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Body & Soul

Brand-new man

How an ad exec used work tactics in changing genders

By 5, Chris Edwards knew the girl in the mirror couldn't be him. By college, he was sure of it. The author of the memoir "Balls: It Takes Some To Get Some" (Greenleaf Book Group, out now) tells *The Post's* **BARBARA HOFFMAN** how, at an ad agency in mid-'90s Boston, he "rebranded" himself from woman to man — and what others making a life switch can learn.

IT'S not easy being the boss' daughter, especially when you know deep down you're his son. I was 24, and thought I'd work a year or two at my dad's agency, then move away and transition in secret.

"Why move?" my therapist said. "You're going to need support... The way you act could shape the way other people react." Suddenly, I felt empowered. Back then, the latest thing in

advertising was "evangelism marketing," what we call word-of-mouth today. My agency had just won Volkswagen, and it was our goal to make consumers brand evangelists for the cars by talking up how great they were. I thought, why not make my co-workers brand evangelists for me?

I spent nine months strategizing. First, I came out to my closest colleagues. I told my story in great detail, and coached them on how to tell it to others: to say I'd been dealing with something hard for years, and to avoid the negatively charged term "sex change" and use the technical term "gender dysphoria" instead.

Then, one day, my dad, who knew about my struggle, put me on the board-meeting agenda for 5 p.m. There were eight white men in suits and ties, looking at me in my sneakers, khakis and blue linen shirt. As I sat there, shaking, I wondered if my outfit looked like Pat's from "SNL."

Chris Edwards' memoir "Balls: It Takes Some To Get Some" chronicles his journey from woman to man in the workplace.



Stephen Yang

After my father introduced me, I explained what gender dysphoria was, and asked them to imagine having a woman's reflection

staring back at them in the mirror. When I told them I thought of killing myself, one man had tears in his eyes.

It wasn't until I told them I'd be using the men's room that they freaked out. "We should send out a memo," someone said. I told them they wouldn't need to, since my colleagues were ready to spread the word once the meeting ended, and that, for the next two weeks, I'd use a bathroom at a cafe outside the agency, to give people time to adjust.

When I came into work the next morning, my buddy in the art studio gave me a bar mitzvah card, though neither of us [is] Jewish. It said, "Today, you are a man," and he gave me guy tips like, "Always look straight ahead at the urinal." Most people treated me normally, which is all I wanted.

From then on, I wore only men's clothes. I brought my stylist a picture I liked from GQ, and she cut my hair in stages.

People ask me if my career skyrocketed when I changed genders. I say yes, but not for the reasons they think: I was finally comfortable in my own skin. I'd speak up more at meetings, was happier and came up with better ideas. I wasn't wasting my energy pretending to be something I wasn't.

Anyone going through a major change — divorce, a new career — has the power to redefine themselves. With the right strategy, you can control how others perceive the new you.