



**Closing the Leadership Gap  
Why Women Can and Must help Run the World**

**Notes by Frumi Rachel Barr, MBA, Ph.D.**

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**Publisher:** Penguin Group

**Copyright year:** 2004

**ISBN:** 0-670-03274-3

**Authors' Bio:** Marie C. Wilson is a founder and president of the White House Project, an organization dedicated to advancing women's leadership across sectors, including the U.S. presidency. She is also president of the Ms. Foundation for Women, through which she created Take Our Daughters to Work and began the Collaborative Fund for Women's Economic Development.

**Authors' big thought:** This book is a call to action to increase the presence of women in powerful leadership positions in our country – in politics as well as business. The issue isn't a personal one about women's ability or willingness to lead; it's about a common perception that men are leaders and women are not. This book offers prescriptions and role models of women who have mastered the challenges and requirements for leadership. These women are at the leading edge of change and can motivate all of us to take action, not just for fairness but for the sake of the larger social good.

**Chapter Notes:**

**Introduction: It's About Time**

- Women populate half the democracy; we should occupy half the positions of leadership – both for gender equity and because women, a natural resource, should be mined for energy. The author is convinced that our future depends on the leadership of women – not to replace men, but to transform our options alongside them.
- Power sharing will provide a different voice at the table, giving women the opportunity to shape policy in line with our values and giving men any permission they need to bring all of themselves to leadership including their softer side.
- Of 435 seats in the House of Representatives, only 59 are occupied by women; of 100 senators, only 14 are women. Only 24 women have ever been governors in the United States. Women are nearly half the workforce, yet we make up only 12 percent of top executives and 15.7 percent of corporate officers; we hold a mere 12.4 percent of board seats in five hundred of the country's largest companies. Internationally the U.S. ranks sixtieth in women's political leadership.
- Until there are diverse females in authority so that a chosen few are not expected to speak for an entire race or gender, those few will have to carry the burden for all of us.

- Cultural shifts require an organized effort and a woman-by-woman guerilla campaign if we are to see change, especially as it relates to how women are represented in the media.
- Through our buying power and our voices, we must demonstrate what we will and will not accept.
- How quickly we get to critical mass also depends on changing the *perception* of women as leaders, and on starting to *value* female qualities rather than using them as excuses to marginalize us as “working moms”.
- The deeper the author’s research, the clearer the answer: To trust women is to trust in a different future awash with ideas and lit by the energy of *all* people. It means more options. It means a fairer equation.

## Chapter 1. Why Women Matter

- Carly Fiorina, chair and CEO of HP, created a stir when she denied there was a glass ceiling, saying women have to play by male rules and allow themselves to be judged by male standards, that if they don’t, they risk being marginalized.
- Marie J. Toulant, CEO of Barnes and nobles said, “I don’t think it marginalizes women to say we’re different: it recognizes that we have different styles. We are different than men and we should celebrate it.”
- Do we women lead differently? Yes we do, and it is a hot underground topic for women at the top.
- We find ourselves wedged into stereotypes, often acting against female values, trying to fit the male definition of leadership.
- Women are among the fastest growth groups for entrepreneurship, with a woman starting a business every sixty seconds.
- The core of what women bring to leadership – a tendency toward greater inclusiveness, empathy, communication up and down hierarchies, focus on broader issues – makes stronger government and richer business.
- Management scientist Henry Mintzberg found in the men he studied: an unrelenting work pace with little time for other activity, heavy identity with the job, and difficulty sharing information. Sally Helgesen in her research for her book *The Female Advantage*, found almost the opposite in women: steady workers who also made time for on-the-job breaks and non-work activities, who saw their jobs as only one aspect of themselves, and who scheduled time to share information in the office. Though both genders are oriented toward the big picture, there’s a difference when it comes to women: “It encompasses a vision of society – women relate discussions to their larger effect upon the role of the family, the American education system, the environment, even world peace.”
- In the Wellesley study by Mary Parker Follett, sixty executive women from all walks talked about how women lead differently: They are better communicators and listeners, more nurturing, more willing to involve others in decision making, and more likely to roll up their sleeves and work with the team.
- A root of learning for them: mothering. A one leader said, “One of the best training grounds for leadership is motherhood”.
- Elected female leadership has made a tremendous difference in politics. Women tend to include diverse viewpoints in decision making, have a broader conception of public policy, and

offer new solutions. Recent research has shown a direct relationship between the number of women in a legislative body and the passage of bills benefiting women and children. However, we would need at least 15 percent of legislators to be women for a likelihood that family-friendly bills would pass. The U.S. Congress is currently 14 percent women.

