

Changing the Balance of Power

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Women are on the verge of changing the balance of power – at home, at work, in our communities, and in our voluntary associations.

I'm going to use the word *power* a lot, and I know that many of us are really uncomfortable with this word. Isn't power a hard word, isn't it a harsh word? While some people are attracted to its force, others are repelled by the aggression that the pursuit of power implies. So what are the implications for women when they say they have power or they want power? Today I want to talk about the push-and-pull experience of women around the issue of power. I want to talk about some of the ways women are moving forward, and I want to talk about the ways in which we get tripped up. Most of all, I want to talk about how changing the *balance of power* can change the way we live.

Women are on the verge of changing the balance of power, not because they crave power but because they crave the opportunity that power will bring. We want our voices to be heard, we want our ideas to be considered, we want to be free to pursue the careers that interest us, and we want to be free to sculpt our lives so that we can carve out time for home and family. We want to use the power of our passion to develop Jewish lives, to build Jewish homes, and to create Jewish community. We want to use the power of our pocketbooks to make charitable contributions – no matter what the size or scale – to groups that we care about. We want our gifts to be well spent, we want these groups to be stewarded by leaders whom we trust, and we want to make a hands-on difference. We want to use our power to live good lives, to do good work, to help create havens for our families and connections for our community.

Now, I want to talk about some of the double binds that we find ourselves in when we try to change the balance of power.

Jewish women are among the most accomplished in the world. The highest percentage of college-educated people in the world is Jewish women. Look at the network of extraordinary voluntary and civic institutions that Jewish women have built for the Jewish world and society at large. Your passion and commitment has been the backbone of support for a network of organizations that have accomplished miracles and wonders – from synagogues to community centers, museums to day schools, universities to rabbinic seminaries, social service agencies and advocacy organizations. Our growing influence as volunteers is matched by our growing impact as donors. Women now raise almost one-third of the funds for local federation campaigns; moreover, at a time when giving is flat or reduced in most sectors, philanthropy by Jewish women is growing.

Here's the double bind: given the ample evidence of our expertise and accomplishments, why do we find ourselves mired in the myth of meritocracy? The myth of meritocracy will be familiar to many of you, whether you've competed for a professional position or suggested a woman candidate for a job or a promotion, or for a leadership role in your local synagogue or charity. The meritocracy myth is embedded in the question, "Shouldn't we pick the best person for the job and not just choose a woman?" As Americans and as Jews, we believe that we live in a meritocracy. We believe our choices are fair, and our judgments are just. This is the meritocracy myth, and it informs (and infects) much of professional and volunteer life, in our own community and in the larger American sphere.

There is an impressive body of research that shows, in fact, that women are evaluated "on the merits" much more harshly than men. In one study, when the names on resumes were alternated – Jim becoming Jane and Mary becoming Martin – the resumes of the women received a much lower rating than those of the men. In another experiment, the chairs of 147 college psychology departments were sent a selection of resumes, equally strong, with names of male and female candidates randomly distributed. The chairs of these departments wanted to hire the candidates; the only difference was that the resumes with male names were offered mid-level posts as associate professors while the same resumes with female names were offered entry-level posts as assistant professors.

Studies from the medical profession similarly show that women have to work 2.5 half times as hard as their male counterparts to receive the same rating, and in the field of law, it has been found that female judges also have to perform 2.5 half times as well to receive an equal rating.

Some years ago, a group of women scientists at MIT used their specific expertise to prove the existence of gender bias at the university. Being scientists, they measured everything: the size of their offices, the sizes of their grants, the amount of leave they received, the number of prestigious assignments that were offered to them. After reading their report, Charles Vest, the President of MIT, said, "I have always believed that contemporary gender discrimination within universities is part reality and part perception. True, but I now understand that reality is by far the greater part of the balance."

Given the research, the myth of meritocracy actually suggests that if a woman works two and a half times as hard to leverage her learning, skills and expertise to the level where she is competing, finally, for a top position, chances are that she will be, in fact, the BEST candidate for the post.

