

Gender stereotyping is different in India: Sheryl Sandberg, COO Facebook

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Sheryl Sandberg is Chief Operating Officer at Facebook, and author of the bestselling book *Lean In: Women, Work and Will to Lead*. She talks to ***Kamini Banga*** about the progress women have made in leadership roles in business and politics and how women need to step out and speak up. She challenges gender stereotyping, embraces feminism and emphasizes that women need not become like men to get to the boardroom. Excerpts from the conversation:

On the message of *Lean In*...

We have not achieved true equality (with men) and in order to get there we have to address the cultural and stereo-typical issues that are holding women back. Progress for women at the top everywhere has been much slower this decade. I think we are afraid to talk about gender. So the point of the book is making gender an open and honest conversation in order to give girls and women the same opportunities that men and boys have, particularly opportunities to lead.

For women who are in the workforce, the book is partially autobiographical. I share this because I wanted to have an open conversation on gender. The book is equally applicable for women who are different and in very different circumstances. They tell us how the book has impacted them and spurred them into action. The message of believing in self and gender equality is important for all of us.

On praise, criticism and controversy

I think the best praise is when I see how the book and the LeanIn.org have enriched women's lives. Praise is important but what really matters is when women say - I read the book and I got a raise; I read the book and I was able to argue for something I wanted.

I will tell you a story; a woman wrote saying that when she started her job was four days a week, but as she read the book she realized she had been working an extra day every week because her boss would fix meetings outside of her schedule. So she decided to speak up. Her boss apologised and promised to remember not to schedule anything on her day off. There are several such stories.

The book has been controversial. It generated a lot of conversation and I am really grateful for the debate and I am even grateful for some of the insights that I don't really agree with. Even when it is sometimes hard to hear, I am grateful for these debates because nothing changes without it.

On the message to men

Data shows that all of us are biased, my father included, because we are raised this way. But dangerous are the people that don't believe they have biases. Once again data shows that such people can often be the most discriminatory against women because they are so confident that they are not.

It is very important to me that men read the book and participate in the conversation. Men who are sensitive to gender issues will contribute better in the company and at home. Studies show that men who engage in housework and childcare are happier. Their children do better too; better in education, in their profession, and in terms of emotional stability and happiness. There are really good reasons for men to get involved.

On a different gender equation in India and its impact in the workplace

About 11% of the largest Indian companies have women CEOs which is actually one of the highest in the world - in the US it is more like 4 or 5%. However, at 11% it is still very low and half of them come from banking and financial services, but again we are talking very small percentages. I spent a lot of time working in India. Some of the things around violence against women - obviously the recent rapes, women abused at home are big issues but not just in India alone. I think getting more women into leadership roles, into legislature, as prime ministers, leading companies - are all critical for women gaining power that they need in Indian society. You have to believe that with more women in leadership roles, the situation will be better.

On gender stereotyping - a universal thing

Gender stereotyping is definitely different in India but some of the basic things are still the same. We know that in India as well as in the US, men feel more self-confident and women less so, we know that girls are called bossy but never boys - boys are called leaders. These are rooted in prevalent stereotypes. Therefore, we know that we need

legal, public policy and institutional reform, but all of us need to become aware of our cultural stereotypes and how they hold women back.

This is the 93rd year of women getting to vote in the US. So, we have come a long way. If you think of the suffragettes marching in the streets to give women voting rights and what these people gave up for us, we can't stop. We don't have a choice. It is hard but equality is worth fighting for. And it is getting easier, not harder. Different governments are looking at policy reform and global companies are becoming proactive.

On technology companies breaking with tradition

I think technology companies are a great place for women to work, and that is because technology companies can be very flexible. However, I want to be clear that the problem we face for women in a leadership role is not really that different in technology.

On women being the worst enemy of women

When a group that has been historically discriminated against breaks into the power group, they often take on the characteristics of that group and that includes discrimination against their own type. That's not true only for women but for every minority group that has ever come into power anywhere. On the other hand, as more from the group get power, they no longer have to take on those characteristics. I think that the younger generation of women is coming together to work for equality and to fight for each other.

On the working woman's guilt trip

I feel guilty all the time, but I write books telling myself and other people, "not you". My husband does not feel the same guilt. It is the same thing as self-confidence. I don't always feel as self confident as I should at this stage.

Interestingly, there is strong data suggesting that children of working mothers are not worse off than children of mothers who work in the home. It may even be beneficial for girls in some cases.

On experiences of working in India

I've worked in India in 3 different ways and in 3 different places; I've worked on the ground for the World Bank on a health project, I worked on leprosy, blindness and malaria, and that was from 1992-1994, and I set up Google and Facebook offices in India. It is an amazing country with an amazingly talented population. One of the reasons why American companies like mine come to India to hire is because of the exceptionally well educated, exceptionally talented English speaking population. So I've had a great experience in India and continue to have one.

(Kamini Banga is an independent marketing consultant)