



Break Your Own Rules

How to Change the Patterns of Thinking That Block Women's Paths to Power

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

"We have a dream. It is a big vision ... it is a leap ... and it is audacious: We want to see women make up at least 30 percent of the top leadership positions in corporate America within the next 10 years. ... America's corporations will be better led and everyone will benefit."

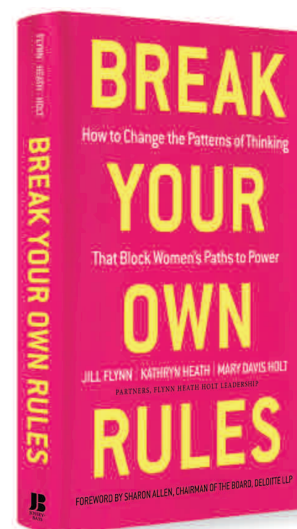
It's time for women everywhere to re-imagine leadership — and put themselves at the top. The good news is that we know exactly how to make this happen: *Break Your Own Rules* distills the six faulty assumptions (or "rules") most women follow that get in the way of achieving their full potential — then delivers the correlating new rules that promise to clear the path all the way to the executive boardroom.

Authors Jill Flynn, Kathryn Heath and Mary Davis Holt have coached and trained more than 5,000 women and helped them earn high-powered corporate positions. Based on their latest research, years of coaching successful business women and more than 1,700 interviews with executives in Fortune 500 companies, *Break Your Own Rules* reveals how women everywhere can start to change the thinking that drives their actions — and start winning in greater numbers.

This hands-on guide is for any woman who is ready to transform her assumptions and join the senior ranks of American business.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- Six behaviors that keep even the most achievement-oriented women from reaching their highest potential.
- Six new doable practices that can move you where you want to go.
- Why so few women run organizations today and what every woman can do Monday morning to change that.
- How women everywhere can start to revolutionize their workplaces, their homes and their communities.



by Jill Flynn, Kathryn Heath
and Mary Davis Holt

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THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: BREAK YOUR OWN RULES

by Jill Flynn, Kathryn Heath and Mary Davis Holt

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Our Vision

We have a dream. It is a big vision ... it is a leap ... and it is audacious: We want to see women make up at least 30 percent of the top leadership positions in corporate America within the next 10 years. We believe that 30 percent will be a tipping point. When 30 percent of corporate leaders are women, the goals and direction of corporate America will change. The Old Rules will be shattered. America's corporations will be better led, and everyone will benefit.

We have a way to go before our vision becomes a reality. Despite the positive impact women leaders have on corporate performance, very few of us hold the top slots in major organizations. As of now, there were just 13 women CEOs steering Fortune 500 companies. That translates to less than a lowly 3 percent — and the number hasn't risen in recent years. For each new woman who enters Fortune's list, another falls off. This is a kick in the gut, considering that women not only outnumber men as a percentage of the total work force but also earn more undergraduate and graduate degrees than men.

And then there is the matter of take-home pay. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, women's wages came in at about 79 percent of men's in 2008. We won't dispute that there has been some progress made in recent decades, but the wage gap still exists — and it's significant.

In an age when more women are taking over power positions in global politics, poor representation in the business sector and the lack of equity are surprising.

Something's very wrong here. Some of this is certainly gender bias; that much we know. If you believe that human nature dictates that senior leaders hire people who are like themselves, then you will figure that men open the gate for other men, and women don't rise through the ranks as easily. We also have stereotypes to contend with, which cast doubts on women's leadership style and even our competitive drive.

Female Representation at the Top

These interrelated realities persist despite the fact that they are proven to be bad for business. Research published by Deloitte, for example, argues that companies with women leaders perform better. The report points to a higher return on equity and higher return on sales for companies with more women board directors. Another study that tracked 1,500 U.S. companies from 1992 to 2006 found a direct positive correlation between the number of senior women managers and financial performance, including market value of the firm, sales growth and return on equity. After all, what better way to be sure that your products and services reflect the true needs of female consumers and decision makers — with all that purchasing power — than by having adequate female representation at the top of your corporation?

