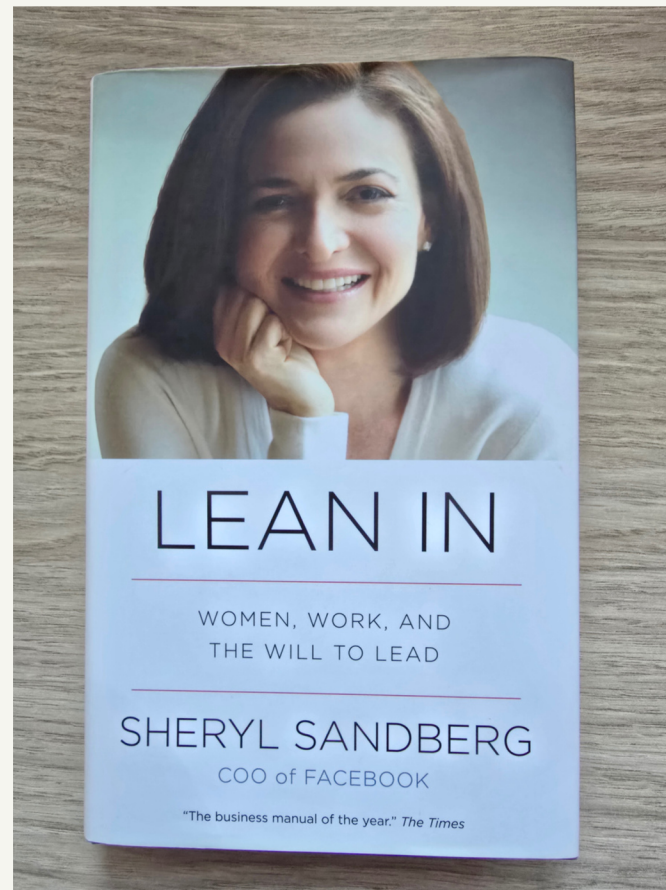


LEAN IN

Women, Work & the Will to Lead



Are you reluctant to claim your ambition and challenge your internalised limits? You're not alone.

In this article, learn about the personal, organisational, and societal barriers that hold women back and how 'Lean In' can help you move forward in your career.

INTRODUCTION

As someone deeply committed to supporting professional women in overcoming confidence challenges, especially those stemming from imposter syndrome, both in 1:1 coaching and through our group coaching programme, ✨**Elevate Her**✨, I'm always seeking resources that offer practical, evidence-based guidance.

Another book that stands out in this regard is **Lean in: Women, Work & The Will to Lead** by **Sheryl Sandberg** (a globally recognised business leader, author, and advocate for women's leadership). This is the book I wish I'd read 10 years ago.

Sheryl is best known for her role as COO of Meta (formerly Facebook), she has also served as Chief of Staff to the U.S. Treasury Secretary and held senior roles at Google. Her influence sits at the intersection of corporate leadership, gender equity, and social change. Lean In calls for women to claim ambition, challenge internalised limits, and participate fully in shaping leadership culture.

Sheryl shares her personal stories and offers practical advice to help women achieve their goals. It's a must-read if you want to challenge your limited beliefs and claim your ambition.

Lean INTO IT



KEY INSIGHTS

- The internal barriers women face can be as limiting as external ones
- Confidence and competence are often perceived differently based on gender
- Career growth is nonlinear and benefits from calculated risk-taking
- Support systems, both professional and personal, are essential
- Systemic change requires both individual action and organisational accountability

Here I share my take on each of the chapters from the book:

The Leadership Ambition Gap - on average, women aspire to leadership roles less often than men as a result of cultural conditioning. This gap is not a lack of capability, but a response to signals women receive early about risk, confidence, and belonging. Closing it requires organisations to examine how ambition is rewarded and who is encouraged to raise their hand.

Sit at the Table - women often diminish their contributions, instead of claiming their expertise and speaking up. Claiming space is not about ego, it is about ensuring that ideas and expertise are visible where decisions are made. When women speak with authority, it reshapes not only perceptions of them, but expectations for leadership itself.



KEY INSIGHTS

Success & Likeability - there's often a double bind where success can reduce perceived likeability. This double bind pressures women to constantly calibrate how much success is 'acceptable.' Recognising this tension allows leaders and teams to question biased reactions rather than asking women to soften their impact.

