



***Her Place at the Table* Discussion Group Guide**

Women have been called America's secret weapon in the global economy. If that's true, disbelievers ask, why have the numbers of women in leadership roles remained stubbornly low. Some observers see downside in the "female advantage" and blame the women—they don't want power, avoid competition, and chose family over careers. Others point to organizational cultures that continue exclusionary practices and punctuate their argument by citing lawsuits against companies like Morgan Stanley, Wal-Mart, and Boeing.

1. How can women resolve these conflicting messages?
2. What do they mean for their careers?
3. How do you weigh in on the debate?

To research ***Her Place at the Table***, the authors interviewed over a hundred women leaders.

The women had good news and bad news.

The bad news: It was still an uphill battle "proving" themselves when they took on leadership assignments. The testing they experienced was intense. They found their credibility and their abilities questioned. Did she get the job just because she's a woman? Is she seasoned enough to take the lead? Is she tough enough to make the tough decisions?

The good news: They had the skills and the mental agility to pass the tests with flying colors. How does your experience stack up against these findings?

Discussion Questions for *Her Place at the Table*:

1. Did you feel you were being tested the last time you took on a new position or agreed to take the lead in an initiative? Were you surprised by the testing? If so, how? Or was it pretty standard for everyone at your organization?
2. Did most people around you—bosses and colleagues—assume that you would succeed? How did you feel about their responses? What was the impact, if any, on the actions you took? On your overall performance?
3. The traps the book describes can be categorized according to the following major "themes":
 - Assuming that you don't have a choice or any room to negotiate—you either accept an opportunity to take a leadership role or you turn it down

- Believing that it would be a sign of weakness to ask for help or call on allies
- Trusting in your technical expertise to deal with the problems at hand; failing to recognize the political dimensions of the problem.
- Thinking that people will give you the benefit of the doubt and the resistance will disappear with time
- Taking for granted that the value you and your team contribute will be recognized and rewarded.

Have you fallen into any of these traps? Any others you can think of? What happened? What did you learn from the experience? What did you learn from ***Her Place at the Table***?

4. What is your favorite story from the book? Why?
5. Which woman would you say is your “heroine”? Why?
6. Consider each of the challenges the authors describe. (*You may want to use Appendix A as an easy reference to the five challenges and the strategic responses*)
Which of the moves do you wish you’d known about before now? In what situation would using it have helped you?
7. Which story did you most identify with? What did you learn from it?