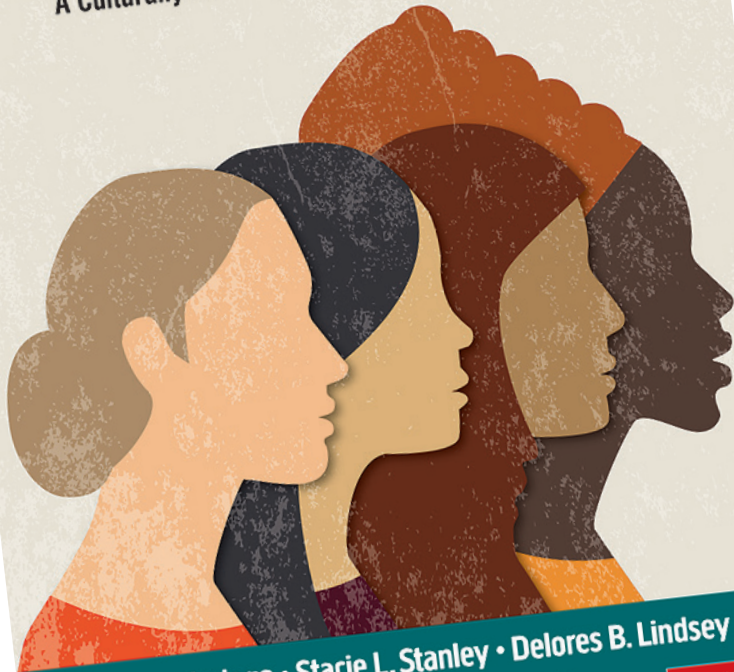


LEADING While *Female*

A Culturally Proficient Response for Gender Equity



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Please enjoy this complimentary excerpt from *Leading While Female*. In Chapter six, the authors recommend men's actions as allies, advocates, and mentors.

CHAPTER 6

Recommending Men's Actions as Allies, Advocates, and Mentors

Being a feminist means believing that every woman should be able to use her voice and pursue her potential, and that women and men should all work together to take down barriers and end the biases that still hold women back.

—Melinda Gates (2019, p. 7)



LOOKING in the MIRROR

Does Melinda Gates's definition of *feminism* align with your values and belief system as an educational leader? On a continuum from creating barriers, intentionally or unintentionally, to being an ally, advocate, and mentor, where are you? As an educational leader, female or male, where do you see yourself mentoring women as educational leaders? What are some actions, beyond traditional introductions and networking, you have taken to interrupt gender inequities in educational leadership? What might be some specific actions you can take to support and strengthen men on their journeys toward mentoring, promoting, and supporting women leaders? In what ways will you measure your success as an advocate for women educational leaders?

MEN AS INTERRUPTERS, ALLIES, ADVOCATES, AND MENTORS

This book is written by women and about women, but it is not written solely *for* women. Gender bias cannot be interrupted by women alone. We seek the partnership of our male colleagues as allies, mentors, and bias interrupters. President Barack Obama's final press conference in 2014 interrupted the status quo as he selected inquiries from female journalists for the eight final media questions of his year-end press conference. Although some may dispute this intentional move as exclusive to the majority culture, others will applaud this act as a public and visible bias interrupter by a national leader from the highest office in the United States. Male leaders at every level have the opportunity and the responsibility to counter and disrupt biases. The advancement of gender equality requires awareness, advocacy, and actions as we confront the realities of gender inequities.

As part of the research for this book, we identified seven male educational leaders who we observed to challenge stereotypes, confront bias, and leverage their own expertise and privilege to benefit women as leaders. Unfortunately, we found we could not develop a list of dozens. As a matter of fact, we struggled to identify those male leaders that we and other successful female educational leaders have observed as intentional in their promotion and advocacy of women leaders. We have worked with and for many *great guys*, but we were seeking those that we identified as intentional promoters of women. We listened to these men's stories and their intentionality to disrupt predictability within their educational institutions as we sought to discover commonalities in their leadership approaches.

The following excerpts are the essence of each story we heard.

Eduardo: Latino, Gay Male

Multiple perspectives come naturally to Eduardo. He was raised by strong Latinas. He understands that his perspective as the leader must be minimized in order to allow other perspectives to be heard and acknowledged. He was not nor is he intimidated by strong females and recognizes that more women at the table increases the likelihood of thoughtful, inclusive perspectives and decisions.

