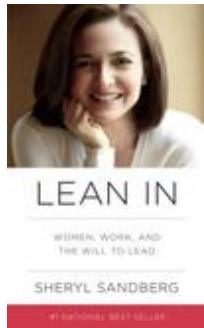


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Confronting the Enemy Within

A Review of

Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead

by Sheryl Sandberg

New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013. 224 pp. ISBN 978-0-385-34994-9. \$24.95

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"It's hard to fight an enemy who has outposts in your head." Sheryl Sandberg, in her best-selling book *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead*, has taken on the challenge posed in this second-wave feminist quote to urge women to confront the internalized sexism that prevents many from "leaning in" to leadership. She raises the call for women to compete more forcefully for a place at the corporate table by noting that "our (feminist) revolution has stalled" (p. 7), as evidenced by the fact that in 2010, women made only 70 cents for every dollar men made . . . an increase of just 30 cents over the last 50 years since the Equal Pay Act was passed in 1963.

Sandberg's concept of "the leadership ambition gap" (p. 12) constitutes the real strength of her argument. She asks women: What would you do if you weren't afraid? For example: If you weren't afraid to speak up? If you weren't afraid to be disliked? If you weren't afraid to expect your husband to do his share of the child care and housework? Sandberg challenges, prods, and persuades women to overcome the internalized sexism that limits their choices while fully acknowledging the power of gender role standards and cultural traditions that bear down on them. Her examples are inspirational and will motivate readers to take more risks in their careers, to rein in their self-doubt and express more self-confidence, and to advocate more for themselves at work and at home.

The first seven chapters provide the basis for an excellent modern consciousness-raising experience and could be used to introduce young women to feminist ideas or for discussion in women's professional groups. The engaging writing is peppered with interesting personal stories and well integrated with thoughtful examples of current research findings concerning unconscious bias, the glass ceiling, gender socialization, and the double bind for women in leadership. Extensive chapter notes bolster the points being made by providing additional detail from scientific studies.

The chapters "Success and Likeability" and "Don't Leave Before You Leave" are particularly motivating. Sandberg gives examples from her own life and those of other accomplished women to show that women face a double bind: to be viewed either as likeable or as competent. This will continue to be the case until it is normal to have women leaders. For now, the best strategy is to ignore criticism, do one's job, and embrace one's power. In "Don't Leave," she confronts the tendency of many women to "lean back," that is, to make a series of small decisions believed to be necessary for having a family but that curtail their career path, such as not reaching for career opportunities even before they have children. The critical time to lean in is in the months and years before having children, not limiting one's choices well before that time in anticipation of later having children.

The last chapters on marriage, motherhood, and societal solutions provide interesting insights as well but lose focus by presenting some contradictory notions. For instance, is it actually possible for women to make whatever choice they want as Sandberg proposes, that is, to work for pay or work inside the home and still have sufficient numbers of

women leaning in to make it to the top echelons? Theory suggests that the institutional climate does not begin to change until the underrepresented group constitutes at least 15 percent of the larger group (e.g., Kanter, 1977). The number of women in high-level jobs is unlikely to increase unless the highly educated, privileged women who can afford not to work outside the home decide to remain in the workforce.

In the chapter "Make Your Partner a Real Partner," Sandberg acknowledges that women "have made more progress in the workforce than the home" (p. 106), but she does not fully confront the intractable nature of gender roles in heterosexual marriage beyond encouraging women to pick the right man. She cites her own marriage as an example of a true partnership with equally shared family responsibilities. Undoubtedly, it is easier to get a man to "share" duties if a nanny and housekeeper are doing the lion's share of the child care and housework. It is less likely that men will do 50 percent of the household labor when there is no paid or unpaid help. A recent study of housework trends with a national sample revealed that husbands create an extra seven hours a week of housework for wives (Mixon, 2008).

This "marriage penalty" for heterosexual women is one that is often overlooked as a major cause of inequality. Research indicates that it is difficult for heterosexual women to attain an equitable housework arrangement (Walters & Whitehouse, 2012). Even among couples in which the woman earns more, the couple will construct identities that support the man as the dominant partner (Tichenor, 2005). This does not have to remain a given. Research with same-sex couples, particularly lesbian couples, shows that it is possible to have an equitable division of household labor (e.g., Connolly, 2005). A greater challenge to male dominance in the home would have strengthened Sandberg's exhortation to lean in.

Sandberg's message is most likely to benefit middle- and upper class heterosexual White women who have the status to demand more concessions for themselves in the workplace. Individual solutions are less realistic for minority or working- or lower class women. For instance, Sandberg recounts a story of succeeding at having parking spaces reserved near the entrance at work for pregnant women after she had to sprint quite a distance—very pregnant and nauseated—to be on time for a meeting. A similar request by a woman lower in the hierarchy probably would be disregarded or draw negative attention to herself or other pregnant women. Nevertheless, it would be advantageous for all women if high-status women were more willing to lean in on matters like this.

It is interesting that Sandberg encourages other women to pursue their careers without apology but even so feels the need to include admissions of her own imposter syndrome, desire to be liked, and maternal guilt. Self-disclosures of conflicted feelings seem to be necessary as means for other women to identify with her. Such disclosures are not the stuff required for male CEOs' self-help or autobiographical writings, though. Women truly will have achieved equality when a talented and hugely successful woman like Sandberg does not have to show her soft family side in order to be liked, admired, or respected.

Sandberg is very aware—and rightly so—that institutions do not change without a great deal of pressure. Some of that pressure has to come from the inside—that is, from women like herself who have made it to the top or even to the middle. Men, too, will have to commit to changing the leadership ratios. That change is not going to be as easy as her last chapter implies. Her focus is mostly on how the gender war among women holds women back. More progress would be made if housewives, working women, and queen bees could support each other's goals. No doubt, that would be beneficial. However, the greater obstacle is patriarchy, which gives men the advantage of having to compete with only the male half of the population. It is difficult to be a team player if men don't want you on the team: all the more reason to lean in.

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