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A cat wouldn't work like a dog, and you shouldn't have to either

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Karen Wormald needed an idea for a business column.

"My cat Fred was lying on the floor, and it occurred to me that people work like dogs. Why don't they work like cats?"

That thought, originally expanded into her column for Business Solutions magazine, evolved into her new book, "How to Work Like a Cat: Walking With Confidence Through a Dog-Eat-Dog World" (96 pages, Willow Creek Press, \$14.95).

"I used to work with a lot of dog mentality," said Wormald, whose freelance writing and editing business, Kew Publications, is based in Midlothian.

"Corporate America is very much 'work as a team, stay with the pack, don't question authority, go along.' They'll kick you, but come back for more with a smile."

So why work like a cat? "It's the cat who makes things move forward. Cats are willing to go out on a limb just to see what's out there. They'll climb a high tree. My cats jump off seven-foot bookcases just for the sheer joy of sailing through the air.

"Dogs are the followers. Cats are the innovators, and that's why they are not always appreciated, because they think differently, they're not afraid to be different and they do their own thing."

Don't be misled by the cute cat on the cover or the fact that some bookstores display the book in the pet section.

"The book belongs in the business section," Wormald said. "I see the book as the anti-'Who Moved My Cheese?' 'Who Moved My Cheese?' is the story of two mice in a maze chasing their cheese around."

Isn't that a book about accepting change?

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DETAILS: Calendar. Page K3. **WANT TO KNOW MORE?** Visit Karen Wormald's Web site. www.work-likeacat.com

"Right, but do you want to accept change like a mouse or like a cat? Cats deal with it in a much more realistic manner. They know when it's time to stay and fight or walk away."

Any cat owner will tell you Wormald nails cat behavior. Anyone whose cheese is moving will tell you she's right about that, too.

Still, the book's packaging may work against its message. It's small and stocking-stuffable; there's a cute cat photo on every other page; its smartness is couched in cat language.

But if cats are Wormald's inspiration besides Fred, she lives with Adele and Yul -- why not use their lingo?

And her strategy for surviving in the corporate world is sound. "There's hard-core advice in there: Learn to pick your battles. Don't just roll over and play dead because they tell you to. Learn to question things. Don't just work hard; work smart."

Wormald once worked in the financial services and insurance industries. She was laid off from one job and fired from the other.

She believes working more like a cat might have saved her. "I should have purred a little bit more, picked my battles better. I was too feral; I needed to be more of a lap cat."

Despite her experiences, she has hope for corporate America: "I think in the end, the cats are going to win."

Jann Malone is The Times-Dispatch's book editor.

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