Leadership Tips for Managers

Brought to you by LeanIn.Org & Girl Scouts of the USA
When it comes to girls and ambition, the pattern is clear: girls are discouraged from leading. When a little boy asserts himself, he is called a “leader.” Yet when a little girl does the same, she risks being branded “bossy”—a precursor to words like “aggressive,” “angry,” and “too ambitious” that plague strong female leaders. Calling girls bossy is one of many things we do to discourage them from leading. It’s no wonder that by middle school, girls are less interested in leadership roles than boys, a trend that continues into adulthood.

LeanIn.Org is proud to partner with Girl Scouts of the USA to bring you Ban Bossy, a public service campaign to encourage leadership and achievement in girls. With the help of girls’ leadership expert Rachel Simmons and the Girl Scout Research Institute, we’ve developed practical tips to help girls flex their leadership muscles and to offer parents, teachers, troop leaders, and managers hands-on strategies for supporting female leadership.

The time to start building female leaders is now. We hope you’ll join us to Ban Bossy—and to encourage girls and women to lead.

Women pay for their success: Success and likeability are positively correlated for men but negatively correlated for women.
If you ask a room full of women, “Have you ever been called aggressive or difficult at work?” almost every hand goes up. If you ask a room full of men the very same question, only a few hands go up. Why are women and men having such vastly different experiences?

Decades of social science research have taught us what we already know—stereotypes are enormously self-reinforcing. Men are expected to be assertive, confident, and opinionated, so we welcome their leadership. In contrast, women are expected to be kind, nurturing, and compassionate, so when they lead, they are going against our expectations. A man who makes a tough decision at work is often seen as decisive, while a woman who does the same may be seen as impulsive and brash.

Gender bias is triggered by these deep-rooted stereotypes of women and men. As Malcolm Gladwell explores in Blink, we often rely on unconscious beliefs and assessments to make snap decisions—we think without thinking. Gender stereotypes are one of these mental shortcuts; we use them to filter information to simplify the world around us. Unfortunately, this often disadvantages women.

Gender bias leads us to systematically discount women’s performance. Women receive less credit for achievements than their male counterparts. And successful women are generally less well liked than successful men.

As a manager, you have a strong incentive to make sure that women can succeed in your organization. In the global war for talent, leveraging the full potential of the population provides a serious competitive advantage. Companies with more women in leadership roles have been shown to perform better.

The good news is that there are small adjustments you can make to overcome gender bias on your team and in your organization. As you do, all ships will rise.

—Rachel Thomas
Co-founder and president of LeanIn.Org
1. Push Back on the “Likeability Penalty”

**THE SITUATION** 
Women navigate a tightrope between being seen as competent and being well liked. When a woman exhibits leadership skills, such as speaking in a direct style or promoting her ideas, she is often liked less by her peers. If she is friendly and helpful, her peers tend to like her but may be less apt to see her as competent. This can have a big impact on a woman’s career. Ask yourself: Who are you more likely to support and promote, the man with high marks across the board or the woman who has equally high marks but is “just not as well liked”?

**THE SOLUTION**
Listen for the language of the likeability penalty. When a woman is described as “aggressive,” “too ambitious,” “out for herself,” or “not well liked,” there’s a good chance this is the penalty in action. Push the person making the comment for a specific example of what the woman did. Then ask, “Would you have the same reaction if a man did the same thing?” In many cases, the answer will be no, and you can surface the possibility that gender bias is the culprit. If they push back, citing that men and women have the same issues with her, remind them that we’re all susceptible to bias—women are more harshly judged by both genders. Finally, it’s important to remember that you can fall into the same bias traps; think carefully about your own response to female coworkers.
2. Get Everyone to Sit at the Table & Participate

THE SITUATION >
Compared to women, men talk more and make more suggestions in meetings, while women are interrupted more, given less credit for their ideas, and have less overall influence. If you watch men and women at the same job level, you will also notice that more of the men sit in the front and center seats, while women tend to gravitate toward the end of the table and edge of the room in meetings—away from the positions that convey status. Lack of full participation often undermines outcomes; but tapping into the skills and expertise of a diverse group of employees can improve performance.

