

Chapter Eleven — Women In Business And Society Are Creating Major Successes At Multiple Levels

The relative status for women in this country has not reached the point where discrimination has ended in all areas, but we have made huge progress in many areas that we should celebrate and endorse.

Women are currently functioning successfully at just about every single level in our country. Unlike many areas of the world where discrimination against women limits the activities of women at truly repressive levels, we have women in all categories of jobs in our country — and we have very explicitly banned any behaviors that explicitly discriminate against women.

That is a very good thing for us as a country — and it represents real progress from where we were in many areas even in our country in relatively recent times.

I have seen significant progress for women happen in very direct ways in my own life and career.

I mentioned earlier in this book that I had a job in a local bank when I was in high school. My job was to be a bank clerk. I waited on customers

and I ran the machine that charged the checks that people wrote against each customer's personal bank accounts.

I wasn't particularly good at that job. I transposed quite a few numbers and I had to go through an almost daily process of finding and correcting my mistakes. I was guided and helped in that process every day by the women clerks who really ran that bank.

I saw those women do wonderful work with customers and with all of the layers of complex and basic functions that were needed to keep that bank running.

As I mentioned earlier in this book, I was shocked and a bit horrified to discover that those women made less than half as much money as a couple of male employees at the bank.

My sense at the time was that the male employees in that setting were doing adequate work, but the female employees were the stars — and the stars received less than half as much money.

When I wanted to protest, the women clerks told me to shut up and not make waves. They told me they did not want to lose what were, at that time, “very good jobs for women for a small town.”

It made me angry — but I honored their request.

I left that very early worksite experience with a slight prejudice in favor of hiring women to do hard jobs. When I later became a hiring manager in my early twenties, I ignored very explicit expert counsel and direct steorage from our corporate human resources department who wanted me to only interview male candidates for several of the creative and analytical jobs that were in my chain of command and work team. I asked, instead, to see resumes from women candidates for those jobs.

Star Players Gave Us Star Performance

The resumes I saw blew me away. There were star players just waiting to be hired. I hired several of those star performers into various jobs and my department ended up being a star department.

Much of my early success in several key areas was tied to their performance.

I have maintained a similar hiring pattern for over three decades now. Those hires have continued to make my work team group performance levels very high. The CFO for each of my last two multi-billion dollar companies was a woman named Kathy. Not the same Kathy. The name was a pure and pleasant coincidence. But what wasn't coincidental was the fact that both Kathys functioned as star CFO's.

My COO for my Minnesota plan was a star-performance woman who succeeded me as CEO. She has been a star in that CEO job ever since she took the job over.

At Kaiser Permanente, when I retired, there were eight regional presidents. Four were women. All eight presidents were stars. My controller, head of communications, brand senior executive, and the audit head for our organization were all women.

The quality committee of my board, the community benefit committee of my board, and the compensation committee of my board were all chaired by women. White males only made up 40 percent of the Board of Directors for that \$50 billion organization.

All of those women in those senior executive roles and in those lead Board roles have been star performers for that organization.

The largest single privately funded systems project that was ever done by any private organization in the world was our \$4 billion complete computerization of our medical record and of our care support systems.

That massive and complex systems implementation project was led with great success by a highly skilled and star level woman executive. She

led that extremely complex and massive project in an extremely collaborative way.

Some Nations Had Star Women Leaders Who Were Clear

Alphas

In my early years of naming women to leadership positions and then to senior leadership positions, I looked at the patterns of leadership roles for women that I could see in history to find role models and approaches that had worked well. I could see that very few nations had ever been headed by women — but it was clear that some of the women who did personally lead nations did some spectacular work.

I could see that those leaders led their nations well and that those leaders were accepted by their followers and their country as their leader. Queen Elizabeth and Queen Victoria both created and successfully managed empires. Catherine the Great expanded and solidified Russia. Golda Meir and Margaret Thatcher were clearly highly competent leaders who had the support of their nations. They each clearly steered their countries in the directions they wanted their countries to go.

