
LEAN IN
DISCUSSION
GUIDE

FOR ALL AUDIENCES

INTRODUCTION

- **We are grateful for what we have.** What did past generations have to deal with that we don't have to deal with? What are you most grateful for?
- **Men still run the world.** Do you think it matters that men hold the majority of leadership positions? What kinds of external and internal barriers make it difficult for women to reach the top?
- **More women in power.** Leymah Gbowee believes that more women in power would help all women everywhere. Do you agree with this? What would be different, if anything, if there were more women in leadership positions?

CHAPTER 1: THE LEADERSHIP AMBITION GAP

- **Gender and aspirations for leadership.** What gender differences exist regarding aspirations to top positions? Why do you think more men than women say they want to get to the top? Have you seen these gender differences in your own life?
- **Gendered beliefs and expectations.** How are boys and girls treated differently at school and at home? What messages do these different ways of treating boys and girls send about how they should act and how they should think about themselves? What role do gendered beliefs and expectations play in the kinds of aspirations boys and girls are encouraged or discouraged from having? Can you think of a time when gender norms (for example, that boys don't become nurses or girls don't study physics) really influenced a decision you made about your life?
- **Gender and leadership.** In what ways are women and girls dissuaded from pursuing their goals and becoming leaders? In what ways are men and boys encouraged to pursue their goals and become leaders? Have you ever been described by others as "being ambitious"? Was this said as a positive or negative comment? Have you ever been referred to as "bossy"? How did it make you feel?
- **Early exposure to gender roles.** What roles did your parent(s) play in your childhood home? If you grew up in a house with two parents, was one more responsible for breadwinning while the other was more responsible for taking care of the kids and the house? Looking back, how do you think the way your parents divided things up shaped your thoughts about gender? If you are from a single-parent family, how did your mother/father meet both financial and caretaking responsibilities? Did having a single parent both provide and care for your family shape your thoughts about gender? Do you think the roles your parent(s) played influenced what you think is appropriate or normal for men and women to do?
- **Silencing voices and opinions.** Have you ever felt as if you were ignored or silenced? Do you think that treatment was based on your gender? Why or why not?
- **Cultural depictions of careerwomen.** Can you think of any movies or TV shows that feature happy, successful men who have both careers and families? What about women?
- **Fear is at the root of so many barriers that women face.** What is your greatest fear? What would you do if you weren't afraid?

CHAPTER 2: SIT AT THE TABLE

- **Sitting at the table.** Where do you usually sit in a classroom or conference room—in the middle of the action? On the sidelines? Are you nervous about drawing attention to yourself?
- **Impostor syndrome.** Have you ever felt like a fraud at school or at work? What makes you feel less insecure and more confident?
- **Attributing success.** When men succeed, how do they account for their success? How do women account for their success? Why does it matter what people attribute their success to? When you succeed, to what do you attribute your accomplishments?
- **The cost of insecurity.** Have you passed on opportunities because you felt unsure or insecure? Have you seen others pass on opportunities they should have seized?
- **Taking risks.** When have you challenged yourself? Did you succeed or fail? Did it make you more likely to challenge yourself in the future?

CHAPTER 3: SUCCESS AND LIKEABILITY

- **Like him, dislike her.** What is the success vs. likeability trade-off women face? Were you surprised to read the different reactions the students had to Heidi and Howard? Does this finding resonate for you on a personal level? Do you believe that women are judged more harshly than men?
- **Pleasing others.** How important is it for you to be liked by your peers? How likeable are the women you know who are in positions of power?
- **Self-promotion.** Have you ever hidden an accomplishment because you worried about being criticized for self-promotion? Have you ever taken credit that was deserved and suffered for it?
- **Gender discount problem.** Do you get asked to do more favors than colleagues of the opposite gender? Do you feel those additional efforts are compensated and/or appreciated?
- **Successful negotiations.** What unique obstacles do women face in negotiations? Have you ever had a disappointing negotiation? A successful one? Why do you think one worked and one didn't? Is there anything you will change in your next negotiation?

CHAPTER 4: IT'S A JUNGLE GYM, NOT A LADDER

- **Moving on up.** Do you see your career as a ladder or a jungle gym? How many jobs have you had in your life? How many do you anticipate having?
- **Your dream.** What is your long-term dream?
- **Your eighteen-month plan.** Do you have an eighteen-month plan? What skills are you trying to acquire? What personal goals have you set?
- **Your definition of success.** How do you define success? What are your goals and what are you doing to achieve them?
- **Everyone can improve.** What personal traits do you display that you would most like to correct? (For example, do you speak too much or too little?)
- **Risk taking.** Are you open to taking risks and accepting challenges on the job or at school, or do you play it safe? What stretch assignments have you taken? Have you ever applied for a job when you didn't meet all of the requirements or that did not exactly match your skill set?

CHAPTER 5: ARE YOU MY MENTOR?

- **Mentors and sponsors.** What is a mentor? What is a sponsor? What do you imagine a great mentor or sponsor would do for you?
- **Finding a mentor.** If you have a mentor, how did that relationship come about? What was most helpful about having a mentor?
- **Men mentoring women.** How can we encourage more men to mentor and sponsor women?
- **Appearances.** Have you ever been worried about how it might look if you spent time alone with a colleague of the opposite sex? How did you handle this?
- **Peers as mentors.** Have your peers helped you in difficult situations? Do you have any peers whom you consider mentors?