THE SOLUTION >
It's important to make sure everyone speaks up and is heard. Start by watching where your team sits in meetings. Make sure women as well as men sit front and center. Set a precedent that every voice counts and establish a no interruptions rule to reinforce it. If a colleague is cut off, interject and say you'd like to hear her finish; this is good for her and elevates your leadership. Openly ask women to contribute to the conversation, and when they do contribute, acknowledge their contributions by name.

WHAT WOMEN CAN DO: FIND A WORK BUDDY

One way to combat these negative meeting dynamics is to pair up with another woman and agree to advocate for each other. You can reinforce her good ideas and ask for her opinions, and she can do the same for you. When a woman advocates for another woman, they both benefit.

— Shared by Gina Bianchini, CEO of Mightybell & co-founder of LeanIn.Org
3. Evaluate Performance Fairly

**THE SITUATION >**
We all understand the importance of fair evaluations, yet women are evaluated more harshly than men.10 This bias is more pronounced when review criteria are unclear, and we’re more likely to rely on gut feelings and personal inferences.11

**THE SOLUTION >**
Awareness begets fairness. Make sure everyone on your team is aware of the gender bias in evaluating performance. Work with your team to set expectations up front. Be specific about what constitutes excellent performance, and make sure goals are understood and measurable. The clearer your criteria are, the better. Ask team members to explain their evaluations—and ask the same of yourself. When we’re accountable for our decisions, we’re more motivated to think through them carefully.

**ACTIVITIES**

1. **Make Résumé Review Gender Blind**
   Hiring decisions are prone to gender bias, too—remember, replacing a woman’s name on a résumé with a man’s can significantly increase her chances of being hired.12 When reviewing résumés for a job opening, consider making them gender blind. After a major U.S. symphony introduced a blind audition process—where musicians played behind a screen—a woman’s odds of advancing to the next round increased by 50 percent.13

2. **Watch “Creating a Level Playing Field”**
   Watch “Creating a Level Playing Field” by Shelley Correll, director of Stanford’s Clayman Institute for Gender Research, to learn six strategies for reducing errors in decision making and recognizing everyone’s best work. Use the discussion guide to lead a team conversation on gender bias, or break into small groups for more exploration and group exercises. You’ll find everything you need at leanin.org/level-playing-field.
4. Give Women Credit

THE SITUATION >
Ask a man to explain his success and he’ll typically point to his innate qualities and skills. Ask a woman and she’ll likely attribute her success to external factors, insisting she did well because she “worked really hard,” “got lucky,” or “had help from others.” And it’s not just women who are tough on themselves. All of us discount women’s achievements. Women also get less credit than their male counterparts for their role in team accomplishments.

THE SOLUTION >
Make sure women get the credit they deserve and look for opportunities to celebrate their success. Help women identify their own success on a regular basis with questions like “What progress have you made since we last spoke?” or “What are you most proud of this month?” Keep a running record of their responses and have them to do the same.

WHAT WOMEN CAN DO:
OWN YOUR SUCCESS

So often we deflect praise with a self-deprecating comment like “I got lucky” or “It was nothing.” What a missed opportunity! Praise can be hard to come by and goes a long way toward establishing your credibility. If nothing else, smile and say, “Thank you.”

In two simple words, you’ve owned your accomplishment and communicated your appreciation.

— Shared by Roxane Divol, senior vice president of partner alliances, Symantec
5. Pay Women Fairly

**THE SITUATION >**
Even if you adjust for number of hours worked, on average women are paid less than men. Yet fair compensation makes good business sense—it can protect organizations from reputation risks and can increase employee motivation.

**THE SOLUTION >**
Audit compensation across your team. Are women getting paid as much as men at the same level? Remember, fair pay begins with evaluating performance correctly and giving everyone full credit for their contributions.