Because our traditional and almost universal pattern has been to have men as heads of families, heads of organizations, and heads of nations, the

number of women leaders in various senior leadership settings over the year has tended to be fairly low.

When I began hiring people into executive level jobs, I studied the experiences that various senior women leaders had in other business settings. I saw both successes and failures. Some of the failures surprised me.

Stress Erodes When The Alpha Job Is Perceived To Be Filled

When I looked closely at a couple of those failures — some of the problem patterns were obvious. I knew, already, from my study of hierarchies that people in any hierarchical setting feel stress when the Alpha position in their hierarchy is not filled. A team who loses their coach feels stress. A ship that loses its captain feels stress. A department that loses its manager feels stress.

People in any hierarchy tend to feel stress when the lead position is vacant.

That stress erodes and melts away when the people in that setting have a sense that the Alpha job in their hierarchy has been filled.

The problem that I saw in a couple of settings and situations where the new Alpha was a woman was that the people in that area had expected a

male Alpha to be in that job and some people actually did not perceive the job to be filled when a woman was named to the position.

I heard from a couple of people that they felt that the lead job was still vacant in some way — because they didn't have a clear sense that there was now an Alpha in the job.

That issue intrigued me. It seemed solvable. It was.

People Need To Perceive That The Alpha Role Has Been Filled

I looked at the support that is given to ruling Queens in various settings and I realized that the needed level of support as the functional Alpha was there for the Queens in those settings because Queens are perceived to be a culturally legitimate form of Alpha for the setting.

Those Queens in those settings fit an Alpha expectation. A woman, I could see, obviously could activate those sets of hierarchical instincts. So that was not an insurmountable barrier.

It was clear to me from several examples that it can feel right to people in a setting to support a woman Alpha where it is clear to people that there a legitimate Alpha in that role.

Several of my role models and mentors for Alpha behavior for women were nuns I knew who led hospital systems. I have worked directly in

various settings with four different nun CEO's whose authority levels in their organizations were never challenged by anyone at any level.

A couple of those sisters negotiated deals with me. There was never a hint of doubt either about their authority levels or about their ability to do extremely good deals for their team.

I am still in awe of some of the approaches that were used to steer me exactly to where a couple of the sisters wanted me steered for the deals that we did with each other.

As I looked at multiple settings with women leaders, I could see that the women CEOs who were succeeding in various settings that I looked at all had people in their organizations who clearly recognized their Alpha status. It was also clear to me that the people in a couple of settings where the new woman leader had failed had a sense that the new Alpha was an anomaly and might be some kind of placeholder, but was clearly not an actual Alpha.

It was clear to me after looking at a couple of settings where the new women leaders had been undermined and not supported by some of their team members that it could generally be useful for new women leaders in

Alpha roles to do a few things early in the transition process that triggered an instinct-supported perception of their personal Alpha status.

To achieve that goal better for the women who I was promoting in my organizations into various departmental Alpha roles and to help women friends of mine who were being promoted into various Alpha roles in a number of other work settings that were unrelated to my organizations, I created a few basic tools that can be used to help trigger the perception of Alpha for new leaders in various settings.

To create the sense in those settings that there was now a legitimate Alpha in those leader roles, I generally coached the women who I named to various Alpha roles to do several symbolic Alpha things very quickly that made it very clear to other people in each hierarchy that the position now had an Alpha in the Alpha chair.

People Hate To Lose Relative Power

One of the Alpha things that I advised each new women Alpha to do was to sit at the head of the table, convene meetings of her leadership team with clear and comfortable command of the agenda, and to announce at an initial meeting of that group that she was going to be asking each person in the room if the chain of command and the organization chart they were

currently using was, in fact, the best organizational plan and the best chart and chain of command for that group to use.

Nothing puts people in any hierarchical setting into panic mode more quickly than the risk of personally losing relative status. People hate to lose power. People hate to lose the perception of power.

