



1.04 Leadership & Self-Awareness

Good Enough to Lead

Discovering Your Leadership Potential

"Changing Lives One Workplace at a Time"



Heather Fife, Harvard 2023

Heather.Fife@ivycg.org

949-302-8342

Ivy Consulting Group, Inc.

www.IvyConsultingGroup.org



Good Enough to Lead

If you were granted one wish to meet any leader in the world (dead or alive), whom would you choose? Think about that for a moment before moving on. If you could meet anyone considered by many to be one of the greatest leaders of all time, who would it be?

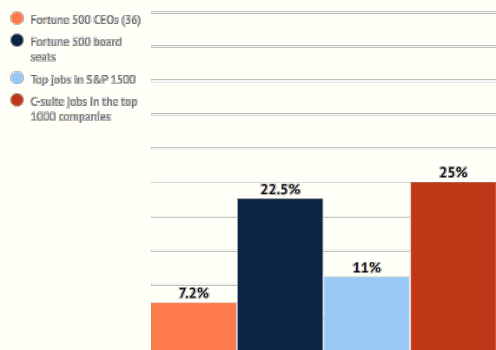
Think about that statement before moving on.

While I may not be able to guess the leader you have chosen, I feel almost certain the leader you chose was a man. Am I correct? *“The gender stereotypes introduced in childhood are reinforced throughout our lives and become self-fulfilling prophecies. As the author of Lean In, Sheryl Sandberg, has written, “Most leadership positions are held by men, so women don’t expect to achieve them, and that becomes one of the reasons they don’t.”*

There is no shortage of qualified women to fill leadership roles. According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, women make up 57.4 percent of the labor force (BLS, 2021), and they outnumber men in earning bachelor’s and master’s degrees. Yet from corporate boardrooms to Congress, healthcare companies to the courts, non-profit organizations to universities, men are far more likely than women to rise to the highest paying and most prestigious leadership roles.

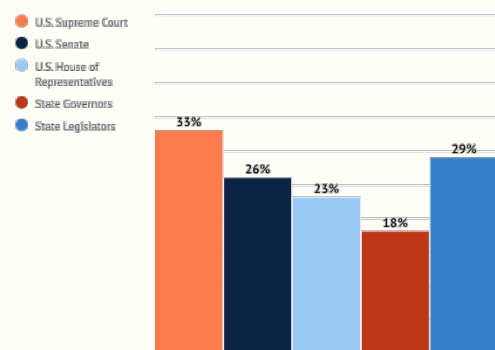
According to a recent McKinsey report, professional women, especially those of color, make up only a small fraction of senior leadership in organizations across the country. In fact, women hold only 21% of C-suite positions.

Women in Corporate Leadership



Source: Fortune Magazine, Pew Research, Korn Ferry

Women in Political Leadership



Source: Rutgers Center for Women in Politics 2019

Even though there has been progress, there continues to be an implicit bias in our world that makes us believe that when it comes to leadership, a woman cannot be as effective as her male counterpart.

Women's lack of confidence is nothing new.

Business executive, billionaire, and philanthropist Sheryl Sandberg states that women are timid to lean in. In her famed TED talk, Sheryl Sandberg described how women unintentionally hold themselves back in their careers. Her talk, which has been viewed more than eleven million times, encouraged women to “sit at the table,” seek challenges, take risks, and pursue their goals with gusto. In her book, **Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead**, Sandberg continues that conversation, combining personal anecdotes, hard data, and compelling research to change the conversation from what women can't do to what they can.

Sandberg, COO of Meta (previously called Facebook) from 2008-2022, provides practical advice on negotiation techniques, mentorship, and building a satisfying career. She describes specific steps women can take to combine professional achievement with personal fulfillment and demonstrates how men can benefit by supporting women in the workplace and at home.

But what are the barriers to women in leadership, and how can professional women overcome them? First, women must leverage their strengths and tap into their unique resources. In addition, all women must find ways to support one another and take an active role in establishing a fair and equitable work environment.

