

## **LEAN IN BY SHERYL SANDBERG | BOOK SUMMARY & PDF**

Lean In is written by Sheryl Sandberg, the Chief Operating Officer of Facebook. The book is an interesting examination of the current workplace and women's role within it. She identifies a need for women to be in leadership roles and explains the reasons why women both hold themselves back, and are held back. Sandberg includes many examples from her own life, specifically working with Mark Zuckerberg and emphasises the importance of men supporting women in the workplace, and women supporting women. We all need to lean in.

### **THE LEADERSHIP AMBITION GAP**

There's no doubt that women have the skills to lead in the workplace. Girls are increasingly outperforming boys in the classroom, earning about 57 percent of the undergraduate and 60 percent of the master's degrees in the United States.

Career progression often depends upon taking risks and advocating for oneself—traits that girls are discouraged from exhibiting. This may explain why girls' academic gains have not yet translated into significantly higher numbers of women in top jobs. 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.

When jobs are described as powerful, challenging, and involving high levels of responsibility, they appeal to more men than women. Even among highly educated professional men and women, more men than women describe themselves as "ambitious."

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. This pattern starts long before they enter the workforce.

### **SIT AT THE TABLE**

Women hold themselves back, literally choosing to watch from the sidelines.

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 seem to 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.

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.

And it's not just women who are tough on themselves. Colleagues and the media are also quick to credit external factors for a woman's achievements.

### **Fake it**

When you don't feel confident, one tactic is that it sometimes helps to fake it.

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.

## **SUCCESS AND LIKEABILITY**

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

This bias is at the very core of why women are held back. It is also at the very core of why women hold themselves back. For men, professional success comes with positive reinforcement at every step of the way. For women, even when they're recognized for their achievements, they're often regarded unfavorably.

In order to protect ourselves as women from being disliked, we question our abilities and downplay our achievements, especially in the presence of others. We put ourselves down before others can.

### **Negotiation**

There is a saying, “Think globally, act locally.” When negotiating, “Think personally, act communally.” Explain that you know that women often get paid less than men so you are going to negotiate rather than accept the original offer. By doing so, you position yourself as connected to a group. And as silly as it sounds, pronouns matter. Whenever possible, women should substitute “we” for “I.” A woman’s request will be better received if she asserts, “We had a great year,” as opposed to “I had a great year.”

### **Legitimation**

But a communal approach is not enough. The second thing women must do is 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”). Still, every negotiation is unique, so women must adjust their approach accordingly.

### **Knowledge is power**

It is also true, as any good negotiator knows, that having a better understanding of the other side leads to a superior outcome. So at the very least, women can enter these negotiations with the knowledge that showing concern for the common good, even as they negotiate for themselves, will strengthen their position.

"For the time being, I fear that women will continue to sacrifice being liked for being successful."

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.

"Everyone needs to get more comfortable with female leaders—including female leaders themselves. "

### **Facebook**

Less than six months after Sheryl Sandberg started at Facebook, Mark and her sat down for the first formal review. One of the things he said was that the desire to be liked by everyone would hold her 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.

## **IT'S A JUNGLE GYM, NOT A LADDER**

The most common metaphor for careers is a ladder, but this concept no longer applies to most workers.

Ladders are limiting—people can move up or down, on or off. Jungle gyms offer more creative exploration. There are many ways to get to the top of a jungle gym. The jungle gym model benefits everyone, but especially women who might be starting careers, switching careers, getting blocked by external barriers, or reentering the workforce after taking time off. The ability to forge a unique path with occasional dips, detours, and even dead ends presents a better chance for fulfillment. Plus, a jungle gym provides great views for many people, not just those at the top. On a ladder, most climbers are stuck staring at the butt of the person above.

### **The job search**

This 'jungle gym' concept 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 adopt two concurrent goals: a long-term dream and an eighteen-month plan.

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. Even a vague goal can provide direction, a far-off guidepost to move toward.

