

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

by Sheryl Sandberg

Knopf, 2013. 240 pp.

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The *Lean In* phenomenon started when Sheryl Sandberg, COO of Facebook was asked to give a talk about being a successful woman in the workplace. Her talk unleashed a movement. She gave a TED Talk that went viral, wrote a book, and launched a global foundation, "offering women the ongoing inspiration and support to help them achieve their goals." We live in a free country, we have equal opportunity legislation on our side. So why have women not advanced further into leadership? This is the question that Sandberg dared to uncover.

Worth over \$1 billion today, Sandberg has been recognized as one of *Time Magazine's* Top 100 most influential people in the world, and by *Fortune* as one of the most powerful women. Sheryl Sandberg graduated top in her class at both Harvard College and Harvard Business School. Her early career started at McKinsey & Company before becoming Chief of Staff to United States Secretary of the Treasury Larry Summers. Ironically, this is the same Larry Summers, then president of Harvard University, who went viral when he suggested at an academic conference that women are under-represented in STEM careers due to "different availability of aptitude at the high end," rather than discrimination. That was like saying women should not drive or vote because, well, they just are not up to the challenge. Summers was ousted by Harvard's own faculty and voted off the island. Sheryl fared well under Summers, who claimed that his comments were just meant to be provocative and start a conversation. Her career then led her to Google and eventually to Facebook, as Mark Zuckerberg's right arm.

Lean In does a great job of creating awareness of our own biases and behaviors. With more women than men in the workforce for the first time in history, a struggling economy, and shrinking middle class, something has to shift. When married men and women agree to share more of the duties at home to support each other personally and professionally, a stronger bond develops. If we take traditional norms and apply them to dual-career family with children, regardless of the income levels of each partner, women statistically get socked with all things domestic. For women, it's like having two jobs. This seems like something that a healthy marriage would work out for itself. Ask for help when you need it, give and take. In the professional realm, having the confidence to step-up, volunteer, raise your hand, or lean in seems for some women, part of their modus operandi. When the organization's culture is focused on performance, leadership comes in all sizes, shapes, colors, and genders. Savvy

management recognizes talent and seeks it out. *Lean In* gives women permission to be bold when they might otherwise be capable, but not confident.

I applaud Sheryl Sandberg for reminding women that they do not need permission to sit at the table. Women are great natural leaders and are often as willing to take the same challenges as men. When a man or woman is attempting to block a deserving, qualified person's chance at career advancement, then that speaks to the heart of the discriminator. Accepting that norm and not saying anything reminds me of a quote from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., "Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter." *Lean In* points out that women might be self-sabotaging due to a lack of self-confidence, rather than being passed over because of gender.

Related to our faith, God views men and women equally in his Kingdom. While Scripture discusses roles within the church and the family, there is no directive that suggests that women should be treated, compensated, or respected any less than men. Women throughout history have been bold. The virtuous woman of Proverbs 31 didn't need Sheryl Sandberg to remind her to be a bold and successful business person, among her other virtues. I am not sure I can explain why women are not confident in a country where we are free to lead. Essentially, women do not need permission to *Lean In*, but rather should claim it and lead as God enables and guides them. Or be left out.