**DID YOU KNOW?**
The wage gap starts right out of school: A recent study found that women in their first year out of college were paid 82 cents for every dollar paid to their male peers.
6. Encourage Women to Negotiate

THE SITUATION >
Women are less likely to negotiate, often because they are concerned they’ll be viewed unfavorably. They are right to worry. We expect men to advocate on their own behalf and be rewarded for their accomplishments, so there’s little downside for them when they negotiate, even fiercely. In contrast, we expect women to be communal and collaborative, so when they negotiate or advocate for themselves, we often react unfavorably. Of course it follows that women are less likely to receive equal pay if they don’t negotiate actively.

THE SOLUTION >
Communicate to all the members of your team—especially the women—that it’s important for them to ask for what they deserve. Research shows that women will negotiate at comparable rates to men when given explicit permission. In addition, remember we’re all prone to penalize women when they negotiate. Be conscious of this dynamic and correct for it; you’ll set a good example for others.

WHAT WOMEN CAN DO:
NEGOTIATE—BUT DO IT EFFECTIVELY!

First and foremost, you need to negotiate—you won’t get what you don’t ask for. And when you do negotiate, understand the gender stereotypes you are fighting against and educate yourself about how to do so effectively. Use communal language, since women get better outcomes when they emphasize a concern for organizational relationships. For example, you can say, “My team exceeded all our goals this year. We all deserve to be rewarded for our accomplishments, including me.” Another way to demonstrate a connection to others is to ground the negotiation in gender pay issues: “Given that women are paid less than men across the board, we would both be disappointed if I didn’t negotiate for myself.” Watch Stanford professor Margaret Neale’s lecture at leanin.org/education/negotiation for other strategies to prepare for your next negotiation.
7. Distribute Work Equally

THE SITUATION >
A majority of women end up in support roles, but line roles with P&L responsibility more often lead to senior leadership positions. Women also tend to take on more service work (e.g., organizing events, training new hires, running team-building programs), leaving less time for mission-critical work. Whether women volunteer for these duties or are just expected to take them on, service work rarely gets someone noticed and promoted. When women are asked a favor at work, they earn almost no social capital for saying yes and are penalized for saying no. Men, on the other hand, gain points for saying yes and face minimal fallout for saying no. Over time, these dynamics can have a serious impact on a woman’s career trajectory.

THE SOLUTION >
Audit who’s doing service work and make sure it’s distributed equally. Pay attention to who volunteers and what they volunteer for. Talk to the people who don’t volunteer for high-profile assignments to understand what’s holding them back—high workload, lack of interest, fear they won’t deliver—and help them work through their concerns.

WHAT WOMEN CAN DO: USE THE STRATEGIC NO
Volunteer for stretch projects that will enhance your career. Then when people ask you to take on undervalued work, use what I call the strategic no. Simply say, “I’m working with Jim on a project that will open the door to an important new client base, but this would be a perfect stretch assignment for X down the hall.” This way you can dodge the project while communicating you’re a good team player.

— Shared by Joan C. Williams, co-author of What Works for Women at Work

DID YOU KNOW?
Two-thirds of executive women in Fortune 200 companies are in support roles, such as HR and communications, but line roles with P&L responsibility more often lead to the C-suite.

ACTIVITY
Audit Your Team’s Project Work
Make a list of the most common types of mission-critical and service work your team does. Service work can be anything from organizing birthday gifts to taking recruits out to dinner. Then evaluate who is doing what. If the women on your team are disproportionately doing service work, make adjustments.
8. Encourage Women to Pursue Opportunities

**THE SITUATION >**
Women tend to underestimate their skills and take fewer risks than men.\(^2^8\) As a result, they may be more hesitant to ask for high-profile projects or apply for new opportunities.\(^2^9\) Even when women have the desire, they don’t always have the flexibility and support to go for it. This has a huge impact on who ends up in leadership roles.

**THE SOLUTION >**
Push back when a woman says she’s “not ready” or “not qualified.” Remind her what she’s already accomplished and how quickly she’s progressing. In addition, make it easier for her—and everyone on your team—to reach for opportunities and still meet family responsibilities. Support and encourage flexibility for everyone. Make it clear you value results over face time and actively serve as a good role model. If you talk openly about leaving early for your son’s game, you signal to everyone that it’s okay to make time for family.

