



LEAN IN

WOMEN, WORK, AND
THE WILL TO LEAD

SHERYL SANDBERG

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THE WILL TO LEAD

Sheryl Sandberg
with Nell Scovell



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TO MY PARENTS

*for raising me to believe that
anything was possible*

AND TO MY HUSBAND

for making everything possible

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INTRODUCTION

Internalizing the Revolution

I GOT PREGNANT with my first child in the summer of 2004. At the time, I was running the online sales and operations groups at Google. I had joined the company three and a half years earlier when it was an obscure start-up with a few hundred employees in a run-down office building. By my first trimester, Google had grown into a company of thousands and moved into a multibuilding campus.

My pregnancy was not easy. The typical morning sickness that often accompanies the first trimester affected me every day for nine long months. I gained almost seventy pounds, and my feet swelled two entire shoe sizes, turning into odd-shaped lumps I could see only when they were propped up on a coffee table. A particularly sensitive Google engineer announced that “Project Whale” was named after me.

One day, after a rough morning spent staring at the bottom of the toilet, I had to rush to make an important client meeting. Google was growing so quickly that parking was an ongoing problem, and the only spot I could find was quite far away. I sprinted across the parking lot, which in reality meant lumbering a bit more quickly than my absurdly slow pregnancy crawl. This only made my nausea worse, and I arrived at the meeting praying that a sales pitch was the only thing that would come out of my mouth. That night, I recounted these troubles to my husband, Dave. He pointed out that Yahoo, where he worked at the time, had designated parking for expectant mothers at the front of each building.

The next day, I marched in—or more like waddled in—to see

Google founders Larry Page and Sergey Brin in their office, which was really just a large room with toys and gadgets strewn all over the floor. I found Sergey in a yoga position in the corner and announced that we needed pregnancy parking, preferably sooner rather than later. He looked up at me and agreed immediately, noting that he had never thought about it before.

To this day, I'm embarrassed that I didn't realize that pregnant women needed reserved parking until I experienced my own aching feet. As one of Google's most senior women, didn't I have a special responsibility to think of this? But like Sergey, it had never occurred to me. The other pregnant women must have suffered in silence, not wanting to ask for special treatment. Or maybe they lacked the confidence or seniority to demand that the problem be fixed. Having one pregnant woman at the top—even one who looked like a whale—made the difference.

Today in the United States and the developed world, women are better off than ever. We stand on the shoulders of the women who came before us, women who had to fight for the rights that we now take for granted. In 1947, Anita Summers, the mother of my longtime mentor Larry Summers, was hired as an economist by the Standard Oil Company. When she accepted the job, her new boss said to her, "I am so glad to have you. I figure I am getting the same brains for less money." Her reaction to this was to feel flattered. It was a huge compliment to be told that she had the same brains as a man. It would have been unthinkable for her to ask for equal compensation.

We feel even more grateful when we compare our lives to those of other women around the world. There are still countries that deny women basic civil rights. Worldwide, about 4.4 million women and girls are trapped in the sex trade.¹ In places like Afghanistan and Sudan, girls receive little or no education, wives are treated as the property of their husbands, and women who are raped are routinely cast out of their homes for disgracing their families. Some rape victims are even sent to jail for committing a "moral crime."² We are centuries ahead of the unacceptable treatment of women in these countries.

But knowing that things could be worse should not stop us from trying to make them better. When the suffragettes marched in the streets, they envisioned a world where men and women would be truly equal. A century later, we are still squinting, trying to bring that vision into focus.