It's a Jungle Gym, not a Ladder - careers are dynamic, exploratory journeys and often not linear. Non-linear careers allow for growth through lateral moves, pauses, and reinvention. Progress often comes from building skills and perspective, not simply climbing rung by rung.

Are You My Mentor? - mentorship doesn't have to be a formal arrangement, it's often something that grows organically through performance and relationships. The most influential mentors are often those who notice potential and open doors in real time. Focus on doing excellent work and building relationships, and mentorship will often follow naturally.

Seek & Speak Your Truth - honest communication, feedback, and authenticity are leadership foundations. Authentic leadership requires the courage to give and receive feedback, even when it is uncomfortable. Trust is built when people feel heard, respected, and able to show up as themselves.



KEY INSIGHTS

Don't Leave Before You Leave - women often scale back ambitions in anticipation of future family responsibilities. Anticipating future constraints can quietly limit present opportunities. Staying engaged and ambitious keeps options open and allows decisions to be made when circumstances are real, not hypothetical.

Make Your Partner a Real Partner - how equitable is your partnership at home? Good partner equity will support your success at work. Career advancement is rarely a solo effort, and unequal labour at home creates invisible barriers at work. True partnership means shared responsibility, shared planning, and shared ambition.

The Myth of Doing It All - thinking you've got to do it all whilst aiming for perfectionism isn't realistic. It's an unhealthy behaviour and can lead to anxiety, stress and burnout. Perfectionism often masquerades as commitment, but it is unsustainable. Sustainable success comes from prioritisation, boundaries, and redefining what 'good enough' looks like.

Let's Start Talking About It - calls for open dialogue, advocacy, and collective action to shift workplace cultures. Change accelerates when experiences are named and shared rather than internalised. Open conversation turns individual challenges into collective responsibility and momentum for systemic change.



MY MAIN TAKEAWAYS

1. **Claim your seat** - confidence often follows action, not the other way around
2. **Redefine success on your terms** - there is no single model for leadership or balance
3. **Progress is collective** - personal advancement and advocacy for others are intertwined

🧠 PERSONAL REFLECTION - *why these lessons matter*

Despite the advances we've made as a society, the gender gap in leadership persists through the personal, organisational, and societal barriers that hold women back. Whilst structural change is essential, women face internal obstacles such as self-doubt, fear of backlash, and perfectionism. But if we can 'lean in' to opportunities, negotiate for ourselves and build supportive partnerships, we can redefine leadership in ways that are both authentic and inclusive.

I've particularly seen the power of 'leaning in' through our women's coaching programmes, both our ✨**Reset Retreat: The Next Chapter**✨ and ✨**Elevate Her.**✨ Through group discussions, self-reflection, and peer support, participants develop rapport and trust and become each other's cheerleaders. It's a joy to behold. ❤️

The book's actionable advice provides a shared language for growth helping female leaders lean in and champion each other.

YOUR INVITATION TO REFLECT



- ? Where in your career or life are you holding back despite being capable?
- ? How do you respond to opportunities that stretch you beyond your comfort zone?
- ? What internal narratives about success, leadership, or balance might you need to challenge?
- ? Who supports your growth, and how intentionally are you cultivating those relationships?
- ? What would 'leaning in' look like for you in the next 6 months?
- ? What else is coming up for you?



ACTION PLANNING

✓ **Awareness** - identify one belief or behaviour that limits your willingness to step forward.

? **What really holds you back?**

✓ **Skilful experimentation** - choose one practical action aligned to your identified belief or behaviour such as speaking up in meetings, applying for a stretch role, or negotiating expectations.

? **What one action would have the biggest impact?**

✓ **Support & Accountability** - engage a mentor, coach, or peer group to reflect, challenge, and encourage progress towards your practical action.

? **Who are the cheerleaders in your network?**

✓ **Partnership & Boundaries** - assess how responsibilities are shared in your personal life and where renegotiation could create space for growth.

? **If renegotiation feels too uncomfortable, what you can you trade?**

✓ **Pay it forward** - look for opportunities to advocate for others by amplifying voices, sharing opportunities, and contributing to more inclusive systems.

? **Who or what do you feel passionate about?**

CONCLUSION

If you're feeling held back in your career, this book is an easy read and provides practical insights for you to explore your inner thoughts and feelings, as well as being able to develop some helpful strategies.

You can consciously and courageously shape your own leadership path.

Remember, you're not alone and you don't have to do it on your own. ❤️

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WORK WITH ME - get in touch today for an informal chat



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