Challenging the myth of meritocracy is one of the most important steps we can take to move women forward and change the balance of power. Changing the balance of power is an important part of this challenge, given another reality that we know from the available research: that when women are less than one-third of any group, they will be seen as tokens rather than as full members of that group. And, as tokens, they will be judged more harshly. For example, researchers found that a resume with a woman's name was judged negatively when it was in a pool of resumes with 10% women and 90%

men; when it was in a pool of 25% women and 75% men, it was still judged negatively, but less so. However, when that same resume was in a group of 37% women and 63% men, it was judged favorably. Same resume.

Debunking the meritocracy myth and exposing gender bias is not enough to change the balance of power. But it may be the first step in motivating smart male CEOs and volunteer leaders to see that their organizations are not making the best use of their talented women and what the consequences might be of that oversight. That's what happened at the accounting firm of Deloitte and Touche when CEO Douglas McCracken started noticing that, with the passage of years, there were very few women staying on as partners and that the firm's turnover rate among women was high. Douglas McCracken was no feminist, but he was a smart businessman who made a couple of key calculations. First, that the cost of turnover was 150% of each annual salary because of recruitment and training costs. Second, if Deloitte and Touche was losing some of its best-and-brightest early in the pipeline, chances were that some of the brightest talents were women, and that would account for the low percentage of female partners in the firm year after year.

As a result of McCracken's analysis, DeLoitte and Touche enlisted every man and woman in the firm in a new training program, specifically designed to break through the barriers caused by gender differences and to create a level playing field in which women and men could work together effectively as colleagues. The managers -- and most of them were male -- were told they would be held accountable for making progress in moving women up the corporate ladder. This expectation compelled managers to examine the ways in which plum assignments were given out and the way that resources were allocated. And when a manager was not succeeding in advancing women in his department, the CEO called him into his office to talk about what was going wrong and what needed to change.

Finally and most profoundly, Deloitte and Touche actually changed the way work assignments were structured at the firm. Because the most intriguing discovery that Douglas McCracken made, as a result of his attempt to "win the talent war for women," was that it wasn't just the talented women who were leaving, but the men as well -- men who no longer wanted to maintain the relentless pace of travel and persistent pressure that professional advancement at DeLoitte and Touche required. As a result, the company changed the structure of its consulting practice. Previously consultants ran on a treadmill of overlapping travel assignments; in the new DeLoitte and Touche, every consultant who was in the field returned to the home office on Friday, which also meant being home for the weekend. When the firm first considered this change, they worried that their clients would be unhappy. As it turned out, the clients responded with great satisfaction to the change. Because the clients also had to travel to regional offices to work with the consultants, they also preferred to return to their local offices and communities on Friday.

Here are the results. Over the last five years, Deloitte and Touche has increased the percentage of its women partners from 5% to 14%; it has decreased turnover from 25% to 18%; and it is the only firm of its kind to earn a place on the prestigious Fortune 100 Best

Companies List.

So, one of the first steps in changing the balance of power may be enlisting men as our allies. When men join us as allies, they often find, like the CEO of Deloitte and Touche, that they have helped everyone, both men and women to lead better lives and do better jobs.