The blunt truth is that men still run the world. Of the 195 independent countries in the world, only 17 are led by women.³ Women hold just 20 percent of seats in parliaments globally.⁴ In the United States, where we pride ourselves on liberty and justice for all, the gender division of leadership roles is not much better. Women became 50 percent of the college graduates in the United States in the early 1980s.⁵ Since then, women have slowly and steadily advanced, earning more and more of the college degrees, taking more of the entry-level jobs, and entering more fields previously dominated by men. Despite these gains, the percentage of women at the top of corporate America has barely budged over the past decade.⁶ A meager twenty-one of the Fortune 500 CEOs are women.⁷ Women hold about 14 percent of executive officer positions, 17 percent of board seats, and constitute 18 percent of our elected congressional officials.⁸ The gap is even worse for women of color, who hold just 4 percent of top corporate jobs, 3 percent of board seats, and 5 percent of congressional seats.⁹ While women continue to outpace men in educational achievement, we have ceased making real progress at the top of any industry. This means that when it comes to making the decisions that most affect our world, women's voices are not heard equally.

Progress remains equally sluggish when it comes to compensation. In 1970, American women were paid 59 cents for every dollar their male counterparts made. By 2010, women had protested, fought, and worked their butts off to raise that compensation to 77 cents for every dollar men made.¹⁰ As activist Marlo Thomas wryly joked on Equal Pay Day 2011, "Forty years and eighteen cents. A dozen eggs have gone up ten times that amount."¹¹

I have watched these disheartening events from a front-row seat. I graduated from college in 1991 and from business school in 1995. In

each entry-level job after graduation, my colleagues were a balanced mix of male and female. I saw that the senior leaders were almost entirely male, but I thought that was due to historical discrimination against women. The proverbial glass ceiling had been cracked in almost every industry, and I believed that it was just a matter of time until my generation took our fair share of the leadership roles. But with each passing year, fewer and fewer of my colleagues were women. More and more often, I was the only woman in the room.

Being the sole woman has resulted in some awkward yet revealing situations. Two years after I joined Facebook as chief operating officer, our chief financial officer departed suddenly, and I had to step in to complete a funding round. Since I had spent my career in operations, not finance, the process of raising capital was new and a bit scary. My team and I flew to New York for the initial pitch to private equity firms. Our first meeting was held in the kind of corporate office featured in movies, complete with a sprawling view of Manhattan. I offered an overview of our business and answered questions. So far so good. Then someone suggested that we break for a few minutes. I turned to the senior partner and asked where the women's restroom was. He stared at me blankly. My question had completely stumped him. I asked, "How long have you been in this office?" And he said, "One year." "Am I the only woman to have pitched a deal here in an entire year?" "I think so," he said, adding, "or maybe you're the only one who had to use the bathroom."

It has been more than two decades since I entered the workforce, and so much is still the same. It is time for us to face the fact that our revolution has stalled.¹² The promise of equality is not the same as true equality.

A truly equal world would be one where women ran half our countries and companies and men ran half our homes. I believe that this would be a better world. The laws of economics and many studies of diversity tell us that if we tapped the entire pool of human resources and talent, our collective performance would improve. Legendary investor Warren Buffett has stated generously that one of the reasons for his great success was that he was competing with only

half of the population. The Warren Buffetts of my generation are still largely enjoying this advantage. When more people get in the race, more records will be broken. And the achievements will extend beyond those individuals to benefit us all.

The night before Leymah Gbowee won the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize for helping to lead the women's protests that toppled Liberia's dictator, she was at a book party in my home. We were celebrating the publication of her autobiography, *Mighty Be Our Powers*, but it was a somber night. A guest asked her how American women could help those who experienced the horrors and mass rapes of war in places like Liberia. Her response was four simple words: "More women in power." Leymah and I could not have come from more different backgrounds, and yet we have both arrived at the same conclusion. Conditions for all women will improve when there are more women in leadership roles giving strong and powerful voice to their needs and concerns.¹³

This brings us to the obvious question—how? How are we going to take down the barriers that prevent more women from getting to the top? Women face real obstacles in the professional world, including blatant and subtle sexism, discrimination, and sexual harassment. Too few workplaces offer the flexibility and access to child care and parental leave that are necessary for pursuing a career while raising children. Men have an easier time finding the mentors and sponsors who are invaluable for career progression. Plus, women have to prove themselves to a far greater extent than men do. And this is not just in our heads. A 2011 McKinsey report noted that men are promoted based on potential, while women are promoted based on past accomplishments.¹⁴

