The background of the cover is a light yellow-green gradient. Scattered across the background are several stylized, light green leaf motifs, some of which are partially cut off by the edges of the page.

THE NEXT GENERATION OF WOMEN LEADERS

**What You Need to Lead but Won't Learn in Business
School**

SELENA REZVANI

 **Greenwood**
PUBLISHING GROUP

THE NEXT GENERATION
OF WOMEN LEADERS

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WHAT YOU NEED TO LEAD BUT WON'T
LEARN IN BUSINESS SCHOOL



Selena Rezvani

*Foreword by
Gail Evans*

PRAEGER

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For my nephews, Alexander, Omar,
Cyrus, Ali, and Maxim,
in the hope that they will grow up in a
world whose leaders represent all of our voices

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Finally, to the 30 women whose insights and advice formed the foundation of this book: you have my deepest respect and gratitude. You have inspired me and indelibly changed how I see the world of leadership. I hope you find a deep sense of satisfaction in knowing how many women you will help.

FOREWORD

Finally a book that advances the leadership outlook for Generation X and Y women. At last, ambitious younger women can learn about the characteristics that have best served women executives, and yet hear advice that is targeted to Generation X and Y's specific age and life experience level.

The combination of stories, advice, and theory presented in the following pages exemplifies the power of women helping other women, the most important power we have.

Additionally, the book emphasizes ownership over your own career. Ultimately we are responsible for our own success. Selena Rezvani contends that finding your passion and seeking a career that matches your values are two of the central tasks of leadership development. She argues compellingly that a woman must see leadership opportunities and strategize to achieve her goals. Young women must see their careers long-range, avoiding the more passive approach of shifting from job to job.

Further, this book helps us to see an important confluence of events; women have never been readier to lead, and the global workplace now demands their unique competencies more than ever. Undeniably, one of the book's best contributions is the section explaining that women who can promote themselves and comfortably ask for what they want are more likely to move into leadership. These and other empowering concepts are richly illustrated through the stories and advice of women at top echelons of their fields.

Whether you approach the issue of leadership development as a student, a new professional, a seasoned worker, an employer, or anyone else wanting to attain success, this innovative book adds a new dimension to

leadership development literature. The value a reader will derive can help them improve personally, but even better: I believe a reader's newfound knowledge will have a cascading effect. Readers will be encouraged to pull other women up! As you read this book, remember, for every woman who succeeds, all women succeed. For every woman who fails, all women fail. Now is the time to help each other to be successful. Go for it!

Gail Evans

Author, *Play Like a Man, Win Like a Woman* and
Executive Vice President, CNN Newsgroup (retired)

INTRODUCTION

As a first year MBA student and aspiring executive, I was extremely disheartened to learn of the low number of women leaders in business. When I looked upward, I saw few executives I could relate to in charge of the visible, important businesses I studied in school. Furthermore, the research I started to do confirmed that what I thought was a low representation of women executives in the United States was in fact a dismal representation.

I wanted to learn more. I sought out—and devoured—books detailing how women had made it to the top of organizations. With a voracious appetite for this material, I wanted to understand what traits or career strategies “the elusive few” had in common that helped them achieve their status. While I gleaned considerable insights from the books I read, the advice provided was targeted at no particular age or experience level of an aspiring woman leader. This meant that as a 30-year-old professional, I was getting the same advice as a 65-year-old, much more seasoned and experienced reader. I wanted more precise advice, focused specifically on Generation X and Y women like me.

As disheartened as I was by the figures that I read, I was simultaneously deeply motivated to do something about it. In 2008, propelled by my curiosity and hunger for knowledge, I seized an independent study opportunity in my MBA program as a means to access these women and start a dialogue.

I researched high-ranking women in various industries and identified a list of professionals from different backgrounds and job roles, with different degrees. While I faced the challenge of not personally knowing any members of this group, I decided to appeal to them anyway, with a request

for a meeting. I wanted to have conversations with women who led family businesses, Fortune 500 companies, nonprofit organizations, and who served as important officials in our government. I drafted my “dream list” of interviewees and made contact with them one by one. I explained to each executive my vision for gleaning their hardest-won lessons and advice and sharing them with other young women. To my amazement, more and more executives said yes to interviews, and the momentum built.