An equally important step in changing the balance of power is the alliance of women with each other. I'll begin by telling you about a project I worked on with a major Jewish organization (to remain strictly anonymous!). We asked this organization if we could work together to move more women into leadership roles. We had a series of ambitious ideas and initiatives – many of which involved high-level men in this organization to bringing in their professional female colleagues and grooming them for positions of power. Most of these mentoring efforts did not succeed. We next identified a small number of women who loved this organization deeply and cared about making it a place that could make best use of their talents. We worked with these women; we talked to them and pushed them and mentored them, but progress seemed to move at a snail's pace. We wanted them to hold public meetings at their conferences and fight for their right to have more than a minority role. But the women we were working with didn't like the backlash that resulted when they convened public meetings. So they went underground and we wished them well, asking them to keep in touch and let us know if we can help. Guess what? These women helped themselves. They developed a great stealth strategy, meeting every time there was a national gathering, but quietly and privately. They worked steadily and strategically to elect one of their leaders as nominating chair. Slowly but surely, their numbers increased. Then they started to analyze why, despite the fact that their numbers had increased, they still felt less powerful in the organization. They decided to observe their male counterparts and compare their behavior to their own. One difference was that the men were always ready to rush up to the microphone in public meetings to make their points while the women waited to be called on or double-checked to be sure that their point could be perfectly made. So the women changed their ways: they became quicker and nimbler, to get to the microphone and make that first point. They also noticed that the men didn't mind repeating each other's points; the most important goal was to make sure their voices were heard and their presence felt. Again, the women experimented with these behaviors. They started to talk at meetings even to reiterate someone else's point. Over time, these efforts and changes started to add up and make a difference, eventually creating an environment in which the women felt their voices were heard and in which increasing numbers of women are advancing to the highest levels of authority in the organization.

Another way that women can support each other as allies is by supporting one another's ideas. How many times have you felt that your ideas in a meeting have been credited to someone else? I have heard this complaint more frequently than any other in my interviews with women leaders all around the country. But what do you do? You can't whine and say, "No fair, that was my idea." I started asking people what might be done to counteract this, and a very clever woman, Lisa Goldberg of the Revson Foundation, came up with the answer. She said, "What we can do is that, when Shelley's idea is

credited to Bob, Miriam can raise her hand and say, ‘I love the idea of holding a parade, I loved it when Shelley suggested it, and I am glad that Bob reiterated it, and I too want to show my support for Shelley’s idea.’” Trust me. If we enlist enough women into this practice, we will change the nature of the conversation and start shifting the balance of power.

We can begin to change the balance of power by enlisting men as allies and by building circles of support among women. But we also need to look at the ways in which each one of us acts, as individuals, when faced with choices that will influence our capacity to succeed. There are many insidious effects of gender bias, but one of the most troubling is the way in which gender bias leads women to internalize certain beliefs and patterns of behavior. One of the most pernicious of these beliefs is that we have to be perfect in order to succeed. When Catalyst, an organization that focuses on advancing women in business, asks women what they think the greatest barriers are to their advancement they answer: bias and the old boys network. When they ask how they succeed, the women answer, “by exceeding expectations.” Now that sounds wonderful, especially if you manage one of these women or you’re this woman’s client. But think about the implications for these women. How might this expectation – to be perfect and to exceed expectations – actually limit women’s progress? How often do women take on impossible tasks without sufficient support or resources?

In my interviews with executive coaches to CEO’s, both men and women, I have heard that one essential difference between female and male executives is that, when women are asked to take on a project with nearly impossible deadlines or expected results, they will say, “Yes” even if it is clear that there are insufficient resources for accomplishing that task. By contrast, men will agree to take the challenge on and then proceed to negotiate, “I’ll do it, but here is what I need in terms of staff, support systems and resources.” With this insight in hand, I started suggesting to my women clients that they negotiate for more resources when taking on particularly demanding jobs, only to have some of them respond, “I can’t do that. It would make me look weak if I say I need help.”

Taking on too much responsibility, with too few resources on the work front is particularly problematic because we already know that women are assuming the lion’s share of responsibility on the home front. Every study confirms that women still take on 2/3rd of all personal and household duties. That is why when you ask young women if they believe that there are systemic barriers that will limit their achievements, they often tell us that bias is not a factor. They are confident that they can move ahead in the work place and that their talents will be recognized. The real fear that young women express is that they will have a difficult time as individuals juggling life and work, family and career. After all they’ve seen the toll it takes on their mother’s generation to try to have it all.

But in fact, we all have the right to try to find good work and lead good lives. That’s why changing the balance of power will require that women demand that their work environments allow them to achieve and advance without consuming their entire lives.

