and then there are always back up plans, which guess what, are pretty damn good.

I think it is important to note, that Linda schedules time to spend with young women who are aspiring sportscasters on a regular basis. She regularly invests time into the next generation of sportscasters, and is considered a leader behind the camera as well as in front of the camera. It reminds us all as we are climbing to our own career goals that it is important to help the next generation come with us.

Linda is available as a speaker for corporate events. To book Linda as a speaker at your next event [click here](#).

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