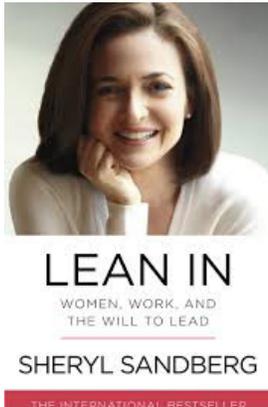


## BOOK REVIEW



### Lean In: Women, Work and the Will to Lead by Sheryl Sandberg with Nell Scovell<sup>#</sup>

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Women are capable of dominating the corporate boardrooms. Surveys on women and leadership have indicated that women are alike men in leadership qualities and even better in significant leadership capabilities such as initiative, self-development, integrity and honesty, and driving results. So why then are we not able to find many women in the top jobs in business? With only 37 women as CEO's of Fortune 500 companies. What is stopping women from reaching the top? Is there an unconscious bias about women playing bigger roles? Sheryl Sandberg along with Nell Scovell answers these questions loud and clear through their book Lean In: Women. Work and the Will to Lead. A call for women to take advantage of the opportunities that come along in their professional journey.

Sheryl Sandberg is Harvard educated COO at Facebook, managing the company's business operations. Sheryl started her career as an economist with the World Bank, after receiving her MBA degree from Harvard, she became the Chief of Staff for the United States Treasury Department. In November 2001 she joined Google as Vice President, Global Online Sales and Operations. Subsequently in March 2008 Sandberg became the Chief Operating Officer at Facebook. She is one of those few women who could make it to the top of the notoriously male dominated world of Silicon Valley.

Sandberg is embodying women who wish to make it to the top in the corporate world. Sandberg

has articulated her perspective in this book. She describes this book as a '*sort of feminist manifesto*', focusing on women who seek to build a career and to attain success. This book reverberates with women who paused on the way to the boardroom. Best of all, every woman though may not have much in common with Sandberg, will still be able to relate to her both personally and professionally.

At the outset, the author brings out the indisputable truth that, '*men still run the world and will continue to do so in the future*'. She presents hard data to prove gender-based discrimination in every spot of the world, particularly in the United States of America. Despite the academic achievements of women, there seem to be unequal returns to these achievements in the corporate world. There is also a persistent discrimination in pay between men and women. The author states in her own words that, '*a truly equal world would be one where women ran half our countries and companies and men ran half our homes*'.

The first chapter, "The Leadership Ambition Gap: What would you do if you weren't afraid?", explores yet another gap between men and women, the ambition gap. Even parents are biased and estimate the ability of boys higher than that of girls. Boys right from a young age are allowed to take charge and to express their opinions, when girls are silenced. Stereotyping that begins in the childhood is endorsed and invigorated

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throughout a girl's life. The author has tried to rip out the guilt-trip illusion that is, having it all. Perhaps, the most important internal barrier that stops women from moving forward is, fear.

“Sit at the table”, describes the imposter syndrome. More than men, women experience it more intensely which leads to self-limiting beliefs. The way women internalise failure and the insecurity it raises affects their performance. When a woman succeeds, people around and even the media usually attributes it to luck and support from others. Another common barrier for women other than self-doubt is lack of confidence. To do away with these unhelpful thoughts and behaviours Sandberg says one need to make both intellectual and emotional adjustment and start believing in their abilities.

The experiment about which the author talks in, “Success and Likability”, found that, *‘success and likeability are positively correlated to men and negatively correlated to women’*. The double standards and prejudicial expectations from women put them in what the author calls a “*damned if they do*” and “*doomed if they don't*” kind of situations. The author uses the analogy the jungle gym in the chapter, “*It's a jungle gym, not a ladder*”, where she asks women to not look at their careers as a ladder as it limits the opportunities available whereas a jungle gym opens more opportunities to the top.

The lessons for women in, “Are you my mentor”, is to have a mentor to look up to. Yet, Sandberg advises women not to seek for a mentor. Performance and potential will make a mentor identify his or her protégé. Sandberg emphasizes the need to be authentic, to seek and speak the truth. The ability to communicate the truth and to listen will make one a natural leader. Seeking the truth also means seeking feedback. Women should not be afraid of bringing their whole self to the workplace and not be afraid of talking about personal life. Separate personal and professional life is just a myth.

In, “Don't leave before you leave”, Sandberg encourages more women to hold over in the game

longer even with the prospects of having children in the future and more women should want to continue working toward the top. The years when women want to have a child is crucial to be leaning in and not leaning back. “Make Your Partner a Real Partner”, explains that as women become more empowered at work, men must become more empowered at home. In families where both parents have full time employment, women still are responsible for childcare and housework. Both men and women whether they are equal partners or not, need to teach this to their sons and daughters. It is important to make the next generation understand the value of being an equal partner in career and at home.

The myth of “doing it all” is a stereotype that plagues women. The fact is no one can do it all, neither men nor women. Life is a trade-off. “Let's start talking about it”, accentuates the gender differences and points out that only lately have we started talking about them. Refraining from discussions on equality hampers progress. Men need to discuss equality with women in the workplace so they can actually move toward equality. More women should start helping other women. “Working together towards equality”, is about the collective power of women. Women need to look at each other more as supporters and less as competitors. When more women work together and lean in, talents of the entire population will be utilised.

Final opinion, the choice to work or to stay at home is personal and a woman should choose to do what makes her happy. Only when a marked change happens in attitude, structure and culture, women will be able to move forward. When women move forward and occupy seats in the C-suite, they will inspire other women around them to do so. That is when we can make the world a better place. This book not only shows how to lean in our own personal and professional life but also help others lean in theirs.

The one observation is that the author being a wealthy and highly educated billionaire, doesn't seem to represent all women. It is possible for a woman of her stature to be blind to her privileges. The book also seems to be offending the stay-at-home moms from the way success is defined. The book at times sounds preachy.

The book also does not offer any concrete solution to the problems of women in the corporate jungle.

This book however has become a must read for ambitious career-oriented women. The anecdotes in

each chapter and her own personal experiences are well suited to the message she wishes to convey.

It has to be read with the life partner and the biases should be discussed and worked through.