



What Organizations Can Learn From How Women Leaders Negotiate the Five Challenges*

This book captures how women leaders negotiate five challenges critical to their success. It is written for individuals. But as we interviewed women leaders and captured their insights, we realized that organizations, too, can learn something from the women whose stories we have featured. While their observations may not apply to all women or even to all organizations, the consensus was broad on one point. Organizations need to recognize the nature and intensity of the testing that women appointed to leadership positions are likely to face.

The Test	What It Is	How It Affects Women In Leadership Roles
The Token Test	The assumption that gender has something to do with a woman's appointment to a leadership role	She must "prove" that gender had nothing to do with her appointment.
The Double-Bind Test	The stereotypes that equate leadership with masculine ("strong") behavior and devalue relational "women's" work	She is forced to "choose" between being a leader and being a woman and, regardless of her choice, can be judged harshly.
The Fitness Test	The notion that women may not have the seasoning or the experience on the line required of leaders	She must demonstrate her fitness for the role, especially if her credentials are atypical. .
The Right Stuff Test	The question whether women have the skills (and backbone) to lead	Skills may not be equally valued or rewarded when practiced by men and women and women can have difficult time proving that they have "what it takes" to get the job done.

Five Challenges to Leadership Success

What can organizations do to complement the efforts of women (and men) as they negotiate the conditions for their success? Traps can catch the unvigilant organization just as quickly as they ensnare individuals.

Challenge 1: Drill Deep: Supply Intelligence for Informed Decisions

Common Traps:

- “She looks like she might be the right person but we’ll just have to see.”
- “It would be good to have a woman in this role.”
- “Some of the aspects of our culture may not fit her at first, but she’ll adjust.”

An Organizational Response:

- Structure mutual intelligence gathering processes to test for fit on both sides.

Challenge 2: Mobilize Backers: Provide Critical Support

Common Traps:

- “It’s a sink or swim culture, let’s see how she does.”
- “People will take her seriously; after all, she’s got the position.”

An Organizational Response:

- Create support and backing mechanisms that make the case for the appointment and counter initial doubts

Challenge 3: Garner Resources: Set Aside Key Allocations

Common Trap:

- “She can do more with less; she’s done it in the past.”

An Organizational Response:

- Align resources with the assignment’s objectives; recognize that access to resources carries symbolic value.

Challenge 4: Bring People on Board: Facilitate Buy-In

Common Trap:

- “She’ll be able to build a team; women are good at that.”

An Organizational Response:

- Communicate the rationale for change early and often.

Challenge 5: Make a Difference: Make The Big Challenge Easier

Common Trap:

- “If she’s doing a good job, we’ll know about it.”

An Organizational Response:

- Ensure that reward systems capture qualitative and quantitative contributions.

* This material has been adapted from *Her Place at the Table: A Woman’s Guide to Negotiating Five Key Challenges to Leadership Success* by Deborah M. Kolb, Judith Williams and Carol Frohlinger, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004.