## **Chapter 2. Barriers to Leadership**

- Why do the paltry numbers of women at the top belie the opposite sentiment for putting them there?
- The answer is buried in a host of barriers – cultural and emotional, societal and historical – that keep women from gaining traction. We must deal with perceptions – both of what a leader looks like (sometimes literally) and that women already run the world even though the statistics say otherwise. In fact, one of our major problems is that we think we have no problem.
- Most Americans don't realize how far we haven't come. We remain in denial despite evidence such as the sea of men on the floor of Congress or in newspaper business sections every day of the week.
- Since elections can be made and lost through media, The White House Project studied past ads of both genders. A diverse "audience" of voters was handpicked to view the ads and react to them through a dial turned up or down to measure the traits that made candidates effective. Before the ads even started, when the candidates appeared on the screen without even speaking a word – in fact before he or she had any real traits at all other than gender – the dialers made decisions about leadership potential. Women stayed even or were dialed down, but men were dialed up from the first second. Women had to dig out, to prove they were worthy of the attention and elected office before their scores turned positive. Men had the instant advantage, based on their maleness.
- A poll from July 2003 on MBA Careers.com showed that men and women get advanced business degrees for very different reasons; men to prepare for entrepreneurship and advancement, women to increase their career opportunities and for credibility. Men did not list credibility as a motivation.
- The only way to change the barriers is to change the rules, inside and out, individually and collectively, rewriting the definition of "leader" and putting a woman's face on it.
- The pipeline theory of women's ascendancy is definitely the means to an end: Insert enough women at all levels and their promotion to higher business ranks or election to higher office is statistically inevitable. But the flow through the pipeline is currently only a trickle (even though it is perceived to be otherwise) and it is limiting the number of women who reach the upper echelons.
- So the "female advantage" is still not taking hold, either at the top or in feeder positions to it. Why? Because this style of leadership and the traits that accompany it, such as inclusiveness, broader focus on issues, communication, and empathy – all typically associated with women, and central to family and community systems- have never found value in the corporate or political worlds in America. Male assertiveness and control continue to be in higher demand.
- We often find resistance to women's leadership because they are not tough enough, both due to the male-oriented definition of "leader" and the entrenched cultural ideal of female: sensitive and warm, self-sacrificing and nurturing, good wife and mother. These assets, while

valued in the home, become reasons to marginalize women on the job. In the words of author and columnist Anna Quindlen, we've got to be "tough as nails and warm as toast".

### *Redefining 'Leader'*

- So once we get to the workplace, we already have two strikes against us: one, that we are females, which don't match the physical look of a leader, and two, that the qualities we bring do not match the traditional actions of a leader. Add that to the structural impediments to anyone (male or female) who might like to be a parent and a worker – no child care, little flexibility in work hours – and you've made it nearly impossible for women to work let alone rise.
- Careerwomen.com, in a 2003 poll on women and career advancement, pointed to barriers in the corporate culture, among them exclusion from informal networks, a culture that clearly favors men, the small number of women serving in senior management ( which, if fixed, might solve the other two), and a continuing perception that family will get in the way.
- If government and industry really valued women at work, they'd make it easier for them to be there, creating programs and flexibility in the job itself. Part of the reason: the expense.
- We need a new definition of "leader" – one that looks and sounds like a woman too – and we've got to set up the structures ( institutional and societal) that will allow this newly defined leader to really go to work. We need child care and other parent-friendly programs, and we need to end, once and for all, women's deal with society to be the sole caregivers.
- Women are still expected, and expect themselves, to serve the family above all else, ensuring the burden of two full-time jobs, since most have to go to work outside the home to help support families. Men are still given a pass to put most of their energy at the office, often at the expense of the family.
  