“If you’re offered a seat on a rocket ship, you don’t ask what seat. You just get on.”

Everyone should have an eighteen-month plan. (Eighteen months because two years seems too long and one year seems too short, but it does not have to be any exact amount of time.)

### **A shift in thinking**

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.”

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.

## **ARE YOU MY MENTOR?**

Now young women are told that if they can just find the right mentor, they will be pushed up the ladder and whisked away to the corner office to live happily ever after. Once again, we are teaching women to be too dependent on others.

To be clear, the issue is not whether mentorship is important. It is. Mentorship and sponsorship are crucial for career progression.

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.

Given this, We need to stop telling women, “Get a mentor and you will excel.” Instead, we need to tell them, “Excel and you will get a mentor.”

### **Men and women**

Men will often gravitate toward sponsoring younger men, with whom they connect more naturally. Since there are so many more men at the top of every industry, the proverbial old-boy network continues to flourish. And since there are already a reduced number of women in leadership roles, it is not possible for the junior women to get enough support unless senior men jump in too.

We need to make male leaders aware of this shortage and encourage them to widen their circle. 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.

## **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. 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.

### **Communication**

Effective communication starts with the understanding that there is my point of view (my truth) and someone else's point of view (his 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 see things only from our own perspective, we can share our views in a nonthreatening way. Statements of opinion are always more constructive in the first person "I" form.

Truth is also better served by using simple language. Office-speak often contains nuances and parentheticals that can bury not just the lead but the entire point.

### **Listen**

Being aware of a problem is the first step to correcting it. It is nearly impossible to know how our actions are perceived by others. 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. Still, people rarely seek enough input.

### **Emotions**

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.

Research suggests that presenting leadership as a list of carefully defined qualities (like strategic, analytical, and performance-oriented) no longer holds. Instead, true leadership stems from individuality that is honestly and sometimes imperfectly expressed. Leaders should strive for authenticity over perfection.

This shift is good news for women, who often feel obliged to suppress their emotions in the workplace 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.

## **DON'T LEAVE BEFORE YOU LEAVE**

From an early age, girls get the message that they will have to choose between succeeding at work and being a good mother. By the time they are in college, women are already thinking about the trade-offs they will make between professional and personal goals.

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.

Often without even realizing it, the woman stops reaching for new opportunities. If any are presented to her, she is likely to decline or offer the kind of hesitant “yes” that gets the project assigned to someone else.

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 unappreciated.

### **Motherhood**

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.

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.

One miscalculation that some women make is to drop out early in their careers because their salary barely covers 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.

## **MAKE YOUR PARTNER A REAL PARTNER**

As women must be more empowered at work, men must be more empowered at home. 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.

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—supportive of her career. No exceptions.

### **Fathers in the workforce**

Both men and women can be penalized at work for prioritizing family, but men may pay an even higher price. When male employees take a leave of absence or just leave work early to care for a sick child, they can face negative consequences that range from being teased to receiving lower performance ratings to reducing their chance for a raise or promotion.

Fathers who want to drop out of the workforce entirely and devote themselves to child care can face extremely negative social pressure. Currently, fathers make up less than 4 percent of parents who work full-time inside the home, and many report that it can be very isolating.

### **Husband and wife**

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.

Women face enough barriers to professional success. If they also have to worry that they will upset their husbands by succeeding, how can we hope to live in an equal world?



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.

## **THE MYTH OF DOING IT ALL**

Trying to do it all and expecting that it all can be done exactly right is a recipe for disappointment. Perfection is the enemy.

## **LET'S START TALKING ABOUT IT**

Major changes can result from these kinds of “nudge techniques,” small interventions that encourage people to behave in slightly different ways at critical moments. The simple act of talking openly about behavioural patterns makes the subconscious conscious.

“Talking can transform minds, which can transform behaviours, which can transform institutions.”

## **WORKING TOGETHER TOWARD EQUALITY**

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.

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.