Instead of allowing each person who was already in that specific power hierarchy in each of those settings to simply continue to assume with complete comfort that their own current powerbase and their own personal relative hierarchical position were both rock solid and risk free, a simple and very clear statement by the new leader that the new leader would now look very directly with discerning eyes at each and all positions in the organization was generally enough to erase that feeling of security and to create a level of personal status level vulnerability for the key people in each chain of command.

People very quickly figure out who actually is boss in a setting when they recognize, understand, and believe that their new boss might and actually could demote them.

That is sobering information. It gets people's attention. It gives people a very useful sense of their own hierarchical position and of their own hierarchical vulnerability.

My experience has been that people who had not been saluting the new leader before that moment generally start to salute at that point and — I was delighted to learn — they actually feel right at an instinct-linked level saluting because they suddenly recognize that there is, in fact, an Alpha there for them to salute.

Stress Levels Are Reduced When People Perceive An Alpha Is

In Place

I will not describe all of the other steps I include in the alpha status recognition process here other than to say that they tend to work. The relevant people in each setting recognize that there is now an Alpha in the room and people begin to act and think accordingly. Support levels for the new leader tend to increase when people have a sense of relative status.

That is not an unkind thing to do to people. Getting clarity on that particular point actually helps reduce the stress levels in that setting for the other people once the alignment process is fully played out and once key

people recognize at an instinct-linked level that the Alpha position in that setting now has an Alpha in it.

As an FYI — it really doesn't matter in the end if any reorganization of any kind actually does happen in those settings. The threat and the process are key — not the functional deed of reorganizing.

It very much does matter that a real org-chart review is done by the new leader and it matters that people in that setting and that chain of command know that the review is real and that a reorganization is possible.

I have also found that doing that particular review generally gives the new Alpha in a setting an extremely useful and timely insight into what each of the people in her area does and how the people in that setting all interact and interrelate with one another.

That specific review is worth doing in a setting for new leaders for that learning value alone — even if the review has no positive impact at any level on the activation of any sets of instincts and even if no reorganizations or reassignments actually take place.

We Organize As Hunters And We Organize As Gatherers

I have been fascinated for a very long time by the fact that we clearly do have a couple of very different instinctive leadership patterns. Those

patterns are pretty basic and they relate back directly to points made earlier in this book about how our primal societies functioned and survived.

In our hunter/gatherer societies, it was true that we had both hunters and gatherers. They can be two very different sets of processes in the real world.

We clearly have the ability organize in one set of ways as hunters, and we have the capability of organizing in other key ways as gatherers. Those two styles were addressed a couple of times earlier in this book.

Those two approaches are described in more detail in both *The Art of Intergroup Peace* book and in the *Primal Pathways* book.

I learned a very long time ago that both of those approaches can work very well in work settings to get important things done. Both genders can easily use either style. I have found, however, that men do tend to be more likely to use the hunter/warrior approach and that women tend to be more likely to use the gatherer approach.

But I have seen star leaders of both genders use both approaches. One of the most effective gatherer leaders I ever worked with was a man and a couple of the best war party leaders I have worked with have been women.

I personally began my career using the hunter style almost exclusively and evolved, over time, to a gatherer style approach to getting things done. Leading extremely complex settings with a pure hunter model would probably have brought me to failure in several settings and situations.

The Hunter Style Is More Directive — The Gatherer Style Is More Collaborative

At the most basic levels, the hunter style is more dictatorial and directive and the gatherer style is more collaborative and inclusive. Both can achieve major successes. The hunter style tends to be more obvious and more visible, so people in those settings generally know who the hunter group leaders are.

Gatherer leaders, by contrast, often succeed in part because they manage to have various other team members getting the credit for specific achievements of the group. That approach of sharing the credit for successes can motivate team members very nicely, but it can make the gatherer leaders own direct role in the entire process less obvious.