Beginning in January of 2008, I conducted interviews with 30 women CEOs, CFOs, COOs, chairs, presidents, and executive vice presidents. The interviews yielded invaluable insights into the professional lives of women. I asked questions related to how Generation X and Y women should approach career advancement. I asked about managing subordinates, using influence, developing a presence, negotiating on the job, and methods for augmenting credibility, among others. My primary intention was to find out what women leaders wished they had known earlier in their careers and what knowledge was most essential to their advancement. The advice shared in the interviews uncovered vitally important career practices for young women. Regardless of interviewee context—whether entrepreneurs, officers of Fortune 500 companies, or high-ranking officials in government—clear themes emerged from the interviews. These themes appear as Chapters 2–9 of this book, and I hope you will benefit from their contents as much as I have.

The advice the interviewees provided had a major impact on me, so much so, in fact, that I found myself doing and seeing things differently immediately afterward. In one situation, I left a morning interview galvanized by what I had heard and set up an afternoon meeting with my boss in which I asked for a substantial raise—a “bump up” that I was later granted. After another interview, I became keenly aware of how often I apologized unnecessarily or diminished the strength of my ideas with statements like, “I’m not sure if this is a good idea but . . .” or “This might be a null point but . . .” Following yet another interview, I went to my performance review armed and ready as a full participant rather than a passive listener. I brought with me substantiation of my best contributions: accolades I had received and initiatives I had spearheaded over the previous year. Perhaps the biggest change was a mental shift. I became the chief executive—and chief decision maker—of my own career and advancement. Rather than sitting on the sidelines wondering what kind of career would “happen to me,” I now see that each of us needs to own every one of our past successes and nurture every future aspiration that we have. As you take in the advice and numerous strategies in this book, expect to reap two equally important, but simple benefits: you will have more tools to propel your career forward and fewer limitations on what you think is possible.

HOW FAR HAVE WE COME?

THE SCOPE OF THE ISSUES

Why write a book on women and leadership? If women make up roughly half of the workforce, have we not progressed enough as a society? After all, one would think the “glass ceiling” has shattered by now. While there is a pervading perception that men and women have achieved generally equal status in the U.S. workplace, statistics tell another story. Women lag significantly behind men in terms of pay and in the representation of the leadership of our businesses, government agencies, boards, and political systems. The reality is that we are not “there” yet.

Statistics of female leaders are moving in the right direction, but slowly. Catalyst, a nonprofit organization that works with businesses to build inclusive workplaces and expand opportunities for women, found through its report, *Catalyst Pyramid: U.S. Women in Business*, that women make up 46.5% of the total U.S. workforce, and yet only 15.7% of women are employed as corporate officers with Fortune 500 companies. This figure has changed little from previous years when 15.7% (2008) and 15.4% (2007) of corporate officer positions were held by women. More dramatic still, women make up only 3% of chief executive officers in Fortune 500 companies (Catalyst, 2009).

The same report found that women’s representation on the boards of Fortune 500 companies is also slow to improve. In 2008 women made up 15.2% of the membership of Fortune 500 boards, up only slightly from 14.8% in 2007. Assuming a similar yearly growth rate of 0.4% continued, women could expect equal representation on Fortune 500 boards in the year 2095. Catalyst President Ilene H. Lang noted that a passive approach to diversity can hurt a company’s performance. She stated, “Increased globalization and shifting demographics dictate that diversity and the advancement of women on corporate boards are strategic business imperatives that twenty-first century companies cannot afford to ignore” (Catalyst, 2005).

When you consider how women compare to men from an educational standpoint, women now earn more than one-half of all bachelor and master's degrees in the United States, and nearly one-half of all doctoral degrees (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007). Furthermore, a positive trend exists where women now make up close to half of medical and law school graduates. In a 2008 article in *The Wall Street Journal* by Sue Shellenbarger, the author notes that female enrollment at full-time MBA programs has remained flat at 30%, while the figures trend up to 49% in medical schools and 47% in law schools. Even though statistics representing women are more favorable than ever in law and medicine, closer examination of research shows us that careers in these fields do not necessarily retain women. In its report *Women in Law*, Catalyst found, for example, that over the 2006–2007 academic year, women made up 46.7% of law school students, 34.4% of all lawyers, and only 18.7% of all partners. The thinning effect, as a woman in law moves upward, tells us that the career path to leadership is less accessible or attractive to women, or perhaps incompatible with their lives.

WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN?

