

# “Follow Her Lead”

Director’s Address, Summer Seminar

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## EXCERPT 1: SPEECH OPENING

**Way back east in Sparta, New Jersey, where I grew up, sports of all kinds shaped my view of the world, my place in it and what it takes to be a leader.**

Four kids in my class had a dad who worked either for the Yankees or the Giants. So leadership opportunities that might have seemed out of reach to most people somehow seemed more accessible to me.

I grew up in a neighborhood full of boys. So in second grade, I joined a boys’ baseball team. (No one told me I couldn’t, so I did.)

After school and most weekends, I’d go to a park in the center of town to play basketball with the boys. Usually it was just me – and nine guys.

I was pretty fearless. Always figuring out a way to fit in, even if I otherwise stood out.

In high school I played tennis and varsity softball, and ran track.

Varsity basketball was probably my favorite sport. Our team was the Spartans, and we were really good: In four years, we only lost about 10 games.

At first, I was pretty much the last kid on the bench. But I loved being part of a high-performing team, because it was so much better than watching from the outside.

I decided I’d just work harder than everyone else: go to more basketball camps, do more drills, play even more basketball at the park. Because I always loved a good challenge.

Like most of you, I was a beneficiary of Title IX, which broke down barriers in sports for women and girls.

Thanks to Title IX and growing up in Sparta, I'd never been told, "You Can't Do That." And so to me, boys and girls were on a level playing field, and the rules of the game were the same. Girls, just like boys, got to be captains of their teams. We all got a shot. And a fair shake.

My view of the world taught me that boys and girls were equals, with equal opportunities. (Maybe that was your view, too?)

For me, this truth prevailed. Until I got to the workplace. ...

## **EXCERPT 2**

**For me, that experience was life-changing. Because the truth I'd learned during childhood about fairness and equal opportunity had begun to unravel.**

Contrary to what I'd learned as a girl on the basketball court, and playing baseball with the boys on the dirt mounds in Sparta, the same boys and girls who'd grown up on a level playing field weren't enjoying the same privilege as men and women in the workplace.

The rules of the game were NOT the same. ...

**We already know what happens.**

When women feel stuck – when we don't see a clear path to the top, when we don't get the feedback we need to succeed – we drop out.

Yes: We quit our organizations, and typically do one of three things:

- We either join a more progressive organization – one with role models and mentors and professional development opportunities for the taking.

- Or, we go to work for a nonprofit, where we feel we can make a difference doing meaningful work.
- Or, we start a business. Today, 44 percent of new businesses are started by women.

But for organizations, this loss of high-potential women is a terrible thing:

- First, there's the cost factor, because it takes big bucks to replace top talent. If a scientist or engineer making \$100,000 leaves, replacing her costs half that, or \$50,000.
- And when she leaves, the organization becomes less diverse, which makes the problem even worse.
- And long term, the organization has fewer women in the pipeline for executive roles. This creates a leadership gap that will get even worse as more baby boomers retire. Already we know that one in five large companies will lose 40 percent of their top-level talent in the next five years as boomers leave the workforce.

All the evidence adds up to this: That getting more women into executive roles is a business IMPERATIVE – not just a “nice to have” – because it produces better results.

Just look at the numbers.

- Studies say companies with three or more women on their board of directors have higher financial performance.
- When women are in leadership roles at U.S. venture-backed companies, these startups are more successful.
- And companies that promote a woman into a management role tend to see a bump in their stock value.

By now you're probably thinking, “Great! So how do we get more of us there?”

By the time you leave here today, you'll have the answers.

### **EXCERPT 3: SPEECH CLOSING**

**You've probably been told many times that you are responsible for paving your own way on your career path, and taking charge of your own professional development.**

You've been told to Lean In – and the rest will fall into place.

But I'm here to tell you: That will only get you so far. Because the truth is this:

You can Lean In as much as you want – but unless your organization plays a key role too, you won't get where you want to go. ...

**The organizations that accept this shared responsibility are the organizations that get it.**

They are the ones retaining women. They are the ones with women leaders in the pipeline. And they are the ones with the most outstanding financial performance.

If all of us buy in to this shared responsibility – that I am responsible for my professional development, and my organization is responsible for creating a supportive culture – then together we will change people.

We will change our organizations.

And we will change the outcome.

**Your job right now is to make a choice. To be intentional about the leader you want to be.**

Don't just let circumstances happen.

And you must also be intentional about helping other women be the leaders they want to be. Because being a leader is a choice. Something you must choose every single day.

But make no mistake: Some days it's hard!

It's a whole lot easier to put your head down, and do the work on your plate right now.

But don't just let circumstances happen.

Because what you choose will matter in the end.

Michael Josephson, who writes about character and ethics, really brings it all home with his poem about what matters.

He says it's

*"not what you bought but what you built, not what you got but what you gave ... What will matter is not what you learned but what you taught.*

*"What will matter is every act of integrity, compassion, courage or sacrifice that enriched, empowered or encouraged others to emulate your example. ...*

*"Living a life that matters doesn't happen by accident. It's not a matter of circumstance but of choice.*

*"Choose to live a life that matters."*

As you begin this day of personal and professional discoveries about leadership, I wish each of you the very best on your lifelong quest to become the leaders you are all destined to be.

Women with integrity, compassion, courage and sacrifice.

So that in the end, you've enriched, empowered and encouraged others.

And chosen to live a life that matters.

Thank you.