That gatherer-leader approach of sharing credit is one of the reasons why some organization Alphas have a hard time discerning the talent levels of the best gatherer leaders in their organizations. Many organizational

Alpha leaders today are men who were promoted to those top jobs based on their own success in using the high visibility hunter leadership model and those leaders often do not know or recognize any other style.

A very high percentage of the people who run companies are men. The truth is that those leaders have often succeeded and advanced in their careers by being good at the hunter management style approach.

Those particular leaders, I have found, tend to be quite good at identifying the other hunter leaders in their work force, but I have seen that many of those executives are significantly less good at directly identifying or even knowing about the existence of the best gatherer leaders in their organizations.

That is due, in large part to the fact that good gatherer leaders tend to spend less time in the spotlight and that low visibility approach to getting important things done can make those gatherer leaders much harder for hunter Alphas to see and find.

Women who are promoted to various senior leadership roles in various settings often are promoted because they have had a high performing work unit or because they have led a very successful project. In either case, the leadership style that succeeded for the women who were promoted

relative to that successful work team or that successful project was often to be a gatherer leader.

The gatherer style involves participative and collaborative work efforts, with people invited to be part of the project in inclusive and collaborative ways.

Today's Work Environment Can Involve Complex Projects

That collaborative and inclusive approach can be a really good approach to use for today's workforce. For many complex projects in today's organizations, that can be the best leadership approach to use.

I have led organizations at the most senior level for more than three decades and I can say with great certainty that some projects in today's world are too complex to have dictators in the lead roles.

It can be a very good thing for organizational success to promote gatherer leaders to many senior leadership roles.

I have done that a number of times. I have had some memorable successes. I also know from experience that it really can sometimes create at least an initial problem in the new job if the new woman leader who has been a gatherer style performance star simply continues to use the gatherer

approach from day one as her first set of visible leadership behaviors in her new job.

The problem that happens in some settings is based on the fact that many people do expect new leaders in purely hierarchical Alpha jobs to behave in Alpha ways. If the new leader in a setting is initially perceived to be too collaborative, I have seen that the risk is high that some people in the new work area will see that participative approach by the new leader to be weak and will not see that approach as worthy of obedience, compliance, or even support.

That's why conducting initial meetings from the head of the table — doing some Alpha-like communications to the workforce — and telling the key leaders in the hierarchy that a re-organization is possible all can have real value in getting people aligned with the new Alpha role.

Some people can actually have problems feeling sufficiently hierarchical and stress free in their own work role if the first actions by the new leader follow the gatherer leadership approach in very participative ways and seem to the workforce members to be indecisive rather than inclusive.

Some Teams Need Some Alpha Behaviors To Get Aligned

I have seen extremely good work — stunningly good work — done by people using the gatherer leadership approach. I personally have spent years very intentionally learning to use that approach more effectively in my own approach to leading the teams I have led.

But the gatherer approach sometimes isn't the best way to first lead a new team immediately after a promotion. Some people do perceive the Alpha role to be unfilled if the new leader starts her leadership process with a less directive style of interaction.

As I noted earlier, that is not a hard problem to fix. My experience in several settings has been that if a women Alpha who is new in the job uses the hunter style in the new role for a while and does a few clearly Alpha things to settle people's hierarchical instincts and to get their sense of relative status in gear and then switches over time back to the gatherer style, that transition approach and sequence of leadership styles can work particularly well.

Later, when the gatherer leadership style is again used by that leader, that gatherer approach is then perceived to be inclusive by an Alpha leader in a very good way rather than being seen as being weak and indecisive.

Queen Elizabeth the First was known for her absolute comfort for being in command, and she was known for her equal comfort in being surrounded by extremely intelligent senior advisors who helped her think through a wide range of factional and strategic issues.

Even though she was clearly the Queen, there were strong traces of gatherer leadership in her collaborative thought processes that helped her succeed as the Alpha for her country at literally historic success levels.