One study out of Pepperdine University, conducted over a 19-year period, determined that those firms with a higher number of women executives outperformed their competitors on key financial measures, including profitability and return on assets. Sylvia Ann Hewlett,



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Published by Soundview Executive Book Summaries® (ISSN 0747-2196), 500 Old Forge Lane, Suite 501, Kennett Square, PA 19348 USA, a division of Concentrated Knowledge Corp. Published monthly. Subscriptions starting at \$99 per year. Copyright © 2012 by Soundview Executive Book Summaries®.

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founder and president of the Center for Work-Life Policy, corroborates these findings: “The fewer female managers a company has, the greater drop in its share price since January 2008. The facts couldn’t be clearer: Smart women equal stronger companies.”

What We Believe

Technical knowledge in one’s field is essential, and leadership skills are crucial. However, we have found that for women who are at midcareer or near the top, building career momentum is not a matter of adding skills. It is about determining what’s keeping you where you are and figuring out how you might be getting in your own way.

We believe that for women to rise to the highest ranks in business, we need to unwind some of our traditional thinking and break our own rules. We have to rethink the conversations we are having in our heads and tell ourselves a new story. ●

Break Your Own Rules

In our coaching sessions with women who want to break into top leadership roles, we propose simple steps to help them increase their chances of success. These steps require women to make adjustments in how they think about themselves. We’ll offer you the same advice:

By thinking differently, you’ll find it much easier to act differently. By acting differently, your voice will be heard, and you will be considered for the job opportunities you really want.

To move into an executive role, you’ll have to break some of your own rules; these are the beliefs and attitudes about yourself and the workplace that have gotten you this far. As Marshall Goldsmith has said, “What got you here won’t get you there.” It’s one thing to get your foot in the door and begin to prove yourself at a company. You deal with tough clients, you hire the right people and develop your team, and you bring in business. All of this sets you up for success. However, it’s another thing entirely to begin to scale the heights of an organization and to put yourself in line for the top jobs. The mindset at the top is completely different.

We present the new thinking that we believe will get you there. We call this thinking the New Rules. Our in-depth research and the lessons each of us has learned from making many mistakes of our own have shown us that these New Rules are decisive in propelling women into the next phases of their careers.

The Old Rules

Before we proceed, let’s have a look at the Old Rules. Keep in mind that we are not labeling these thoughts and behaviors as “bad.” The fact is, we’ve been there and have made all of these mistakes ourselves along the way. We identify with you and with the women we coach every day. Our hope is that by reading this book you’ll be able to bypass some of these stumbling blocks on your way to career success.

- **Focus on Others (Instead of Taking Center Stage).** Many talented women find it natural to focus their attention on helping others succeed instead of spending their precious time nurturing their own career success.
- **Seek Approval (Instead of Proceeding Until Apprehended).** In our coaching sessions, we’ve worked with countless women executives who are exceptionally collaborative leaders. We’ll tell you how to change your thinking in order to proceed on your own authority effectively and with confidence.
- **Be Modest (Instead of Projecting Personal Power).** Many women who are motivated to move into leadership positions are nonetheless ambivalent about projecting power. Modesty and self-deprecation come more naturally. We’ll unwind the self-limiting beliefs that cause women to distance themselves from projecting personal power at work.
- **Work Harder (Instead of Being Politically Savvy).** Many women are disappointed when their hard work and long hours don’t seem to pay off in terms of career advancement. But working harder is not the key to getting promoted and it’s certainly not going to deliver the life you want.
- **Play It Safe (Instead of Playing to Win).** If you want to set yourself apart, you have to play to win. This includes making yourself visible and taking the lead in high-stakes situations. We’ll demonstrate how to stop letting others take the lead and to think differently in order to become more comfortable living with risk.
- **It’s All or Nothing (Instead of Both-And).** Black-and-white thinking does not lead to career success or personal satisfaction. Because complexity and constant change are everywhere in business and in our world today, dealing with ambiguity has become a primary leadership trait that women need to master. It is no coincidence that many of the women who are trying to have it all are also the ones who are most disappointed and frustrated. ●

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Take Center Stage

Having a firm vision of your own aspirations and strengths — and allowing other people to help you succeed — is good for you and everyone around you. Achieving both success and satisfaction requires making choices that allow you to invest in yourself and live into the larger plan you have for yourself and your life. Let's look at the seven components of this New Rule.

The New Rules

1. Take your goals and dreams seriously.

Focusing on your personal goals instead of being the one who nurtures everyone around you requires a certain amount of courage.