The fact that there are few women in top roles has a series of effects. For one, there are fewer visible female leaders for younger women to emulate. With few role models to look up to, young women have less access to and opportunity for dialogue with female leaders, including women executives' most important lessons learned and advice. Perhaps most destructive, if a woman looks upward and sees few or no leaders she can relate to, she may never see leadership as a believable future for her or other women.

BARRIERS

Numerous women I interviewed cited the importance of understanding the barriers to leadership that still exist. These roadblocks were mentioned not to discourage aspiring women leaders, but to arm them with important information that could help them circumnavigate the obstacles. Barriers for women who want to lead can be social, economic, psychological—even generational. The better we understand them, the better we can manage creatively around these impediments. As Rosslyn Kleeman, Chair of the Coalition for Effective Change, astutely noted, “There is a mistaken idea that barriers no longer exist, but there are still a lot. . . . Women need to find a happy medium between acknowledging the barriers that exist and forging ahead anyway.”

SOCIAL BARRIERS

Socially we are getting increasingly accustomed to seeing women in management and leadership positions. However, because of many men and women's early social conditioning, some simply cannot get used to the idea of a woman as a credible leader in the workplace. Often women are criticized if they are perceived as being too feminine or too masculine in their leadership style. Further, messages we received early on that women are not natural "leadership material" or are better suited to "help" rather than "lead" are untrue and unhelpful.

Consider these studies as you understand some of the representative social barriers that women face:

- In a state university study, course syllabi were distributed to 141 students. The students were asked to review the syllabi of courses which were taught by men and women and represented a variety of course topics, including one course called Sociology of Gender. The students were then asked to rate the syllabi according to a number of questions. When evaluating the Sociology of Gender syllabus taught by a female instructor, students were more likely to indicate that the course topics appeared overly political, biased, and contained subjective exams and papers. Across the study population of men and women, a bias emerged against the female instructor of the course, which was strongest among male students. When a male professor's name was listed on the same exact course syllabus, ratings given were more positive. Specifically students rated the male instructor more favorably in terms of assigning reasonable work, being credible and available to students, and having less bias. The study showed that when the same exact course was taught by a man versus a woman, the course was considered more appealing and more comprehensive (Moore & Trahan, 1997).
- Another study, conducted by Julie E. Phelan, Corinne A. Moss-Racusin, and Laurie A. Rudman of Rutgers University, compared perceptions of men and women who interviewed for the same job. A male and female pair of actors was coached and instructed to display behaviors in a job interview associated with agentic or "masculine" qualities, like aggression and ambition. The actors were then taped while interviewing for a job. Study participants were asked to watch the tape and appraise the job applicants' competence, social skills, and hire-ability. The women interviewees who presented themselves agentially were evaluated as competent but lacking social skills, which ultimately hurt their hire-ability. By contrast, confident and

ambitious male candidates were evaluated as competent, likable, and were more likely to be hired than a woman with similar traits (Phelan, Moss-Racusin, & Rudman, 2008).

As you consider the findings of these studies, and the preponderance of similar ones, you can understand some of the nuanced social barriers women face as leaders. Whether they are leading a classroom or interviewing to be a leader—as the cases above illustrate—women are often not seen as intellectually or emotionally equipped as their male counterparts. Stereotypes of women as too passive, too emotional, or too unambitious to lead are simply not based in reality. I provided the illustrative examples of discrimination above to raise your awareness of such dynamics in your own workplace. If and when you feel that you or your ideas are being discounted wrongfully at work, remember some of the dynamics of social conditioning, and that they may be playing a role in your situation.

WOMEN VERSUS WOMEN: REALLY?

Some of the women I interviewed, and some of the studies I researched, talked about barriers that women impose on other women. Specifically this manifested in interviews as a pattern where women at the top, or those vying for a leadership role, compete with one another rather than help each other. Vicki Ho, General Manager, Asia Services for GE Healthcare Clinical Services at General Electric, shared her own observation of this occurrence noting, “Women will not necessarily pull other women up with them when they get promoted. Someone who’s broken open the doors to the senior level may still feel threatened by other women.” She added, “The higher up you go, the more qualified people there are with like skills to your own. Some people react by cutting others down.”

Similarly, Mei Xu, Founder and Chief Executive Officer of Chesapeake Bay Candle, Blissliving Home, commented on this workplace barrier, sharing, “It is not only men who may sometimes have issues with a woman business leader—sometimes it is also women. I don’t know exactly why but it seems that some women can be afraid of other women who are successful or smart.”

