

# Lean In: Women, Work and the Will to Lead<sup>1</sup>

Reviewed by Major Allison D. McFeatters\*

*One of the things about equality is not just that you be treated equally to a man, but that you treat yourself equally to the way you treat a man.*<sup>2</sup>

## I. Introduction

Ranked ninth on the 2013 Forbes list of the world's most powerful women,<sup>3</sup> Sheryl Sandberg appears to have it all with few worries. She is Facebook's chief operating officer;<sup>4</sup> the wife of David Goldberg, the current Chief Executive Officer of SurveyMonkey;<sup>5</sup> mother of two;<sup>6</sup> and now esteemed author. She worked for non-profits,<sup>7</sup> in the federal government,<sup>8</sup> and for powerhouses like Google<sup>9</sup> before taking a chance on a start-up company called Facebook.<sup>10</sup> In a combination of hard data, academic research, input from colleagues, and personal experience, Sandberg creates a thought-provoking and surprisingly controversial<sup>11</sup> book that strives to encourage women to not only embrace, but seek out professional challenges.

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<sup>1</sup> SHERYL SANDBERG, *LEAN IN: WOMEN, WORK AND THE WILL TO LEAD* (2013).

<sup>2</sup> Brainy Quotes, Marlo Thomas, BRAINYQUOTE.COM, [http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/m/marlo\\_thomas.html](http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/m/marlo_thomas.html) (last visited May 8, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> Caroline Howard, *The World's 100 Most Powerful Women in 2013*, FORBES.COM, LLC (July 2, 2014, 11:32 AM), <http://www.forbes.com/power-women> (following the top three most powerful women: Angela Merkel, Janet Yellen, and Melinda Gates, respectively.)

<sup>4</sup> SANDBERG, *supra* note 1, at 229.

<sup>5</sup> Lisa Belkin, *Dave Goldberg, Sheryl Sandberg's Husband, Talks About Their Marriage (VIDEO)*, HUFFINGTON POST (May 3, 2013, 3:15 PM), [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/05/03/dave-goldberg-sheryl-sandberg-husband-video\\_n\\_3210036.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/05/03/dave-goldberg-sheryl-sandberg-husband-video_n_3210036.html).

<sup>6</sup> SANDBERG, *supra* note 1, at 229.

<sup>7</sup> Sandberg's first job out of college was for the World Bank Organization as a research assistant. *Id.* at 55.

<sup>8</sup> After completing Harvard Business School and a brief stint with the private firm McKinsey & Company, Sandberg worked for the Deputy Secretary of Treasury in the U.S. Treasury Department. *Id.* at 56.

<sup>9</sup> *Id.* at 59.

<sup>10</sup> *Id.* at 133.

<sup>11</sup> Sandberg has been heavily criticized for her opinions since the release of this book. Several feel she places the burden of change on women. Others question her ability to push women to take on challenges like she has when she has the luxury of millions of dollars to invest in her support system, unlike the majority of women in her audience. For more information, see Tania Lombrozo, *Should All Women Heed Author's Advice to 'Lean In'?*,

How does the professional advice of Facebook's chief operating officer, with no military background, apply to military women and family members? Consider, as an example, Major Squared Away,<sup>12</sup> who after thirteen years of service in the Judge Advocate General's Corps following her direct commission, is selected for one of the coveted resident positions at Command and General Staff College (CGSC). Attendance at the school requires her to live in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, for one school year. Her children are comfortable having been in the same school district for three years—a school district that they love. Her husband landed a job with promise and security. Does she accept the offer to attend CGSC and uproot her family knowing that they will be moving again in a year? Does she leave her family in place and embark on a year separation? Does she turn the offer down, giving the family desires greater priority than her own?

The root of Major Squared Away's problem is similar to that faced by civilian professionals and their families considering a professional change. Sandberg wrote this book for "any woman who wants to increase her chances of making it to the top of her field or pursue any goal vigorously," as well as "any man who wants to understand what a woman—a colleague, wife, mother, or daughter—is up against so he can do his part to build an equal world."<sup>13</sup> This review first provides an overview of Sandberg's advice to working mothers and her main theories on what is needed to reach true workforce equality,<sup>14</sup> and then explores whether those opinions can or should apply to military culture. Although full of recommendations slightly more applicable to the civilian sector than the military, *Lean In* is the paperback cheerleader every working mother needs in her pocket, cargo or otherwise, as a source of motivational support.

