



# soundview

## Featured Book Review

### **LEAN IN** **Women, Work and the Will To Lead** by Sheryl Sandberg

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According to Sheryl Sandberg, “leaning in” is an ambitious challenge to women to push forward and chart their own course to reach significant personal goals. She notes that even though women are better off now than ever before in history, women’s voices are still not heard equally. In fact, Sandberg believes that women should be dissatisfied with the status quo and push themselves to keep reaching for equality.

*Lean In* affirms that women often hold themselves back in their careers, whereas they actually deserve to move to the forefront, in leadership roles. Sandberg’s chapters focus on adjustments that women can make, such as increasing self-confidence and not trying to do it all. She examines how women can “sit at the table,” take on risks, embrace challenges and seek their own goals. She asserts that a better world will exist when “half of our institutions are run by women and half our homes are run by men.”

A wide gamut of women will embrace this book: those who have choices as to where, when and how much they work and those who face challenges wherever they work. For both groups of women, Sandberg addresses practical ways to remove barriers that prevent women from getting to the top. These barriers are both external and internal. External hurdles include sexism, harassment and discrimination. The internal barriers, those that women build within our minds, are lack of self-confidence and reluctance to raise our hands. Women hesitate to assert themselves, according to Sandberg, by “pulling back when we should be leaning in.”

#### **Gender Stereotypes and the Leadership Gap**

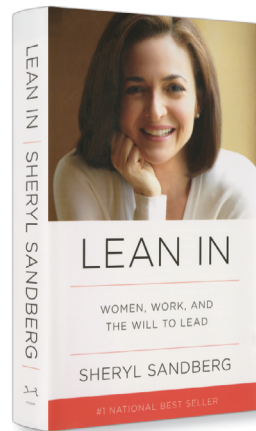
So many times women have said of other women, “I don’t know how she does it!” Sandberg notes that fear underlies

many barriers to being both a happy mother and a competent professional: fear of failure, of being judged, of aspiring to too much, of not being liked, of attracting negative attention. She points to national trends: Highly trained women are scaling back and dropping out of the workforce in high numbers because integrating personal aspirations with professional goals has been very challenging.

Sandberg notes that different treatment of boys and girls, from birth through school, is a symptom of gender stereotyping, which becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. A cause of this inequality is what Sandberg calls the “stereotype threat.” When members of a group become aware of a negative stereotype, they are likely to perform according to that stereotype. This phenomenon may discourage girls from entering some technical fields, and girls may consequently hesitate to aspire to senior leadership jobs.

In fact, when a girl tries to lead, she may be labeled as bossy and may pay a social penalty. Even though girls outperform boys in many college classrooms, girls’ academic gains have not been reflected in greater numbers of women in top jobs, writes Sandberg. This phenomenon is the “leadership ambition gap.”

Women often feel undeserving and guilty instead of worthy of recognition for their high achievement (the impostor syndrome of underestimating ourselves.) Sandberg quotes Tina Fey: “The beauty of the impostor syndrome is that you vacillate between extreme egomania and a complete feeling of ‘I’m a fraud.’” Research supports that when one feels more powerful and in charge, he or she has a higher tolerance for risk in reaching for opportunities. Sandberg acknowledges, “I know that in order to continue to grow and challenge myself, I have to believe in my own abilities. I still face situations that I fear are beyond my capabilities. But now I know how to take a deep breath and keep my hand up. I have learned to sit at the table.”



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## Does Achievement Put Women in a Double Bind?

Sandberg cites research showing that success and likeability are positively correlated for men and negatively correlated for women. Research reveals that even though no one admits to stereotyping, when a woman is successful both men and women like her less. In other words, we evaluate people based on stereotypes.

Therefore, women are held back because they keep themselves back, insists Sandberg. Successful women may be perceived as non-team players or as too aggressive. Women's self-doubt may cause them to downplay their achievements.

The nice-vs.-competence dilemma is explained by a Stanford professor, Deborah Gruenfeld: "Our entrenched cultural ideas associate men with leadership qualities and women with nurturing qualities and put women in a double bind." Thus, women feel they need to do the job and get along with everyone. Even when a woman negotiates successfully for herself, she may pay the price of sacrificing good will, Sandberg asserts.

As Mark Zuckerberg told Sandberg at her first formal review, "If you want to change things, you can't please everyone." Sandberg found that Mark was absolutely right.

## Multiple Ways to Climb to the Top

Even though a ladder is a common metaphor for a career, Sandberg insists that a jungle gym is a more appropriate comparison, because it provides various ways of reaching the top, through creativity and individuality. Women who are starting or changing careers or re-entering the workforce especially benefit from the growth alternatives that a jungle-gym model represents.