2. Think bigger. Aim higher. If you knew you could not fail, what would you want to do in your career? Think bigger ... Aim higher.

The most important thing you can do for yourself as a professional woman is to determine what it is you want from your career.

As you clarify your ambitions, write them down. In a couple of weeks, as you become more comfortable with your dreams and aspirations, identify one or two people whom you can trust ... and tell them. Next, seek out role models. Find out how each one became comfortable setting ambitious goals for herself.

3. Just say no. Doing “women’s work” at the office is bad for your confidence and worse for your career.

Are you the office go-to girl for party planning, philanthropic pursuits and after-work self-defense classes? What about at home? How do you feel routinely taking responsibility for every little thing?

Even beyond women’s work, it’s important to set boundaries. When a colleague asks you to sit in on a meeting or read a report, take a moment to decide if it’s work you should do. Without that deliberation, you may find yourself owning work that is someone else’s. Instead of helping a colleague prepare a presentation, suggest someone else who can do it. When all else fails, remember what Nelson Mandela says: “No is a complete sentence.”

4. Be ruthless with your calendar. Here is an assignment. Take out your calendar for the past month and analyze it closely. Ask yourself, *How much time am I spending in a given month on other people’s priorities, other people’s meetings, other people’s development and support?*

After you have analyzed your calendar, identify at least two actions you can take to be more purposeful about the way you spend time.

5. Take time to re-fuel. Figure out ways to minimize your contact with people and activities that sap your energy. Obviously, we cannot eliminate all of these encounters in our lives, but we can work to consciously reduce the number of them. Next, schedule two or three ways to refuel your energy every single day. Is it working out? Having lunch with a friend? Reading a novel? Watching a movie? Do whatever works for you. Refueling will help you sustain your pace.

6. Get famous for something. What is your brand? Are you known as someone with deep technical skills, as someone who can fix projects that are in the ditch, as someone who makes great sales presentations?

Whatever your passion or expertise entails, being the best (and best known) for something is one of the fastest ways to gain access to center stage.

7. Practice taking center stage. Lynne Ford, CEO of ING Individual Retirement, told us how she worked on her stage presence: “I really got into playing out the scene in my head; seeing myself giving the presentation. I found that I had to master the content first, and then I focused on the visual presentation.

“By trial and error I was able to get better. After a while, no one was reading papers anymore at the back of the room.”

Being center stage does not come naturally to most of us, even men. They may want you to believe that it does ... but it doesn’t. ●

Proceed Until Apprehended

It may seem obvious that we need to step forward and lobby for the opportunities we want, but the reality is that many of us expect doors to open based on our hard work and track record.

The New Rules

1. Don’t wait for permission. There are plenty of instances in life when proper protocol entails obeying the rules. However, there are many *other* times when you need to give yourself the green light to proceed.

Being bold and resolute takes practice. The best way to add assertiveness to your repertoire is by looking for opportunities to flex your muscles. Here are some hints to help you proceed until apprehended:

- *Act like you mean it.* It’s not just what you say, but how you say it that causes people to take your authority seriously. Speak honestly and directly with a minimum of “in my opinion” qualifiers.
- *Break a few rules.* Do things your own way once in

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a while and show people that you are your own person.

- *Be the dissenter.* Being assertive means you need to learn to be comfortable delivering bad news or an opposing position.
- *Don't overdo it.* Assertiveness and aggression are two altogether different things. Being assertive means that you effectively stand up for yourself, your point of view and your interests. But being labeled overly aggressive, especially as a woman, will have the opposite effect: You'll lose credibility, and colleagues will stop listening.

2. Make things happen. If you want to be viewed as senior leader material, you need to demonstrate that you can inspire others and make change happen. So step out of your comfort zone and rise to the challenge.

3. Fake it 'til you make it. Sometimes you just need to take a deep breath and put on your game face. When we interviewed her for this book, Cathy Bessant, the global technology and operations executive for Bank of America, told us: "You know, when guys lose their confidence they just bravado right through it. They puff their chest out and fake it 'til they make it. They do a much better job at this than we women do. But I'm an example of a woman who is learning how." ●

Project Personal Power

Mary Matalin, political consultant and CNN contributor, told us that projecting personal power is all about confidence. "You become the way you behave," she said. We've found that to be true. We use these New Rules to teach our clients to wield their personal power effectively.

