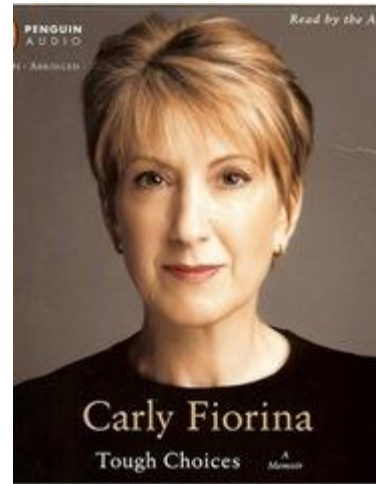


A Summary of
Women and the Labyrinth of Leadership
Authors: Alice Eagly and Linda Carli
(An HBR, September 2007 Article)

Most of what is in the brief summary are the ideas of Eagly and Carli, using their language, sometimes verbatim and other times with a little bit of a re-write on my part. At a few places I provide some brief thoughts of my own. The article is very good. The second half of the article provides a dozen or so suggestions for how to make the workplace leadership track more accessible for women.

First the Facts:

- Of Fortune 500 companies, in the roles of Chairman of the Board, President, CEO and COO, only 6% of those positions are held by women.
- Of Fortune 500 companies, in the role of CEO, only 2% of the positions are held by women.
- In the European Union's 50 largest publicly traded companies, in the roles of Chairman of the Board and CEO, only 4% of the positions are held by women.
- Of the Global 500 companies, in the role of CEO, only 1% of the positions are held by women.



Now, the reasons for this situation.



ONE: The idea of a glass ceiling has been used to describe the fact that in organizations, women can rise to a certain point, but then it seems as if an invisible barrier prevents them from going any further. The authors prefer the metaphor of a labyrinth that is complex and challenging with walls that are holding women back. The items that follow can be viewed as “wall” that limit the leadership development of women.

TWO: There is a wide resistance to women in leadership. This is, in part, due to the fact that most people [see men and women as having different traits](#) and that men have the traits needed for leadership whereas women do not.

Women are seen as having the qualities of: concern for the compassionate treatment of others, being affectionate, helpful, friendly, kind, sympathetic, interpersonally sensitive, gentle and soft-spoken. Men are seen as being: aggressive, ambitious, dominant, self-confident, forceful, self-reliant and individualistic. It is the latter qualities that are seen as the traits needed for leadership!



And when women act in ways that are just described for men, the women are severely criticized. In essence, if they act like women they are



viewed as incapable of leadership and if they act like men they are criticized for being like men (and often a pejorative term is used to describe such a woman.)

[Leaving her political view and policies completely out of this for the purpose of this article, this very issue, of course, has been the “devil and the deep blue sea” dilemma for Hillary Clinton in her run for the democratic nomination for president. If she acts like a woman she is described as being weak and if she acts like a man she is described as a b****!].

THREE: The previous point now moves into another closely related one. Not only are women and men considered to have different traits, but there is the issue of “*leadership style*” as well. Is there a distinct leadership style for women. There seems to be a popular consensus that there is.

In a kind of amusing twist, Coach Mike Krzyzewski, head coach of the Duke University basketball program is described as coaching the way a woman would coach and that is the secret of his success! His leadership, coaching style is described as mentoring and interpersonally sensitive (like a woman)!



In the language of Burn’s magisterial work on leadership, women are seen as somewhat more transformational in their leadership style and men are seen as somewhat more transactional in their leadership style.

What is striking about this is that in Burn’s work – the transformational style is a much healthier, more productive style of leadership (and that is the style women have!).



FOUR: *The demands of family* life are a wall that limit women. (By the way, I love the picture to the left. A business woman in dress shoes, with her toddler and a tattoo!) In light of the needs of the family, it is women who interrupt their careers

and take more time off to attend to the family. One result of this is fewer hours/years of experience. In addition, the majority of domestic work still falls on the shoulders of women, whether it is housework or taking care of kids.



FIVE: Women have less time for the *professional socializing and networking* that seem essential for upward leadership mobility.

[In a previous post, I blogged about an interesting dynamic that upwardly career minded leaders were actually much less effective and beneficial when it came to leading high performance teams. Some of the research shows there are different traits and qualities evident in those leaders who are predominantly concerned about their personal career advancement and those who are concerned about team/company performance. AND IRONICALLY, the leaders who get promoted are those who pay attention to their career advancement.]

The studies show that “social capital” is vital for advancement into leadership roles and may be even more so than skillful performance! Women find it harder to make the time for such networking activities.



The conclusion to all of this: Despite the old jingle that tried to be encouraging for women, “*You’ve come a long way baby...*” (which is itself derogatory in its language) the glass ceiling is still very low, the walls are still very high, the way is still very hard and the numbers of woman who actually succeed in highest level leadership positions still very small.

We have a lot of work ahead of us . . .

Brian Rice