As disheartening as this dynamic is, some interviewees noted a lessening effect of woman-versus-woman friction at work. DeeDee Wilson, Chief Financial Officer at Aritzia, recalled, “When I was first starting out in business, one barrier was other women. Perhaps because there were so few jobs at the top, women were very competitive with one another. However,

in the last 7–10 years, women in the work force seem to understand that it is in everyone's best interest for women to support each other."

Ultimately female executives can present a wonderful resource to younger and less experienced women. We all benefit when the leadership of our organizations is representative of the combined male and female workforce, and it helps to remember that there is enough "room for everyone" and countless leadership opportunities all around us.

ECONOMIC PARITY

Economics present a different kind of obstacle for women. Naomi C. Earp, Chair of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, reiterated this point, sharing in our interview, "One barrier is around pay equity—data shows that women make about 80% of what men do." The Institute for Women's Policy Research found the ratio of women's to men's median weekly earnings for full-time workers to be 79.9% in 2008, the third consecutive decline since the historical high of 81% in 2005 (Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2009). If a woman thinks she will not be paid fairly for equal work, she may be discouraged from becoming an executive, or dismiss it altogether as a worthwhile career path.

Nonetheless, the Equal Pay Act of 1963 prohibits sex-based wage discrimination between men and women in the same establishment who perform jobs that require equal skill, effort, and responsibility (The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission). More recently President Obama signed the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009, which makes it easier to file a compensation discrimination charge (Open Congress, 2009). Additionally, further momentum has been harnessed with the Paycheck Fairness Act, which has already passed the House and is now pending in the Senate. According to the National Women's Law Center, this additional piece of legislation could serve to strengthen our current laws against wage discrimination and provide tools to enable the federal government to be more proactive in preventing wage discrimination.

To fight the barrier of wage disparity, a nonprofit organization called The WAGE Project, which does admirable work to close the wage gap between men and women, was formed by Evelyn Murphy. WAGE Clubs have been formed nationally where women can come together for personal support and help each other take action individually and collectively to help close the wage gap. I suggest young women in particular get involved in The WAGE Project as a means to learn about their own possible wage gap; what it means now, in the future, and in retirement years.

PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPEDIMENTS

Lastly psychological barriers get in the way of our leadership potential when we disqualify ourselves from opportunities. Even if our viewpoint lacks supporting evidence, our own psychological barriers may tell us things like, “I could never do a job with a heavy finance component,” “I couldn’t lead others successfully because no one would listen to me,” or “I won’t be promoted even if I apply for the job.”

Jeanine Becker, Senior Counsel at Motorola, Inc., commented on this phenomenon when she reflected, “[One] barrier is that women don’t always think they have the capability to lead. I often hear women colleagues say, ‘I need one more year in my job in order to be ready for that opportunity,’ or ‘If that job opportunity came up in 2–3 years, I would take it.’ Women feel a need for a certain level of prior training and experience that men do not necessarily demand in order to jump into a new role. There’s a need for women to trust themselves more and ask themselves, ‘What resources would it take for me to be comfortable *enough* to succeed with this step up in responsibility?’ Can the organization provide coaching, mentoring, training, or something else to facilitate my success?” Clearly, getting comfortable with and even embracing a certain level of risk is an important hallmark of a leader.

Being young can intensify these self-imposed psychological barriers because we can lack the benefit of years of experience and deep confidence in our professional abilities. Donna Callejon, Chief Operating Officer at GlobalGiving, shared her own observation of this trend when she noted, “A young woman’s own ambivalence can create a psychological barrier. I regularly see a pattern of younger women who are not sure what they want to do and are afraid to take a wrong step. They seem to think if they screw up, they won’t be able to bounce back.” Have you ever disqualified yourself from an interesting assignment you wanted to pursue? Have you talked yourself out of taking a risk? Do you have regrets about opting out of an opportunity?

The beauty of being young is that our careers have resilience. We do not need to see decisions or career risks as “all or nothing.” Additionally the barriers and limitations that we impose on ourselves are one of the few obstacles over which we have control. Consider what, if any, psychological barriers you carry around; think about if they have ever served you in a positive way (my guess is not), and then let them go!

THE BUSINESS CASE FOR DIVERSITY

Despite some of the barriers to leadership that women face, there is a compelling case to be made for diversity. Taking an inclusive approach to the management teams of our organizations (as well as the leadership of