The New Rules

1. Exude poise, confidence and power. We use video cameras in our coaching and training sessions in order to help individual women see how they come across to others. Most of the women we coach are unanimous in their dislike for this process, but they admit that it is a powerful technique.

To exude poise, confidence and power, we have to pay attention to our verbals and our nonverbals. The videotape is like a mirror. Once we see ourselves on tape, we can begin to practice making small changes that will add up to creating a major impact.

2. Take credit for your hard work. When Sharon Allen became chairman of Deloitte & Touche USA in 2003, she became not only the highest-ranking woman in the firm's history but also the first woman to hold

that role at a leading professional services firm. It's not surprising, then, that Allen would have some practical wisdom to impart.

Allen said, "Through my experience, I've realized that many women think if they work hard, others will recognize their accomplishments and they'll be rewarded. What I've learned is that it's important to ensure that those around you recognize your accomplishments and the contributions you've made. And there are ways to do that without being a braggart."

3. Don't confide your insecurities. Grace under pressure is not the easiest thing to achieve. We like to tell our clients to think of a swan gliding across the water: majestic and graceful above the water, but chaotic underneath — pedaling its feet fast and furiously to keep forward momentum. It's fine to feel the chaos, but best to try to display that outward calm.

4. Practice your power skills. Changing our "natural" ways of behaving can be a challenge; however, learning how to project personal power is a must if we want to succeed at senior levels.

You can learn what type of impact you are making on others and make changes to enhance your personal power. ●

Be Politically Savvy

If maneuvering through the political aspects of your career doesn't come easily to you, don't despair. We'd be willing to bet that even the most savvy women executives had to work at mastering their technique. We can help.

The New Rules

1. Recognize that women excel at politics. As we write this, there are 10 female presidents, including in Argentina, Costa Rica, India, Ireland, Liberia and Switzerland. In addition, there are 11 women prime ministers in such places as Australia, Bangladesh, Croatia, Finland, Germany and Slovakia. Although we won't assert that gender equity is improving rapidly in many sectors, women are making strides across the globe and flexing their political muscle in government.

Women have proved to be adept at maneuvering in purely political situations, everywhere from philanthropy and small business to family management and local politics. Women, after all, are natural consensus builders who must navigate tricky terrain. When women in our workshops tell us they need remedial work on office politics, we ask them to reflect on the nonbusiness parts of their lives.

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2. Be in the know. Do you know how business is done in your company? Being “in the know” makes office politics much easier to navigate. Here are a few practical tips to help you see which information sources to tap into and what people to count on when you’re facing a challenge:

- *Lose the org chart.* Every company is different, but most settings have informal social networks that are just as important as the established corporate hierarchy — if not more so. It’s worth your while, therefore, to actually chart the peer groups who have influence.
- *Connect the dots.* Once you’ve charted the key social networks, map your needs against that structure. You’ll be able to use the chart whenever you are trying to build consensus around a particular idea or need.
- *Understand the numbers.* Data on the company balance sheet say it all. The sooner you feel comfortable eyeballing spread sheets, the sooner you can actually start to read between the line items to determine what’s relevant to you.
- *Get connected.* Practice being fully present in meetings and in conversation. Be purposeful. Figure it out.

3. Run for office at the office. We coach women to realize that, at a certain point, they need to campaign for their career. It is naive to believe that you will be selected for high-level jobs without making your career aspirations transparent and building support for yourself.

Here are some of the components for our framework for being politically savvy without selling your soul:

- *Build a platform.* When you have something important to accomplish, you need a point of view. Building a platform at work means prioritizing your goals, and creating a formal pitch and message to bring them to life.
- *Build a coalition.* First, identify like-minded people who have goals that are similar to yours, and create a bridge that further links your interests. Second, identify the people who are likely to stand in your way because their interests diverge, and determine if there are ways to create alignment. Think about what sorts of people are missing from your coalition — top executives, technical experts, support staff — and decide whom you’ll bring on board to fill the gaps. Finally, identify the people who will never be in a position to support your interests, and consider how to appease them or mitigate the concerns they may raise.

You Are a Natural at Politics

See for yourself: Assemble a list that represents the relationships you manage, the decisions you make on behalf of yourself and others, and all of the everyday negotiations that you accomplish without a second thought. This list should be all that you need to remind yourself that you are naturally effective in political situations. Thinking about how savvy you’ve been in other contexts can give you the confidence you need to demonstrate political prowess at work.

