

BOOK SUMMARY

Lean In: Women, Work and the Will to Lead

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The Leadership Ambition Gap – What Would You Do If You Weren't Afraid?

Even though I grew up in a traditional home, my parents had the same expectations for me, my sister, and my brother. All three of us were encouraged to excel in school, do equal chores, and engage in extracurricular activities. We were all supposed to be athletic too. My brother and sister joined sports teams, but I was the kid that got picked last in gym. Despite my athletic shortcomings, I was raised to believe that girls could do anything boys could do and that *all* career paths were open to me.

When I arrived at college in the fall of 1987, my classmates of both genders seemed equally focused on academics. I don't remember thinking about my future career any differently from the male students. I also don't remember any conversations about someday balancing work and children. My friends and I assumed that we would have both. Men and women competed openly and aggressively with one another in classes, activities, and job interviews. Just two generations removed from my grandmother, the playing field seemed to be level.

But more than twenty years after my college graduation, the world has not evolved nearly as much as I believed it would. Almost all of my classmates work in professional settings. Some of my female classmates work in professional settings. Some of my female classmates work full-time or part-time outside the home, and just as many are stay-at-home mothers and volunteers like my mom. This mirrors the national trend. In comparison to their male counterparts, highly trained women are scaling back and dropping out of the workforce in high numbers. In turn, these diverging percentages teach institutions and mentors to invest more in men, who are statistically more likely to stay.

So what happened? My generation was raised in an era of increasing equality, a trend we thought would continue. In retrospect, we were naïve and idealistic. Integrating professional and personal aspirations proved far more challenging than we had imagined. During the same years that our careers demanded maximum time investment, our biology demanded that we have children. Our partners did not share the housework and child rearing, so we found ourselves with two full-time jobs. The workplace did not evolve to give us the flexibility we needed to fulfill our responsibilities at home. We anticipated none of this. We were caught by surprise.

If my generation was too naïve, the generations that have followed may be too practical. We knew too little, and now girls know too much. Girls growing up today are not the first generation to have equal opportunity, but they are the first to know that all opportunity does not necessarily translate into professional achievement. Many of these girls watched their mother try to "do it all" and then decide that something had to give. That something was usually their careers.

The pipeline that supplies the educated workforce is chock-full of women at the entry level, but by the time that same pipeline is filling leadership positions, it is overwhelmingly stocked with men. There are so many reasons for this winnowing out, but one important contributor is a leadership ambition gap. Of course, many individual women are as professionally ambitious as any individual man. Yet drilling down, the data clearly indicate that in field after field, more men than women aspire to the most senior jobs. A 2012 McKinsey survey of more than four thousand employees of leading companies found that 36 percent of the men wanted to reach the C-suite, compared to only 18 percent of the women. When jobs are described as powerful, challenging, and involving high levels of responsibility, they appeal to more men than women. And while the ambition gap is more pronounced at the highest levels, the underlying dynamic is evident at every step of the career ladder. A survey of college students found that more men than women chose "reaching a managerial level" as a career priority in the first three years after graduating. Even among highly educated professional men and women, more men than women described themselves as "ambitious."

There is some hope that a shift is starting to occur in the next generation. A 2012 Pew study found for the first time that among young people ages eighteen to thirty-four, more young women (66 percent) than young men (59 percent) rated "success in a high-paying career or profession" as important to their lives. A recent survey of Millennials found that women were just as likely to describe themselves as ambitious as men. Although this is an improvement, even among this demographic, the leadership ambition gap remains. Millennial women are less likely than Millennial men to agree that the statement "I aspire to a leadership role in whatever field I ultimately work" describes them very well. Millennial women were also less likely than their male peers to characterize themselves as "leaders," "visionaries," "self-confident," and "willing to take risks."

Since more men aim for leadership roles, it is not surprising that they obtain them, especially given all the other obstacles that women have to overcome. Professional ambition is expected of men but is optional – or worse, sometimes even a negative-for women. “She is very ambitious” is not a compliment in our culture. Aggressive and hard-charging women violate unwritten rules about acceptable social conduct. Men are continually applauded for being ambitious and powerful and successful, but women who display these same traits often pay a social penalty. Female accomplishments come at a cost.

Many have argued with me that ambition is not the problem. Women are not less ambitious than men, they insist, but more enlightened with different and more meaningful goals. I do not dismiss or dispute this argument. There is far more to life than climbing a career ladder, including raising children, seeking personal fulfillment, contributing to society and improving the lives of others. And there are many people who are deeply committed to their jobs but do not – and should not have to – aspire to run their organizations. Leadership roles are not the only way to have profound impact.

Compounding the problem is a social-psychological phenomenon called “stereotype threat.” Social scientists have observed that when members of a group are made aware of a negative stereotype, they are more likely to perform according to that stereotype. For example, stereotypically, boys are better at math and science than girls. When girls are reminded of their gender before a math or science test, even by something as simple as checking off an M or F box at the top of the test, they perform worse. Stereotype threat discourages girls and women from entering technical fields and is one of the key reasons that so few study computer science.

The stereotype of a working woman is rarely attractive. Popular culture has long portrayed successful working women as so consumed by their careers that they have no personal life. A study found that of Millennial men and women who work in an organization with a woman in a senior role, only about 20 percent want to emulate her career. This unappealing stereotype is particularly unfortunate since most women have no choice but to remain in the workforce. About 41 percent of mothers are primarily breadwinners and earn the majority of their family’s earnings. Another 23 percent of mothers are co-breadwinners, contributing at least a quarter of the family’s earnings. The number of women supporting families on their own is increasing quickly; between 1973 and 2006, the proportion of families headed by a single mother grew from one to ten to one in five. These numbers are dramatically higher in Hispanic and African-American families. Twenty-seven percent of Latino children and 52 percent of African-American children are being raised by a single mother.

Of all industrialized nations in the world, the United States is the only one without a paid maternity leave policy. For many men, the fundamental assumption is that they can have both a successful professional life and a fulfilling personal life. For many women, the assumption is that trying to do both is difficult at best and impossible at worst. Women are surrounded by headlines and stories warning them that they cannot be committed to both their families and their careers. They are told over and over again that they have to choose, because if they try to do too much, they’ll be harried and unhappy. Framing the issues as “work-life balance” – as if the two were diametrically opposed – practically ensures work will lose out. Who would ever choose work over life?

The good news is that not only can women have both families and careers, they can thrive while doing so. In 2009, Sharon Meers and Joanna Strober published *Getting to 50/50*, a comprehensive review of governmental, social science, and original research that led them to conclude that children, parents, and marriages can all flourish when both parents have full careers. The data plainly reveal that sharing financial and child-care responsibilities leads to less guilty moms, more involved dads, and thriving children. Professor Rosalind Chait Barnett at Brandeis University did a comprehensive review of studies on work-life balance and found that women who participate in multiple roles actually have lower levels of anxiety and high levels of mental well-being. Employed women reap rewards including greater financial security, more stable marriages, better health, and, in general, increase life satisfaction.

We need more portrayals of women as competent professionals and happy mothers – or even happy professionals and competent mothers. The current negative images may make us laugh, but they also make women unnecessarily fearful by presenting life’s challenges as insurmountable. Our culture remains baffled: *I don’t know how she does it.*

Fear is at the root of so many of the barriers that women face. Fear of not being liked. Fear of making the wrong choice. Fear of drawing negative attention. Fear of overreaching. Fear of being judged. Fear of failure. And the holy trinity of fear: the fear of being a bad mother/wife/daughter.

In 2011, Debra Spar, president of Barnard College, invited me to deliver its commencement address. This speech was the first time I openly discussed the leadership ambition gap. Standing on the podium, I felt nervous. I told the members of the graduating class that they could be ambitious not just in pursuing their dreams but in aspiring to become leaders in their fields. I knew this message could be misinterpreted as my judging women for not making the same choices that I have. Nothing could be farther from the truth. I believe that choice means choice for all of us. But I also believe that we need to do more to

encourage women to reach for leadership roles. If we can't tell women to aim high at a college graduation, when can we? As I addressed the enthusiastic women, I found myself fighting back the tears. I know my speech was meant to motivate them, but they actually motivated me. In the months that followed, I started thinking that I should speak up more often and more publicly about these issues. I should urge more women to believe in themselves and aspire to lead. I should urge more men to become part of the solution by supporting women in the workforce and at home. Writing this book is not just me encouraging others to lean in. This is me leaning in. Writing this book is what I would do if I weren't afraid.

Sit at the Table

A few years ago, I hosted a meeting for Treasury Secretary Tim Geithner at Facebook. Secretary Geithner arrived with four members of his staff, two senior and two more junior, and we all gathered in our one nice conference room. Our invited guests, mostly men, grabbed their plates and food and sat down at the large conference table. Secretary Geithner's team, all women, took their food last and sat in chairs off to the side of the room. I motioned for the women to come sit at the table, waving them over so they would feel welcomed. They demurred and remained in their seats.

The four women had every right to be at this meeting, but because of their seating choice, they seemed like spectators rather than participants. I knew I had to say something. So after the meeting, I pulled them aside to talk. I pointed out that they should have sat at the table even without an invitation, but when publicly welcomed, they most certainly should have joined. At first, they seemed surprised, and then they agreed.

My senior year of college, I was inducted into the Phi Beta Kappa honor society. At that time, Harvard and Radcliffe had separate chapters, so my ceremony was for women only. The keynote speaker, Dr. Peggy McIntosh from the Wellesley Centers for Women, gave a talk called "Feeling Like a Fraud." She explained that many people, but especially women, feel fraudulent when they are praised for their accomplishments. Instead of feeling worthy of recognition, they feel undeserving and guilty, as if a mistake has been made. Despite being high achievers, even experts in their fields, women can't shake the sense that it is only a matter of time until they are found out for who they really are – impostors with limited skills or abilities.

This phenomenon of capable people being plagued by self-doubt has a name – the impostor syndrome. Both men and women are susceptible to the impostor syndrome, but women tend to experience it more intensely and be more limited by it.

For women, feeling like a fraud is a symptom of a greater problem. We consistently underestimate ourselves. Multiple studies in multiple industries show that women often judge their own performance as worse than it actually is, while men judge their own performance as better than it actually is. Ask a man to explain his success and he will typically credit his own innate qualities and skills. Ask a woman the same question and she will attribute her success to external factors, insisting she did well because she "worked really hard," or "got lucky," or "had help from others." Men and women also differ when it comes to explaining failure. When a man fails, he points to factors like "didn't study enough" or "not interested in the subject matter." When a woman fails, she is more likely to believe it is due to an inherent lack of ability. And in situations where a man and a woman each receive negative feedback, the woman's self-confidence and self-esteem drop to a much greater degree. The internalization of failure and the insecurity it breeds hurt future performance, so this pattern has serious long-term consequences.