Sandberg's work history exemplifies a jungle-gym career ascendancy. Her first job after college was at the World Bank, which included a stint in India researching leprosy. Subsequently she attended Cambridge Business School and joined the Nonprofit Club, where she studied social marketing. After her next job at McKinsey and Company, she became secretary of the Treasury Department, where she was involved in national and international economic policy. As she perceived the exponential growth of technology, she moved to Silicon Valley, where she was employed by Google.

She admits that the best piece of career advice came from a friend, Google CEO Eric Schmidt: Only one criterion mattered when picking a career: fast growth. She has since advocated that employees seek "rocket ships within their companies" by seeking positions that encourage stretching and reaching, as on a jungle gym. Sandberg also advises that everyone develop a long-term dream, namely, an 18-month plan that is two pronged: It sets goals to help us focus on results, and it sets personal goals for acquiring new skills.

## The Results of Missed Opportunities

Millennial women are not as likely as men to characterize themselves as "leaders" or "willing to take risks." Yet, aversion to risk can cause a woman to avoid tackling challenging tasks that could advance her career. Women may avoid "stretch assignments" because they feel they do not have the skills necessary for that reach. Unfortunately, this leaning back is counter-productive because many skills are actually learned on the job, she observes.

Seeking challenges beyond one's comfort level triggers leadership in climbing the jungle gym. In short, managing a career involves willingness to take risks, seek promotions and choose growth opportunities leading to a seat on the rocket ship.

Studies show that people who are mentored and sponsored report having more career success than those who are not. Mentoring has become a key topic in women's seminars, because mentoring (advising, supporting and providing feedback) is regarded as important for career progression.

The question arises, how do mentees find mentors? This book reiterates that mentors select their protégées based on performance, potential and initiative. Advice for mentees therefore includes the following:

- Be open to feedback;
- Use your working time productively;
- Do not expect hand-holding or solutions to be handed to you;
- Be proactive in your job (don't wait for a mentor to be a Prince Charming).

In reciprocal mentoring, both the mentee and the mentor benefit, because both gain useful information, a sense of collegiality and commitment.

## The Challenge of Honest Dialogue and Honest Feedback

Authentic communication is as difficult yet as necessary in the workplace as it is in successful relationships. Yet, open communication is stymied at work for many reasons, Sandberg notes. One barrier is that performance is often assessed by someone else's perception, which makes people less likely to tell the truth. Many women also perceive that speaking honestly will label them as negative or non-team players.

Sandberg affirms that communication works best when people combine appropriateness with authenticity, so that we are not brutally honest but delicately honest. Effective communication starts with several steps:

- The realization that there is my point of view (my truth) and someone else's point of view (his truth);
- The I-message, wherein opinion can be stated non-confrontationally using the first-person pronoun;

- Simple, minimal words, not wordy nuances that can obfuscate the point;
- The ability to really listen and acknowledge the speaker's feelings ("I understand you are feeling ... because ...")

The advantage of knowledge derived from honest interchange is greater than wallowing in supposedly blissful ignorance, which seldom leads to improvement. As Sandberg explains, asking for advice and feedback builds relationships that increase collegiality and equality in the workplace.

## Eliciting and Fostering Honest Views

She tackles the challenge of how to encourage those around us to speak authentically. We can actively seek others' input by simply asking what the other person is thinking. ("Mike, what do you think about ...?") Another way to encourage genuine dialogue is to speak openly about our own weaknesses, perhaps admitting our own impatience or quirks, which helps others to relate to us and opens up deeper levels of conversation.

Sandberg adds that thanking people publicly encourages them and others around them to continue the good work. Moreover, sometimes humor can effectively help deliver an honest message. At other times when humor is not appropriate, an uncomfortable situation can be relieved by honest human emotion, such as when Sandberg "cried on Mark Zuckerberg's shoulder!"

Indeed, sharing emotions may increase motivation. Sandberg uses the phrase "Bringing our whole selves to work": no strict line of demarcation between our personal and professional lives. She cites prominent thinker Marcus Buckingham's research that leadership derives from "individuality that is honestly and sometimes imperfectly expressed." This shift bodes well for women who often feel obligated to relegate their emotions to a stereotypically male image. She concludes that compassion and sensitivity are the cornerstone for more authentic leadership.

## A Career-Loving Parent or a Working Mom?

Even though we may follow the maxim, "To fail to prepare is to prepare to fail," Sandberg notes the paradox that when it comes to meshing career and family, planning too far in advance can close doors rather than open them. The time leading up to having a family is not the time to lean

back but the time to lean in to one's job. Women who do not stretch themselves professionally before they become parents may fall behind. When a mom returns to the workplace, she may feel marginalized or underutilized.

As a parent of two children, Sandberg continued to lean into her job and options; she took a new job at Facebook when her second child was seven months old. She points out the irony: "Women wind up leaving the workforce precisely because of things they did to stay in the workforce."

Sandberg declares that women most likely to leave the workplace are those married to men at two ends of the income gamut: ones earning the least and ones earning

the most. Mothers married to low-income-earning husbands often cannot find jobs that cover the cost of daycare.

