

BookWisdom at Work

A Girl's Guide to Success

Story by Ann Daly

WE'VE COME A LONG WAY, BABY – IN THE CORNER OFFICE, THE BOARDROOM, and the C-suite. But the most recent research indicates that the progress of women in business is leveling off. In some cases, we've lost ground.

Portfolio magazine's recent cover story on gender in the workplace gives this snapshot:

"Key indicators such as pay, board seats, and corporate-officer posts all reflect a leveling off or drop in recent years. Although the gap between men's and women's pay narrowed significantly through the 1980s, gains since then have been partly erased by a drop every few years. In 2006, women over the age of 25 earned 78.7 cents for every dollar earned by men, according to the most recent statistics from the U.S. Labor Department. That's a decline from 2005's figure of 79.4 cents on the dollar and also represents only about a 5-cent increase since 1991."

The CEO names that we love to drop – Carly Fiorina, Meg Whitman, Anne Mulcahy – are the exceptions, not the rule.

As much as we want to believe that our 21st century world has become "gender-blind" and that the workplace treats men and women the same, the fact is, working women still face a different set of cultural expectations than their male counterparts. It's just a lot more subtle these days.

It's a double bind: a woman has got to be brilliant but self-effacing, assertive enough but not "aggressive," highly accomplished and just as humble. Oh, yeah, and if you agree with Rush Limbaugh's assessment of Hillary Clinton as a presidential candidate, she needs to retire from public view before she begins to wrinkle.

What's a working girl to do?

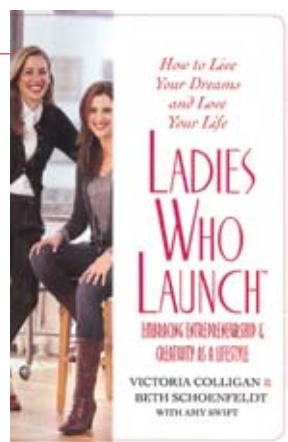
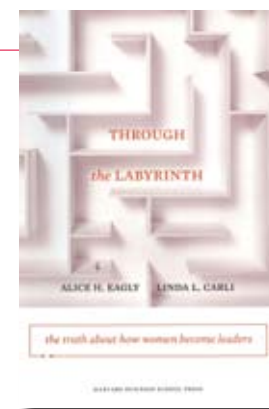
The Leadership Labyrinth

In *Through the Labyrinth*, social scientists Alice H. Eagly and Linda L. Carli set out to understand why so few women have reached the highest levels of leadership. And, as their subtitle proclaims, they're out to reveal *The Truth about How Women Become Leaders*. Their research is impeccable, and their analytical prowess prevents them from settling for the kind of simplistic answers that we hear so often in the mass media. The result is required reading.

Eagly and Carli analyze the situation step-by-step. They break down the issue into questions like: Are men simply better, more natural leaders? Are women's careers compromised by their responsibilities at home? Does discrimination against women still exist in the workplace? Do organizational traditions and practices create obstacles to women's leadership? And do women have leadership styles that work for or against them?

The book's central metaphor is the labyrinth. According to Eagly and Carli, the labyrinth is more fitting to the experience of women in the workplace than the old image of the "glass ceiling." It's not that women breeze through lower levels of management, only to bang their heads on the invisible barrier to the C-suite. Instead, women encounter potential roadblocks, detours, and dead ends at every turn in their careers.

If you want to understand the nuanced mechanisms of gender difference in the workplace, this book explains it all. As for a 10-step solution, well, this isn't that kind of book. What the authors do offer is a two-fold recommendation for navigating the labyrinth: first, develop a flexible leadership style blending both authoritative (traditionally male) and communal (stereotypically female) elements; second, develop "social capital" through relationships with colleagues both inside and outside your organization.



If You Can't Join 'Em, Beat 'Em

For those of us who would rather not worry about soft-pedaling ourselves, there's always the entrepreneurial option. Women, in fact, are off-ramping corporate life to start their own businesses at a significantly higher rate than men.

If for no other reason, you gotta love *Ladies Who Launch* because of its subversively witty title. The basic message: take advantage of your intuitive, creative talents without apology.