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NPR.ORG (Apr. 2, 2013, 7:38 AM ET), <http://www.npr.org/blogs/13/7/2013/03/31/175862363/should-all-women-heed-authors-advice-to-lean-in>.

<sup>12</sup> Major Squared-Away is a fictitious character loosely based off experiences and choices faced by female judge advocates.

<sup>13</sup> *Id.* at 10.

<sup>14</sup> Sandberg defines true world equality as a world "where women [run] half our countries and companies and men [run] half our homes." SANDBERG, *supra* note 1, at 7.

## II. You Are Your Own Worst Enemy

*Lean In* calls on women, particularly working mothers, to stop being their own worst enemy. Relying on a mix of raw data from national surveys and personal experience, Sandberg believes men currently run the world, citing that women lead roughly nine percent of the world's independent countries and occupy twenty percent of parliament seats.<sup>15</sup> The main reason Sandberg thinks women hold a minority of leadership roles is that women routinely choose family responsibilities over professional challenges once they become mothers.

We hold ourselves back in ways both big and small, by lacking self-confidence, by not raising our hands, and by pulling back when we should be leaning in. We internalize the negative messages we get throughout our lives—the messages that say it's wrong to be outspoken, aggressive, more powerful than men. We lower our own expectations of what we can achieve. We continue to do the majority of the housework and child care. We compromise our career goals to make room for partners and children who may not even exist yet.<sup>16</sup>

Sandberg proposes women end this struggle to reach their full potential through a reformed perception of self and household norms.

Sandberg begins by asking the reader to imagine the extent of their potential if fear was not a factor. “What would you do if you weren't afraid?”<sup>17</sup> The reader is amused by stories about Sandberg's grandmother and Sandberg's own upbringing<sup>18</sup> before they are confronted with Sandberg's opinion that the women of today's generation are too practical and overly cautious. Sandberg says this generational shift occurred after women watched

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<sup>15</sup> *Id.* at 5.

<sup>16</sup> *Id.* at 8.

<sup>17</sup> *Id.* at 12.

<sup>18</sup> In the first chapter, Sandberg talks about her grandmother, Rosalind “Girly” Einhorn, who valued education and was not afraid to take risks during the Depression, when the majority of the populace valued certainty and security. After being pulled from high school to support her family as a seamstress during the Depression, Rosalind went against the odds by graduating from high school and college, and saving her husband's struggling business through hard decisions and determination. Sandberg compares that to her own childhood home, where she and her siblings were encouraged to excel in school, complete their chores, and participate in extracurricular activities despite Sandberg's athletic shortcomings—all early lessons in the value of competition and balanced lifestyles. *Id.* at 12-15.

their mothers attempt to juggle both work and family, and inevitably choose one over the other.<sup>19</sup>

The female reader is then encouraged to treat herself with the same respect she would pay her male counterpart by “sit(ting) at the table,”<sup>20</sup> focusing on her success instead of her likeability,<sup>21</sup> and to speak authentically.<sup>22</sup> Each page of *Lean In* includes personal anecdotes that allow the reader to better understand Sandberg's advice and find ways to apply Sandberg's tactics to their own life. *Lean In* is not a list of hard and fast rules, but a compilation of good ideas that professional women, and men working alongside women, may find helpful during various phases of her career.

## III. The Internal Struggle

In an exceptional manner, *Lean In* highlights the internal struggle working, married mothers experience when searching for personal balance between work, spouse, and children. Through stories about missed dinners and babysitting fiascos, Sandberg brings the reader into her household and the weekly coordination she and husband, David, juggle through to ensure the kids have a ride to school and dinner on the table.<sup>23</sup> Sandberg admits that she and her husband are fortunate to be able to afford excellent child care and help<sup>24</sup> when their career schedules do not mesh with their children's needs. After reading this book, the working mother walks away with a sense of vindication—I am not the only one trying to do it all!