Barriers to Female Leadership

Since the end of the second World War, even with the odds stacked against them, professional women have made significant progress in overcoming barriers in the workplace. However, there continues to be an outdated perception of gender-specific roles that prevents women from advancing to leadership positions. Ilene Long, CEO of the non-profit women's advocacy group Catalyst, noted in their 2004 report *Women and Men in US Corporate Leadership* that women are equally ambitious as men but are “up against barriers, namely exclusion from informal networks, stereotyping, and a lack of role models.”

And it's not only men who are to blame. As women, we also have a mindset that makes us believe that leaders are men.

Gender Stereotypes

Since the day we were born, society has eroded our career choices by labeling toys for boys and girls. These stereotypes continue to exist because men have been leaders for so long, and the traits associated with leadership are often thought of as masculine and not viewed as favorably when exhibited by women. For instance, employers tend to interpret men's assertive behavior in the workplace as strong, direct, and commanding, but when women display the same assertiveness, their employers often see them as aggressive, temperamental, and even bitchy.

Fear of Not Being Liked

Heidi Roizen was a successful Silicon Valley venture capitalist who became the subject of a case study at Columbia Business School. Professor Frank Flynn presented half his class with the case study with Heidi's name on it and gave half the class the same case study with her name changed to "Howard." The students rated "Howard" and Heidi as equally competent, but they liked Howard but not Heidi.

The essence is that research has demonstrated a negative correlation for women between power and success. For men, the relationship is positive, i.e., successful men are perceived as more powerful and revered. It is the fear of being seen in this light that stops many women from being assertive when seeking promotions.

Fewer Connections and Established Networks

Men still surpass women in having the networks to learn about opportunities and find mentors and sponsors to champion their advancement.

Business travel, and social activities, such as golf or happy hours, often leave women out, not because women wouldn't join but because men don't invite them. In turn, professional women miss opportunities to build the rapport and relationships responsible for career advancement.

Family Responsibilities

Professional women often face significant challenges balancing work and family. In a traditional household, men work, and women are left at home to care for the house and raise children. However, when women flooded the workforce during the Second World War, the expectation of women maintaining the household chores and raising the family did not change. Furthermore, even when the responsibility of raising a child does not exist, many employers assume that younger women will soon have children and, in doing so, will become less effective at work. The expectation and responsibility to maintain a household can limit their ability to pursue leadership positions.

Closing the Leadership Gap

The American Association of University Women (AAUW) is the nation's leading voice promoting equity and education for women and girls. Since our founding in 1881, AAUW members have examined and taken positions on the fundamental issues of the day — educational, social, economic, and political.

According to the AAUW, there are several things that individuals, employers, and policymakers can do to promote equality in the workplace.

Individual Responsibilities

- Examine your biases — and be an ally, mentor, and sponsor for women.
- If you're a woman, seek out skill-building opportunities and leadership training. Learn to negotiate for salary and benefits with AAUW Work Smart.

Employer Responsibilities

- Prioritize an equitable workplace. Widen recruitment networks and candidate pools. Do blind resume screening.
- Support internal growth opportunities, continued professional development, skill training, and equitable retention and promotion policies.
- Promote workplace flexibility policies that will enable all employees to find an appropriate work/life balance.

Policymakers

- Support state pay equity laws and the federal Paycheck Fairness Act. Ban salary-history questions for job applicants and prohibit punishment for workers who share salary information.
- Pass state and local initiatives that promote parental leave and flex-time policies. Support the federal Family and Medical Insurance Leave (FAMILY) Act.
- Support continued EEOC salary collection and reporting requirements to root out pay disparity.

Strategies to Overcome

Considering these barriers to advancement, women in the workforce can utilize several strategies to help overcome the challenges. Before we get into the strategies, it is beneficial to define leadership and identify some traits and qualities that make the great ones stand out.

WHAT IS A LEADER:

Being a leader means setting an example for others, taking the initiative to solve problems, inspiring those around you, and making decisions that benefit everyone. Leaders also possess communication skills, empathy, self-awareness, and resilience, which are essential for success in any field or profession. By becoming a leader, you will gain valuable experience while helping others reach their potential.

