

IAFFE 2013 PAPER ABSTRACT
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Note: accompanying Powerpoint slides are available through the IAFFE website.

That's funny, you don't look brainy: How to advance your ideas and thinking, and change the world as we know it

Women's voices are still missing from the public discourse.

In 2010, National Public Radio took a deep look at the diversity of experts they were selecting for their talk shows. They discovered that in the shows sampled, only 35% of experts interviewed were women. (1)

Nationwide, women contribute fewer than 25% of opinion pieces. (2)

Over at the *Wall Street Journal's* bestselling books list, Sheryl Sandberg's *Lean In* topped hardcover business books for the week ending April 14, 2013. (3) There were no other business books by women on the list. Before Sandberg's highly discussed argument for how women can attain leadership positions, books by women rarely showed up on the *Journal's* business list.

Why should we be bothered by these numbers? Even though women make up 50.8% (4) of the U.S. population, their voices are conspicuously missing as an influential force in our lives, shaping public opinion.

What needs to be influenced? For starters, and this is the short list: what gets taught in our schools; the education system itself; what products get made; what we buy and how safe those products will be; who gets

health care and how much it costs; what constitutes poverty and to what extent government helps the poor; women's and girls' rights and human rights; and who can emigrate to this country.

So I'm on a mission. Specifically, I want talented, successful women to break through the noise and be acknowledged as the leading voices, or foremost authorities, in their fields. We need their voices — your voices — in key decision-making, idea-influencing areas of our lives.

Too many women toil away in obscurity — in academia, business, public life and the not-for-profit world — while making remarkable contributions. The ideas that brought about these contributions need to be broadcast as loud as possible across all media and platforms, in order to influence and change the status quo.

My objective is that you think about getting the acknowledgement you deserve for your ideas, that you imagine how you can rise to your rightful place as an enduring thinker in your field, and that you'll create a plan for a legacy of ideas that positively affects the lives of many, and makes the world a better place.

This paper outlines how you can become a thought leader or public intellectual, how you can take what you already know in your field, and focus it in such a way that you create a breakthrough success path to achieve the standing of “acknowledged authority” in your field.

In this paper I discuss:

- What a thought leader is
- Who becomes a thought leader or public intellectual
- Barriers and obstacles, especially those because of gender
- The six steps for becoming a thought leader

You can make a conscious decision to break through the pack and transform yourself from excellent to that singular, one-of-a-kind authority that unmistakably distinguishes you, a sought-after, talked-about professional in your field who makes a difference in people's lives.

The paper covers the core areas you'll need to get your thought leadership on a forward path, and gives you the foundation for a plan for what you'll do next to achieve this breakthrough goal.

Let's take a quick look at some more numbers. If you have even a sliver of doubt that you can make a difference, I hope you'll let these numbers prod you into action.

Women are:

- 13.5% of guests on Sunday morning talk shows (5)
- 13% of contributors to Wikipedia (6)
- 3% of ad agency creative directors (7)
- 15% of senior management in all industries (8)
- 18.3% of Congressional seats (9)
- 3% of *Wall Street Journal* op-eds by scholars (10)

Society at large stands to be the big winner when more women contribute their ideas and influence the important conversations going on all around us.

For example, issues that matter especially to women, their families and children, such as pay equity for women (11), are more likely to be implemented with larger numbers of women in public office.

Policies will change when the numbers of women who make and influence policy take their seat at the table. And women, children and families in particular will be much better off.

Thought Leadership Defined

Thought leaders are deeply knowledgeable people who change the way we think about our lives. We find out about their ideas, and they influence us because we believe in what they're saying.

Being a thought leader is more than about making money or doing well in your profession. It's about making a difference by adding your voice and ideas to the important conversations that shape opinions. You're on a *mission* to really change the way people think.

We can look to a number of women as examples of those who have influenced us or who were controversial (some still are controversial):

Margaret Sanger, birth control activist

Rosa Parks, civil rights activist

Maria Montessori, education innovator

Rachel Carson, environmentalist and author

Jane Goodall, primatologist

Florence Nightingale, nurse and letter writer

Ayn Rand, philosopher and author

Simone De Beauvoir, philosopher and author

Marie Curie, scientist, Nobel laureate

Gloria Steinem, Betty Friedan, women's rights activists and authors

Oprah Winfrey, TV personality

I make a special case for Oprah: she has been a remarkable influencer through the power of television. Her show reached millions of viewers every day. When she recommended a book or product, millions of people would purchase the item.