I learned over time that while it is hard to shake feelings of self-doubt, I could understand that there was a distortion. I would never possess my brother's effortless confidence, but I could challenge the notion that I was constantly headed for failure. When I felt like I was not capable of doing something, I'd remind myself that I did not fail all of my exams in college. Or even one. I learned to undistort the distortion.

When I don't feel confident, one tactic I've learned is that it sometimes helps to fake it. I discovered this when I was an aerobics instructor in the 1980s. Influenced by the gospel of Jane Fonda, aerobics meant smiling solidly for a full hour. Some days, the smile came naturally. Other days, I was in a lousy mood and had to fake it. Yet after an hour of forced smiling, I often felt cheerful.

Research backs up this "fake it till you feel it" strategy. One study found that when people assumed a high-power pose (for example, taking up space by spreading their limbs) for just two minutes, their dominance hormone levels (testosterone) went up and their stress hormone levels (cortisol) went down. As a result, they felt more powerful and in charge and showed a greater tolerance for risk. A simple change in posture led to a significant change in attitude.

I would not suggest that anyone move beyond feeling confident into arrogance or boastfulness. No one likes that in men or women. But feeling confident – or pretending that you feel confident – is necessary to reach for opportunities. It's a cliché, but opportunities are rarely offered; they're seized. At a certain point it's your ability to learn quickly that matters. One of the things I tell people these days is that there is no perfect fit when you're looking for the next big thing to do. You have to take

opportunities and make an opportunity fit for you, rather than the other way around. The ability to learn is the most important quality a leader can have.

If we want a world with greater equality, we need to acknowledge that women are less likely to “keep their hands up.” We need institutions and individuals to notice and correct for this behavior by encouraging, promoting, and championing more women. And women have to learn to keep their hands up, because when they lower them, even managers with the best intentions might not notice.

I know that my success comes from hard work, help from others, and being at the right place at the right time. I feel a deep and enduring sense of gratitude to those who have given me opportunities and support. I recognize the sheer luck of being born into my family in the United States rather than one of the many places in the world where women are denied basic rights. I believe that all of us – men and women alike – should acknowledge good fortune and thank the people who have helped us. No one accomplishes anything all alone.

But I also know that in order to grow and challenge myself, I have to believe in my own abilities. I still face situations that I fear are beyond my capabilities. I still have days when I feel like a fraud. And I still sometimes find myself spoken over and discounted while men sitting next to me are not. But now I know how to take a deep breath and keep my hand up. I have learned to sit at the table.

Success and Likeability

In 2003, Columbia Business School professor Frank Flynn and New York University professor Cameron Anderson ran an experiment to test perceptions of men and women in the workplace. They started with a Harvard Business School case study about a real-life entrepreneur named Heidi Roizen. The case described how Roizen became a successful venture capitalist by using her “outgoing personality ... and vast personal and professional network [that] included many of the most powerful business leaders in the technology sector.” Flynn and Anderson assigned half the students to read Heidi’s story and gave the other half the same story with just one difference – they change the name “Heidi” to “Howard.”

Professors Flynn and Anderson then polled the students about their impressions of Heidi or Howard. The students rated Heidi and Howard as equally competent, which made sense since “their” accomplishments were completely identical. Yet while students respected both Heidi and Howard, Howard came across as a more appealing colleague. Heidi, on the other hand, was often seen as selfish and not “the type of person you would want to hire or work for.” The same data with a single difference – gender – created vastly different impressions.

This experiment supports what research has already clearly shown: success and likeability are positively correlated for men and negatively correlated for women. When a man is successful, he is liked by both men and women. When a woman is successful, people of both genders like her less. This truth is both shocking and unsurprising: shocking because no one would ever admit to stereotyping on the basis of gender and unsurprising because clearly we do.

Decades of social science studies have confirmed what the Heidi/Howard case study so blatantly demonstrates: we evaluate people based on stereotypes (gender, race, nationality, and age, among others). Our stereotype of men holds that they are providers, decisive, and driven. Our stereotype of women holds that they are caregivers, sensitive, and communal. Because we characterize men and women in opposition to each other, professional achievement and all the traits associated with it get placed in the male column. By focusing on her career and taking a calculated approach to amassing power, Heidi violated our stereotypical expectations of women. Yet by behaving in the same manner, Howard lived up to our stereotypical expectations of men. The end result? Liked him, disliked her.

We’re aware that when a woman acts forcefully or competitively, she’s deviating from expected behavior. If a woman pushes to get the job done, if she’s highly competent, if she focuses on her results rather than on pleasing others, she’s acting like a man. And if she acts like a man, people dislike her. In response to this negative reaction, we temper our goals. Author Ken Auletta summarized this phenomenon in *The New Yorker* when he observed that for women, “self-doubt becomes a form of self-defense.” In order to protect ourselves from being disliked, we question our abilities and downplay our achievements, especially in the presence of others. We put ourselves down before others can.

If a woman is competent she doesn’t seem nice enough. If a woman seems really nice, she is considered more nice than competent. Since people want to hire and promote those who are both competent and nice, this creates a huge stumbling block for women. Acting in stereotypically feminine ways makes it difficult to reach for the same opportunities as men, but defying expectations and reaching for those opportunities leads to being judged as undeserving and selfish. Nothing has changed since high school; intelligence and success are not clear paths to popularity at any age. This complicates everything because at the same time women need to sit at the table and own their success, doing so causes them to be liked less.

Most people, myself included, really want to be liked – and not just because it feels good. Being liked is also a key factor in both professional and personal success. A willingness to make an introduction or advocate for or promote someone depends upon having positive feelings about that person. We need to believe in her ability to do the job and get along with everybody while doing it. That’s why, instinctively, many of us feel pressure to mute our accomplishments.

Owning one’s success is key to achieving more success. Professional advancement depends upon people believing that an employee is contributing to good results. Men can comfortably claim credit for what they do as long as they don’t veer into arrogance. For women, taking credit comes at a real social and professional cost. In fact, a woman who explains why she is qualified or mentions previous successes in a job interview can lower her chances of getting hired.

As if this double bind were not enough to navigate, gendered stereotypes can also lead to women having to do additional work without additional reward. When a man helps a colleague, the recipient feels indebted to him and is highly likely to return the favor. But when a woman helps out, the feeling of indebtedness is weaker. She’s communal, right? She wants to help others. Professor Flynn calls this the “gender discount” problem, and it means that women are paying a professional penalty for their presumed desire to be communal. On the other hand, when a man helps a coworker, it’s considered an imposition and he is compensated with more favorable performance evaluations and rewards like salary increases and bonuses. Even more frustrating, when a woman declines to help a colleague, she often receives less favorable reviews and fewer rewards. But a man who declines to help? He pays no penalty.

Because of these unfair expectations, women find themselves in “damned if they do” and “doomed if they don’t” situations. This is especially true when it comes to negotiations concerning compensation, benefits, titles and other perks. By and large, men negotiate more than women. There is little downside when men negotiate for themselves. People expect men to advocate on their own behalf, point out their contributions, and be recognized and rewarded for them. For men, there is truly no harm in asking. But since women are expected to be concerned with others, when they advocate for themselves or point to their own value, both men and women react unfavorably. Interestingly, women can negotiate as well as or even more successfully than men when negotiating for others (such as their company or a colleague), because in these cases, their advocacy does not make them appear self-serving. However, when a woman negotiates on her own behalf, she violates the perceived gender norm. Both male and female colleagues often resist working with a woman who has negotiated for a higher salary because she’s seen as more demanding than a woman who refrained from negotiating. Even when a woman negotiates successfully for herself, she can pay a longer-term cost in goodwill and future advancement. Regrettably, all women are Heidi. Try as we might, we just can’t be Howard.

The goal of successful negotiation is to achieve our objectives and continue to have people like us. Professor Hannah Riley Bowles, who studies gender and negotiations at Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government, believes that women can increase their chances of achieving a desired outcome by doing two things in combination. First women must come across as being nice, concerned about others, and “appropriately” female. When women take a more instrumental approach (“This is what I want and deserve”), people react far more negatively.

But a communal approach is not enough. According to Professor Bowles, the second thing women must do is to provide a legitimate explanation for the negotiation. Men don’t have to legitimize their negotiations; they are expected to look out for themselves. Women, however, have to justify their requests. One way of doing this is to suggest that someone more senior encouraged the negotiation (“My manager suggested I talk with you about my compensation”) [Marsha Clark note – strongly disagree, own it] or to cite industry standards (“My understanding is that jobs that involve this level of responsibility are compensated in this range”). Still, every negotiation is unique, so women must adjust their approach accordingly.

Arianna Huffington, founder of the Huffington Post, believes that learning to withstand criticism is a necessity for women. Early in her career, Arianna realized that the cost of speaking her mind was that she would inevitably offend someone. She does not believe it is realistic or even desirable to tell women not to care when we are attacked. Her advice is that we should let ourselves react emotionally and feel whatever anger or sadness being criticized evokes for us. And then we should quickly move on. She points to children as her role model. A child can cry one moment and run off to play in the next. For me, this has been good advice. I wish I were strong enough to ignore what others say, but experience tells me I often can’t. Allowing myself to feel upset, even really upset, and then move on – that’s something I can do.

It also helps to lean on one another. We can comfort ourselves with the knowledge that the attacks are not personal. Real change will come when powerful women are less of an exception. It is easy to dislike senior women because there are so few. If women held 50 percent of the top jobs, it would just not be possible to dislike that many people.

Since 1999, editor Pattie Sellers of *Fortune* magazine has overseen an annual conference that she calls the Most Powerful Women Summit. [Sheryl and other attending women pushed back against the reference to “Most Powerful” Women.] Pattie explained that she and her colleagues chose the name on purpose to force women to confront their own power and feel more comfortable with the word. I still struggle with this. I am fine applying the word “powerful” to other women – the more the better – but I still shake my head in denial when it is applied to me. The nagging voice in the back of my head reminds me, as it did in business school. “Don’t flaunt your success, or even let people know about your success. If you do people won’t like you.

Less than six months after I started at Facebook, Mark and I sat down for my first formal review. One of the things he told me was that my desire to be liked by everyone would hold me back. He said that when you want to change things, you can’t please everyone. If you do please everyone, you aren’t making enough progress. Mark was right.

It’s a Jungle Gym, Not a Ladder

As of 2010, the average American had eleven jobs from the ages of eighteen to forty-six alone. This means that the days of joining an organization or corporation and staying there to climb that one ladder are long gone.

A jungle gym scramble is the best description of my career. Younger colleagues and students frequently ask me how I planned my path. When I tell them I didn’t, they usually react with surprise followed by relief. They seem encouraged to know that careers do not need to be mapped out from the start. This is especially comforting in a tough market where job seekers often have to accept what is available and hope that it points in a desirable direction. We all want a job or role that truly excites and engages us. This search requires both focus and flexibility, so I recommend adopting two concurrent goals: a long-term dream and an eighteen-month plan.