Sandberg is not the first author to air dirty family laundry and personal struggles in print,<sup>25</sup> but she does it with such candor and directness that a reader can relate to Sandberg's

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<sup>19</sup> *Id.* at 15.

<sup>20</sup> *Id.* at 27.

<sup>21</sup> *Id.* at 39.

<sup>22</sup> *Id.* at 77.

<sup>23</sup> Sandberg explains how she and her husband worked in different cities for their first year as parents, until Sandberg accepted a promotion at work and Dave found a job which allowed him to live full time with Sandberg and their child. From that point on, Sandberg describes how she and Dave sit down at the beginning of each week and agree on who will drive the children to school and be home with the kids each night. *Id.* at 111.

<sup>24</sup> Sandberg readily admits that she has “remarkable resources” at hand to assist her in balancing the struggles of work and home, which include a husband who is a “real partner;” the financial ability to hire assistants for the office and home; a sister who is a pediatrician, lives close by, and is willing to take care of Sandberg's children when needed; and a good measure of control over her work schedule. *Id.* at 134.

<sup>25</sup> Carmine Gallo, *How Sheryl Sandberg's Last Minute Addition To Her TED Talk Sparked A Movement*, FORBES.COM, LLC (Feb. 28, 2014, 9:17 am), <http://www.forbes.com/search/?q=Sheryl+Sandberg+TED+Talk> (analyzing the number of personal stories told in the 500 most popular TED Talks, as well as the importance of using personal stories when influencing others).

parental challenges and choices even without sharing the luxury of a multi-million-dollar bank account.<sup>26</sup>

#### IV. Military Application? Yes and No

##### A. The Issues That Affect Us All

Servicemembers do not often have the ability to defer deployments, assignments, or promotions for personal matters, but sometimes we do. Think first of the dual military couple and the choices one spouse has to make when her partner has an opportunity to serve his dream job and one is left to fill a position that does not compete with or create a conflict of interest with the other's spouse's position. Consider those parents with children in the Exceptional Family Member Program who are limited in assignment locations. Do they take the "good" job in a location not suitable to their family's needs and bear the separation, or do they settle for the "okay" job that allows their family to remain under one roof? Consider the parent that may turn down a chance to deploy in fear of the effect an extended absence may have on his child.

These are honest, real, and reasonable factors active duty spouses and parents analyze during each assignment cycle. The root of these issues is not military specific, but are challenges working parents face in one way or another regardless of their employment. As we learn from *Lean In*, Sandberg would advise dual military spouses to challenge themselves with jobs that will independently prepare each individual for future success and promotion potential. Women should not settle for jobs that simply align with their spouses, but advocate for a job that betters them for future positions of authority. Sandberg encourages parents, especially working mothers, to not feel guilty for time spent away from the home, but to rely on their support systems to ensure their children's needs are met and define success as "making the best choices we can . . . and accepting them."<sup>27</sup>

##### B. Application to the Judge Advocate Female

All too often, officers are faced with difficult choices like Major Squared Away's. Like the entry-level employees mentioned in *Lean In*, junior captains are watching their senior leadership and paying close attention to who is selected for promotion and who is chosen for schools. When

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<sup>26</sup> Morningstar, Inc. determined through federal disclosure filings that Sandberg's total Facebook compensation in 2011 was \$30,957,954. \$466,833 was salary and cash bonus while the rest constitutes Sandberg's share of Facebook stock awards. FORBES.COM, *LLC, Sheryl Sandberg Profile*, <http://www.forbes.com/profile/sheryl-sandberg> (last visited July 8, 2014).

<sup>27</sup> SANDBERG, *supra* note 1, at 139.

making these difficult and personal decisions, we need to be cognizant of what Sandberg calls the "leadership ambition gap,"<sup>28</sup> and try to make decisions regarding professional growth without fear of failure or an overly practical approach.