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**DID YOU KNOW?**
Research shows that men apply for jobs when they meet 60% of the criteria, while women wait until they feel they meet 100% of the criteria.\(^3^0\)

**DID YOU KNOW?**
Women are more likely than men to suffer from the impostor syndrome, a phenomenon that plagues people with self-doubt. Despite external evidence of their competence, they feel like frauds.\(^3^1\)
9. Let Your Team Know You’ll Support Them Through Pregnancy

THE SITUATION >
Companies lose talented women during their childbearing years—one study found that more than 40 percent of highly qualified women with children choose to “off-ramp,”32 and more than a quarter of them never rejoin the workforce.33 As a result, organizations incur significant expense recruiting and onboarding new employees and lose valuable institutional knowledge and connections.34

THE SOLUTION >
It’s not illegal to talk about pregnancy, only to discriminate based on it.35 Let the women—and men—on your team know you’ll support their decision to start a family. Offer to talk to them if and when they’re ready. They may not take you up on it, but they’ll feel supported knowing your door is open. Be explicit that you are asking so you can help them—for example, assure them you won’t start giving away the best assignments and that their jobs will be waiting for them on their return.

ACTIVITY
Learn How to Talk About Pregnancy
Read Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom’s guidelines for talking to women about pregnancy within the framework of the law. Go to leanin.org/talking-about-pregnancy-at-work.
10. Mentor & Sponsor Women

THE SITUATION >

Mentorship and sponsorship are key drivers of success, yet women can have a harder time finding mentors and sponsors, especially those with lots of influence.36 Mentoring relationships often form between individuals with common interests.37 Men end up gravitating toward other men, and since there are more men in senior roles, women miss out.38 Moreover, junior women and senior men often avoid mentoring relationships out of concern that a close relationship—or even time spent together—will look inappropriate.39

THE SOLUTION >

We need more male managers to mentor and sponsor junior women, and we should reward them when they do. Establish formal mentorship and sponsorship programs. Encourage informal interactions between the women and men on your team—personal connections lead to relationships that can propel careers. Finally, look for ways to make access to managers equal.

WHAT WOMEN CAN DO:

1. FOCUS ON AUTHENTIC CONNECTIONS

Too many young women start with, “Will you be my mentor?” That’s an awfully big ask. More specific and thoughtful questions are more effective—for example, “I researched Competitor X and wonder why we don’t compare our product features to theirs. Do you have a few minutes to discuss?” I always feel compelled to spend a few minutes answering, and over time these quick exchanges lead to a deeper relationship that I feel invested in.

— Shared by Heather S. Burgess, associate director, Procter & Gamble

2. START A CIRCLE

Finding a mentor can be difficult, but peers can be just as effective at offering guidance. This is the power of Lean In Circles. These small self-organizing groups meet regularly to harness the experience and creativity of all their members. Research shows that people are more confident and are able to learn and accomplish more in groups.41 Start or join your own Circle today at leanin.org/circles, and invite men to join the conversation too.

DID YOU KNOW?

According to a recent report, almost two-thirds of male executives are hesitant to have one-on-one meetings with a more junior woman.40
JOIN US TO BAN BOSSY

Post “I will #banbossy” to your social media channels and visit banbossy.com to take the pledge and learn more.

Visit banbossy.com for more information and tips for parents and girls.

LeanIn.Org

LeanIn.Org is the nonprofit organization founded by Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg to empower all women to achieve their ambitions. LeanIn.Org offers inspiration and support through an online community, free expert lectures, and Lean In Circles, small peer groups who meet regularly to share and learn together.

leanin.org

The photographs in this document are from the Lean In Collection on Getty Images available at gettyimages.com/leanin.
Endnotes


15 Sheryl Sandberg, *Lean In*, 30; and Madeline E. Heilman and Michelle C. Haynes, “No Credit Where Credit Is Due.”


26 Madeline E. Heilman and Julie J. Chen, “Same Behavior, Different Consequences.”


33 Ibid.

34 Ibid.


40 Ibid.