In addition to the external barriers erected by society, women are hindered by barriers that exist within ourselves. We hold ourselves back in ways both big and small, by lacking self-confidence, by not raising our hands, and by pulling back when we should be leaning in. We internalize the negative messages we get throughout our lives—the messages that say it's wrong to be outspoken, aggressive, more powerful than men. We lower our own expectations of what we can

achieve. We continue to do the majority of the housework and child care. We compromise our career goals to make room for partners and children who may not even exist yet. Compared to our male colleagues, fewer of us aspire to senior positions. This is not a list of things other women have done. I have made every mistake on this list. At times, I still do.

My argument is that getting rid of these internal barriers is critical to gaining power. Others have argued that women can get to the top only when the institutional barriers are gone. This is the ultimate chicken-and-egg situation. The chicken: Women will tear down the external barriers once we achieve leadership roles. We will march into our bosses' offices and demand what we need, including pregnancy parking. Or better yet, we'll become bosses and make sure all women have what they need. The egg: We need to eliminate the external barriers to get women into those roles in the first place. Both sides are right. So rather than engage in philosophical arguments over which comes first, let's agree to wage battles on both fronts. They are equally important. I am encouraging women to address the chicken, but I fully support those who are focusing on the egg.

Internal obstacles are rarely discussed and often underplayed. Throughout my life, I was told over and over about inequalities in the workplace and how hard it would be to have a career and a family. I rarely heard anything, however, about the ways I might hold myself back. These internal obstacles deserve a lot more attention, in part because they are under our own control. We can dismantle the hurdles in ourselves today. We can start this very moment.

I never thought I would write a book. I am not a scholar, a journalist, or a sociologist. But I decided to speak out after talking to hundreds of women, listening to their struggles, sharing my own, and realizing that the gains we have made are not enough and may even be slipping. The first chapter of this book lays out some of the complex challenges women face. Each subsequent chapter focuses on an adjustment or difference that we can make ourselves: increasing our self-confidence ("Sit at the Table"), getting our partners to do more at home ("Make Your Partner a Real Partner"), not holding

ourselves to unattainable standards (“The Myth of Doing It All”). I do not pretend to have perfect solutions to these deep and complicated issues. I rely on hard data, academic research, my own observations, and lessons I have learned along the way.

This book is not a memoir, although I have included stories about my life. It is not a self-help book, although I truly hope it helps. It is not a book on career management, although I offer advice in that area. It is not a feminist manifesto—okay, it is sort of a feminist manifesto, but one that I hope inspires men as much as it inspires women.

Whatever this book is, I am writing it for any woman who wants to increase her chances of making it to the top of her field or pursue any goal vigorously. This includes women at all stages of their lives and careers, from those who are just starting out to those who are taking a break and may want to jump back in. I am also writing this for any man who wants to understand what a woman—a colleague, wife, mother, or daughter—is up against so that he can do his part to build an equal world.

This book makes the case for leaning in, for being ambitious in any pursuit. And while I believe that increasing the number of women in positions of power is a necessary element of true equality, I do not believe that there is one definition of success or happiness. Not all women want careers. Not all women want children. Not all women want both. I would never advocate that we should all have the same objectives. Many people are not interested in acquiring power, not because they lack ambition, but because they are living their lives as they desire. Some of the most important contributions to our world are made by caring for one person at a time. We each have to chart our own unique course and define which goals fit our lives, values, and dreams.

I am also acutely aware that the vast majority of women are struggling to make ends meet and take care of their families. Parts of this book will be most relevant to women fortunate enough to have choices about how much and when and where to work; other parts apply to situations that women face in every workplace, within every

community, and in every home. If we can succeed in adding more female voices at the highest levels, we will expand opportunities and extend fairer treatment to all.