The "leadership ambition gap" is Sandberg's proposition that professional men aspire to senior leadership positions more than professional women. Sandberg points to studies that have found that working women who were born between 1980 and 2000 are less likely than working men born during the same era to describe themselves as "leaders," "visionaries," "self-confident," and "willing to take risks." Sandberg believes this is partly because women of this era share the same equal opportunities their mothers did, but are the first to recognize that more opportunity does not always translate to professional achievement. "Many of these girls watched their mothers try to 'do it all' and then decide that something had to give. That something was usually their career."<sup>29</sup>

As today's working women once watched their professional mothers struggle to balance opportunities, so are subordinate employees (possibly enlisted Soldiers and junior officers) watching their leaders balance career progression with family obligations. Sandberg points out that fear serves as the root for many barriers to professional success and personal fulfillment, and that professional leaders should strive to create a culture that encourages people to take risks.<sup>30</sup> This begs the question: how does a professional, especially female leader, avoid contributing to the leadership ambition gap and balance the responsibility of making decisions that are best for their family, without sending risk-adverse messages to subordinates? Rather than answers, *Lean In* provides encouragement to leaders, particularly women, to find the individual approach that works for them while sending a message they want to convey to their subordinates.

##### C. A Fruitless Battle?

Women have less chance of promotion and retention in the military than their male counterparts, often through no fault of their own. The military has long imposed policy that restricts career progression, and thereby promotion potential, of female servicemembers.<sup>31</sup> After years of closed-off

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<sup>28</sup> *Id.* at 12–26.

<sup>29</sup> *Id.* at 15.

<sup>30</sup> *Id.* at 24.

<sup>31</sup> BETH J. ASCH, TREY MILLER & ALESSANDRO MALCHIODI, *A NEW LOOK AT GENDER AND MINORITY DIFFERENCES IN OFFICER CAREER PROGRESSION IN THE MILITARY* (2012). The RAND National Defense Research Institute concluded a study of promotion and retention rates among officers based on gender and ethnicity in 2012 for the Office of the Secretary of Defense. Building upon a previous study, this research

military occupational specialties, the military branches are just now analyzing when and how to expand the number of specialties open to women at the lowest reasonable level of command.<sup>32</sup> Although the Department of Defense is making progress on women's equality among our ranks, women will remain ineligible for service in infantry,<sup>33</sup> armor, or special operations military occupational specialties, which then makes it improbable for women to hold some of the most distinguished senior leadership positions (i.e. command positions) in several of the U.S. Army's division and corps elements.

Sandberg opines that women will not see true equality in the world until we reach a fifty/fifty ratio of male leaders to female leaders.<sup>34</sup> In February 2013, the Office of the Undersecretary of Defense, Personnel and Readiness,

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reexamined promotion and retention rates among men, women, whites, blacks, Asians, Hispanics, and other racial backgrounds through 2010. The overall finding was that "military accession of women, blacks, Asians, Hispanics, and persons of other racial backgrounds have increased over time," yet "the proportions of these groups in the senior officer corps remain relatively low." Relying on Proxy-PERSTEMPO data including information on "officer service, occupation, grade, months to current grade, source of commission, deployments, dates of entry and of commission, and demographic variables such as race, ethnicity, gender, marital status and education," the study found that "female officers are less likely to be promoted than white males." *Id.* at Summary xi; U.S. DEP'T OF ARMY, REG. 600-13, ARMY POLICY FOR THE ASSIGNMENT OF FEMALE SOLDIERS para. 1-12 (27 Mar. 1992). Under the Combat Exclusion Policy, "service members are eligible to be assigned to all positions for which they are qualified, except that women shall be excluded from assignment to units below the brigade level whose primary mission is to engage in direct combat on the ground." *Id.*