- The popular culture – television, movies, journalism, advertising, and books- presents enormous opportunity for crafting a new vision of women in society. It has the power to redefine "leader", to normalize the sight and sound of a woman in charge at the highest levels.
- In Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, a woman is forced to wear a scarlet A to signify her n=break with society through her adultery. The author using the scarlet A as a metaphor for the ways women are minimized and defined, ways we are kept in our place, and ways we keep ourselves from the life we might lead. The "A"s that resound for her: authority, ambition, ability, and authenticity.
- Throughout history we have largely been denied the authority to command on a grand scale since so few of us have reached the top in any sector. Ambition, a hallmark of manhood, is considered to be unwomanly; and sometimes downright unnatural. Despite our natural and learned abilities, we tend to be trusted less often than less qualified men. And in the process of negotiating authority, ambition, and ability we sometimes lose the core of who we are – our authenticity, our genuine voice, and our willingness to see the world differently and insist upon changing it.

### **Chapter 3. Authority**

- If we intend to dismantle the barriers to women's leadership, one of the first we should tackle is authority. Women must be seen as commanding and powerful.

- Any focus in the superficial will always erode authority.
- Media coverage of women – more personal, less issue based and less likely to include evidence to support their quoted remarks – undermines authority, leaving the impression that women don't understand and can't handle real power.
- Women are rarely seen and almost never positioned as leaders by the press, whose coverage of them is usually light in content and volume. When we do get our day in the headlines, our authority tends to be challenged more often, our statements scrutinized more thoroughly than those of men.
- When our expertise is ignored, even unintentionally, our authority remains cloaked. Loosening the media barrier becomes absolutely essential to changing perceptions, to letting Americans know that knowledge and solutions are available from more than the usual suspects.
- During the White House Project's dial-testing study, where they showed real political ads used in governors' races, they also showed ads of their own making, with professional actors, to see if they could determine what worked. They confirmed what female candidates and their advisers suspected: Women can't present themselves in the same way men do and still be seen as authoritative. Here's what women had to do to make it with the viewers:
  1. Wear formal clothing
  2. Use active language coupled with issues not ordinarily associated with women, like crime or the economy.
  3. Use an impressive backdrop related to how you want to be seen
  4. Discuss your credentials because the voters will require proof of your competence.
- Business executives can break down barriers and change perceptions with this in mind.
- Gail Evans says, in her book *She Wins, You Win* it is vital that we play on the women's team – talking, planning, and collaborating to improve the situation for everyone. We stand a rung down because we don't band together, like men do, to create the power we need to move up. Evan proposed "a new strategy to advance our careers as a whole".
- We need this strategy so we can counteract centuries of lading without authority. The effort can be as simple as introducing another woman to the boss with all the authority she deserves. It can be an informal meeting to share information. It can come in the form of a note of thanks, a note of praise, and a note of support for a woman seeking a promotion. It can be spoken recognition of a woman's idea in a meeting, or recognition of a male ally. But it must be consistent and persistent, and it has to involve every woman, making it safe by the magnitude of its numbers.
- Leadership consultant Shifra Bronzick says that it's very hard to motivate women if they think that the agenda is selfish or narrow, such as pushing themselves up the chain of command. We have been socialized to believe that a voice for personal gain is not a voice worth hearing, that our focus must always be outward helping others get what they need.
- A good start: Become trustworthy voices for each other, refusing to allow diminishment, fighting invisibility, reminding each other that we *are* experts.

#### **Chapter 4. Ambition**

- Ambition in men is an expectation and a virtue. In women it can be a kiss of death, guaranteeing isolation, ending relationships (personal and professional), pushing entire families into therapy, and making even the most self-assured CEO wonder what she was thinking.