Some, especially other women in business, have cautioned me about speaking out publicly on these issues. When I have spoken out anyway, several of my comments have upset people of both genders. I know some believe that by focusing on what women can change themselves—pressing them to lean in—it seems like I am letting our institutions off the hook. Or even worse, they accuse me of blaming the victim. Far from blaming the victim, I believe that female leaders are key to the solution. Some critics will also point out that it is much easier for me to lean in, since my financial resources allow me to afford any help I need. My intention is to offer advice that would have been useful to me long before I had heard of Google or Facebook and that will resonate with women in a broad range of circumstances.

I have heard these criticisms in the past and I know that I will hear them—and others—in the future. My hope is that my message will be judged on its merits. We can't avoid this conversation. This issue transcends all of us. The time is long overdue to encourage more women to dream the possible dream and encourage more men to support women in the workforce and in the home.

We can reignite the revolution by internalizing the revolution. The shift to a more equal world will happen person by person. We move closer to the larger goal of true equality with each woman who leans in.

The Leadership Ambition Gap

What Would You Do If You Weren't Afraid?

MY GRANDMOTHER Rosalind Einhorn was born exactly fifty-two years before I was, on August 28, 1917. Like many poor Jewish families in the boroughs of New York City, hers lived in a small, crowded apartment close to their relatives. Her parents, aunts, and uncles addressed her male cousins by their given names, but she and her sister were referred to only as “Girlie.”

During the Depression, my grandmother was pulled out of Morris High School to help support the household by sewing fabric flowers onto undergarments that her mother could resell for a tiny profit. No one in the community would have considered taking a boy out of school. A boy's education was the family's hope to move up the financial and social ladder. Education for girls, however, was less important both financially, since they were unlikely to contribute to the family's income, and culturally, since boys were expected to study the Torah while girls were expected to run a “proper home.” Luckily for my grandmother, a local teacher insisted that her parents put her back into school. She went on not only to finish high school but to graduate from U.C. Berkeley.

After college, “Girlie” worked selling pocketbooks and accessories at David's Fifth Avenue. When she left her job to marry my grandfather, family legend has it that David's had to hire four people to replace her. Years later, when my grandfather's paint business was struggling, she jumped in and took some of the hard steps he was

reluctant to take, helping to save the family from financial ruin. She displayed her business acumen again in her forties. After being diagnosed with breast cancer, she beat it and then dedicated herself to raising money for the clinic that treated her by selling knockoff watches out of the trunk of her car. Girlie ended up with a profit margin that Apple would envy. I have never met anyone with more energy and determination than my grandmother. When Warren Buffett talks about competing against only half of the population, I think about her and wonder how different her life might have been if she had been born half a century later.

When my grandmother had children of her own—my mother and her two brothers—she emphasized education for all of them. My mother attended the University of Pennsylvania, where classes were coed. When she graduated in 1965 with a degree in French literature, she surveyed a workforce that she believed consisted of two career options for women: teaching or nursing. She chose teaching. She began a Ph.D. program, got married, and then dropped out when she became pregnant with me. It was thought to be a sign of weakness if a husband needed his wife's help to support their family, so my mother became a stay-at-home parent and an active volunteer. The centuries-old division of labor stood.

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 who 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 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 male 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.¹ In turn, these diverging percentages teach institutions and mentors to invest more in men, who are statistically more likely to stay.

Judith Rodin, president of the Rockefeller Foundation and the first woman to serve as president of an Ivy League university, once remarked to an audience of women my age, “My generation fought so hard to give all of you choices. We believe in choices. But choosing to leave the workforce was not the choice we thought so many of you would make.”²

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 that opportunity does not necessarily translate into professional achievement. Many of these girls watched their mothers try to “do it all” and then decide that something had to give. That something was

usually their careers.

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.³ This gender gap in academic achievement has even caused some to worry about the "end of men."⁴ But while compliant, raise-your-hand-and-speak-when-called-on behaviors might be rewarded in school, they are less valued in the workplace.⁵ 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.

