

LEAN IN: WOMEN, WORK, AND THE WILL TO LEAD

“BREAKING THE ‘GLASSDOOR’ WITHIN YOURSELF IS THE FIRST STEP”, SAYS SHERYL SANDBERG IN HER LATEST BOOK

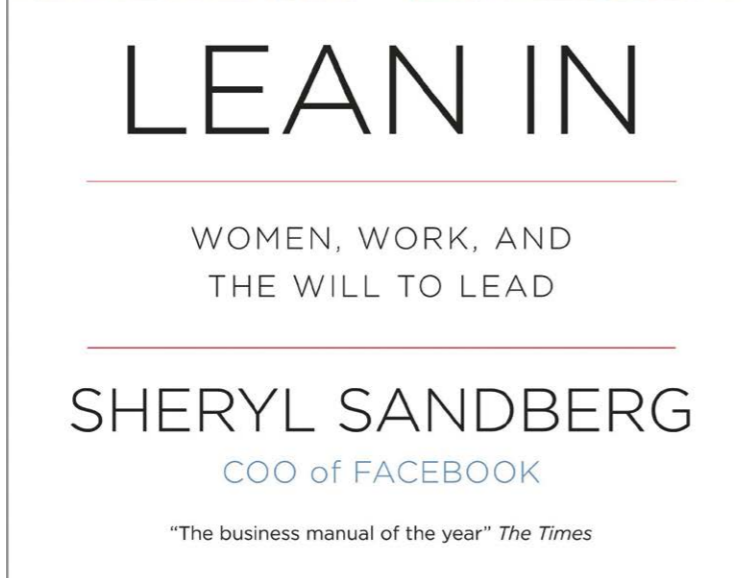
Text: Ramya Srinivasan Photos: Various Sources

In the few years since the book, ‘Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead’, written by Sheryl Sandberg, Chief Operating Officer, Facebook, has been published, it has achieved cult status. Although both critiqued and acclaimed by its readers, the idea of ‘lean in’ circles has now made an inevitable entry into the vocabulary of corporates. Sandberg, herself, has evolved into a popular role model for women everywhere, for her professional achievements and for the way she has battled through personal tragedy and loss.

IN A NUTSHELL

The book is triggered by the angst that although we have made light years of progress in women leadership and development since the times of our grandmothers, we are still not where we would like to be. Sandberg is at her candid best, baring her thoughts on how women still continue to struggle to find their footing in senior positions.

For example, she says, “A meagre 4% of the Fortune 500 CEOs are women. In the US, women hold about 14% of executive officer positions and 17% of board seats, numbers that have barely budged over



the years.”

Sandberg asks, why?

And, she dares to go into the uncomfortable nooks of not just the corporate world, but also our personal lives, and society, to some extent, in

finding an answer to this question. The answer is obviously not simple. While there are external barriers such as challenges in childcare, subtle sexism, discrimination, etc., there are barriers that exist within ourselves, and the focus of the book is to figure out how to break these internal prejudices built over the years. By doing this, she believes that more women can become senior leaders. And, with more women in power, there would be better empathy and understanding of the problems unique to women, and it would then be easier to change our systems and policies.

SIMPLE AND POWERFUL CONCEPTS

Over the course of the book, Sandberg comes up with powerful suggestions to get over this hump. These ideas and discussion points succeed in showing the mirror to women across the world about what is holding them back.

For example, in ‘Sit at the table’, she points out how women are happy to take the backseat, even when they have significant opinions to offer and accomplishments to boast of. Then, she contrasts this with the attitude of men who are not scared to put themselves out there.

BOOK FACTS

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

PUBLISHER: Knopf, Random House

AUTHOR: Sheryl Sandberg

YEAR: 2013

GOODREADS RATING : 3.91/5

OUR FAVORITE LINE: “Our revolution has stalled. The promise of equality is not the same as true equality.”

REVIEW: “If I could go back in time, I’d have the book stapled to my 20-year-old forehead. It advances the cause of gender equity in two ways: By asking women to step into their fullest selves and not hold back because of the fear that they’ll be rejected. By sharing facts that can help us have a different conversation about what is limiting our workforce, and specifically limiting our ability to have everyone count in a meaningful way.” –**Nilofer Merchant**, Fortune 500 leader, author, and strategist.

“Multiple studies in multiple industries show that women often judge their own performance as worse than it actually is, while men judge their own performance as better than it actually is.”

She further dissects this difference in attitude between men and women.

“Ask a man to explain his success and he will typically credit his own innate qualities and skills. Ask a woman the same question and she will attribute her success to external factors, insisting she did well because “she really worked hard” or “got lucky” or “got help from others.” “

She calls this the ‘Impostor Syndrome’ when even accomplished women feel fake and not deserving of what they achieved. She, then, goes to recommend to let go of the fears and take risks. There are several other chapters in the book such as ‘Make your partner a real partner’, ‘Don’t leave before you leave’,



and ‘The Myth of doing it all’, in which she manages to peel the layers some more.

WHY SHOULD YOU READ IT?

Whether you are a woman looking to break away from the mold, or a man trying to understand the specific challenges of women at workplace, this book makes sense. With her disarming writing style, the unflinching manner in which she shares her own personal demerits and insecurities, and her realistic attitude of never painting the picture too grim or rosy and instead of calling out things just as they are, Sandberg wins you over. At around 200 pages, it’s an explosive package of ideas, anecdotes and statistics. In handling a sensitive subject like this, it is miraculous that she manages to get away without creating a man versus woman divide.

However, critics have panned the book

for putting too much onus on women, and for being too ‘elitist’, thus targeting only women with ample resources at their disposal.

The elitist argument is partially right in that the book does aim towards ambitious women, who have come to a certain distance in their career already. But, Sandberg, here is not trying to solve all problems for women in the world but focuses on getting women to senior leadership positions, so they can create a cascading effect and pull up others.

The book does reinforce the need for a certain hard, aggressive mindset that can make you uncomfortable. But that’s corporate culture in general, and it’s a debate for another day whether it’s worth challenging that paradigm altogether. Today, however, this book is a great conversation starter on women leadership, and for that, let’s thank Sandberg ■