

# Women Leaders

*Is this a breakthrough moment?*



by Gloria Feldt

**W**OMEN LEADERS have come a long way. This is an amazing moment when *women can lead and live without limits*. I've seen women make stunning progress, and I know breakthroughs can happen.

Will women make *the breakthrough moment* when gender parity in leadership becomes normative—or will we continue on current trajectory? Signs point both ways. Discriminatory laws have been mostly eliminated. Women earn 60 percent of college degrees and make up half the workplace. Many *glass ceilings* are smashed. Many men too think it's women's moment. In his foreword to *Enlightened Power: How Women are Transforming the Practice of Leadership*, David Gergen wrote: "Think of all the words we use to describe old style leadership: *aggressive, assertive, autocratic, muscular, closed*.

When we describe the new leadership, we employ terms like *consensual, relational, web-based, caring, inclusive, open, transparent*—all qualities that we associate with the *feminine style of leadership*."

The business case for recruiting and retaining high performing women leaders is *unassailable: when women are included, the quality of decision-making improves and companies make more money*. Sustained gender diversity in boardroom correlates with *better corporate performance*.

Yet women have been stuck for years at 18 percent of leadership positions across 10 sectors. Women are no further along the corporate ladder than they were six years ago! Why? No, it's not only because women are still regarded as the family caregivers—increasingly, men are sharing those tasks—and yet insidious cultural barriers and implicit biases remain. Still, *no law or formal barrier is keeping women from attaining top leadership roles*, and no one will walk us through the doors to leadership except ourselves.

*My intent isn't to blame, but to inspire women and give practical power tools to leverage this breakthrough moment*. When women run for office,

they are elected in the same percentages as men. But they are only half as likely even to think about running. And when they consider it, they wait longer than men to take the plunge.

This same dynamic occurs in work, politics, and personal relationships. You can't win if you don't run, and *you can't get into the C-suite if you don't put yourself forward for the position*.

Paradoxically, I've spent most of my career working for power for others. This is gendered behavior regarded (and rewarded) as laudable—being nice, putting the needs of others first, self-sacrificing, not caring about such *male prerogatives* as earning a high income or having a *power title*. It's hard to change a culture while you're living in it. And women who assume power positions by adopting male models of power and leadership and fail to bring other women along or help change the culture *don't advance the cause of equality*.

## Thinking Differently About Power

Many women express reluctance to take on power positions (and even avoid programs with the word *power* in the title), feeling *power suggests dominance*.

Few women *love power*. Since women have borne the brunt of abusive *power-over*, many women eschew *power* even when they have it.

*Women need to define power in terms that work for them*. Once they define *power as the power to accomplish something for others, or for the good of us all*, women are more willing to use their power. The use of power is

legitimated, taken out of the realm of the *power-over* realm. When I propose this definition to women, I see tension relieved. *Power-to* makes one *powerful*.

*Power-over* is passé; *power-to* is *leadership*. Kim Campbell, first female prime minister of Canada, said: "Power exists. Somebody will have it. *If you would exercise it ethically, why not you? I love power*. I'm *power-hungry* because when I have power I can make things happen."

By defining *power* not as *power-over* but as *power-to*, we shift from a *culture of oppression* to a *culture of positive intention* to make things better for everyone. The *breakthrough* comes when negative connotations about *power* give way to a vision of a world where women are *equal opportunity leaders and doers*, and where both genders can lead with integrity. LE

Gloria Feldt is the author of *No Excuses: 9 Ways Women Can Change the Way We Think About Power* (Seal Press). Visit [www.gloriafeldt.com](http://www.gloriafeldt.com).

**ACTION:** Define power in terms that work for you.

# Remarkable Leaders

*Let's recognize and support them.*



by Karol M. Wasylshyn

**T**HE CANDIDATE IS bright, personable, accomplished, charismatic. But how do you tell if she is the *real thing* or a *narcissistic masquerade*?

We need to identify *remarkable leaders* who can guide us toward success and support them in their growth.

- *Employees* need to spot the *three main types of leaders*, manage their boss's difficult (or quirky) behavior, and navigate their own career future.

- *Managers* need to analyze and understand their own leadership types and make necessary adjustments.

I coach people how to manage *three types of leaders*—*Remarkable, Perilous and Toxic*—and show how to deepen a positive, learning relationship with a *Remarkable* boss; reinforce best behavior and lessen discontented behaviors with a *Perilous* boss; and minimize a *Toxic* supervisor's destructive effects on you and perhaps others.

*The Remarkable leader, who is attuned, active and well-grounded, needs you to:* 1) discover the power of establishing a *reciprocal relationship* by replacing *What's in it for me?* with *What's in it for us?* 2) Be an ambassador by reinforcing her strategy; and 3) act as a talent scout recruiting *A-players*.

*The Perilous leader, who is intelligent, insecure and moody, needs you to:* 1) reduce their sense of *unrequited work* by emphasizing their contributions; 2) clothe the emperor by keeping it real in regards to employees' issues and concerns; and 3) keep your boss focused on the power of providing positive affirmation and feedback.

*The Toxic leader, who is suspicious, arrogant and cold, needs you to:* 1) leverage *peerage* through open communication with your peers; 2) develop and apply *internal locus of control*—a belief that you can control your own destiny through clarity about and confidence in your talents, experiences and accomplishments; and 3) decide if it's in your best interest to stay or to go.

This knowledge can influence more focused decisions about leaders. LE

Karol Wasylshyn is founder of Leadership Development Forum, an executive coach and consultant, and author of *Behind the Executive Door* (Springer). Visit [www.karolwasylshyn.com](http://www.karolwasylshyn.com).