Throughout my childhood, my parents emphasized the importance of pursuing a meaningful life. Dinner discussions often centered on social injustice and those fighting to make the world a better place. As a child, I never thought about what I wanted to be, but I thought a lot about what I wanted to do. As sappy as it sounds, I hoped to change the world. I always believed I would work at a non-profit or in government. That was my dream. And while I don’t believe in mapping out each step of a career, I do believe it helps to have a long-term dream or goal.

A long-term dream does not have to be realistic or even specific. It may reflect the desire to work in a particular field or to travel throughout the world. Maybe the dream is to have professional autonomy or a certain amount of free time. Maybe it’s to create something lasting or win a coveted prize. Some goals require more traditional paths; anyone who aspires to become a Supreme Court justice should probably start by attending law school. But even a vague goal can provide direction, a far-off guidepost to move toward.

Just as I believe everyone should have a long-term dream, I also believe everyone should have an eighteen-month plan. Typically, my eighteen-month plan set goals on two fronts. First and most important, I set targets for what my team can accomplish. Employees who concentrate on results and impact are the most valuable. This is not just thinking communally – the expected and often smart choice for a woman – but simply good business. Second, I try to set more personal goals for learning new skills in the next eighteen months. It’s often painful, but I ask myself, “How can I improve?” If I am afraid to do something, it is usually because I am not good at it or perhaps am too scared to even try.

Trying to overcorrect is a great way to find middle ground. In order for me to speak the right amount in a meeting, I have to feel as if I am saying very little. People who are shy will have to feel like they are saying way too much. Overriding our natural tendencies is very difficult.

In many cases, women need to be more open to taking risks in their careers. The cost of stability is often diminished opportunities for growth. Of course, there are times in life when being risk averse is a good thing; adolescent and adult males drown in much greater numbers than adolescent and adult females. But in business, being risk averse can result in stagnation. An analysis of senior corporate management appointments found that women are significantly more likely than men to continue to perform the same function even when they take on new duties. And when female managers move up, they are more likely to do so internally instead of switching to a different company. At times, staying in the same functional area in the same organization creates inertia and limits opportunity to expand. Seeking out diverse experiences is useful preparation for leadership.

Being risk averse in the workplace can also cause women to be more reluctant to take on challenging tasks. In my experience, more men look for stretch assignment and take on high-visibility projects, while more women hang back. Research suggests that this is particularly true for women in environments that emphasize individual performance or when women are working closely with men.

One reason women avoid stretch assignments and new challenges is that they worry too much about whether they currently have the skills they need for a new role. This can become a self-fulfilling prophecy, since so many abilities are acquired on the job. An internal report at Hewlett Packard revealed that women only apply for open jobs if they think they meet 100 percent of the criteria listed. Men apply if they think they meet 60 percent of the requirements. This difference has a huge ripple effect. Women need to shift from thinking “I’m not ready to do that” to thinking “I want to do that – and I’ll learn by doing it.”

Women are also more reluctant to apply for promotions even when deserved, often believing that good performance will naturally lead to rewards. Carol Frohlinger and Deborah Kolb, founders of Negotiating Women, Inc., describe this as the “Tiara Syndrome,” where women “expect that if they keep doing their job well someone will notice them and place a tiara on their head.” In a perfect meritocracy, tiaras would be doled out to the deserving, but I have yet to see one floating around an office. Hard work and results *should* be recognized by others, but when they aren’t, advocating for oneself becomes necessary. As discussed earlier, this must be done with great care. But it must be done.

Taking risks, choosing growth, challenging ourselves, and asking for promotions (with smiles on our faces, of course) are all important elements of managing a career. One of my favorite quotes comes from author Alice Walker, who observed, “The most common way people give up their power is by thinking they don’t have any.” Do not wait for power to be offered. Like that tiara, it might never materialize. And anyway, who wears a tiara on a jungle gym?

Are You My Mentor?

When someone finds the right mentor, it is obvious. The question becomes a statement. Chasing or forcing that connection rarely works, and yet I see women attempt this all the time. When I give speeches or attend meetings a startling number of women introduce themselves and, in the same breath, ask me to be their mentor. I cannot recall a single man asking me to do the same (although men have asked me to mentor their wives or girlfriends).

The men [are] focusing on how to manage a business and the women [are] focusing on how to manage a career. The men wanted answers and the women wanted permission and help. I realized that searching for a mentor has become the professional equivalent of waiting for Prince Charming.

To be clear, the issue is not whether mentorship is important. It is. Mentorship and sponsorship are crucial for career progression. Both men and women with sponsors are more likely to ask for stretch assignments and pay raises than their peers of the same gender without sponsors. Unfortunately for women, men often have an easier time acquiring and maintaining these relationships. One recent study shows that men are significantly more likely than women to be sponsored and that those with sponsors are more satisfied with their rates of advancement.

Because it is harder for young women to find mentors and sponsors, they are taking a more active role in seeking them out. And while I normally applaud assertive behavior, this energy is sometimes misdirected. No matter how crucial these connections are they probably won’t develop from asking a virtual stranger, “Will you be my mentor?” The strongest relationships spring out of a real and often earned connection felt by both sides.

Studies show that mentors select protégés based on performance and potential. Intuitively, people invest in those who stand out for their talent or who can really benefit from help. Mentors continue to invest when mentees use their time well and are truly open to feedback. It may turn into a friendship, but the foundation is a professional relationship. Given this, I believe we have sent the wrong message to young women. We need to stop telling them, “Get a mentor and you will excel.” Instead, we need to tell them, “Excel and you will get a mentor.”

Mentorship is often a more reciprocal relationship than it may appear, especially in situations where people are already working at the same company. The mentee may receive more direct assistance, but the mentor receives benefits too, including useful information, greater commitment from colleagues, and a sense of fulfillment and pride. Sociologists and psychologists have long observed our deep desire to participate in reciprocal behavior. The fact that humans feel obligated to return favors has been documented in virtually all societies and underpins all kinds of social relationships. The mentor/mentee relationship is no exception. When done right, everybody flourishes.

Getting the attention of a senior person with a virtuoso performance works, but it’s not the only way to get a mentor. I have seen lower-level employees nimbly grab a moment after a meeting or in the hall to ask advice from a respected and busy senior person. The exchange is casual and quick. After taking that advice, the would-be mentee follows up to offer thanks and then uses that opportunity to ask for more guidance. Without even realizing it, the senior person becomes involved and invested in the junior person’s career. The word “mentor” never needs to be uttered. The relationship is more important than the label.

The label itself is open to interpretation. For years, I kept an eye on an enormously talented young woman on my team at Google and advised her each time she had a major decision to make. I never used the word “mentor,” but I invested a lot of time in her development. So I was surprised one day when she stated flatly that she “never had a mentor or anyone really looking out” for her. I asked what a mentor meant to her. She explained that it would be someone she spoke to for at least an hour every week. I smiled, thinking, *that’s not a mentor – that’s a therapist.*

Few mentors have time for excessive hand-holding. Most are dealing with their high-stress jobs. A mentee who is positive and prepared can be a bright spot in a day. For this reason, mentees should avoid complaining excessively to a mentor. Using a mentor’s time to validate feelings may help psychologically, but it is better to focus on specific problems with real solutions. Most people in positions to mentor are quite adept at problem solving. Give them a problem to solve. Sometimes high-potential women have a difficult time asking for help because they don’t want to appear stumped. Being unsure how to proceed is the most natural feeling in the world. I feel that way all the time. Asking for input is not a sign of weakness but often the first step in finding the path forward.

It’s wonderful when senior men mentor women. It’s even better when they champion and sponsor them. Any male leader who is serious about moving toward a more equal world can make this a priority and be part of the solution. It should be a badge of honor for men to sponsor women. And since we know that different perspectives improve performance, companies should foster and reward this performance.

Junior women and senior men often avoid engaging in mentoring or sponsoring relationships out of fear of what others might think. A study published by the Center for Work-Life Policy and the Harvard Business Review reported that 64 percent of men at the level of vice president and above are hesitant to have a one-on-one meeting with a more junior woman. For their part, half the junior women avoided close contact with senior men. This evasiveness must end. Personal connections lead to assignments and promotions, so it needs to be okay for men and women to spend more informal time together the same way men can. A senior man and junior man at a bar are seen as mentoring. A senior man and a junior woman seen at a bar can be mentoring ... but it looks like dating. This interpretation holds women back and creates a double bind. If women try to cultivate a close relationship with a male sponsor, they risk being the target of workplace gossip. If women try to get to the top without a sponsor’s help, their careers will often stall. We cannot assume that interactions between men and women have a sexual component. And everyone has to make sure to behave professionally so women – and men – feel safe in all settings.

Peers can also mentor and sponsor one another. There is a saying that “all advice is autobiographical.” Friends at the same stage of their careers may actually provide more current and useful counsel. Several of my older mentors advised me against taking a job at Google in 2001. Yet almost all my peers understood the potential of Silicon Valley. Peers are also in the trenches and may better understand problems that superiors do not, especially when those problems are generated by the superiors in the first place.

Seek and Speak Your Truth

Authentic communication is not always easy, but it is the basis for successful relationships at home and real effectiveness at work. Yet people constantly back away from honesty to protect themselves and others. This reticence causes and perpetuates all kinds of problems: uncomfortable issues that never get addressed, resentment that builds, unfit managers who get promoted rather than fired, and on and on. Often these situations don’t improve because no one tells anyone what is really happening. We are so rarely brave enough to tell the truth.

Being honest in the workplace is especially difficult. All organizations have some form of hierarchy, which means that someone’s performance is assessed by someone else’s perception. This makes people even less likely to tell the truth. Every organization faces this challenge, no matter how flat they try to be. When psychologists study power dynamics, they find that people in low-power positions are more hesitant to share their views and often hedge their statements when they do. This helps explain why for many women, speaking honestly in a professional environment carries an additional set of fears. Fear of not being considered a team player. Fear of seeming negative or nagging. Fear that constructive criticism will come across as just plain old criticism. Fear that by peaking up, we will call attention to ourselves, which might open us up to attack (a fear brought to us by that same voice in the back of our heads that urges us not to sit at the table).

Communication works best when we combine appropriateness with authenticity, finding that sweet spot where opinions are not brutally honest but delicately honest. Speaking truthfully without hurting feelings comes naturally to some and is an acquired skill for others.