Who becomes a Thought Leader, Thinker, or Public Intellectual

There are no boundaries or factors limiting where thought leaders emerge. We recognize them in such areas as economics, science, business, the public sector, policy, non-profit sector, education, academia, healthcare, law, medicine, technology, finance, engineering, and math.

George Leonard, the late author of a thoughtful book called *Mastery* (12), talks about the process of getting incrementally stronger, in any endeavor, and not allowing plateaus to stall us. He refers to this continuous process as mastery. If we apply mastery to becoming a thought leader or public intellectual, we would consistently update and advance our thinking, get and stay in the public eye, and ensure that our ideas are influencing as we intend them to.

Thought leadership is also a state of mind and being. As a thought leader, you'll be saying things others don't say. Some of it may be contrarian. You want people talking about your work.

Some of this talk will be positive, some negative, especially if your ideas buck so-called conventional wisdom. You know you're succeeding if your ideas start conversations. The media in particular gravitate to those who show up with a different script, in that it's a novel way of framing an argument that makes us rethink our own views.

Going back to Sheryl Sandberg and her *Lean In* book: her message about how to get more women into leadership is fresh, contrarian, and like no-one else's. The contrarian element is in her placing most of the responsibility for change squarely on women's shoulders — it's women whom she's urging to "lean in."

The media had a field day discussing her ideas for at least a couple of months, keeping Sandberg's book topping bestseller lists in both the business and non-fiction categories for weeks.

Four Reasons to become a Thought Leader

There are four defining reasons for advancing your position as a thought-leading woman.

First, as **Influencer**. Thought leaders have ideas that influence the way we think. Think about that for a moment: your ideas can be so well accepted, that people quote and reference you and turn to you as the person with the most compelling message. As a thought leader, you are by definition an influencer.

Next is **Recognizable Brand**. As I write this, the most prominent brand advanced by a woman is Sheryl Sandberg's *Lean In* — it includes the book and Leanin.org, her non-profit that aims to extend the "Lean In" concept through "lean in circles."

Sandberg is the Chief Operating Officer of Facebook, and she's rapidly emerged as a thought leader on how more women can advance into

leadership positions. As I noted earlier, her lean in idea has stirred up controversy, and almost overnight catapulted her to household-name status.

In some instances the media have tried to reframe Sandberg's main argument as a catfight with Anne-Marie Slaughter. The former Director of Policy Planning for Hillary Clinton, Slaughter famously caused a stir in 2012 after she quit her job and published a controversial article in the Atlantic about how women "can't have it all." (13)

You want people talking about your work like this. As we've seen with Sandberg's ideas, some of the chatter is positive, some negative. All of it has been outstanding for Sandberg's *Lean In* brand.

After Recognizable Brand is **Prestige and Profits**. When other influential people seek you out, you can't help but feel good about it. And why not? We all have a need to be acknowledged, and it's a good side benefit.

In terms of profits: when others refer to you as a "thinker" because you're contributing important ideas, you'll find that the greater the recognition, the greater the financial reward. As women we would do well to welcome this opportunity to improve our financial condition.

The fourth defining reason to become a thought leader: to **Leave a legacy of ideas**. This is the big picture piece. Your legacy of ideas tells the story of where you've made a difference, how you've changed people's minds, and what you've done to change the status quo.

This change can take place in the slimmest or narrowest of places. As I learned this March as a certified delegate to the U.N's 57th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, change — in arguably the most challenging issue of our time: ending violence against women and girls — is happening incrementally, house-by-house, street-by-street, and throughout the village.

Top 3 Common Threads of a Thought Leader

To become a thought leader you must have experience, expertise and passion. It requires a fire in the belly, *your* belly, a drive to make a difference or a positive impact on the world, even if, as I suggested earlier, your piece of the world is a narrow niche.