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.⁶ When jobs are described as powerful, challenging, and involving high levels of responsibility, they appeal to more men than women.⁷ And while the ambition gap is most 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.⁸ Even among highly educated professional men and women, more men than women describe themselves as "ambitious."⁹

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.¹⁰ A recent survey of Millennials¹¹ 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.”¹²

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. Author Samantha Ettus and her husband read their daughter’s kindergarten yearbook, where each child answered the question “What do you want to be when you grow up?” They noted that several of the boys wanted to be president. None of the girls did.¹³ (Current data suggest that when these girls become women, they will continue to feel the same way.)¹⁴ In middle school, more boys than girls aspire to leadership roles in future careers.¹⁵ At the top fifty colleges, less than a third of student government presidents are women.¹⁶

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.¹⁷

And for all the progress, there is still societal pressure for women to keep an eye on marriage from a young age. When I went to college, as much as my parents emphasized academic achievement, they emphasized marriage even more. They told me that the most eligible women marry young to get a “good man” before they are all taken. I followed their advice and throughout college, I vetted every date as a

potential husband (which, trust me, is a sure way to ruin a date at age nineteen).

When I was graduating, my thesis advisor, Larry Summers, suggested that I apply for international fellowships. I rejected the idea on the grounds that a foreign country was not a likely place to turn a date into a husband. Instead, I moved to Washington, D.C., which was full of eligible men. It worked. My first year out of college, I met a man who was not just eligible, but also wonderful, so I married him. I was twenty-four and convinced that marriage was the first—and necessary—step to a happy and productive life.

It didn't work out that way. I was just not mature enough to have made this lifelong decision, and the relationship quickly unraveled. By the age of twenty-five, I had managed to get married ... and also divorced. At the time, this felt like a massive personal *and* public failure. For many years, I felt that no matter what I accomplished professionally, it paled in comparison to the scarlet letter D stitched on my chest. (Almost ten years later, I learned that the “good ones” were not all taken, and I wisely and very happily married Dave Goldberg.)

Like me, Gayle Tzemach Lemmon, deputy director of the Council on Foreign Relations' Women and Foreign Policy Program, was encouraged to prioritize marriage over career. As she described in *The Atlantic*, “When I was 27, I received a posh fellowship to travel to Germany to learn German and work at the *Wall Street Journal*.... It was an incredible opportunity for a 20-something by any objective standard, and I knew it would help prepare me for graduate school and beyond. My girlfriends, however, expressed shock and horror that I would leave my boyfriend at the time to live abroad for a year. My relatives asked whether I was worried that I'd never get married. And when I attended a barbecue with my then-beau, his boss took me aside to remind me that ‘there aren't many guys like that out there.’ ” The result of these negative reactions, in Gayle's view, is that many women “still see ambition as a dirty word.”¹⁸

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.

I also acknowledge that there are biological differences between men and women. I have breast-fed two children and noted, at times with great disappointment, that this was simply not something my husband was equipped to do. Are there characteristics inherent in sex differences that make women more nurturing and men more assertive? Quite possibly. Still, in today's world, where we no longer have to hunt in the wild for our food, our desire for leadership is largely a culturally created and reinforced trait. How individuals view what they can and should accomplish is in large part formed by our societal expectations.

From the moment we are born, boys and girls are treated differently.¹⁹ Parents tend to talk to girl babies more than boy babies.²⁰ Mothers overestimate the crawling ability of their sons and underestimate the crawling ability of their daughters.²¹ Reflecting the belief that girls need to be helped more than boys, mothers often spend more time comforting and hugging infant girls and more time watching infant boys play by themselves.²²

Other cultural messages are more blatant. Gymboree once sold onesies proclaiming “Smart like Daddy” for boys and “Pretty like Mommy” for girls.²³ The same year, J. C. Penney marketed a T-shirt to teenage girls that bragged, “I’m too pretty to do homework so my brother has to do it for me.”²⁴ These things did not happen in 1951. They happened in 2011.

Even worse, the messages sent to girls can move beyond encouraging superficial traits and veer into explicitly discouraging leadership. When a girl tries to lead, she is often labeled bossy. Boys are seldom called bossy because a boy taking the role of a boss does