- Although men have to *manage* their ambition, women have to *mask* it.
- Successful women often have to spin their ambition so they don't appear too unladylike. They still need to soft-shell their ambition with self-deprecation and a nurturing style. For now, that's the only way women can be accepted as corporate and political leaders. Those who don't succumb to the soft sell may be denied the ultimate reward.
- Not all ambitions are created equal, and for women, two are unquestioned: wife and mother. Any ambition beyond them can cost us because it is expected to come in addition to, and behind, the other two. If it doesn't, it can produce societal suspicion and boatloads of guilt. The daily experiences of women with both a career and family come with consequences.
- In many ways, fear of women's ambition, when it strays beyond the roles of wife and mother, is a fear of our desire, of our wanting. The resistance to women as leaders stems from an assumption that, were women given a chance, we would climb right up the ladder and away from men and children, authoring a life squarely at odds with our maternal mandate. So, society limits our choices, providing little support in the workplace and making it tremendously difficult to have both a career and a family. Women, socialized to stifle their dreams, sometimes find it hard to ask for what we need.
- It's not just society that guarantees we keep our ambitions in check; we also require it of one another, especially when we're young. Most recently, this phenomenon has been labeled "mean girls". When boys are mean, they are expressing their *power*: when girls are mean, they are expressing their *lack* of power. These girls react to their lack of power by controlling what they can: other girls.
- We need to change the risk/reward ratio that many view as an insurmountable barrier to entry. If we can increase the number of women in power at the highest level, we can turn the system inside out, creating the atmosphere we need to attract a new generation, and a new gender, of leaders.
- Men know full well that there is safety in numbers. Women, however, still work in isolation most of the time.
- Everyone knows at least one woman who should be urged to follow her dream, a woman who is utterly capable of being more than she is if only she were given encouragement. We need to find her and feed her ambition. Don't wait for the culture to change. Change it yourself by helping others step forward.
- Societal convention and perception keep all generations of women a little too close to home, holding the bullhorn away from a new voice in leadership. The trick is to take the confining A's of our lives – authority, ambition, ability and authenticity – and turn them into strengths.
- Ambition, which has come to be defined almost entirely as a desire for economic success in a career, could mean so much more. Women in power have a chance to rewrite the meaning of the word, to have ambitions for fairness, a just and safe world for our families and a more cohesive community acting for the common good. We can lead and redirect our desires not just toward consumption and personal success, but also toward a consuming, ambitious passion for connection, for interwoven webs of opportunity at work, and we need not forfeit who we are and whom we love in the process.
- We must also learn to cultivate men as allies. It is important that we seek out those who would rise to the occasion, not only for their help but also to keep them strong so they can mentor both genders, creating other support suites and even more allies.

## Chapter 5. Ability

- Few would challenge the notion that women are as able as men, if given the same opportunities and training. We can be- and have been – scientists and diplomats, CEOs and athletes, astronauts and soldiers. But we also possess skills earned much closer to home: a collaborative style, community building with a focus on broader issues, a tendency to reach across lines of authority.
- Motherhood, often used as an excuse to keep us down, is actually one of the best sources of our power. It is not only the place where authority and ambition go unquestioned, but it is also a profession that breeds ability.
- The thought that a mother might abandon her children for power and status deeply troubles Americans. Pat Schroeder, former Democratic representative from Colorado had an unforgettable answer to the inevitable question, How can you be both a lawmaker and a mother: “I have a brain and a uterus, and I use both.”
- Nowhere are women’s abilities challenged as forcefully as they are in national and international conflict resolution, where war could be the inevitable outcome of a bad negotiation. Polls indicate that men are trusted far more than women on foreign policy and on law and order. Webs of inclusion, collaboration, community and family focus: The abilities of women are ideally suited to maintain the peace- making our presence a critical missing component among today’s ruling elite.
- While women are peacemakers, they are also unacknowledged warriors. Though their contributions have historically been overlooked, nearly two million female war veterans have served the United States.
- Often the small, incremental movements create the most change. The casual flapping of a butterfly in Brazil, if the air patterns are right, can change the weather thousands of miles away. If we interrupt even one entrenched pattern a day, we will create our own butterfly effect, changing the lives of women far beyond our own shores.

## Chapter 6. Authenticity.

1993 – Take our Daughters to Work day in New York City:

“I noticed your job was boring,” the girl said.

“Maybe a little boring,” the woman replied, a bit taken aback.

“Didn’t you ever want to do something else?”

“Yes, I did.”

“What did you want to do?”

“I wanted to be a singer,” came the surprising answer.

“Well, sing me a song!”

And with that simple request, the buttoned up executive belted out a Barbra Streisand standard. “The Way We Were.”

Without knowing it the child uncovered the essence of what we ask as we review our life choices: What songs have we stopped singing? What parts of ourselves have we cut off to survive?

- We long for leaders who project a clear and grounded human presence, a fully assembled package with no parts missing – leaders we can copy and admire, whose agendas don’t shift like

windsocks. We trust people who are transparent – who say what they mean and mean what they say, and whose behaviors align with their belief systems.

