

Foreword

ANNE-MARIE SLAUGHTER

Joan C. Williams and Rachel Dempsey, mother and daughter, have written a book that every working woman should read. It is also a book that every man who works with women should read. If women act on the prescriptions in these pages and men begin to understand the deep culturally embedded biases and assumptions that mean a book like this still needs to be written, the workplace will be a better place, the United States will be more competitive, and the intertwining of work and family life will be easier for all caregivers.

What Works for Women at Work is a project by The New Girls' Network, an all-star list of "Fortune 500 executives, entrepreneurs, bestselling writers, partners at major consulting firms, and rainmakers at some of the biggest law firms in the world" that Joan C. Williams, a law professor, put together. These women are not representative of the entire female American workforce, in either class or racial or ethnic terms, but they do include women of color, who face what Joan and Rachel call the "double jeopardy" of race and gender discrimination and have their own distinct tales to tell. Above all, these women are the face of female success.

Yet all these women, and frankly every woman I know who has ever worked in either a paid or volunteer capacity, recognize the

four patterns of behavior that create the primary obstacles to women's advancement to leadership positions across every industry:

1. Prove-It-Again!
2. The Tightrope
3. The Maternal Wall
4. Tug of War

I am part of the first generation of women who were actually advantaged, at least in some circumstances, by our gender, thanks to the sacrifices and drive of the women a generation ahead of me—women like Joan C. Williams. By the time we entered the labor force in the late 1980s and early 1990s, university faculties, law firms, businesses, and government agencies were actively looking for women. The women they hired had to meet the same hiring criteria that men did, but if they were above the bar, they often had a leg up on their male colleagues, at least at the outset. In my own case, all-male law faculties were starting to look for women when I went on the law-teaching market in 1990; 20 years later, Hillary Clinton wanted to break the glass ceiling at the Policy Planning office, which was a “big think” job that no woman had ever even been considered for.

But even if overt gender discrimination has decreased dramatically, and women in the middle class are starting to outearn and rise higher than their mates, these four patterns ring so true, not for entering the workforce but during the ascent to leadership positions. We have all seen women held to higher standards of performance while male colleagues are given the benefit of the doubt for slipups and promoted on potential, the core of the “Prove-It-Again!” pattern. We have all seen women who are criticized for being too assertive when they act like men and too passive if they act like (traditional) women, which Joan and Rachel call “The Tightrope.” Toward the end of my two years in government, when lots of jobs were turning over at the midpoint of the administration, I and other women I worked with tried to ensure that women

candidates were considered for promotion. Over and over again, I would hear, “She’s smart and has gotten a lot of things done, but she has sharp elbows.” “Sharp elbows” is code for “she insisted on pushing her point or her position and won the day,” behavior that in a man would be lauded.

Many of us live with the third pattern: “The Maternal Wall.” Every time someone says, “Women today can do everything that men can do,” the response should be, “Yes, absolutely, as long as they don’t have children.” Far too many women are still being asked to make significant trade-offs between their careers and their families, but when was the last time you or anyone else asked a man how he was going to manage his career once he had children?

The final pattern is the “Tug of War,” in which women judge each other in ways that hurt our collective march forward. No one ever talks about daddy wars or dogfights (actually, we do talk about dogfights, but not pejoratively). Most of us can recall a situation in which another woman seemed more determined to shut us out of a largely all-male group than to help us in.

So as Joan and Rachel write, out of the 127 professional women they interviewed, only five said that they had not encountered these patterns, or not recently. We know that the evidence that Joan and Rachel have assembled from scores of scientific studies is true and present in our lives. But another part of us really doesn’t *want* to focus on these patterns. We don’t *want* to see our world full of male bias against us. We know, like, and respect most of the men we work with. We know that they don’t actually *see* these patterns.

Indeed, the studies Joan and Rachel draw on show why so many men are blind: we are living and working in a world shaped by deeply, deeply embedded assumptions about gender roles. These assumptions are laid down from infancy onward and create a set of filters in our brains that condition our interpretation of virtually all human interaction. Only with cleverly designed experiments in the relatively new field of experimental social psychology are we able to tease them out.

The good news is that men can learn. Once in a meeting in Washington, D.C., I made a point that was generally ignored until a well-respected younger man made the same point, at which point everyone jumped on it. Joan and Rachel call this the “stolen idea” phenomenon; I have always heard it called the “butterfly syndrome,” in which a woman makes a remark that stays on the table like a caterpillar until a man says the same thing and it becomes a butterfly. At any rate, I pulled aside the younger man who had picked up my thought after the meeting and told him that because he was already working for Hillary Clinton and over the course of his career he was going to work with many other women, it was important for him to understand what had just happened. I described the exchange in the meeting as I and the other women at the table had experienced it. He took it in, thought about it, and nodded. I phrased my advice in terms of something that would help him work more effectively with women over the course of his career, and he took it and learned from it in that spirit.

That is why every man who works with women, supports women, or parents girls should read this book. Men who get it can be enormously helpful by making other men aware of their biases and of course by promoting deserving women. I would never have succeeded in my career without strong male mentors dedicated to supporting strong women. More and more men are also now seeing the workplace through their wives’ eyes as their wives encounter the four behavior patterns in this book.

Men should read this book to understand; women should read this book to act. Because the best thing about *What Works for Women at Work* is that it crystallizes these four patterns of behavior in order to advise all working women *what to do about them*. It is a practical “how-to” manual for women trying to figure out what concretely to do when they realize that something is wrong in their careers, that they are not advancing as fast as the men around them or have been turned down for a promotion they wanted, and either don’t understand what is wrong or don’t know what to do about it. Chapter after chapter offers specific, actionable suggestions drawn

from women who have been there and succeeded. It's a book by and for Rachel as much as Joan.

The continual theme through all the valuable advice offered in this book is balance: balance between masculine and feminine, principle and pragmatism, niceness and authority, self-promotion and selflessness, and work and family. Balance should also be the watchword for all of us in reading this book. We know that its descriptions of bias against women, even in 2012, are true. But we will not succeed if we approach our lives angry and embittered. So we must balance awareness and activism with getting it done as professionally as we know how. This book will help us get there.

Preface

Joan's Story

This book started when I began reading a field of research that changed my life. That field, called experimental social psychology, led me to leave my job of 25 years and move my family 3,000 miles across the country. Only then did my career really take off and did I get rid of a heavy load of anger that was warping my personal as well as my professional life.

For years, I had been respected at work—but, to be honest, disliked. Now, I am the first to admit that I'm no Bill Clinton. Sometimes I speak up when I should keep quiet, and sometimes I keep quiet when I should speak up. If I believe in something, you'll hear about it, and if I think something is unfair, I'll say so. Not a shrinking violet. But I saw men around me who were less politically adept than I was—and they did just fine. I was a selfish prima donna. They were smart and quirky.

As I immersed myself in social psychology, I found this dynamic described with eerie precision. Reading the studies was such a “scales-from-eyes” experience that I saw my whole life in a different light—one that inspired me to start an organization called The Center for WorkLife Law, which I still direct today, and gave me the courage to move my family from Washington, D.C., where I