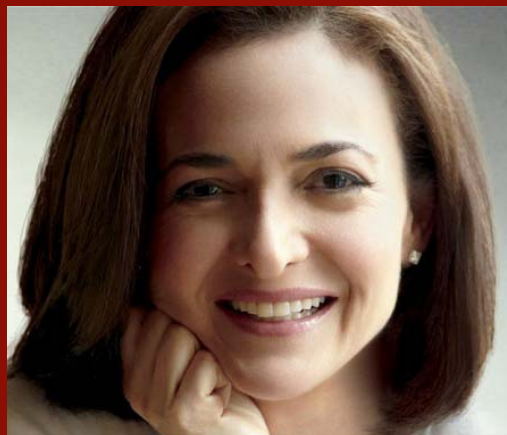


BOOK review



LEAN IN

WOMEN, WORK, AND
THE WILL TO LEAD

SHERYL SANDBERG

“**S**heryl provides practical suggestions for managing and overcoming the challenges that arise on the ‘jungle gym’ of career advancement. I nodded my head in agreement and laughed out loud as I read these pages.

Condoleezza Rice,
former U.S. Secretary of State



Review by Leslie G. Cliff, OC CFA

Founding Partner & Director of Wealth
Management, Genus Capital Management

I agree completely with Ms. Rice. I wish this book had been published 30 years ago. Before I get too far along, let me say that my review is biased by my experiences — my thoughts and comments are in red.

Thirty years after women became 50 percent of the college graduates in the United States, men still hold the vast majority of leadership positions in government and industry. This means that women’s voices are still not heard equally in the decisions that most affect our lives.

In *Lean In*, Sheryl Sandberg examines why women’s progress in achieving leadership roles has stalled, explains the root causes, and offers compelling commonsense solutions that can empower women to achieve their full potential.

First, who is Sheryl Sandberg? Ms. Sandberg is the chief operating officer of Facebook and is ranked on *Fortune’s* list of the 50 Most Powerful Women in Business and is

on of *Time’s* 100 most Influential People in the World. Before Facebook, Ms. Sandberg was Vice President of Global Online Sales and Operations at Google. Prior to Google, she served as chief of staff for the U.S. Secretary of the Treasury. In 2010, she gave an electrifying TEDTalk in which she described how women unintentionally hold themselves back in their careers. Her talk, which became a phenomenon and has been viewed more than two million times, encouraged women to “sit at the table”, seek challenges, take risks, and pursue their goals with gusto.

Written with both humour and wisdom, *Lean In* is an inspiring call to action and a blueprint for individual growth.

It's a Jungle Gym, Not a Ladder

Careers do not need to be mapped out from the start. In terms of career-building, ladders are limiting—people can move up or down. Jungle gyms offer more creative exploration and many ways to get to the top. Often one must step sideways or even down to go back up. What is important is having a long-term dream and an eighteen-month plan.

I know a young woman who has a dream of becoming a judge. When starting to get serious about her dream, she was confronted with the practical reality that she had to be a lawyer first. She is entering law school in September.

The long-term dream does not have to be realistic or even specific. The eighteen-month goals are for more personal learning new skills goals. Ask yourself, “How can I improve?” The tendency of women to be risk adverse relative to men can really hurt them in this situation. Seeking out diverse experiences is useful preparation for leadership. 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.”

“A Hewlett-Packard report revealed that women only apply for open jobs if they think they meet 100% of the criteria. Men apply if they think they meet 60%.

Tiara Syndrome: Women are more reluctant to apply for promotions even when deserved, often believing that good job performance will naturally lead to rewards. After doing a great job someone will just put a tiara on your head. Hard work and results *should* be recognized but when they aren’t, advocating for oneself becomes necessary. This must be done with care, but it must be done.

The Leadership Ambition Gap

The author identifies many cultural norms that discourage women from excelling. Fear is the root of many 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.



Ms. Sandberg’s fabulous advice is to consider: “What would you do if you weren’t afraid?”