That is why talented women – and young men as well – are increasingly seeking employment in companies that are committed to supporting flexible work arrangements – including job sharing, telecommuting, adjustable work hours. They are seeking to pursue their professions in institutions that are willing to experiment with new ways of structuring assignments – like the Deloitte and Touche initiative. And some are starting to challenge the notion that commitment equals face time, and they are leading the effort to scrutinize the expenditure of time with the same ferocity that we apply to assessing financial expenditures.

Many of these initiatives have been spearheaded in response to women – but increasingly, young men are expressing their desire to prioritize their personal lives.

Ironically, the Jewish world – a world which prizes the pursuit of Jewish identity, spirituality, culture, education, building Jewish homes and fostering community – which should be on the forefront of these initiatives is actually behind the curve. It is only recently – as women have moved up in positions of Jewish professional leadership – in every setting – from Hillel to Foundations to JCCS and synagogues – that we are starting to hear voices raised around this issue. Keep your ears open. As more young women enter the Jewish world – as professionals or as volunteers – I suspect you’ll be hearing more and more about creative ways to help Jewish professionals to navigate the conflicting demands between personal and professional life; and I am confident that it is many of the youngest women here tonight that will become the teachers to my generation about better ways to balance life and work.

There is another way in which women can take responsibility about changing the balance of power, and that is in their volunteer activity and philanthropy. Some years ago, when I interviewed nearly one hundred Jewish women board members, I asked them what they hoped to do after their current volunteer involvement, most of them said, “I am not expecting anything. I will wait for my talents to be recognized.” But when I interviewed male organizational leaders, they said they frequently sat down with the Board Chairs or CEOs and asked, “What do you have in mind for me here?” Think about it. If the men demand a trajectory for their philanthropic career from the start, and the women are waiting to be recognized, isn’t it likely that a man will be selected for a choice post? Fortunately, women now are realizing that their volunteer and philanthropic careers have to be managed with the same kind of thought that goes into being a good parent and a good worker. It is no coincidence that, in the last two years, five major Jewish organizations – organizations that never had a woman president – have put women presidents or chairs at their helms. Several of these women told me quite clearly, “I wanted those posts and campaigned to get them.” The lesson is -- if women want their volunteer skills and philanthropic potential put to the best and highest use, they will have to take the lead and think through these issues, from the start.

Another way that women must change themselves – in order to change the balance of power – is by examining the barriers they erect between their professional lives and their civic and volunteer roles. Women work extremely hard within their own companies and institutions -- to “exceed expectations” -- while scrupulously keeping their volunteer

activities separate from their professional lives. But, in doing so, they actually limit their professional advancement in the larger field. By contrast, men see leadership roles in the community as an essential part of their professional careers. They don't hesitate to take time away from their own workplaces to network, to sit on committees, to join boards, and to give speeches. Women tend to see these opportunities as either civic duties or self-promotion and, when they accept these volunteer positions, they are overly vigilant about maintaining the hourly demands of their jobs. As a result, women often turn down opportunities that would give them increased visibility in their field, or new contacts in another arena, or they run themselves ragged trying to fulfill their responsibility in each sphere. The conclusion here is that women must learn how to become their own best allies – by becoming strategic about the volunteer choices that they make and by balancing their organizational commitments with activities that build their own personal portfolios.

So, when we succeed in changing the balance of power, what can we expect? What is the difference that difference will make?

Women do lead differently, and not because of biology. Women lead differently because of their experience – because they are determined to exceed expectations and because they are working two and a half times as hard as their male counterparts, and because they have learned how to manage and get things done, even with lesser authority and fewer resources. I think it is no coincidence that it was during the 1970's, when women went into corporations in record numbers, that we began to see new management trends. The news was that corporations were becoming less hierarchical and more team-oriented and collaborative. I believe that the influence of women middle managers played a huge role in this shift.

Judy Rosener, who reported on her study of CEOs in the Harvard Business Review article, [Ways Women Lead](#), found that, to succeed without having authority, you need to bring people together and create positive collaborative entities in which everyone benefits. Similarly, when researchers studied the differences between male and female legislators over a thirty-year period, they found that women legislators rely on a wider range of opinions than their male counterparts in formulating policy, show evidence of greater responsiveness to constituent requests and emphasize hands-on collaboration rather than a hierarchical control and command approach.