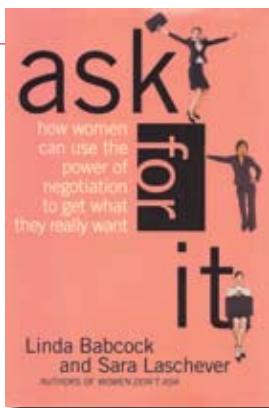
Victoria Colligan and Beth Schoenfeldt, cofounders of the *Ladies Who Launch* incubator, make their intentions clear: "*Ladies Who Launch* will reprogram how you think about your dreams so that they are as real as the coffee you drink each morning."

To that end, they begin by describing what they see as the "feminine approach to launching." Personally, I don't think it's ultimately useful (or accurate) to consign one set of attributes to a "feminine approach" in stark opposition to a "masculine approach." After all, even Jack Welch will counsel men to "listen to your gut." But it is useful to remember that the "softer" approach, as Babcock and Leschever described it, is valid and strategically useful in the right time and place.

For women who are sheepish about launching their own business, *Ladies Who Launch* offers an empowering message: leverage your own strengths rather than remake yourself in a traditional business mold.

In part two of the book, Colligan and Schoenfeldt share their incubator program. It's a four-step process, easier said than done: imagine it, speak it, do it, celebrate it.

Thinking about starting a business? *Ladies Who Launch* will inspire you to make the leap.



Just Ask for It

Ken and Barbie are graduating from UT in May. Each of them has received the job offer of their dreams, at the same starting salary of \$25K. Barbie is giddy, and accepts immediately. Ken, however, thinks he can do better. He asks for more, and negotiates a starting salary of \$30K.

Make the calculation.

In the most modest scenario, Ken deposits that extra \$5K in a 3% interest-bearing account. Assuming an average 3% annual raise for both of them over their lifetimes, Ken continues to deposit the additional money he makes from that original \$5K. By the time they are ready to retire at age 65, Ken will earn an extra three-quarters of a million dollars.

Economist Linda Babcock and writer Sara Laschever want you to know how much you may be leaving on the table when you don't negotiate. They want you to believe in what you're worth. They want you to speak up for what you want, whether it's a more appropriate salary, a more fitting title or a plum assignment. They want you to realize that, if you don't ask for it, no one's gonna hand it over to you. (Really, they may like you, even love you. But that doesn't mean they'll go out of their way to make sure you're happy. That's your job.)

And if you read this book, you'll likely never sell yourself short again.

Ask for It is the sequel to Babcock and Laschever's previous book, *Women Don't Ask*. That book focused on documenting the situation. This book focuses on the solution.

Very readable, illustrated with tons of great case studies and worksheets, *Ask for It* outlines a four-phase program that shows you how to identify what you're really worth, maximize your bargaining power, develop the best solution for your situation, and manage responses and emotions. It also includes the "negotiation gym" – a 6-week program that will help you exercise your negotiation skills, one step at a time.

At the end, the authors caution us to remember the world we operate in: women are expected to be, well, "womanly." No stark demands, nothing too aggressive. Sad, but true. The authors offer a final set of guidelines for making the ask in a "relentlessly pleasant" way. "Multiple studies have shown," they write, "that using a 'softer' style can improve a woman's chances for success when she negotiates. As long as you behave in ways that don't seem too aggressive while making your request, you can still ask for what you want and hold him firm against pressure to concede too much or too soon. Using a 'softer' style when you negotiate, in other words, will allow you to remain tough on the issues."

Start a revolution: give this book as a graduation present to every young woman you know. ★

MORE INFO

Join life coach Ann Daly to discuss these and other books. Learn how to customize your career, develop as a leader, balance work and life, and launch your own business.

Ann Daly's BookWisdom at Work

May 28 at 7 p.m.

BookWoman

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Ask for It. Linda Babcock and Sara Laschever. New York: Bantam Books, 2008.

Ladies Who Launch. Victoria Colligan and Beth Schoenfeldt with Amy Swift. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2007.

Through the Labyrinth. Alice H. Eagly and Linda L. Carli. Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2007.

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