Our point is this: You are a natural.

- *Line up sponsors.* Sponsors expose their protégés to choice assignments and fight to get them promoted.

4. Become a political activist. You can’t opt out of office politics. If you’re not sure how to crack your company code, identify someone who seems especially comfortable building coalitions and who is well networked within your company, and interview that person to find out how he or she approaches it.

Political savvy is not a skill that comes naturally to many of us. The good news is that changing your thinking about politics and realizing that it is an important part of your existing job make it easier to commit to some small adjustments that can have a big impact on your career opportunities.

Career coach Kathryn Mayer put it nicely: “You can be yourself, maintain integrity and leverage your relationship skills to garner support and recognition of your ideas and advance your career. That’s what political savvy is all about.” ●

Play to Win

In our research, we have found a theme running through the topic of women and risk. We heard over and over that women must be bolder, get out of their comfort zone, take risks and play to win.

Let’s look at some of the New Rules that are associated with the Play to Win mindset.

The New Rules

1. It is a game. Over and over again we advise women to become crystal clear on what specific deliverables signify success.

You cannot win unless you have a clear sense of what success is.

2. Reinvent yourself. Staying put in a job that’s lost

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all appeal and isn't leading you to better things is riskier than taking a chance on change. The longer you stay put, the more difficult it can be to summon the courage and vision required to tackle what's next.

3. Leave your trapeze. The American futurist Marilyn Ferguson said, "It is not so much that we're afraid of change or so in love with the old ways, but it's that place in between that we fear. It's like being between trapezes. It's Linus when his blanket is in the dryer. There's nothing to hold on to."

4. Be a risk taker. Becoming comfortable with risk and change is one thing. Actually leading the change is quite another. Still, if you are frustrated with the inefficiencies you see all around you, why not take the initiative and improve the situation? It's a great way to establish yourself as a leader and a problem solver.

5. Be a rainmaker. Women who can sell are powerful. There's no two ways about it: Rainmakers get promoted. Why? Because they bring in business? And you don't need to be on the sales team to be a rainmaker. If you are managing client relationships, closing deals of any sort or even managing a team of customer-facing contributors — you can use your skills to become visible by bringing revenue and customers into the organization. Julie Morgenstern, author of the book *Never Check E-Mail in the Morning*, says, "Dance close to the revenue line."

6. Do-overs are fine. The important feature of failure is the ability to learn from your mistakes and to pick yourself up to start again. In many cases, do-overs are fine, because past experiences make you smarter. Great managers instill this value in their people. ●

It's Both-And

The "all-or-nothing" trap robs us of satisfaction and success. Luckily, it is a great place to start to break our own rules.

The New Rules

1. Don't limit yourself. Adopting a Both-And mindset requires us to break away from negative and extreme thinking. Research tells us that having a positive outlook lowers anxiety and actually increases lifespan. Not only that, optimists have better coping skills when the going gets tough.

2. Just get over it. We've found that women prefer everything to proceed along smoothly; we are more bothered than men by the little bumps in the road. Although it is easier said than done, sometimes we'd be a lot happier if we simply decided to let go of the little things that don't amount to much.

'Blending' Work and Family

In our interview with Bonnie St. John, Olympic champion, motivational speaker and author of *Live Your Joy*, she tells us about an "aha" moment: "For me, the epiphany was that it doesn't need to be a teeter-totter. I avoid the extreme ups and downs and guilt. Instead, it's what I call blending." By "blending," St. John means that she has created a life that brings work and family aspirations together in a fluid way. It allows for personal satisfaction and control. St. John looks for creative solutions to accomplishing her goals, but she's not doing every little thing herself — only the important things. She goes on to say, "With blending, there is a possibility of having more of both. It isn't simple, it isn't trivial, but it is possible."

What we love about St. John's perspective is that she's found a smart, holistic way to think about her world — one that allows her to live into her goals without making herself crazy. She's breaking her own rules and creating new ones that work for her.

3. Be an entrepreneur. Being able to adapt to adversity and thrive in ambiguous situations has become a primary career survival skill. Change, as they say, is the new normal.

Given these challenges, we find ourselves coaching women to have an entrepreneurial perspective. Even in a big-business setting, being an entrepreneur opens you up to a world of possibilities.