I learned from Fred [Kofman, a former MIT professor] that effective communication starts with the understanding that there is a point of view (my truth) and someone else’s point of view (their truth). Rarely is there one absolute truth, so people who believe that they speak *the* truth are very silencing of others. When we recognize that we can only see things from our

perspective, we can share our truths in a non-threatening way. Statements of opinion are always more constructive in the first-person “I” form. Compare these two statements: “You never take my suggestions seriously” and “I feel frustrated that you have not responded to my last four emails, which leads me to believe that my suggestions are not that important to you. Is that so?” The former can elicit a quick and defensive “That’s not true!” The latter is much harder to deny. One triggers a disagreement; the other sparks a discussion. I wish I could always maintain this perspective in my communications. I don’t – but I continue to try.

When communicating hard truths, less is often more. The ability to listen is as important as the ability to speak. From the time my siblings and I were very young, our mother taught us – or more like forced us – to mirror each other, which means restating the other person’s point before responding to it. As painful as this was at the time, reflecting someone’s point of view clarifies the disagreement and becomes a starting point for resolution.

Being aware of a problem is the first to correcting it. It is nearly impossible to know how our actions are perceived by another. We can try to guess what they’re thinking, but asking directly is far more effective. With real knowledge, we can adjust our actions and avoid getting tripped up.

As hard as it is to have an honest dialogue about business decisions, it is even harder to give individuals honest feedback. This is true for entry-level employees, senior leaders, and everyone in between. One thing that helps is to remember that feedback, like truth, is not absolute. Feedback is an opinion, grounded in observations and experiences, which allows us to know what impressions we make on others. The information is revealing and uncomfortable, which is why all of us would rather offer feedback to those who welcome it. If I make an observation or recommendation and someone reacts badly – or even just visibly tenses up – I quickly learn to save my comments for things that really matter. The upside of painful knowledge is so much greater than the downside of blissful ignorance.

I have also learned the hard way that being open to hearing the truth means taking responsibility for my mistakes. As often as I try to persuade other people to offer their honest views, it is still a challenge to elicit them. Miscommunication is always a two-way street. If I wanted more suggestions, I would have to take responsibility for making that clear. Another way to foster authentic communication is to speak openly about my own weaknesses. I acknowledge my impatience openly and ask my colleagues to let me know when I need to chill out. By mentioning this myself, I give others permission to bring up my impatience – and joke about it too.

When people are open and honest, thanking them publicly encourages them to continue while sending a powerful signal to others. [And] humor can be an amazing tool for delivering an honest message in a good-humored way. A recent study found that “sense of humor” was the phrase most frequently used to describe the most effective leaders. Unfortunately, our sense of humor sometimes fails us when we need it most. When I get emotional, it’s very hard for me to treat a problem lightly.

Most women believe – and research suggests – that it is not a good idea to cry at work. It is never something that I plan to do, but on those rare occasions when I have felt really frustrated, or worse, betrayed, tears have filled my eyes. Even as I have gotten older, it still happens every so often. Sharing emotions builds deeper relationships. Motivation comes from working on things we care about. To really care about others, we have to understand them – what they like and dislike, what they feel as well as think. Emotion drives both men and women and influences every decision we make. Recognizing the role emotions play and being willing to discuss them makes us better managers, partners, and peers.

People often pretend that professional decisions are not affected by their personal lives. They are afraid to talk about their home situations at work as if one should never interfere with the other, when of course, they can and do. I know many women who won’t discuss their children at work out of fear that their priorities will be questioned. I hope this won’t always be the case. Not every workplace and every colleague [is] generous and caring. But I do think we are moving toward at least blurring the line between personal and professional. Increasingly, prominent thinkers in the field of leadership studies are challenging traditional notions of leadership. Their research suggests that presenting leadership as a list of carefully defined qualities no longer holds. Instead, true leadership stems from individuality that is honestly and sometimes imperfectly expressed. They believe leaders should strive for authenticity over perfection. This shift is good news for women, who often feel obliged to suppress their emotions in an attempt to come across as more stereotypically male. And it’s also good news for men who may be doing the exact same thing.

Maybe someday shedding tears in the workplace will no longer be viewed as embarrassing or weak, but as a simple display of authentic emotion. And maybe the compassion and sensitivity that have historically held some women back will make them more natural leaders in the future. In the meantime, we can all hasten this change by committing ourselves to both seek – and speak – our truth.

Don't Leave Before You Leave

As I've mentioned, I'm a big believer in thoughtful preparation. Everywhere I go, I carry a little notebook with my to-do list. But when it comes to integrating career and family, planning too far in advance can close doors rather than open them. I have seen this happen over and over. Women rarely make one big decision to leave the workforce. Instead they make a lot of small decisions along the way, making accommodations and sacrifices that they believe will be required to have a family. Of all the ways women hold themselves back, perhaps the most pervasive is that they leave before they leave.

The classic scenario unfolds like this. An ambitious and successful woman holds down a challenging career path with the thought of having children in the back of her mind. At some point, this thought moves to the front of her mind, typically once she finds a partner. The woman considers how hard she is working and reasons that to make room for a child she will have to scale back. A law associate might decide not to shoot for partner because someday she hopes to have a family. A teacher might pass on leading curriculum development for her school. A sales representative might take a smaller territory or not apply for a management role. Often without even realizing it, the woman starts reaching for new opportunities. If they are presented to her, she is likely to decline or offer the kind of hesitant "yes" that gets the project assigned to someone else. The problem is even if she were to get pregnant immediately, she still has nine months before she has to care for an actual child. And since women usually start this mental preparation well before trying to conceive, several years often pass between the thought and conception, let alone birth.

By the time the baby arrives, the woman is likely to be in a drastically different place in her career than she would have been had she not leaned back. Before, she was a top performer, on par with her peers in responsibility, opportunity, and pay. By not finding ways to stretch herself in the years leading up to motherhood, she has fallen behind. When she returns to the workplace after her child is born, she is likely to feel less fulfilled, underutilized, or underappreciated. She may wonder why she is working for someone (usually a man) who has less experience than she does. Or she may wonder why she does not have the exciting new project or the corner office. At this point, she probably scales her ambitions back even further since she no longer believes that she can get to the top. And if she has the financial resources to leave her job, she is more likely to do so.

The more satisfied a person is with her position, the less likely she is to leave. So the irony – and, to me, the tragedy – is that women wind up leaving the workforce precisely because of things they did to *stay in* the workforce. With the best of intentions, they end up in a job that is less fulfilling and less engaging. When they finally have a child, the choice – for those who have one – is between becoming a stay-at-home mother or returning to a less-than-appealing professional situation.

There are many powerful reasons to exit the workforce. Being a stay-at-home parent is a wonderful, and often necessary, choice for many people. Not every parent needs, wants, or should be expected to work outside the home. In addition, we do not control all of the factors that influence us, including the health of our children. Plus, many people welcome the opportunity to get out of the rat race. No one should pass judgment on these highly personal decisions. I fully support any man or woman who dedicates his or her life to raising the next generation. It is important and demanding and joyful work.

What I am arguing is that the time to scale back is when a break is needed or when a child arrives – not before, and certainly not years in advance. The months and years leading up to having children are not the time to lean back, but the critical time to lean in. Given life's variable, I would never recommend that every woman lean in regardless of circumstances. There have been times when I chose not to.

The birth of a child instantly changes how we defined ourselves. Women become mothers. Men become fathers. Couples become parents. Our priorities shift in fundamental ways. Parenting may be the most rewarding experience, but it is also the hardest and most humbling. If there were a right way to raise kids, everyone would do it. Clearly, that is not the case. One of the immediate questions new parents face is who will provide primary care for a child. The historical choice has been the mother. Breast-feeding alone has made this both the logical and the biological choice. But the advent of the modern-day breast pump has changed the equation.

Despite modern methods that can immunize the impact of biological imperatives, women still do the vast majority of child care. As a result, becoming a parent decreases workforce participation for women but not men. Forty-three percent of highly qualified women with children are leaving careers or "off-ramping" for a period of time.

Women who are most likely to leave the workforce are concentrated at opposite ends of the earning scale, married to men who earn the least and the most. In 2006, only 20 percent of mothers whose husband's earnings landed in the middle (between the 25th and 75th percentiles) were out of the labor force. In contrast, a whopping 52 percent of mothers with husbands in the bottom quarter and 40 percent of mothers with husbands in the top 5 percent were out of the labor force. Obviously, their reasons for staying home are vastly different. Mothers married to the lowest-earning men struggle to find jobs that pay enough to cover child care costs, which are increasingly unaffordable. Over the past decade, child care costs have

risen twice as fast as the median income of families with children. The cost for two children (an infant and a four-year-old) to go to a day care center is greater than the annual median rent payment in every state of the country.

Women married to men with greater resources leave for a variety of reasons, but one important factor is the number of hours that their husbands work. When husbands work fifty or more hours per week, wives with children are 44 percent more likely to quit their jobs than wives with children whose husbands work less. Many of these mothers are those with the highest levels of education. A 2007 survey of Harvard Business School alumni found that while men's rates of full-time employment never fell below 91 percent, only 81 percent of women who graduated in the early 1990s were working full-time. Of Yale alumni who had reached their forties by 2000, only 56 percent of the women remained in the workforce, compared with 90 percent of the men. This exodus of highly educated women is a major contributor to the leadership gap.

While it's hard to predict how an individual will react to becoming a parent, it's easy to predict society's reaction. When a couple announces that they are having a baby, everyone says "Congratulations!" to the man and "Congratulations! What are you planning on doing about work?" to the woman. The broadly held assumption is that raising their child is her responsibility. In more than thirty years, this perception has changed very little. A survey of the Princeton class of 1975 found that 54 percent of the women foresaw work-family conflict compared to only 26 percent of men. The same survey of the Princeton class of 2006 found that 62 percent of the women anticipated work-family conflict compared to only 33 percent of the men. Three decades separate the studies and still nearly twice as many women as men enter the workforce anticipating this stumbling block. Even in 2006, 46 percent of the men who anticipated this conflict expected their spouse to step off her career track to raise their children. Only 5 percent of the women believed their spouse would alter his career to accommodate their child.

Personal choices are not always as personal as they appear. We are all influenced by social conventions, peer pressure, and familial expectations. On top of these forces, women who can afford to drop out of the workplace often receive not just permission but encouragement to do so from all directions.

Imagine that a career is like a marathon – a long, grueling, and ultimately rewarding endeavor. Now imagine a marathon where both men and women arrive at the starting line equally fit and trained. The gun goes off. The men and women run side by side. The male marathoners are routinely cheered on: "Lookin' strong! On your way!" But the female runners hear a different message: "You know you don't have to do this!" the crowd shouts. Or "Good start – but you probably won't want to finish." The farther the marathoners run, the louder the cries grow for the men: "Keep going! You've got this!" But the women hear more and more doubts about their efforts. External voices, and often their own internal voice, repeatedly question their decision to keep running. The voices can even grow hostile. As the women struggle to endure the rigors of the race, spectators shout, "Why are you running when your children need you at home?" If a female marathoner can ignore the shouts of the crowd and get past the tough middle of the race, she will often hit her stride.