Sit at the Table

I continue to be alarmed not just at how we as women fail to put ourselves forward, but also at how we fail to notice and correct for this gap. And that “we” includes me. I once gave a talk to a few hundred employees. After the speech I took questions for the time permitted. Later that afternoon, I came back to my desk, where a young woman was waiting to talk to me. “I learned something today” she said. “What?” I asked, feeling good, as I figured she was about to tell me how my words had touched her. Instead, she said, “I learned to keep my hand up.” She explained that at the end of my speech I announced I would take two more questions. I did so then she and all the other women put down their hands. But several men kept their hands up and their questions were answered. Her words hit me like a ton of bricks. Even though I was giving the speech on gender issues, I had been blind to one myself.

I know that to continue to grow and challenge myself, I have to believe in my own abilities. I still face situations that I fear are beyond my capabilities. 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.

If one is really interested in the very complicated subject of Women and Ambition then the book to read is *Necessary Dreams*. It’s a very complex and interesting topic and I highly recommend the book.



Make Your Partner a Real Partner

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.



Success and Likeability

In 2003, Columbia Business School and New York University 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”. Half the students were assigned Heidi’s story and the other half the same story with just one difference – they changed the name Heidi to Howard.

The students rated Heidi and Howard as equally competent. Yet while students respected both Heidi and Howard, Howard came across as a more appealing colleague. Heidi, on the other hand, was seen as selfish and not “the type of person you would want to hire or work for.” Single difference – gender – created vastly different impressions. When a woman is successful, people of both genders like her

less. The author quotes Professor Gruenfeld. “Our entrenched cultural ideas associate men with leadership qualities and women with nurturing qualities and put women in a double bind. We believe not only that women are nurturing, but that they should be nurturing above all else. When a woman does anything that signals she might not be nice first and foremost, it creates a negative impression and makes us uncomfortable.”

Because of these unfair expectations, women find themselves in “damned if they do” and “doomed if they don’t” situations. This need to be liked can lead woman to accept less pay and/or to work harder than their male counterparts. Solution: Mary Sue Coleman, president of the University of Michigan, recommends a style she calls “relentlessly pleasant”. The method requires smiling frequently, expressing appreciation and concern, invoking common interests, emphasizing larger goals, and approaching negotiation as solving a problem as opposed to taking a critical stance. Negotiate with the knowledge that showing concern for the common good, even as they negotiate for themselves, will strengthen their position.

“Leaders should strive for authenticity over perfection.”

Arianna Huffington, founder of The Huffington Post, believes that learning to withstand criticism is a necessity for women. 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 the next. Allow yourself to feel upset, even really upset, and then move on – that’s something you can control. If you do please everyone, you aren’t making enough progress.

A wonderful mentor in my life once told me, “Don’t worry so much about being liked – worry about being respected.” I would have really benefitted from being more relentlessly pleasant in my career. I find this paradox particularly difficult.

Seek and Speak Your Truth

As we grow up and learn to speak appropriately, we lose something in authenticity. Communication works best when we combine appropriateness with authenticity, finding that sweet spot where opinions are not brutally honest but delicately honest. Find your sweet spot – it’s important to your success.

Listening is more important than talking. A great tool is to repeat back to someone what they just told you. Being able to summarize and clarify someone’s viewpoint is impossible without listening carefully. Develop this skill! *The same mentor once said to me, “There is a reason why the good Lord gave you two ears and only one mouth”. I still find listening properly a challenge.*

I try to foster authentic communication by speaking openly about my own weaknesses. When people are open and honest, thanking them publicly encourages them to continue while sending a powerful signal to others. The author cites research that claims true leadership stems from

individuality that is honestly and sometimes imperfectly expressed. Leaders should strive for authenticity over perfection.



Random Gems *that resonated with me*

As former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright once said, “There’s a special place in hell for women who don’t help other women”. No woman 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.

- ▶ Until women have supportive employers and colleagues as well as partners who share family responsibilities, they don’t have real choice.
- ▶ As often as I try to persuade people to share their honest views, it is still a challenge to elicit them. A way I try to foster authentic communication is to speak openly about my own weaknesses
- ▶ Reflecting someone’s viewpoint clarifies the issue and requires listening carefully. It tells the other person – I heard you and in fact you did hear them.

If this review interests you, then please read the book. The author couples humour with many examples in her own life to tell wonderful stories and make empathic conclusions. I do not doubt that Sheryl Sandberg’s long term dream involves politics not business. ■