Matteo: Italian, Straight Male

Matteo is intentional in his leadership to ensure that his executive cabinet has a balanced voice. He expanded his circle to include women through mentoring and hiring practices. He has a history of being at the table with White men and challenges himself to find women, to include women of color. He recognizes the barrier of men thinking like men and thus visualizing men in leadership positions. His intention is to alter that vision and create procedures for men to visualize women and the impact that the presence of women on the leadership team makes in an organization.

Ray: African American, Straight Male

Ray strategically mentors women to become leaders. He taps women for leadership roles and recognizes they are not part of the clique or pathway to leadership. He is very aware of the barriers that women of color encounter and seeks to reduce the barriers in his organization. He specifically notes the unique barriers of Black women and the perceptions of them as aggressive and how they're often referred to as "angry Black women." Ray recognizes that many women of color face the additional burden of having to prove themselves by being overly prepared and overly worked without sweating, crying, or complaining. He works to overcome systems barriers such as *men will win at all costs* and *loyalty is the number-one value of the district!* He is very conscious of the additional roles that women play in their homes and responds using a gender equity lens. He encourages women not to be okay with being the *only one* and to mentor others for leadership roles. Ray advises women of sexual harassment situations to call it out, name it, and *do not go quietly!*

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Joe: African American, Straight Male

Joe identifies his strong relationship with his mother and her leadership in the home as a reason for his attention to the values of women in leadership. He models that relationship with his wife. He is accustomed to strong women in leadership roles in his homelife and workplace. As a Black male, he relates to the barriers that women confront based on stereotypes and the arrogance of the dominant culture. He has observed others prejudice and pass over women as if they are invisible. This is an experience that he recognizes as a Black man. He has observed males step to the front of the room with confidence, while women have to develop strategies and finesse, even though their competence levels are as high or higher than males. He strategically advocates in the hiring process for the woman candidate in a male-dominated position based on qualification and style. He has found women leaders to be nonjudgmental, patient, steady, and collaborative.

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Bob: White, Straight Male

Bob intentionally mentors women as leaders. He works to convince them of their capabilities. He assures a workplace that does not necessitate a choice between family and work. He honors the importance of career and home and strategically models this through values and actions. He holds reasonable expectations of all employees and recognizes that woman leaders may

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have different realities than their male colleagues. Bob works to ensure that his decisions, from the mundane to policy, are thoughtful and balanced. His values for gender equity stem from a male mentor, early in Bob’s career, who advocated for balanced perspectives and the necessity to seek diverse leaders. Bob said, *I recognized the concept of “his turn” and realized I had never heard “her turn.”* He made it his responsibility to eliminate that disparity on his watch.

Randall: White, Straight Male

Randall believes that nothing can get in the way when leaders are focused on a clear vision and goals. He encourages women to lead, even if they think they are not ready or capable. He supports women in cohorts, women networks, collaborative organizations, and formal and informal relationships to serve as mentors and coaches to other women leaders inside and outside the organization. Randall states, *Gender inequity is no longer an option.* As a White male, he uses his privilege to assist boards and other policy makers to examine equitable hiring practices and compensation. Randall says, *White males must mentor up the system so other males know and understand the*

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Jason: White, Gay Male

Jason is intentional about his promotion and sponsorship of women in leadership. He has observed women standing in line and waiting their turn, in contrast to men pushing themselves forward into leadership roles. As a leader, he is constantly on the lookout for *who is in the room* and encourages women to prepare, apply, take a risk, and recognize their competence. Jason recognizes that traditional roles of the female educator are not generally pathways to executive leadership roles. Jason’s goal is to alter those pathways toward math, science, technology, and secondary-level leadership roles that lead to executive leadership positions. Jason conducts leadership training academies and invites women who may not see themselves as leaders—yet have demonstrated their leadership capabilities—to join the group.

Reflection

As a male reading the summary comments from the men we interviewed, where are you on the continuum of support? As a female leader, what are your reactions and insights as you read the summaries?