Although pundits and politicians, usually male, often claim that motherhood is the most important and difficult work of all, women who take time out of the workplace pay a big career penalty. Only 74 percent of professional women will rejoin the workforce in any capacity, and only 40 percent will return to full-time jobs. Those who do rejoin will often see their earning decrease dramatically. Controlling for education and hours worked, women's average annual earnings decrease by 20 percent if they are out of the workforce for just one year. Average annual earnings that professional women off-ramp from the workforce decline by 30 percent after two to three years, which is the average amount of time that professional women off-ramp from the workforce. If society truly valued the work of caring for children, companies and institutions would find ways to reduce these steep penalties and help parents combine career and family responsibilities. All too often rigid work schedules, lack of paid family leave, and expensive or undependable child care derail women's best efforts. Governmental and company policies such as paid personal time off, affordable high-quality child care, and flexible work practices would serve families, and society, well.

One miscalculation that some women make is to drop out early in their careers because their salaries barely cover the cost of child care. Child care is a huge expense, and it's frustrating to work hard just to break even. But professional women need to measure the cost of child care against their future salary rather than their current salary. Women have started to think of paying for child care as a way of investing in their families' future. As the years go by, compensation often increases. Flexibility typically increases, too, as senior leaders often have more control over their hours and schedules.

And what about men who want to leave the workforce? If we make it too easy for women to drop out of the career marathon, we also make it too hard for men. Just as women feel that they bear the primary responsibility of caring for their children, many men feel they bear the primary responsibility of supporting their families financially. Their self-worth is tied mainly to their professional success, and they frequently believe that they have no choice but to finish the marathon. Only a compelling, challenging, and rewarding job will begin to make the choice of leaving a child in someone else's care and returning to work a fair contest. And even after a choice is made, parents have every right to reassess along the way.

Anyone lucky enough to have options should keep them open. Don't enter the workforce already looking for the exit. Don't put on the brakes. Accelerate. Keep a foot on the gas pedal until a decision must be made. That's the only way to ensure that when that day comes, there will be a real decision to make.

Make Your Partner a Real Partner

In the last thirty years, women have made more progress in the workforce than in the home. According to the most recent analysis, when a husband and wife both are employed full-time, the mother does 40 percent more child care and about 30 percent more housework than their father. A 2009 survey found that only 9 percent of people in dual-earner marriages said that they shared housework, child care, and breadwinning evenly. So while men are taking on more household responsibilities, this increase is happening very slowly, and we are still far away from parity. (Perhaps, unsurprisingly, same-sex couples divide household tasks much more evenly.)

Public policy reinforces this gender bias. The U.S. Census Bureau considers mothers the "designated parent," even when both parents are present in the home. When mothers care for their children, it's "parenting," but when fathers care for their children, the government deems it a "child care arrangement." I have even heard a few men say they are heading home to "babysit" for their own children. I have never heard a woman refer to taking care of her own children as "babysitting." A friend of mine ran a team-building exercise during a company retreat where people were asked to fill in their hobbies. Half of the men in the group listed "their children" as hobbies. *A hobby?* For most mothers, kids are not a hobby. Showering is a hobby.

If women want to succeed more at work and men want to succeed more at home, these expectations have to be challenged. As Gloria Steinem once observed, "It's not about biology, but about consciousness." As women must be more empowered at work, men must be more empowered at home. I have seen so many women inadvertently discourage their husbands from doing their share by being too controlling or critical. Social scientists call this "maternal gatekeeping," which is a fancy term for "Ohmigod, that's not the way you do it! Just move aside and let me!" When it comes to children, fathers often take their cues from mothers. This gives a mother great power to encourage or impede the father's involvement. If she acts as a gatekeeper mother and is reluctant to hand over responsibility, or worse, questions the father's efforts, he does less.

Anyone who wants her mate to be a true partner must treat him as an equal – and equally capable – partner. And if that's not reason enough, bear in mind that a study found that wives who engage in gatekeeping behaviors do five more hours of family work per week than wives who take a more collaborative approach. Another common and counterproductive dynamic occurs when women assign or suggest tasks to their partners. She is delegating, and that's a step in the right direction. But sharing responsibility should mean sharing responsibility. Each partner needs to be in charge of specific activities or it becomes too easy for one to feel like he's doing a favor instead of doing his part.

I truly believe that the single most important career decision that a woman makes is whether she will have a life partner and who that partner is. I don't know of one woman in a leadership position whose life partner is not fully – and I mean fully – supportive of her career. No exceptions. And contrary to the popular notion that only unmarried women can make it to the top, the majority of the most successful female business leaders have partners. Of the twenty-eight women who have served as CEOs of Fortune 500 companies, twenty-six were married, one was divorced, and only one had never married. Many of these CEOs said they "could not have succeeded without the support of their husbands, helping with the children, the household chores, and showing a willingness to move."

Not surprisingly, a lack of spousal support can have the opposite effect on a career. In a 2007 study of well-educated professional women who had left the paid workforce, 60 percent cited their husbands as a critical factor in their decision. These women specifically listed their husband's lack of participation in child care and other domestic tasks and the expectation that wives should be the ones to cut back on employment as reasons for quitting. No wonder when asked at a conference what men could do to help women's leadership, Harvard Business School professor Rosabeth Moss Kanter answered, "The laundry." Tasks like laundry, food shopping, cleaning and cooking are mundane and mandatory. Typically, these tasks fall to women.

Studies from around the world have concluded that children benefit greatly from paternal involvement. Research over the last forty years has consistently found that in comparison to children with less-involved fathers, children with involved and loving fathers have higher levels of psychological well-being and better cognitive abilities. When fathers provide even just routine child care, children have higher levels of educational and economic achievement and lower delinquency rates. Their children even tend to be more empathetic and socially competent. These findings hold true for children from all socioeconomic backgrounds, whether or not the mother is highly involved.

Gender-specific expectations remain self-fulfilling. The belief that mothers are more committed to family than to work penalizes women because employers assume they won't live up to expectations of professional dedication. The reverse is true for men, who are expected to put their careers first. We judge men primarily by their professional success and send them a clear message that personal achievements are insufficient for them to be valued or feel fulfilled. This mind-set leads to a grown man bragging on the soccer field that he left his post-partum wife and newborn at the hospital to go kick a ball.

Making gender matters even worse, men's success is viewed not just in absolute terms, but often in comparison to their wives'. The image of a happy couple still includes a husband who is more professionally successful than the wife. If the reverse occurs, it's perceived as threatening to the marriage. People frequently pull me aside to ask sympathetically, "How is Dave? Is he okay with, you know, all your [whispering] success?" Dave is far more self-confident than I am, and given his own professional success, these comments are easy for him to brush off. More and more men will have to do the same since almost 30 percent of U.S. working wives now out earn their husbands. As that number continues to grow, I hope the whispering stops

When looking for a life partner, my advice to women is date all of them: the bad boys, the cool boys, the commitment-phobic boys, the crazy boys. But do not marry them. The things that make the bad boys sexy do not make them good husbands. When it comes time to settle down, find someone who wants an equal partner. Someone who thinks women should be smart, opinionated, and ambitious. Someone who values fairness and expects or, even better, *wants* to do his share in the home. These men exist and, trust me, over time, nothing is sexier.

Even after finding the right guy – or gal – no one comes fully formed. I learned from my mother to be careful about role definition in the beginning of a relationship. Even though my mother did most of the household work, my father always vacuumed the floor after dinner. She never had to persuade him to do this chore; it was simply his job from day one. At the start of a romance, it's tempting for a woman to show a more classic "girlfriendly" side by volunteering to cook meals and take care of errands. And, suddenly, we're back in 1955. If a relationship begins in an unequal place, it is likely to get more unbalanced when and if children are added to the equation.

Research reflects that equality between partners leads to happier relationships. When husbands do more housework, wives are less depressed, marital conflicts decrease, and satisfaction rises. When women work outside the home and share breadwinning duties, couples are more likely to stay together. In fact, the risk of divorce reduces by about half when a wife earns half the income and a husband does half the housework. For men, participating in child rearing fosters the development of patience, empathy, and adaptability, characteristics that benefit all of their relationships. For women, earning money increases their decision-making ability in the home, protects them in case of divorce, and can be important security in later years, as women outlive their husbands. Also – and many might find this the most motivating factor – couples who share domestic responsibilities have more sex. It may be counterintuitive, but the best way for a man to make a pass at his wife might be to do the dishes.

I also feel strongly that when a mother stays home, her time during the day should still be considered real work – because it is. Raising children is at least as stressful and demanding as a paying job. It is unfair that mothers are frequently expected to work long into the night while fathers who work outside the home get the chance to relax from their day jobs. When the father is home, he should take on half the child care and housework. Also, most employed fathers interact with other grown-ups all day, while mothers at home are often starved for adult conversation by evening.

True partnership in our homes does more than just benefit couples today; it also sets the stage for the next generation. The workplace has evolved more than the home in part because we enter it as adults, so each generation experiences a new dynamic. But the homes we create tend to be more rooted in our childhoods. It is no surprise that married and cohabitating men whose mothers were employed while they were growing up do more housework as adults than other men. The sooner we break the cycle, the sooner we will reach equality.

A more equal division of labor between parents will model better behavior for the next generation. I have heard so many women say that they wished their partners helped more with child care, but since it's only a few more years until their kids are off to school, it's not worth the battle to change the dynamic. In my opinion, it is always worth the battle to change an undesirable dynamic. I also worry that these women will face the same dynamic when it comes time to care for aging parents. Women provide more than twice as much care not only for their parents, but for their in-laws as well. This is an additional burden that needs to be shared. And children need to see it being shared so that their generation will follow that example.

This revolution will happen one family at a time. The good news is that men in younger generations appear more eager to be real partners than men in previous generations. A survey that asked participants to rate the importance of various job characteristics found that men in their forties most frequently selected "work which challenges me" as very important, while

men in their twenties and thirties most frequently selected having a job with a schedule that “allows me to spend more time with my family.” If these trends hold as this group ages, it could signal a promising shift.

Wonderful, sensitive men of all ages are out there. And the more women value kindness and support in their boyfriends, the more men will demonstrate it. We need more men to sit at the table ... the kitchen table.

The Myth of Doing It All

“Having it all.” Perhaps the greatest trap ever set for women was the coining of this phrase. Bandied about in speeches, headlines, and articles, these three little words are intended to be aspirational but instead make us all feel like we have fallen short. I have never met a woman, or man, who has stated emphatically, “Yes, I have it all.” Because no matter what any of us has – and how grateful we are for what we have – no one has it all.