- Unfortunately they are not the norm. Men conform to other men, and in that conformity, retain the essence of being a man. Women, on the other hand, often find that they must lose qualities associated with being female to blend in with the boys.
- Grasping hard and holding form to ourselves is much easier when we're surrounded by others like us. As women expand the definitions of authority, ambition, and ability, they begin to bridge the disconnect between "leader" and "woman".
- Sadly, we force our children to hack off emotional limbs. Our girls lose agency, voice, anger and their authentic take on the world – all of which boys get to keep and expand. Boys, however, are asked to jettison their caring sides, their softer emotions, even before they enter kindergarten. Girls keep their relational sensitivity but it marginalizes them.
- What's fascinating is that when we see a man who has kept even a slice of his caring side, we find him irresistible.
- Traditionally, our culture sees leadership as man's work; when it is executed by women (or nontraditionally by men); it is often not acknowledged as leadership at all.
- Women are more and more dissatisfied with organizations that fail to fully value their work, or to see them as leaders. Contrary to popular belief, women don't always point to work and family conflicts as the main reason for leaving their jobs. Rather, they are tired of challenging the inefficiencies and ineffectiveness of the workplace – they want to work *differently*. So they stop out, drop out, create companies, take lower level jobs, become consultants. And our workplaces lose the very transformational leadership that we need, and possibly, the most talented women we have.
- Each small step brings us closer to the collective nature of community leadership. When we finally assign value to the assets of women, when we encourage men to lead relationally, when we merge our public and private selves to create strong bonds at work and at home, we will alter the meaning of leadership.

## Chapter 7. Culture.

- Television, movies, journalism, advertising, toys, and books present a huge opportunity to stretch the collective imagination, showing women and men in nontraditional roles and challenging the perception of what is possible in the real world.
- The images we present in culture transform who we are, what we might become, and what we think. One of the more pointed examples: the Bureau of Motion Pictures of the early 1940s, which helped Hollywood shape public perceptions of World War II.
- No one works harder at (or has a better grasp of) this manipulation than advertisers. They know women represent 83 percent of the purchasing power in the US, an astonishing \$3 trillion market.
- Political candidates also infiltrate through media.
- We adopt cultural stimuli and then adapt the messages to our lives.
- Does culture simply reflect our society, or does it change the society it serves, moving it a step beyond its comfort zone? Television provides a mirror on the answer. Clearly society has progressed in its culture as it watches lifestyle alternatives played out in the comfort of the

home. Now its time to push culture even further – making women into *leaders* and not just leading ladies.

- Continuous exposure to images – even fictional ones – takes on the power of truth. That is why, when we witness only men in leadership roles, it becomes our reality, our norm, though we know women are just as ready and capable. Female leaders are simply an unfamiliar sight – an enormous issue if we are to put women in equal power.

### **Chapter 8. the Business of Transformation**

- Fresh eyes and fresh solutions applied to old and abiding problems, unique skills honed through family and community service, the opportunity for a true democracy, transforming business and politics: These are the advantages of the leadership of women. We know that the values of women commonly bring to the workplace – empathy and inclusion across lines of authority, relational skills, and community focus- are the tickets to success there.
- We know that broader societal legislation, benefiting everyone, is more likely to pass if women are elected to office. We know the power of women as peacemakers in a troubled world. And we know the expectations of the next generation – girls expected to lead and *breed*, boys expect to work *and* to play with their kids. It’s time for real and permanent power sharing – women side by side wit men, can and must help run the world. But if none of those imperatives work for you, try this one: It’s good for business.
- The potential to transform an entire industry now exists because a few law firms noticed that women were good for business. Every walk of life needs its revolutionaries, its Vinson & Elkins (law firm) its No Glass Ceiling Task Force. It needs mentors and allies, workers willing to speak up and risk being marginalized for the chance to make permanent change.
- What if we intentionally discarded that well-worn phrase “balancing work and family” and instead spoke of “integrating work and family,” of formalizing the work of women as community builders by making it a value of both genders instead of a “third shift” for women. Women in sufficient numbers could then bring these competencies into the workplace, showing men how to participate, making women’s uniqueness “good for business.”

**Recommendation:** Written with passion, documented with lively anecdotes and behind-the scenes stories from the trenches, and filled with concrete steps that can be easily taken by women and men from every walk of life, this is a manifesto and a handbook that could tip the tipping point for closing the leadership gap. I was inspired.

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**About the reviewer: Frumi Rachel Barr, MBA, PhD**

Many CEO's find themselves asking "What now?" to sensitive situations that only an experienced former CEO can understand. Frumi is brought in to solve problems and often remains to work with you, as your confidante and secret weapon. She has an uncanny knack of getting to the heart of your corporate climate and maximizing your team's performance, profitability and sustainability.

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