4. Get centered. Maintaining a satisfying work-life balance sometimes feels like a hopeless struggle. But even if genuine work-life balance is a big fat myth, the kind of balance we're talking about is emotional — being on an even keel and having a handle on the priorities in your life. Like Olympic champion Bonnie St. John [see sidebar], think of it as blending, not balancing.

5. Call in reinforcements. Having a support network is a prerequisite not only for career success, but also for maintaining that blending of work and home that allows you to have a well-rounded life. ●

Stand Together and Close Ranks

We've told you our big dream: We want to see women make up at least 30 percent of the leaders at the top levels of corporate America within the next 10 years. We believe that 30 percent will be a tipping point for change — a change that will be positive not just for women but for everyone.

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Let's review what we know. We're good for the bottom line. The research firm Catalyst studied 353 Fortune 500 companies and found that those with more women serving as senior leaders had significantly higher returns on equity.

But despite all the good news and steady progress, we're a long way from achieving equal leadership representation at the most senior ranks. We believe that to get red suits at the table, women must stand together and be the drivers of change at three levels: We need individual, group and systemic change.

Individual Level: Awareness, Choice, Then Change

We work with women every day to encourage them to break their own rules. Our framework for change at the individual level consists of three phases:

- **Awareness.** Good leaders are self-aware — they have an accurate understanding of their strengths and weaknesses, their accomplishments and needs.
- **Choice.** Once you have gathered enough information to see how you are being perceived, you have an opportunity for change. It's up to you to make the move. Change requires a decision. You can decide to change or stay the same. Actually making the decision to change is a powerful act.
- **Change.** Once you have decided to make a change, put together a plan for yourself.

Group Level: Women Supporting Other Women

We are passionate believers in the idea that women must help other women succeed. In our interview with Gail Evans, former CNN executive and author of *Play Like a Man, Win Like a Woman*, she put it this way: "We need to push each other up. The guys push each other up all the time. And if they don't succeed, they just slap each other on the back and say *It was a good try; we'll go for it next time*. We have to do the same — we must surround ourselves with supportive women who will give us a boost."

A second way that women can support women is by closing ranks. This is true solidarity: women promoting other women. When a position opens up at the senior level, women need to support one of their own to be chosen for the job. We need to support each other, even if it means we have to wait in line longer for our own turn.

There is so much we can accomplish if we stand together and close ranks.

System-Level Support

Building a business infrastructure and a society that support our ambition and allow us a less arduous path to success takes time — but it will happen. It will happen because we will refuse to allow circumstances to remain the same. Our relentless networking and political savvy will open doors. Our support for each other will create networks, mentors and active sponsors. Our collaborative leadership style and emotional intelligence will make us more relevant in a networked world. Our growing confidence will compensate for the double standards and double binds that keep us in supporting roles. Our time in the leadership pipeline will offer us experience and access to important and visible assignments. We will rise to senior leadership levels.

Helen Mets-Morris, vice president and general manager at Avery Dennison, put it this way: "Breaking through is a huge cultural challenge. But I am so much more effective now that I'm aware of the size of the challenge. In terms of motivation, I believe that every one of us who is working for change is making a difference."

Concluding Words on Change

There is a mountain of research that explains the biological and psychological reasons why people avoid change and stay stuck in bad situations. In their book, *Leadership on the Lie*, Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky say that "habits, values, and attitudes, even dysfunctional ones, are part of one's identity. To change the way people see and do things is to challenge how they define themselves."

Challenging how we define ourselves is a tall order. We've asked you to examine your individual thought patterns and to change the way you think about success. That takes work. But even if you struggle with change, the truth is that once you take the leap, you'll be rewarded. We've found that when the women we work with make even small changes, they feel brave and invigorated. We tell them to remember those feelings — they make change a little bit easier the next time. ●

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

If you liked *Break Your Own Rules*, you'll also like:

1. ***What's Holding You Back* by Robert J. Herbold.** The noted CEO reveals the 10 core principles of confident leadership.
2. ***The Power of Professionalism* by Bill Wiersma.** Wiersma outlines the seven key mind-sets of trusted professionals, offering a blueprint for both individuals and organizations interested in fostering a culture of professionalism.
3. ***Credibility* by James Kouzes and Barry Posner.** This book expands on *The Leadership Challenge*, and shows why credibility remains the foundation of great leadership.