Nor can we. The very concept of having it all flies in the face of the basic laws of economics and common sense. As Sharon Poczter, professor of economics at Cornell, explains, “The antiquated rhetoric of ‘having it all’ disregards the basis of every economic relationship: the idea of trade-offs. All of us are dealing with the constrained optimization that is life, attempting to maximize our utility based on parameters like career, kids, relationships, etc., doing our best to allocate the resource of time. Due to the scarcity of this resource, therefore, none of us can ‘have it all,’ and those who claim to are most likely lying.”

Instead of pondering the question “Can we have it all?,” we should be asking the more practical question “Can we do it all?” And again, the answer is no. Each of us makes choices constantly between work and family, exercising and relaxing. Making time for others and taking time for ourselves. Being a parent means making adjustments, compromises, and sacrifices every day. For most people, sacrifices and hardships are not a choice, but a necessity. About 65 percent of married-couple families with children in the United States have two parents in the workforce, with almost all relying on both incomes to support their household. Being a single working parent can be even more difficult. About 30 percent of families with children are led by a single parent, with 85% of those led by a woman.

Employed mothers and fathers both struggle with multiple responsibilities, but mothers also have to endure the rude questions and accusatory looks that remind us that we’re shortchanging both our jobs *and* our children. As if we needed reminding. Like me, most of the women I know do a great job worrying that we don’t measure up. We compare our efforts at work to those of our colleagues, usually men, who typically have far less responsibilities at home. Then we compare our efforts at home to those of mothers who dedicate themselves solely to their families. Outside observers reminding us that we must be struggling – and *failing* – is just bitter icing on an already soggy cake.

Trying to do it all and expecting that it all can be done exactly right is a recipe for disappointment. Perfection is the enemy. Gloria Steinem said it best: “You can’t do it all. No one can have two full-time jobs, have perfect children, cook three meals, and be multi-orgasmic ‘til dawn ... Superwoman is the adversary of the women’s movement.”

It is impossible to control all the variables when it comes to parenting. For women who have achieved previous success by planning ahead and pushing themselves hard, this chaos can be difficult to accept. The stakes are high, as they may expect nothing less than perfection, both at home and in the workplace. When they fall short of lofty ideals, they may retreat altogether – from workplace to home or vice versa. Another one of my favorite posters at Facebook declares in big red letters, “Done is better than perfect.” I have tried to embrace this motto and let go of unattainable standards. Aiming for perfection causes frustration at best and paralysis at worst.

I was extremely fortunate that early in my career I was warned about the perils of trying to do it all by someone I deeply admired. Larry Kanarek managed the Washington, DC office of McKinsey & Company where I interned in 1994. Larry gathered everyone together for a talk. He explained that since he was running the office, employees came to him when they wanted to quit. Over time, he noticed that people quit for one reason only: they were burnt out, tired of working long hours and traveling. Larry said he could understand the complaint, but what he could not understand was that all the people who quit – every single one – had unused vacation time. Up until the day they left, they did everything McKinsey asked of them before deciding that it was too much. Larry implored us to exert more control over our careers. He said McKinsey would never stop making demands on our time, so it was up to us to decide what we were willing to do. It was our responsibility to draw the line. We needed to determine how many hours we were willing to work in a day and how many nights we were willing to travel. If later on, the job did not work out, we would know that we had tried on our own terms. Counter intuitively, long-term success at work often depends on not trying to meet every demand placed on us. The best way to make room for both life and career is to make choices deliberately – to set limits and stick to them.

Slowly, it began to dawn on me that my job did not really require that I spend twelve full hours a day in the office. I became much more efficient – more vigilant about only attending or setting up meetings that were truly necessary, more determined

to maximize my output during every minute I spent away from home. I also started paying more attention to the working hours of those around me; cutting unnecessary meetings saved time for them as well. I tried to focus on what really mattered. “Done” while still a challenge, turns out to be far more achievable and often a relief.

I deeply understand the fear of appearing to be putting our families above our careers. Mothers don’t want to be perceived as less dedicated to their jobs than men or women without family responsibilities. We overwork to overcompensate. Even in workplaces that offer reduced or flextime arrangements, people fear that reducing their hours will jeopardize their career prospects. And this is not just a perception problem. Employees who make use of flexible work policies are often penalized and seen as less committed than their peers. And those penalties can be greater for mothers in professional jobs. This all needs to change, especially since new evidence suggests working from home might be more productive in certain cases.

It is difficult to distinguish between the aspects of a job that are truly necessary and those that are not. Sometimes the situation is hard to read and the lines are hard to draw. Technology is also changing the emphasis on strict office hours since so much work can be conducted online. While few companies can provide as much flexibility as Google and Facebook, other industries are starting to move in a similar direction. Still the traditional practice of judging employees by face time rather than results unfortunately persists. Because of this, many employees focused on hours clocked in the office rather than achieving their goals as efficiently as possible. A shift to focusing more on results would benefit individuals and make companies more efficient and competitive.

A related issue that affects many Americans is the extension of working hours. In 2009, married middle income parents worked about eight-and-a-half hours more per week than in 1979. His trend has been particularly pronounced among professionals and managers, especially men. A survey of high-earning professionals in the corporate world found that 62 percent work more than fifty hours per week and 10 percent work more than eight hours per week. Technology, while liberating us at times from the physical office, has also extended the workday. A 2012 survey of employed adults showed that 80 percent of the respondents continued to work after leaving the office, 38 percent checked email at the dinner table, and 69 percent can’t go to bed without checking their in-box. This is the new normal for many of us.

The new normal means there are just not enough hours in the day. For years, I attempted to solve this problem by skimping on sleep, a common but often counterproductive approach. I realized my mistake partially from observing my children and seeing how a happy child can melt into a puddle of tears when he’s shy a couple hours of sleep. It turns out that adults aren’t much different. Sleeping four or five hours a night induced mental impairment equivalent to a blood alcohol level above the legal driving limit. Sleep deprivation makes people anxious, irritable, and confused. If I could go back and change one thing about how I lived in those early years, I would force myself to get more sleep.

It’s not only working parents who are looking for more hours in the day; people without children are also overworked, maybe to an even extra extent. When I was in business school, I attended a Women in Consulting panel with three speakers: two married women with children and one single woman without children. After the married women spoke about how hard it was to balance their lives, the single woman interjected that she was tired of people not taking her need to have a life seriously. She felt that her colleagues were always rushing off to be with their families, leaving her to pick up the slack. She argued, “My co-workers should understand that I need to go to a party tonight – and this is just as legitimate as their kids’ soccer games – because going to a party is the only way I might actually meet someone and start a family so I can have a soccer game to go to one day!” I often quote this story to make sure single employees know that they, too, have every right to a full life.

I still struggle with the trade-offs between work and home on a daily basis. Every woman I know does, and I know that I am far luckier than most. I have remarkable resources – a husband who is a real partner, the ability to hire great people to assist me both in the office and at home, and a good measure of control over my schedule.

If there is a new normal for the workplace, there is a new normal for home too. Just as expectations for how many hours people will work have risen dramatically, so have expectations for how many hours mothers will spend focused on their children. In 1975, stay-at-home mothers spent an average of about eleven hours per week on primary child care (defined as routine caregiving and activities that foster a child’s well-being, such as reading and fully focused play). Mothers employed outside the home in 1975 spent six hours doing these activities. Today, stay-at-home mothers spend about seventeen hours per week on primary child care, on average, while mothers who work outside the home spend about eleven hours. This means that an employed mother today spends about the same amount of time on primary child care activities as a non-employed mother did in 1975.

When I drop my kids off at school and see the mothers who are staying to volunteer, I worry that my children are worse off because I’m not with them full-time. This is where my trust in hard data and research has helped me the most. Study after

study suggests that the pressure society places on women to stay home and do “what’s best for the child” is based on emotion, not evidence.

In 1991, the Early Child Care Research Network, under the auspices of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, initiated the most ambitious and comprehensive study to date on the relationship between child care and child development, and in particular on the effect of exclusive maternal care versus child care. The Research network, which comprised more than thirty child development experts from leading universities across the country, spent eighteen months designing the study. They tracked more than one thousand children over the course of fifteen years, repeatedly assessing the children’s cognitive skills, language abilities, and social behaviors. Dozens of papers have been published about what they found. In 2006, the researchers released a report summarizing their findings, which concluded that “children who were cared for exclusively by their mothers did not develop differently than those who were cared for by others.” They found no gap in cognitive skills, language competence, social competence, ability to build and maintain relationships, or in the quality of the mother-child bond. Parental behavioral factors – including fathers who are responsive and positive, mothers who favor “self-directed child behavior,” and parents with emotional intimacy in their marriages – influence a child’s development two to three times more than any form of child care.

Children absolutely need parental involvement, love, care, time, and attention. But parents who work outside the home are still capable of giving their children a loving and secure childhood. Some data even suggest that having two parents working outside the home can be advantageous to a child’s development, particularly girls. Guilt management can be just as important as time management for mothers.

To this day, I count the hours away from my kids and feel sad when I miss a dinner or a night with them. Far from worrying about nights he misses, [my husband] Dave thinks we are heroes for getting home for sinner as often as we do. Our different viewpoints seem inextricably gender based. A study that conducted in-depth interviews with mothers and father in dual earner families uncovered similar reactions. The mothers were riddled with guilt about what their jobs were doing to their families. The fathers were not. As Marie Wilson, founder of the White House Project, has noted, “Show me a woman without guilt and I’ll show you a man.”

I know that I can easily spend time focusing on what I’m not doing; like many, I excel at self-flagellation. But when I dwell less on the conflicts and compromises, and more on being fully engaged with the task at hand, the center holds and I feel content. I love my job and the brilliant and fascinating people I work with. I also love my time with my kids.

I would never claim to be able to find serenity or total focus in every moment. I am so far from that. But when I remember that no one can do it all and identify my real priorities at home and at work, I feel better, and I am more productive in the office and probably a better mother as well. If I had to embrace a definition of success, it would be that success is making the best choices we can ... and accepting them. The secret is there is no secret – just doing the best you can with what you’ve got.

In December 2010, I was standing with Pat Mitchell, waiting to go onstage to give my TEDTalk. The day before, I had dropped my daughter off at preschool and told her that I was flying to the East Coast so I wouldn’t see her that night. She clung to my leg and begged me not to leave. I couldn’t shake that image and, at the last minute, asked Pat if I should add it to my speech. “Absolutely tell that story,” said Pat. “Other women go through this, and you’ll help them by being honest that this is hard for you too.”

I took a deep breath and stepped onstage. I tried to be authentic and shared my truth. I announced to the room – and basically everyone on the internet – that I fall very short of doing it all. And Pat was right. It felt really good not just to admit this to myself, but to share it with others.

Let’s Start Talking About It

Sometimes I wonder what it would be like to go through life without being labeled by my gender. I don’t wake up thinking, *What am I going to do today as Facebook’s female COO?*, but that’s often how I’m referred to by others. Men in the professional world are rarely seen through this same gender lens. A Google search for “Facebook’s male CEO” returns this message: “No results found.”