<sup>32</sup> Led by Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta, the Department of Defense overturned the Combat Exclusion Policy in January 2013. Secretary Panetta directed all branches of the military to compose plans to allow women to serve in previously closed positions. The goal is to have these plans through service review, through congressional notification procedures, and implemented before 1 January 2016. Office of the Asst. Sec. of Def., Pub. Affairs, *Defense Department Rescinds Direct Combat Exclusion Rule; Services to Expand Integration of Women into Previously Restricted Occupations and Units*, U.S. DEP'T OF DEF. (Jan. 23, 2013), <http://www.defense.gov/Releases/Release.aspx?ReleaseID=15784>; Michelle Tan, *Women in Combat: Army to Open 14,000 Jobs*, 6 *MOSs*, ARMY TIMES (May 2, 2012, 2:57 PM), <http://www.armytimes.com/article/20120502/NEWS/205020312/Women-combat-Army-open-14K-jobs-6-MOSs>. The U.S. Army announced its plan to open six military occupational specialties and 14,000 jobs to women. In the near future, female officers will be able to serve as Adjutant General (42B), Chaplain (56M), Chemical Officer (74A), Field Artillery Fire Support Officer or Effects Coordinator (13A), Logistics Officer (90A), Field Surgeon or Medical Platoon Leader (62B), Military Intelligence Officer (70B), Signal Officer (25A) or Physician Assistant (65D) at battalion level. The six military occupational specialties opening up to women include Multiple Launch Rocket System (MLRS) Coordinator (13M), MLRS Operations Fire Detection Specialist (13P), Field Artillery Fire Finder Radar Operator Specialist (13R), M1 Abrams Tank System Maintainer (91A), Bradley Fighting Vehicle System Maintainer (91M), and Artillery Mechanic (91P).

<sup>33</sup> OFFICE OF THE UNDER SEC. OF DEFENSE, PERS. AND READINESS, REPORT TO CONGRESS ON THE REVIEW OF LAWS, POLICIES AND REGULATIONS RESTRICTING THE SERVICE OF FEMALE MEMBERS IN THE U.S. ARMED FORCES 15 (2012).

<sup>34</sup> SANDBERG, *supra* note 1, at 7; see *supra* note 14 and accompanying text.

reported that women comprise approximately seven percent of active component general/flag officers and approximately eleven percent of the senior enlisted force.<sup>35</sup> That is far from the fifty/fifty ratio Sandberg finds a requisite premise to true workforce equality. In a volunteer military incapable of forcing an increase in volunteer female accessions, with built-in barriers to promotion and service in several military occupational specialties, Sandberg's proposal for women in senior leadership positions to help subordinate female employees circumvent the professional jungle gym will never work.<sup>36</sup>

## V. Conclusion

Sandberg offers pointed advice and an often ignored view into the guilt and internal struggle every mother experiences at one time or another, whether working inside or outside the home. It is an excellent read for women wanting to increase their chances of making it to the top of their careers, and for the men who want to support them. It is also an excellent source of encouragement for female Soldiers faced with difficult decisions that could inadvertently send a negative message to junior Soldiers. It does not, however, offer advice on how women can change a culture that makes certain promotions simply unobtainable. This is not a fault of the book or a fault of Sandberg. She has more than enough experience in the civilian sector to support her opinions on gender equality in the workforce, but lacks the military experience necessary to understand the challenges unique to military women. Military women face a brass ceiling,<sup>37</sup> while Sandberg's experience lies in successfully breaking through a glass ceiling.

*Lean In* encourages women to take care of themselves and their female colleagues. Although it does not speak to the single parent or the military woman desiring positions currently unavailable as a matter of policy, it gives working women everywhere comfort in knowing they are not the only people struggling to find a balance between professional obligations and family commitments.

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<sup>35</sup> *Id.* at 3.

<sup>36</sup> Despite the lack of senior female military leaders, military women of all ranks are helping their female colleagues circumvent the professional jungle gym within the Armed Forces through Women's Mentorship Networks, such as the program currently underway at Fort Hood. Amaani Lyle, *Women Mentorship Program Empowers Service Members*, AMERICAN FORCES PRESS SERVICES, Feb. 10, 2014, <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=121637>.

<sup>37</sup> Jeremiah Goulka, *Breaking the Military's Brass Ceiling*, AM. PROSPECT (Jan. 29, 2013), <http://prospect.org/article/breaking-military%E2%80%99s-brass-ceiling>. "... lots of women already serve in combat, get shot at, get wounded, and get killed. But like the military before Truman desegregated it, the system created a ceiling made of brass rather than glass. Denied the opportunity to command the types of units that are actually required for rising to the very top of the military hierarchy, top female personnel leave the military." *Id.*