



A new face of feminism

Facebook honcho Sheryl Sandberg's manifesto is a call to live fearlessly

LEAN IN: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead, by Sheryl Sandberg, Alfred A. Knopf, 228 pp., \$24.95.

BY MARION WINIK
Special to Newsday

Rarely has the publication of a book been met with such a volley of snark and countersnark as “Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead,” a business advice book by Facebook chief operating officer Sheryl Sandberg. Noticeably arm’s-length coverage by Jodi Kantor in *The New York Times* kicked off weeks of hoopla and vitriol in the blogosphere. Critics, many of whom had not read the book, which was published Tuesday, accused Sandberg of overreaching; of being elitist, anti-motherhood and anti-feminist; of not adequately representing poor, minority and non-heterosexual women; and, finally, of wearing Louboutin and Prada. Others rushed quickly to decry what seemed like knee-jerk feminist posturing or plain old hating the rich.

I doubt Sandberg was surprised. Despite her deep desires to be likable and useful to society, both crystallized in this book, she has been a target at every step of her career. “About to ruin Facebook forever” was just one of the warm welcomes she received as she climbed what she prefers to describe as the corporate jungle gym rather than ladder (more entry points, lots of challenges and obstacles, no single pinnacle, you “aren’t stuck staring at the butt of the person above”).

The likely reason for the backlash is found in Chapter Three, “Success and Likeability,” which opens with a memo-



Sheryl Sandberg, chief operating officer of Facebook, writes that women should face their fears and “Lean In” rather than sit back.

table bit of research:

Columbia Business School did a study about a powerful entrepreneur named Heidi Roizen. Half the students read Heidi’s story, and the other half read the same story with the name changed to Howard. Students rated Heidi and Howard as equally competent but found Howard much more appealing. Heidi was seen as selfish and not “the type of person you would want to hire or work for.”

Sheryl Sandberg is the uber-Heidi, and she knows it. But once the critics get out of the way, I think a whole

world of Heidis young and old will be eager to hear what she has to say.

“Lean In” is all the things Sandberg says it isn’t in her introduction, probably in a futile attempt to pre-empt the haters: it is a memoir, a self-help book, a career management guide and a feminist manifesto. (Well, she admits it’s sort of a feminist manifesto.) The anecdotes that illustrate her points begin in childhood: As her brother put it in a wedding toast, “Some of you think we are Sheryl’s younger siblings, but really we were Sheryl’s first employees — employee number one and employee number two.” We hear about the challenges she faced in her rise from Harvard Business School to consultant at McKinsey, to chief of staff at the Treasury Department, to Google veep, to her current position, working in a field she’s

never been comfortable with, for Mark Zuckerberg, who “was only seven years old when I graduated from college.”

She includes not just the wisdom she gained about decision-making (don’t go for the better job, go for the faster-growing company) and salary negotiations (turns out men almost always and women almost never ask for more than the offer), but also the personal factors that make her unique story relatable — a divorce that made her turn down a position in her ex’s city, a pregnancy that made her reject a dream job, the nightmare of finding out her kids had head lice just before taking them aboard a corporate jet. If she didn’t have me at hello, she certainly had me at the lice.

Sandberg’s conclusions about the techniques and life strategies that work for women — asking for help but

not foisting yourself on mentors, getting one’s husband to be a true partner at home, not letting kids interrupt one’s career, combining niceness with insistence as you “cross a minefield backward in high heels” — seem as if they would be of great use to women who aspire to leadership. For this reason, I plan to save this book for my 12-year-old daughter. As she makes her way through the world, I would very much like her to have access to “What Would Sheryl Do?” I’d like her to hear the question Sandberg asked in the Barnard commencement speech where she first exhorted young women to “lean in” to their careers:

“So please ask yourself: What would I do if I weren’t afraid? And then go do it.”

Let’s hope this is a book that is read as much as talked about.

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