As Gloria Steinem observed, “Whoever has power takes over the noun – and the norm – while the less powerful get an adjective.” Since no one wants to be perceived as less powerful, a lot of women reject the gender identification and insist, “I don’t see myself as a woman; I see myself as a novelist/athlete/professional/fill-in-the-blank.” They are right to do so. No one wants her achievements modified. We all just want to be the noun. Yet the world has a way of reminding women that they are women, and girls that they are girls.

I headed into college believing that the feminists of the sixties and seventies had done the hard work of achieving equality for my generation. And, yet, if anyone had called me a feminist, I would have quickly corrected that notion. This reaction is prevalent even today according to sociologist Marianne Cooper. In her 2011 article, “The New F-Word,” Marianne wrote about college English professor Michele Elam, who observed something strange in her Introduction to Feminist Studies course. Even though her students were interested enough in gender equality to take an entire class on the subject, very few “felt comfortable using the word ‘feminism’.” And even “fewer identified themselves as feminists.” As Professor Elam noted, it was as if “being called a feminist was to suspect that some foul epithet had been hurled your way.”

I carried this attitude with me when I entered the workforce. I figured if sexism still existed, I would just prove it wrong. I would do my job and do it well. What I didn’t know at the time was that ignoring the issue is a classic survival technique. Within traditional institutions, success has often been contingent upon a woman not speaking out but fitting in or, more colloquially, being ‘one of the guys.’ The first women to enter corporate America dressed in manly suits with button down shirts. ... We were fitting in, and there was no reason to call attention to ourselves.

But while gender was not openly acknowledged, it was still lurking below the surface. I started to see differences in attitudes toward women. I started noticing how often employees were judged not by their objective performance, but by the subjective standard of how well they fit in.

I couldn’t deny being a woman; even if I tried, people would still figure it out. And defending myself just made me seem ... defensive. My gut and the signals I received from others cautioned me that arguing the issue would make me sound like a strident feminist. And I still did not want that. I also worried that pointing out the disadvantages women face in the workforce might be interpreted as whining or asking for special treatment. So I ignored the comments. I put my head down and worked hard.

Then as the years ticked by, I started seeing female friends and colleagues drop out of the workforce. Some left by choice. Others left out of frustration, pushed out the door by companies that did not allow flexibility and welcomed home by partners who weren’t doing their share of the housework and child rearing. Others remained but scaled back their ambitions to meet outsized demands. I watched as the promise my generation had for female leadership dwindled. By the time I had been at Google for a few years I realized that the problem wasn’t going away. So even though the thought still scared me, I decided it was time to stop putting my head down and to start speaking out.

Fortunately, I had company. In 2005, my colleagues Susan Wojcicki and Marissa Mayer and I all noticed that the speakers who visited the Google campus were fascinating, notable, and almost always male. In response, we founded Women@Google and kicked off the new series with luminaries Gloria Steinem and Jane Fonda, who were launching the Women’s Media Center. ... After the Women@Google event, Gloria invited me to speak at the Women’s media Center in New York. I said yes without hesitating.

I began my talk by explaining that in business we are taught to fit in, but that I was starting to think this might not be the right approach. I said out loud that there are differences between men and women both in their behavior and in the way their behavior is perceived by others. I admitted that I could see these dynamics playing out in the workforce, and that, in order to fix the problems we needed to be able to talk about gender without people thinking we were crying for help, asking for special treatment, or about to sue. A lot poured out of me that day. Then I returned to Northern California and put the conversation on hold.

In the following four years, I gave two talks on women in the workplace, both behind closed doors to professional women’s groups at nearby Stanford. Then one day, Pat Mitchell called to tell me that she was launching TEDWomen and invited me to speak on social media. I told her I had another subject in mind and started pulling together a talk on how women can succeed in the workforce (a talk that TED later named “Why We Have Too Few Women Leaders”). Very quickly, I became excited. And just as quickly, I learned that no one else shared my excitement. Friends and colleagues – both male and female – warned me that making this speech would harm my career by instantly typecasting me as a female COO and not a real business executive. In other words, I wouldn’t be blending in.

Staying quiet and fitting in may have been all the first generations of women who entered corporate America could do; in some cases, it might still be the safest path. But this strategy is not paying off for women as a group. Instead, we need to speak out, identify the barriers that are holding women back and find solutions.

The response to my TEDTalk showed me that addressing these issues openly can make a difference. Women forwarded the video to their friends, colleagues, daughters, and sisters. I began receiving emails and letters from women all over the world who wanted to share their stories of how they gained the courage to reach for more opportunities, sit at more tables, and believe more in themselves.

I know it isn't easy. Anyone who brings up gender in the workplace is wading into deep and muddy waters. The subject itself presents a paradox, forcing us to acknowledge the differences while trying to achieve the goal of being treated the same. Women, especially those at junior levels, worry that raising gender issues makes them appear unprofessional or as if they are blaming others. I have listened to women vent frustration over being undervalued and even demeaned on a daily basis at work. When I ask if they have aired any of these complaints to their superiors, they've responded, "Oh no, I couldn't." There is so much fear that speaking up will make the situation worse or even result in being penalized or fired. It seems safer to bear the injustice.

For men, raising the subject can be even harder. A male friend who runs a large organization once confided in me, "It's easier to talk about your sex life in public than to talk about gender." The fact that he wouldn't go on record with this quote shows he meant it. Vittorio Colao, CEO of Vodafone, told me that he showed my TedTalk to his senior management team because he shares my belief that women sometimes hold themselves back. He also believed this message was easier to hear from a woman than a man. His point is valid. If a man had delivered the same message or even gently pointed out that women might be taking actions that limited their options, he would have been pilloried.

Shutting down discussion is self-defeating and impedes progress. We need to talk and listen and debate and refute and instruct and learn and evolve. And since the majority of managers are men, we need them to feel comfortable addressing these issues directly with female employees. When a woman sits on the side of a room, a man needs to be able to wave her over to the table and explain why so she will know to sit at the table the next time.

Most people would agree that gender bias exists ... in others. *We*, however, would never be swayed by such superficial and unenlightened opinions. Except we are. Our preconceived notions about masculinity and femininity influence how we interact with and evaluate colleagues in the workplace. A 2012 study found that when evaluating resumes for a lab manager position from a male student and a female student, scientists of both sexes gave better marks to the male applicant. Even though the students had the same qualifications and experience, the scientists deemed the female student less competent and offered her a lower starting salary and less mentoring. Other studies of job applicants, candidates for scholarships, and musicians auditioning for orchestra have come to the same conclusion: gender bias influences how we view performance and typically raises our assessment of men while lowering our assessment of women. Even today, gender-blind evaluations still result in better outcomes for women. Unfortunately, most jobs require face-to-face interviews.

All of us, myself included, are biased, whether we admit it or not. And thinking that we are objective can actually make this even worse, creating what social scientists call a "bias blind spot." This blind spot causes people to be too confident about their own powers of objectivity so that they fail to correct for bias. When evaluating identically described male and female candidates for the job of police chief, respondents who claimed to be the most impartial actually exhibited *more* bias in favor of male candidates. This is not just counterproductive but deeply dangerous. Evaluators in that same study actually shifted hiring criteria to give men an advantage. When a male applicant possessed a strong educational record, that quality was considered critical to the success of a police chief. But when a male applicant possessed a weaker educational record, that quality was rated as less important. This favoritism was not shown to female applicants. If anything, the reverse happened. When a woman possessed a certain skill, ability, or background, that quality tended to carry less weight. The infuriating take-away from this study is that 'merit' can be manipulated to justify discrimination.

Social scientists are uncovering new examples of bias all the time. In 2012, a series of studies compared men in more 'modern' marriages (whose wives worked outside the home full-time) to men in more 'traditional' marriages (whose wives worked at home). The researchers wanted to determine if a man's home arrangement affected his professional behavior. It did. Compared to men in modern marriages, men in more traditional marriages viewed the presence of women in the workforce less favorably. They also denied promotions to qualified female employees more often and were more likely to think that companies with a higher percentage of female employees ran less smoothly. The researchers speculated that men in traditional marriages are not overtly hostile toward women but instead are 'benevolent sexists' – holding positive yet outdated views about women. (Another term I have heard is "nice guy misogynists"). These men might even believe that women have superior strengths in certain areas like moral reasoning, which makes them better equipped to succeed in business. In all likelihood, men who share this attitude are unaware of how their conscious and unconscious beliefs hurt their female colleagues.

Another bias arises from our tendency to want to work with people who are like us. Innovisor, a consulting firm, conducted research in twenty-nine countries and found that when men and women select a colleague to collaborate with, both were significantly more likely to choose someone of the same gender. Yet diverse groups often perform better. Armed with this information, managers should take a more active role in mixing and matching when assigning teams. Or, at the very least, managers should point out this tendency to give employees the motivation to shake things up.

Of course, not every woman deserves to be well liked. Some women are disliked for behaviors that they would do well to change. In a perfect world, they would receive constructive feedback and the opportunity to make those changes. Still, calling attention to this bias forces people to think about whether there is a real problem or a perception problem. The goal is to give women something men tend to receive automatically – the benefit of the doubt.

Every job will demand some sacrifice. The key is to avoid unnecessary sacrifice. This is especially hard since our work culture values complete dedication. We worry that even mentioning other priorities makes us less valuable employees. I have faced this too. As I described, once I had children, I changed my working hours to be home for dinner. But only fairly recently did I start talking about this change. And while the impact of my actually leaving work early was negligible, admitting that I went home at five-thirty turned out to be kind of a big deal.

The discussions may be difficult, but the positives are many. We cannot change what we are unaware of, and once we are aware, we cannot help but change.

Social gains are never handed out. They must be seized. Leaders of the women's movement – from Susan B. Anthony to Jane Addams to Alice Paul to Bella Abzug to Flo Kennedy to so many others – spoke out loudly and bravely to demand the rights that we now have. Their courage changed our culture and our laws to benefit us all. Looking back, it made no sense for my college friends and me to distance ourselves from the hard-won achievement of earlier feminists. We should have cheered their efforts. Instead, we lowered our voices, thinking the battle was over, and with this reticence we hurt ourselves.

Semantics can be important, but I don't think progress turns on our willingness to apply a label to ourselves. I do think progress turns on our willingness to speak up about the impact gender has on us. We can no longer pretend that biases do not exist nor can we talk around them.

Working Together Toward Equality

I began this book by acknowledging that women in the developed world are better off than ever, but the goal of true equality still eludes us. So how do we move forward? First, we must decide that true equality is long overdue and will be achieved only when more women rise to the top of every government and every industry. Then we have to do the hard work of getting there. All of us – men and women alike – have to understand and acknowledge how stereotypes and biases cloud our beliefs and perpetuate the status quo. Instead of ignoring our differences, we need to accept and transcend them.