CHAPTER 6: SEEK AND SPEAK YOUR TRUTH

- **Authentic communication.** Do you feel safe being honest with your peers? Your teachers or supervisors? Can you think of a time when people weren't honest with each other and it hurt a project?
- **Getting feedback.** Do you actively solicit feedback? Has feedback made you a better employee or student? Do you remember what that feedback was?
- **Giving feedback.** Do you offer feedback to others? Have you ever had feedback about a colleague's performance that would have helped him or her but you did not share it? If yes, do you regret not sharing it?
- **Using humor.** Have you ever used humor to get your point across? Did it work?
- **Getting emotional.** Have you ever cried at work or in school? Have you seen others cry in a similar situation? How was it regarded? Do you feel that attitudes toward showing strong emotions outside the home are changing?
- **Professional persona.** How much do you separate your personal life from your career or classroom life? Why?

CHAPTER 7: DON'T LEAVE BEFORE YOU LEAVE

- **Leaning back.** Have you pulled back from seeking challenges in anticipation of having to carve out—or someday having to carve out—time for a family life? When you were in school, did thoughts about having to balance work and family in the future influence how long you stayed in school, the course of study you chose, or the type of job and career you envisioned for yourself?
- **Your chosen field.** What would be the impact of having children on your career? For those with children, has there been an impact on your career? Why or why not? Do you think your chosen field is supportive of employees with children?
- **Making plans.** Has anyone in your office asked you about your plans to have children or asked other employees about their plans to have children? If no, do you wish someone had raised the subject? Why or why not?
- **Pregnancy.** If you have children, did your pregnancy affect your work? If so, how? Did being pregnant affect how others treated or interacted with you at work or school?
- **Primary child care.** Do you think mothers are better suited to raising children than fathers? Do you think that's the result of socialization or a biological imperative?
- **The career marathon.** Do you think society cheers one gender on more than the other? Have you encouraged someone to stay in school or the workforce when he or she was thinking about leaving? Have you encouraged someone to leave school or the workforce to stay home with his or her children?
- **Men as primary caretakers.** Do you know any men who have scaled back their work responsibilities to take on more responsibility at home? Do you know any men who left jobs and careers to become the stay-at-home parent? What challenges did they face?

CHAPTER 8: MAKE YOUR PARTNER A REAL PARTNER

- **Division of household responsibilities.** Do you expect your partner to split household tasks fifty-fifty? What about child care? Why or why not?
- **Maternal gatekeeping.** Have you seen women practice “maternal gatekeeping”? If you have children, do you or your partner act as a “gatekeeper”?
- **Choosing a partner.** What are the qualities you think women should look for in a partner? Is supporting a spouse’s career high on your list?
- **Ambitions.** Which is more important to the men in your life: (1) finding work that challenges and rewards them or (2) having a schedule that allows them to spend time with their family? Which is more important to the women in your life: (1) finding work that challenges and rewards them or (2) having a schedule that allows them to spend time with their family?
- **The next generation.** Would you be happy if you had a son who became a stay-at-home dad? A daughter who wanted to have a high-level job?

CHAPTER 9: THE MYTH OF DOING IT ALL

- **Perfectionism.** Do you agree that “done is better than perfect”? If you had an extra hour in the day all to yourself, what would you do with it?
- **Setting boundaries.** What boundaries have you set for yourself? How much control do you feel you have over your schedule?
- **Parental leave.** Does the organization you work for provide maternity leave? What about paternity leave? If you or your partner made use of a leave policy, did you have any concerns about how this would be viewed by colleagues or employers? If you have children, did you feel as if colleagues questioned your commitment to your job once you started a family?
- **Effect on children.** Do you think there is a strong belief in our society that mothers are the best caretakers of their children? Why do you think this is? Does knowing that studies have shown that “exclusive maternal care was not related to better or worse outcomes for children” affect the way you think about child care? About you or your partner’s career?
- **Rewards.** What’s your favorite time of the day? How do you reward yourself?

CHAPTER 10: LET'S START TALKING ABOUT IT

- **Feminism.** Do you consider yourself a feminist? Why or why not? If yes, have you always done so, or is it a more recent development?
- **Fitting in.** Have you ever tried to fit into a masculine or feminine stereotype? Did it work?
- **Awareness.** Do you notice how many men or women are in a meeting or class? Do you notice when someone remains silent or is interrupted when he or she tries to speak? Have you ever observed a woman making a suggestion that was ignored until it was repeated by a man? Did you say anything to the group or the person who repeated the idea?
- **Biases.** Do you think you are biased? (Trick question—everyone is.) What is your bias blind spot? What biases have you witnessed in the boardroom or the classroom? Have you ever raised concerns or pointed out instances of gender bias? If so, what was the reaction?
- **Getting what you need.** Have you ever asked for an accommodation for your schedule and received it? If you didn't ask, why not? If you didn't receive it, why not?

CHAPTER 11: WORKING TOGETHER TOWARD EQUALITY

- **Real choice.** Do you believe men and women have equal opportunities to contribute in their homes, classrooms and workplaces?
- **Judging others.** Do you feel that women judge one another for making different decisions? Do you feel that men judge one another for making different decisions? Do you judge?
- **Queen bees.** In your experience, have women been supportive of other women, or have they actively held them back? Do you think women fitting the queen bee stereotype are less prevalent than before?
- **Be a coalition.** Do you feel as if you could have done more to support women in your workplace or at school? Do you regret any moments when you could have helped more but did not?
- **Supporting one another.** What can men do to help create more equal workplaces and families? What can women do to help create more equal workplaces and families?
- **Inspiration.** Who in your life inspires you to care about and fight for gender equality?