Mothers married to high-income men often leave employment because the hours husbands work require moms to care for the children. She advises that professional women weigh the cost of child care against their future salary rather than their current salary, before they contemplate leaving. The exodus of highly educated women from the workplace contributes further to the leadership gap.

Sandberg's message is that if society truly values the work of caring for children and develops ways to help parents balance family and career responsibilities, both employees and employer will benefit immensely. Access to paid family leave, affordable day care and flexible work schedules would narrow the leadership gap.

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## Real Partnership: Why Men Must Be More Empowered at Home

Without realizing it, women who do not view their partners as equally capable of chores and child care discourage them from sharing in work at home. But if women take a more collaborative approach to household duties, men will more readily assume their share. (Sandberg humorously suggests that even if dads put the diaper on the baby's head, the wife should just smile!)

Underpinning this need for equal partnership is Sandberg's contention that spousal support is crucial to a woman's successful leadership. The metaphor of a pendulum swinging back and forth aptly describes how partners can coordinate work schedules with household chores.

Because studies on child development reveal that children with involved and caring fathers show significantly high

levels of cognitive abilities and psychological well-being, it is crucial that men be encouraged to lean into their families.

Gender-specific expectations bring many unfortunate self-fulfilling complications. The belief that mothers are more committed to family than to work penalizes women because employers assume women are not as professionally dedicated as men.

Surveys of younger generations of men reveal the enormous advantages of an equal partnership:

- Partners experience greater happiness in the relationship and higher satisfaction;
- Men participating in raising children practice greater patience and understanding;
- Both partners experience/practice flexibility and negotiation;
- Women earning money gain an increased ability to make decisions at home and in their future;
- Partners model examples of greater equality for the next generation.

### **Pursuing a Career and Children: It's a Matter of Focus**

“Can we do it all?” Of course, the answer is no. Expecting women to do everything right leads them to major disappointment and self-doubt. Sandberg notes that women who have achieved professional success by pushing themselves ahead may have difficulty distinguishing between essential and non-essential aspects of the job, curtailing hours or “unplugging.” But women can maximize their efficiency by focusing on what is important (being home for dinner, attending Sally’s game or Billy’s parent-teacher conference.)

The new normal in both the workplace and home includes an overloaded schedule and pressure to excel. Women whose children are in daycare often worry that their children suffer, but studies reveal no gaps in cognitive skills or social competence between children cared for exclusively by their mothers and those in day care. Thus responsive, caring parents working outside the home are quite capable of providing secure and nurturing environments for their children.

When Sandberg founded Women@Google, she tackled the problem of how women perceive themselves on the job. She contends that women need to speak out and seek solutions to barriers that impede advancement. At Facebook she teaches managers to encourage women to both vocalize their plans regarding families and to continue seeking opportunities. As she says, “Talking can transform minds, which can transform behaviors, which can transform institutions.”

### **Ongoing Dialogue about Equality**

Sandberg reports that women will enjoy real choice when they have supportive employers, colleagues and partners, and men will have real choice when they are respected for contributing inside the home.

Achieving equality also requires women to support other women. Ironically, women already in power often regard aspiring women as competition. The term “queen bee” describes gender discrimination: A woman leader tries to dominate and keep other women down.

Sandberg also reminds us that even when we disagree, we should keep our shared goals in the forefront. She calls for not less debate but more constructive debate. “We versus us” and “Us versus them” is counterproductive to the goal, which is “a coalition of support,” where children see fathers providing school transportation and mothers happy at jobs.

*Lean In* is a canonical must-read for working women seeking empowerment. In this inspiring powerhouse of a book, Sandberg provides pragmatic advice on overcoming the biases and gender stereotyping surrounding working women. Sandberg’s firsthand experience, extensive research, interviews and humor lend strong credibility to her advocacy of women leaning in and charging ahead in pursuit of individual growth and goal attainment. Her engaging call to action reminds us all that more women in leadership positions will create a more equitable world of both professional and personal fulfillment.

She shares her contagious optimism in her final hope that her own children will end up where they want to be by leaning in — all the way.

**The Author:** Sheryl Sandberg is Chief Operating Officer at Facebook and is ranked on Fortune’s list of the 50 Most Powerful Women in Business and as one of *Time*’s 100 Most Influential People in the World. Prior to working at Facebook, she was Vice President of Global Online Sales and Operations at Google and Chief of Staff at the United States Treasury Department. Before that, she worked as a consultant at McKinsey & Company and as a research assistant at the World Bank. Sheryl serves on the boards of Facebook, The Walt Disney Company, Women for Women International, V-Day and ONE, and she chairs the board of Lean In. She received a BA in Economics from Harvard University and an MBA from the Harvard Business School. Sheryl lives in northern California with her husband, Dave Goldberg, and their two children.



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