This difference in leadership – what we call *facilitative leadership* -- is so important right now. It is so clear that no one person or authority figure holds the answers to the complex challenges that we are wrestling with in our society and in our world. This kind of leadership requires real *emotional intelligence* from each one of us, wherever we are and whatever we are doing. You use your emotional intelligence when you understand that enthusiasm and optimism are actually contagious, and that the same is true of negativity.

This is the kind of intelligence that will sound familiar to anyone in this room who is a parent or has sat on a committee or has coached a team.

When we talk about emotional intelligence in the practice of leadership, it means being a good manager of your own emotions and socially aware and adept at managing relationships with others. People who have developed their emotional intelligence are proving to be far more effective at a wide range of leadership tasks. In fact, when researchers investigated the difference between groups of high potential managers who became effective leaders and those who did not sustain their leadership performance, the key differential was how well they scored in their emotional competency inventory. That's the leadership edge that people who have expanded their capacity to be emotionally intelligent bring to their work and their lives. Interestingly enough, you can build your competence in these arenas. Researchers Daniel Goleman and Annie McKee tell us that the development of emotional intelligence is all about practice – starting at home, or in small peer groups, or when you volunteer. Practice at your child's school or your local synagogue because it is only through continued practice that you become a master of your own emotions and your relations with others.

To practice emotional intelligence, here are five lessons offered by Goleman and McKee. First, think about your ideal vision of yourself and your role in your family, your community and your workplace. Go beyond the “should-haves” and the “could-haves” to imagine the ideal of who you would like to be and what you would like to do. The second step is to think about where you are now. Take an honest assessment of the strengths you have that will help you reach your ideal, as well as the gaps. The third step is to create a plan for learning: what will reinforce and amplify your strengths? What will help narrow the gaps? Finally, you need to find safe places to practice these new behaviors and to experiment with new ideas, thoughts and feelings. And then you need to develop a trusting network of peers with whom you can practice these new behaviors. This guide to practicing and enhancing your emotional intelligence is being used by top CEOs in corporate America. But I believe that most of the women in this room will find that these practices come naturally, as women have long used their understanding of themselves and others to build identity, family and community. So much of what women have always done is being named and noticed now, in a world that recognizes that connection and collaboration is essential to good leadership.

People bemoan the fact that we have fewer leaders – fewer role models with impeccable credentials. But the fact is, any one of us has the potential to exercise leadership, wherever we are – in our families, our schools, our shuls, our Federations, our voluntary organizations, our communities and our work environments. Let's leverage that strength and pursue our ideals together, so that we can change the balance of power and give each and every person the power to unleash their full potential for learning, living and leading.

What we need most from leaders in every sphere is people who can help us expand our capacity for change. We need people who can facilitate conversations rather than pontificate. We need people who listen as passionately as they speak. We need people who are skillful at framing the questions but are comfortable with not always knowing the answers. We need people who can collaborate, who can embrace diversity and

orchestrate constructive controversy. And we need people who can synthesize a range of ideas and connect a range of people.

We know that so many of our institutions are struggling to find the balance -- protecting Jewish life in Israel and around the world while simultaneously creating communities that are responsive to the next generation's need for innovation and new ideas. How do we maintain our loyalty to cherished values while we stretch ourselves towards new resiliency and flexibility? To answer these questions, each one of us needs to look within and then stand ready to exercise leadership wherever we are. The exercise of emotional intelligence and facilitative leadership is available to each and every one of us. You don't have to head an institution to make a difference.

When women decide to exercise leadership wherever they are, they will become a powerful force for innovation and change. At the same time, they can use their emotional intelligence and facilitative skills as a steadying force for continuity and commitment. At this turning point in our community, women can play a critical role in ensuring that the Jewish community becomes a resource for its members – a resource of wisdom and ingenuity, commitment and change.