

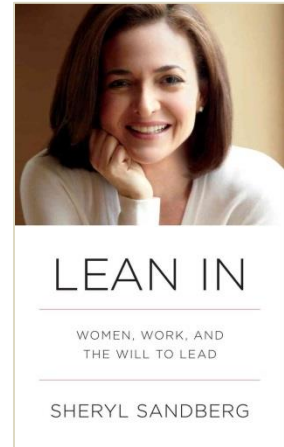
Discussion Questions for Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead

By Sheryl Sandberg

These discussion questions were prepared by the National Network to End Domestic Violence (NNEDV) for the *Reader with a Cause* book club group on Goodreads.com.

If you like our questions please feel free to use them – and don't forget to join the conversation online at:

https://www.goodreads.com/topic/group_folder/223300



I. Reaction Thread

What did you think of the book?? Did you try any of Sandberg's tips or recommendations? Would you recommend this book to a friend?

[[Full Disclosure: NNEDV is on Facebook's Safety Advisory Board, but we were not asked to select this book by Facebook, nor did Sheryl Sandberg or any other Facebook employee provide any input on the discussion questions developed by NNEDV.]]

2. Transferrable Advice?

Sandberg's educational accolades and professional accomplishments (earning an A.B. and M.B.A. from Harvard, past Vice President of Global Online Sales at Google, and current COO of Facebook) provide her with a unique perspective on women in business, given that women only run 4.8% of Fortune 500 companies. [1]

Did you find Sandberg's advice to be applicable for women of all socioeconomic classes, or only to women working in professional environments with educational backgrounds similar to her own? (Sandberg herself asserts in the beginning of the book that her suggestions may not be applicable for all individuals.) Do you find parts of Sandberg's advice useful even if your background is far different from hers?

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[1] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_women_CEOs_of_Fortune_500_companies

3. On "Leaning In"

Sandberg often refers to women's problematic habit of remaining spectators in professional environments...



“Secretary Geithner’s team, all women, took their food last and sat in chairs off to the side of the room. I motioned for the women to come and sit at the table, waving them over so they would feel welcomed. They demurred and remained in their seats. The four women had every right to be at this meeting, but because of their seating choice, they seemed like spectators rather than participants.” (Chapter 2 “Sit at the Table,” page 28)

Have you ever noticed yourself “playing the spectator?” If so, do you think it was self-imposed or projected due to your gender and the expectation that you play more of a supportive role?

4. On the “Gender Discount”

In the Heidi vs. Howard Harvard study that Sandberg references, the author illustrates the expectation for women to assist their coworkers and contribute to a more communal workforce. Women who don’t help their coworkers are seen less favorably and may even be penalized for their behavior; therefore, women are stuck in a “damned if they do or damned if they don’t” situation.

What do you think: do women perpetuate this expectation in the workplace? Do men truly “pay no penalty” if they choose not to participate in a more communal workplace?

5. On “Tiara Syndrome”

Sandberg references Carol Frohlinger and Deborah Kolb, founders of Negotiating Women Inc., and their description of “Tiara Syndrome,” which they describe as a phenomenon wherein women expect that if they “keep doing their job well someone will notice them and place a tiara on their head.” Sandberg asserts that despite the fact that hard work and results *should* be recognized, they often are not. Instead of waiting for our power to be seen by our coworkers and supervisors, women need to be assertive and use all available opportunities to demonstrate their power and worth.

Though Sandberg is making a powerful assertion about a woman’s need to be more assertive in the workplace, this conflicts with her other assertions that women who are more assertive in the workplace are often penalized for this more “masculine behavior.” Do you find that these two ideas to be in conflict?

What do you think about the concept of “Tiara Syndrome?” Do you think that women should risk being penalized in order to avoid it? Have you witnessed “Tiara Syndrome” in your own work-life or in your workplace?

6. On Authenticity at Home & at Work

In her chapter “*Seek and Speak Your Truth*,” Sandberg discusses the conflict women often face at work in the expectation of managing a professional self. Sandberg asserts that the idea of having



a dual identity inside of work vs. who you are on the weekends is a farce. Instead, she advocates for a more authentic self.

The U.S. Department of Labor apparently agrees with Sandberg – in this blog entry “Coming to Work Fully,” [link: <http://social.dol.gov/blog/coming-to-work-fully/>] Kathy Martinez applauds organizations, like the DOL, that encourage employees to bring their “whole selves” to the job.

What do you think about the cultural expectation to keep emotions and/or your “whole self” out of the office? Do you think being more open at work actually leads to a more “authentic self?”

7. On Mentors & Mentees

In the chapter “Are You My Mentor?” Sandberg focuses upon the important role that mentors often play in shaping the careers of young workers as they look to break into the workforce. She believes in the power of mentors, but she advises against the way in which women often seek out their mentors. Sandberg suggests that we need to stop telling young women, “Get a mentor, and you will excel,” instead we should tell them “Excel, and you will get a mentor.”

What role have mentors played in your career? Did you actively seek a mentor or did you find a mentor after you were already well established in your career? What do you think is the best way to get a mentor?

8. On “Leaving Before You Leave”

Sandberg tackles the controversial topic of maternity and family leave head-on and encourages women to lean in even further right before going on maternity leave, explaining that this actually deepens a woman’s commitment to her job and gives her something to look forward to after her maternity leave ends.

Unfortunately, the odds are not in working mothers’ favor: “Only 74 percent of professional women will rejoin the workforce in any capacity, and only 40 percent will return to full-time jobs. Those who do rejoin will often see their earnings decrease dramatically. Controlling for education and hours worked, women’s average annual earnings decrease by 20 percent if they are out of the workforce for just one year. Average annual earnings decline by 30 percent after two to three years, which is the average amount of time that professional women off-ramp from the workforce.” (101-2)

Do you think “leaning in” before going on maternity leave is good advice? How else can we change company culture and relevant laws to make maternity and family leave more comprehensive and compulsive?



9. Be the Change

In her conclusion, Sandberg points out that it is individual actions which change the larger picture of women's participation and ultimate success in the workplace. She says that these "nudge techniques" are the small changes that are necessary; and that "social gains are never handed out. They must be seized."

Overall, do you agree with Sandberg's assertions of women being responsible for their own success or failure or do you think that she is ignoring larger structural inequalities? What "nudge techniques" do you think you can include in your own behavior?