For decades, we have focused on giving women the choice to work inside or outside the home. We have celebrated the fact that women have the right to make this decision, and rightly so. But we have to ask ourselves if we have become so focused on supporting personal choices that we're failing to encourage women to aspire to leadership. It is time to cheer on girls and women who want to sit at the table, seek challenges, and lean in to their careers. Equal opportunity is not equal unless everyone receives the encouragement that makes seizing those opportunities possible. Only then can both men and women achieve their full potential.

None of this is attainable unless we pursue these goals together. Men need to support women and, I wish it went without saying, women need to support women too. Deborah Gruenfeld makes the case: "We need to look out for one another, work together, and act more like a coalition. As individuals, we have relatively low levels of power. Working together, we are fifty percent of the population and therefore have real power." As obvious as this sounds, women have not always worked together in the past. We are a new generation and we need a new approach.

The more women can stick up for one another, the better. Sadly this doesn't always happen. And it seems to happen even less when women voice a position that involves a gender-related issue. The attacks on Marissa [Mayer, CEO of Yahoo] for her maternity leave plans came almost entirely from other women. His has certainly been my experience too. Everyone loves a fight – and they *really* love a catfight. The media will report endlessly about women attacking other women, which distracts from the real issues. There are so many of us who care deeply about these matters. We should strive to resolve our differences quickly, and when we disagree, stay focused on our shared goals. This is not a plea for less debate, but for more constructive debate.

It is a painful truth that one of the obstacles to more women gaining power has sometimes been women already in power. Women in the generations ahead of me believed, largely correctly, that only one woman would be allowed to ascend to the senior ranks in any particular company. In the days of tokenism, women looked around the room and instead of bonding against an unfair system; they often viewed one another as competition. Ambition fueled hostility, and women wound up being ignored, undermined, and in some cases even sabotaged by other women.

In the 1970s, this phenomenon was common enough that the term “queen bee” was used to describe a woman who flourished in a leadership role, especially in male dominated industries, and who used her position to keep other female “worker bees” down. For some, it was simple self-preservation. For others, it reflected their coming-of-age in a society that believed men were superior to women. In this sense, queen bee behavior was not just a case of gender discrimination but also a consequence of that discrimination. Queen bees internalized the low status of women and in order to feel worthy themselves wanted only to associate with men. Often, these queen bees were rewarded for maintaining the status quo and not promoting other women.

Unfortunately, this ‘there can only be one’ attitude still lingers today. It makes no sense for women to feel that we are competing against one another anymore, but some still do. In certain instances, women question their female colleagues’ level of career commitment, aggressiveness, and leadership abilities. One study found that female professors believed that male Ph.D. students were more committed to their careers than female Ph.D. students, even though a survey of the students found no gender difference in their reported levels of commitment. Other research suggests that once a woman achieves success, particularly in a gender-biased context, her capacity to see gender discrimination is reduced.

It’s heartbreaking to think about one woman holding back another. As former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright once said, “There is a special place in hell for women who don’t help other women.” And the consequences extend beyond individual pain. Women’s negative views of female co-workers are often viewed as an objective assessment – more credible than the views of men. When women voice gender bias, they legitimize it. Obviously, a negative attitude cannot be gender based if it comes from another woman, right? *Wrong*. Often without realizing it, women internalize disparaging cultural attitudes and then echo them back. As a result, women are not just victims of sexism, they can also be perpetrators.

There is hope that this attitude is changing. A recent survey found that ‘high-potential women’ working in business want to ‘pay it forward,’ and 73 percent have reached out to other women to help them develop their talents. Almost all of the women I have encountered professionally have gone out of their way to be helpful. The queen bee was banished, and the hive is becoming stronger. I know that not every woman encounters this kind of positive female support, and yet oddly, we often expect it. Most women don’t assume that men will reach out and help, but with our own gender, we assume there will be a connection. We imagine women will act communally and maybe we do so out of our own bias.

Once in my career, I felt that a senior woman treated me poorly. She would complain about me and my team behind my back but would not discuss any concerns she had with me, even when I asked directly. When I first met her, I had hopes that she would be an ally. When she turned out to be not just unhelpful but actually spiteful, I was not just disappointed; I felt betrayed. I now recognize that had this senior woman been a man and acted the same way, I still would have been frustrated, but I wouldn’t have taken it so personally. It’s time to drop the double standard. Gender should neither magnify nor excuse rude and dismissive treatment. We should expect professional behavior, and even kindness, from everyone.

Any coalition of support must also include men, many of whom care about gender inequality as much as women do. AN ‘us versus them’ crusade will not move us toward true equality. Nor will an ‘us versus us’ crusade, which U.C. Hastings law professor Joan Williams calls the “gender wars.” These wars are being waged on many fronts, but the mommy wars, which pit mothers who work outside the home against mothers who work inside the home, attract the most attention. As Professor Williams explains, “These mommy wars are so bitter because both groups’ identities are at stake because of another clash of social ideals: The ideal worker is defined as someone always available for work, and the ‘good mother’ is defined as always available to her children. So ideal-worker women need to prove that, although they weren’t always there, their children are fine, fine, fine ... Women who have rejected the ideal-worker norm and settled for a lower career (or no career) need to prove that their compromise was necessary for the good of their families. So you have each group of women judging the other, because neither group of women has been able to live up to inconsistent ideals.”

Professor Williams is absolutely right. One of the conflicts inherent in having choice is that we all make different ones. There is always an opportunity cost, and I don’t know any woman who feels comfortable with all her decisions. As a result, we inadvertently hold that discomfort against those who remind us of the path not taken. Guilt and insecurity make us second-guess ourselves and, in turn, resent one another.

In a letter *The Atlantic* in June 2012, Barnard president Debora Spar wrote about this messy and complicated emotion, exploring why she and so many successful women feel so guilty. She decided that it’s because women “have been subtly striving all our lives to prove that we have picked up the torch that feminism provided. That we haven’t failed the mothers and grandmothers who made our ambitions possible. And yet, in a deep and profound way, we are failing. Because feminism wasn’t supposed to make us feel guilty, or prod us into constant competitions over who is raising children better, organizing more cooperative marriages, or getting less sleep. It was supposed to make us free – to give us not only choices but the ability to make these choices without constantly feeling that we’d somehow gotten it wrong.

We all want the same thing: to feel comfortable with our choices and to feel validated by those around us. So let's start by validating one another. Mothers who work outside the home should regard mothers who work inside the home as real workers. And mothers who work inside the home should be equally respectful of those choosing another option. We must work harder to rise above this. The gender wars need an immediate and lasting peace. True equality will be achieved only when we *all* fight the stereotypes that hold us back. Feeling threatened by others' choices pulls us all down.

The goal is to work toward a world where those social norms no longer exist. If more children see fathers at school pickups and mothers who are busy at jobs, both boys and girls will envision more options for themselves. Expectations will not be set by gender but by personal passion, talents and interests.

I am fully aware that most women are not focused on changing social norms for the next generation but simply trying to get through each day. Forty percent of employed mothers lack sick days and vacation leave, and about 50 percent of employed mothers are unable to take time off to care for a sick child. Only about half of women receive any pay during maternity leave. These policies can have severe consequences; families with no access to paid family leave often go into debt and can fall into poverty. Part-time jobs with fluctuating schedules offer little chance to plan and often stop short of the forty-hour week that provides basic benefits.

Too many work standards remain inflexible and unfair, often penalizing women with children. Too many talented women try their hardest to reach the top and bump up against systemic barriers. So many others pull back because they do not think they have a choice. All of this brings me back to Leymah Gbowee's insistence that we need more women in power. When leadership insists that these policies change, they will. Google put in pregnancy parking when I asked for it and it remains there long after I left. We must raise both the ceiling and the floor.

It's up to us to end the self-fulfilling belief that "women can't do this, women can't do that." Throwing up our hands and saying "It can't be done" ensures that it *never* will be done. I have written this book to encourage women to dream big, forge a path through the obstacles, and achieve their full potential. I am hoping that each woman will set her own goals and reach for them with gusto. And I am hoping that each man will do his part to support women in the workplace and in the home, also with gusto. As we start using the talents of the entire population, our institutions will be more productive, our homes will be happier, and the children growing up in those homes will no longer be held back by narrow stereotypes.

I know that for many women, getting to the top of their organizations is far from their primary focus. My intention is not to exclude them or ignore their valid concerns. I believe that if more women lean in, we can change the power structure of our world and expand opportunities for all. More female leadership will lead to fairer treatment for *all* women. Shared experience forms the basis of empathy and, in turn, can spark the institutional changes we need.

Critics have scoffed at me for trusting that once women are in power, they will help one another, since that has not always been the case. I'm willing to take that bet. The first wave of women who ascended to leadership positions were few and far between, and to survive, many focused more on fitting in than on helping others. The current wave of female leadership is increasingly willing to speak up. The more women attain positions of power, the less pressure there will be to conform, and the more they will do for other women. Research already suggests that companies with more women in leadership roles have better work-life policies, smaller gender gaps in executive compensation, and more women in mid-level management.

The hard work of generations before us means equality is within our reach. We can close the leadership gap *now*. Each individual's success can make success a little easier for the next. We can do this – for ourselves, for one another, for our daughters, and for our sons. If we push hard now, this next wave can be the last wave. In the future, there will be no female leaders. There will just be leaders.

We need to be grateful for what we have but dissatisfied with the status quo. This dissatisfaction spurs the charge for change. We must keep going.

The march toward true equality continues. It continues down the halls of governments, corporations, academia, hospitals, law firms, nonprofits, research labs, and every organization, large and small. We owe it to the generations that came before us and the generations that will come after to keep fighting. I believe women can lead more in the workplace. I believe men can contribute more in the home. And I believe this will create a better world, one where half our institutions are run by men and half our homes are run by men.

I look toward the world I want for all children – and my own. My greatest hope is that my son and my daughter will be able to choose what to do with their lives without external or internal obstacles slowing them down or making them question their choices. If my son wants to do the important work of raising children full-time, I hope he is respected and supported. And if

my daughter wants to work full-time outside her home, I hope she is not just respected and supported, but also liked for her achievements.

I hope they both end up exactly where they want to be. And when they find where their true passions lie, I hope they both lean – all the way.

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Let's Keep Talking...

My goal is that this book is not the end of the conversation, but the beginning.

I invite you to continue the discussion with me by joining the Lean In Community at www.facebook.com/leaninorg. Let's keep talking about these issues and supporting one another. Women and men of all ages are welcome.

I also encourage you to visit www.leanin.org for practical education and personal experiences that can help you reach your goals. Here you can explore topics critical to your success – from negotiating effectively to understanding your strengths. You can also create and join Lean In Circles, small peer groups that meet in person for ongoing encouragement and development.