The number one quality of a leader is the ability to inspire and motivate others. Leaders must be able to create an environment that encourages collaboration, innovation, and growth. They must also possess strong communication skills, emotional intelligence, and empathy to effectively guide their team toward success.

WHO CAN BE A LEADER

Anyone can be a leader. The most prominent trait to becoming a good leader is believing in yourself. This means having confidence in your abilities, taking ownership of your choices and decisions, and trusting that you have the skills necessary to lead. It also involves setting goals for yourself and working towards them with determination. Finally, believing in yourself as a leader means being open to feedback from others and learning from mistakes. Leadership is an ongoing journey – it takes practice, dedication, resilience, and courage to be successful.

In fact, there is growing evidence that women can bring a unique set of skills and perspectives to leadership roles that can be beneficial for businesses and organizations. Studies have also found that companies with more gender-balanced leadership teams tend to outperform their peers in terms of sales, profits, and market share. So, it's clear that having more women in leadership positions could be beneficial for all involved.

RECAP: WHY ARE WOMEN AFRAID TO BE LEADERS

There are several reasons women may be afraid to take on leadership roles. Some of these include:

1. **Fear of failure and criticism** – Women often fear that if they fail as a leader, it will reflect badly on their gender or confirm existing stereotypes about them being “weak” or “incompetent.” This can lead to anxiety or self-doubt when taking on a new role in which they feel unprepared for the responsibilities that come with it.
2. **Lack of confidence** – Many women lack the confidence needed to take charge and assert themselves in positions where traditionally men have held power over them, such as politics, business, and other areas where decisions must be made quickly.
3. **Unfamiliarity with leadership roles** – Without prior experience leading others, many women may not know how to effectively manage tasks and delegate responsibility among team members which can make them wary of taking on an unfamiliar role like this one without proper guidance or training first.
4. **Social pressure** – Women may also face social pressure from friends, family members, colleagues etc., who do not believe that they are capable enough to succeed at such a position due to preconceived notions about their gender's capabilities and traditional societal expectations placed upon them as well

BELIEVE IN YOURSELF

You are the only one that knows what is best for you. No one else can make decisions or act like you can, so it's important to trust yourself and believe in your abilities. Believing in yourself will give you greater confidence and self-esteem, which will help you tackle any challenge that comes your way with a positive attitude and determination to succeed. Having faith in yourself builds resilience when faced with tough times; it helps to keep going even if the odds seem stacked against you because, ultimately, no matter what happens, you know that everything will be ok because you have faith in yourself and your capabilities.

WHY SHOULD YOU CARE?

Women are needed in the leadership of the workforce. Women should be leaders because they possess unique skills and experiences that can help shape organizations, teams, and communities in positive ways. Women bring empathy, collaboration, communication, problem-solving abilities, creativity, and resilience to the table, qualities that are essential for successful leadership. By having more female representation at all levels of decision-making, companies will benefit from increased innovation and improved morale and productivity. Additionally, it is important for young women to have role models in leadership positions who demonstrate that anything is possible with hard work. The leader's values, beliefs, and ideas will shape the direction of the organization or team you are a part of. Knowing who your leader is can help you understand their vision and how it will influence your work. Additionally, knowing the leader can help you better communicate with them if needed. It is important to know who the leader is because they are responsible for making decisions that affect the entire group.

Empower Yourself

As professional women, we will continue facing obstacles on our success journey. Nonetheless, by working together to develop leadership programs, cultivating relationships with mentors and sponsors, and learning to advocate for our unique goals and needs, people will no longer refer to us as “women in leadership” but as “leaders who change the world.”

About the Author

Heather Fife is the Head of Business Development at Ivy Consulting Group, Inc. Before joining ICG, Heather ran a large dermatology clinic in Las Vegas, NV, where she incorporated several very successful programs to improve the culture and drive performance within the team.

Heather is a student at Harvard University where she studies Industrial-Organizational Psychology, is the proud mother of three beautiful children and is passionate about empowering female-owned business owners to break down barriers and achieve their goals.

*Connect with Heather on [LinkedIn](#).
email: heather.fife@ivycg.org
phone: 949-302-8342*

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