RECOMMENDING ACTIONS FOR ALL MALES

From the focused interviews and conversations with allies, mentors, and advocates, we found commonalities and themes in the comments and responses. We offer the following targeted actions that surfaced from our interviews for all males:

- **Mentor women with intention and purpose.** Women are less likely than men to receive targeted mentoring that promotes advancement in their careers and opens professional doors for them. Valuable relationships are instrumental to the success of women in leadership. Women who seek positions of influence need experienced mentors from the top of the organization, particularly in positions where women are in the minority. We encourage men to seek out women within the organization to mentor. We provide caution of the traditional hierarchical mentor relationship, which can create a “heroic rescuer” to the female protégée (Johnson & Smith, 2018). Belle Rose Ragins and Kathy Kram’s research (2007) substantiates that mentorships with the greatest impact are mutual in nature. Both mentor and mentee benefit from the relationship. We all have a responsibility to lead and learn. Although mentors generally have more experience, female mentees bring insights to the table that can be mutually beneficial to the relationship and ultimately to the promotion of gender equity and inclusion within the organization. Mentoring benefits the recipient as well as the mentor. Hearing a female’s workplace experience is a powerful way to truly understand the reality and relevancy of gender bias. High-impact mentorships between men and women have distinctive characteristics to include mutual listening and affirmation, humility, shared power, and an extended range of outcomes (Johnson & Smith, 2018.) The extended range of mentoring outcomes is strengthened from solely navigating professional advancements to conversations that cover issues such as the imposter syndrome, gender identity, work–family challenges, and resiliency. When women say they are *not ready, not prepared, or not qualified*, allow them to see themselves through a different lens as perhaps lacking confidence but not competence.
- **Value the multiple perspectives, talents, capabilities, and voices of women.** Gender-diverse teams make for richer and more impactful leadership teams. A socially responsible organization with a diversity of perspectives and opinions is a healthy one for every individual. As you grow your talent pipeline and pathways for women, the organization thrives. The voice of the female leader will offer a diverse perspective and will also foster innovation, greater profitability, and creativity. Therefore, male team members must recognize and ensure that the voice of the woman

is uninterrupted, maximized, and validated for her contribution. Set the goal of listening to women and the nuances of gender diversity and resist the urge to interrupt with solutions or opinions. When different points of view are brought together, narrow perspectives are less likely to prevail. Women will become more motivated when male leaders are explicit about their disapproval of gender biases that result in leadership imbalance. The voices of women will broaden the understanding of the challenges, experiences, and unique contributions of the woman in leadership.

- **Recognize and seek to eliminate biases in the workplace.** Gender bias can be described as an unintentional mental association stemming from tradition, perceptions, norms, values, culture, and/or experience. When we hear the titles Superintendent, Chief Business Official, Chief Executive Officer, President, or Chief Technology Officer, the image that surfaces is often of a male. Although diversity training within any organization is a useful tool, it is only the beginning. Good intentions, vague goals, or an absence of clear outcomes will not lead to gender parity. A commitment to clearly stated outcomes as meaningful metrics of success, aligned with the training, will establish the desired results of gender diversity. Superintendent and cabinet-level leaders take opportunities to demonstrate actions that reflect the given values of the organization. Difficult and courageous conversations led by the leader are essential in the building of the pipeline toward gender equity. The male leader must demonstrate and model fair treatment, as well as hold others accountable. Male leaders are required to speak up even when the female is not in the room. Whether it is in the boardroom or the locker room, the expectations are the same. The leader who publicly denounces sexism and consistently models equity with every action is one who ensures a confident and comfortable workplace for all employees. When a woman is called bossy, bitchy, aggressive, shrill, or overly ambitious, mindful leaders request and expect specific examples that lend themselves to these descriptors. Male allies are prepared to challenge the assumptions and discuss the contrasting characteristics of a male in a similar scenario. The feeling of belonging is one privilege that the male educational leader often enjoys as an unearned advantage. Organizational leaders must seek ways to ensure that the female employee also enjoys a sense of belonging and connectedness, thereby reducing and eliminating unearned advantages.
- **Advocate for women in securing and sustaining leadership positions.** Although women comprise half the workforce in the United States, they are vastly underrepresented in positions of executive leadership. Unconscious and institutional blind spots

can be attributed to the stubborn persistence of gender inequities in the hiring practices. The Tools of Cultural Proficiency are the foundational components to be used in all aspects of the organization and most certainly in the human resources departments as they determine who gets through the door. The Cultural Proficiency Framework provides the following guidelines:

- Review and revise the screening, interviewing, and hiring practices of the organization, eliminating barriers for female candidates. Identify any deterrents to females “getting in” because of gender.
 - Examine all documents and procedures with a culturally proficient lens, with an emphasis on succession, planning, and promotion.
 - Revisit career pathways available to women. The traditional female pathway of elementary teacher, curriculum specialist, or elementary principal is generally not the road to the superintendency. How can you create pathways that encourage women to fill the roles that are pipelines to executive leadership positions that have been historically filled by male leaders?
 - Provide leadership training, mock interviews, and counseling for candidates.
 - Conduct an in-depth compensation study to determine if there are financial discrepancies as a result of gender discrimination. Are men and women compensated equitably? Women are less likely than men to negotiate for salaries and benefits. Women incur extreme financial losses due to their avoidance of negotiations. In *What Works: Gender Equality by Design* (2018), Iris Bohnet finds that when women act more like men and “lean in,” they get pushed back. Bohnet recommends that organizations train managers to counteract their biases and that women be encouraged to bring someone to assist and support them with negotiations.
- **Include male participation in family-friendly policies.** This will eliminate perceptions that these policies are to accommodate women only, thereby continuing to perpetuate the myth that the home is solely women’s work.
 - **Recognize and value the unique challenges of the woman in her homelife.** Sally Blount, Dean of the Kellogg School of Business at Northwestern College (2017), labels the struggle between home and work for the female leader as the *mid-career marathon*. Women are torn between work and the stressors of homelife. They are often forced by the organization to make

choices that disqualify them from positions of leadership. Motherhood creates false assumptions that women are suddenly less competent or less dedicated to their workplace. Male leaders can be of tremendous assistance by modeling realistic expectations and demonstrating their understanding of the traditional female role in the home. Men can clearly demonstrate their understanding that, in most cases, the workplace is not a level playing field. On average, women in the US still do twice the housework and twice as much child care as men. The sleep of women is two-and-a-half times more likely to be interrupted as they care for others. Avoid telling mothers, *I don't know how you do it all*, which—although well intended—may be a signal that they should not be at work. Males sharing their own stories and the time they devote to family as working fathers provides mothers with permission to devote time to their family without guilt (Blount, 2017).

- **Examine board policy for issues of gender inequity.** Address unique challenges of women as leaders in board policy and procedures to include job shares, maternity leave, parental leaves, breastfeeding mothers, schedule adjustments, flexible hours, and gradual return programs to address attrition and advancement as women balance family and career. When board policy does not include or eliminates the unique accommodations designed for women, it becomes a barrier to success for all employees.
- **Establish and encourage women's networks and collaboratives.** Men have historically been admitted into executive training programs in higher numbers than women. Networks are critical to the acceleration of a woman's career. Equity leaders, allies, advocates, and mentors can support the woman in educational leadership using the following intentional networking strategies:
 - Encourage women to attend, join, and connect with other women in formal and informal ways.
 - Form a male advocacy group and provide platforms for men to demonstrate their commitment to gender equity. A male ally group can further clarify roles in incorporating gender-supportive behaviors on the job. Provide opportunities for women to benefit from male and female networks. As women work to expand networking opportunities, they must visualize beyond the golf course to forums that are inclusive and welcoming.
 - Realize and recognize that men's uses of various platforms (e.g., attendance of women's conferences, coauthoring with female leaders in leadership journals, walking in women's movement rallies) to demonstrate their commitment to gender

equity are symbolic, intentional, public, and critical to women leaders. This transparent display of intentional inclusion strengthens the commitment of the organization to gender equity.

The dialogue on gender equity involves everyone. This is not women speaking to women about women. When a workplace is gender biased, all employees suffer. We invite and encourage you to be part of the conversation. We appreciate and acknowledge the allies, advocates, and mentors who are engaging in gender equity efforts and are relentlessly advocating for an intentional voice at the table for every educational leader.



Looking Through the Window

As you look through the window of your organization, in what ways have male leaders in your district intentionally interrupted gender inequities? What are the actions that have been taken to reveal gender blindness and biases within the organization? What are some actions taken to support gender equity by the male allies, mentors, and advocates?