Her country was much stronger at the end of her reign. She used a mixed model that I believe has great potential for success in many settings in our increasingly complex world for both men and women in leadership roles.

We Are Making Progress At Multiple Levels

Today, we are making progress at multiple levels relative to women's issues in our country. We are making progress on economic issues and our political agendas now have women in key roles at every level.

Our society has collectively grown in enlightenment on many issues relating to women and we have incorporated our enlightenment in a very useful and functional way into our laws and our cultural expectations.

We now have laws that allow women to vote. Laws exist for that issue because it is clear that we need laws to protect progress in a number of areas after progress has been made.

Because we have actual laws about voting, we don't need to rely on the good will or the personal enlightenment levels of the people who are running the polling sites for any given election to allow women at any site to vote.

We had the good sense to build a law that codifies and guarantees that right to vote for all women at all sites. We also enforce that law with absolute consistency.

That enforcement makes both the practice and the law real. Enforcement, I have learned, is critical for many kinds of behavior change situations where we want enlightened behaviors to be the normal and expected behaviors.

Laws and enforcement are both needed to protect our values from slippage. If we did not both enact and enforce voting rights laws, voting rights violations would exist and people who did not agree with those values would create problems that would keep other people from voting.

For all areas where we have intergroup diversity, we need to embrace a culture of inclusion and of win/win intergroup interactions — and we need to protect the existence of that culture with rules and laws that make behaviors that violate that set of cultural expectations illegal. The law is our friend when we are steering primal behaviors. We are all smart enough to have our cultures embedded in our personal belief systems and that is most likely to happen in some area of behavior if we turn our enlightened values into legally enforced expectations.

We Have Excluded Half Our Population

For women's issues, we are now at the cusp of a positive new era.

We now need to remove the remaining barriers that exist to full inclusion for all jobs, careers, and roles for women.

We will prosper when that happens.

We have excluded roughly half of our population in this country from full participation in a wide range of our opportunities for a very long time.

We will be stronger as a nation when we extend those opportunities to all of us and in the process, we will literally double the number of people who can make full contributions for us all and to us all.

I know that to be true from direct and real world experience. My old care system — with half of the sitting presidents women and with half of the senior leadership women — has won J.D. Powers, Consumer Reports, and Medicare star ratings as the number one system in the entire country. That same care system with nearly 200,000 total employees has a majority of women employees and also has 59 percent of its total workforce from our minority populations. The senior leadership levels for that organization were as diverse as the workforce.

Inclusion Works

Inclusion, I can tell you from direct and large-scale real world experience, works. We won multiple performance recognitions in a number of key areas of performance as a highly inclusive organization.

I absolutely guarantee that we could not have achieved those levels of success and we would not have attained that degree of functional excellence if I had excluded half of that leadership team from that effort based on their gender. We needed that entire team to do what we did. Inclusion worked.

I believe to my core that we will be stronger as a country as well when we make inclusion a core competency and when we receive the advantage of having full involvement from all of our team members at the highest levels.

Those negative exclusion levels and clear elements of discrimination for both minority Americans and women need to be components of our past — but not key components of our future. That is, I believe, the path we need to be on now.

When you look at the world around us, a number of major companies are being led extremely well by women leaders. Xerox, Avon, DuPont, Hewlett Packard, International Business Machines, General Motors, and The Gates Foundation all are among the major corporations who have women leaders who serve as clear models for what can be done.

A decade from now, that list will be even more impressive. The message we can learn from that set of leaders could not be more clear. The key to success in a setting is to have the right person in each of those jobs — and “right person” is not linked to gender. Right person is linked to skill set, disposition, vision, and the ability to lead.

Choose leaders. Be leaders.

In today’s complex and diverse world, the skill sets of inclusive leaders can be the key factor that creates organizational victories and it clearly will make us stronger as a country when we include the full skill sets of all of our people — both men and women — in our society at every level.