I advise that you get to know not only as much about your field as possible, but in particular other related areas it touches. It pays to be a ferocious learner and always be curious. Something you run across today that seems insignificant could well be a gem of insight you can use tomorrow.

Traits and Characteristics of a Thought Leader

A thought leader is someone who:

- Shows the way
- Has followers
- Has depth of knowledge in area of expertise
- Owns a breakthrough idea (in one's area of expertise)
- Writes prolifically and speaks extensively about the idea, successfully communicates it, the idea is widely published and it resonates
- Influences people to change the way they think and behave
- Inspires many people
- Is well-known by many people in a niche or industry
- Is quoted extensively in the media and by other influential people
- Is invited to keynote at important meetings
- Knows other thought leaders
- Is deeply inspired to leave a legacy of ideas
- Has a thick skin!

Let's focus on that last point — that thought leaders need to have a thick skin. As a woman, even with a thick skin we encounter more barriers than our male counterparts.

Why it's (still) harder for women

Regardless of whether you're thick or thin skinned, take things personally or brush them off with a laugh, it seems as though women need to work harder, be liked more, and be better than a man in order to be considered equal to men.

In her book, *Hardball for Women*, author Pat Heim tells us, "If we become the aggressive, no-nonsense win-at-all-costs players our male counterparts pride themselves in being, we're labeled "bossy," "obnoxious," "overbearing," "ambitious," or "strident bitches." (14) I would add "aggressive" to this list.

Heim goes on to say, "If we...continue to be passive, nurturant, overly sensitive" and "unambitious," ...what we perceive as important contributions and successes are diminished.

Not all barriers to women's success are external or because of how society stereotypes us. Women add to the barriers when we ourselves buy into gendered stereotypes, hold ourselves back, tell ourselves that our work isn't worthy of telling the world, or we keep quiet and don't make our opinions public because we're worried about being negatively criticized.

In her influential book, *Women Lead The Way*, Linda Tarr-Whelan informs us that when women attain at least 30% of top leadership positions (the "30% Solution"), not only do the conversations and dynamics change, organizations do measurably better. (15)

Studies by consulting firm McKinsey (16) and Credit Suisse Research Institute (17) show, for example, that corporations with more women on their boards outperform their peers.

I argue that we can apply the 30% Solution to women as thought leaders: when the numbers of women acknowledged as thinkers and opinion-shapers reaches at least 30% across most sectors, we'll start to see shifts in public discourse.

For now, women need to walk the fine line of being true to ourselves,

break down barriers to achieve Tarr-Whelan's 30% change-maker milestone, and do the work we're passionate about, regardless of how others label us.

Thought Leadership Continuum

Some exceptional people have breakthrough ideas seemingly out of nowhere. These are the exception.

Most thought leaders start as experts in their field, or know a lot about a particular discipline. On the thought leadership continuum, as an expert you're in a big competitive space.

Some experts advance to writing and speaking about their ideas, and are known as being distinctive. Most people stop at this point.

The few who aren't satisfied with the status quo are those whose ideas are breakthrough, meaning that you have a new or different way of thinking about an issue. Your thinking or approach could be a new process, or an invention. Women who want to break the status quo and are willing to act on their convictions have great potential to become thought leaders.

It's important to identify where you are on the thought leadership continuum today. Think about why you placed yourself at that point.

Now ask what thought leadership could look like for you. What will you be known for? Who knows about you? Where will you publish and speak?

Finally, consider what you think you'll need to do to become a thought leader or public intellectual — jot down things that come to mind that you can realistically carry out.

Guise 6-Step Thought Leader Development System for Women

If you like structure, the Guise 6-step system for advancing your standing as a thought leader will help you think through what you need to do, and when to do it. It isn't necessarily a linear process. You can move in and out of a step as needed — it's adaptable to your specific needs.

First, assess where you are right now. This will give you a good sense for what you'll do over the next few weeks and months.

Step I: Develop your idea (1 to 5 months).

- 1. Define your idea:** Write down what's cooking in your head or that you're already using in your work. This is a "brain dump" of your concept. Answer such questions as: What is my idea about? How would someone recognize it if they tripped over it? Who needs my idea and why?
- 2. Write up your idea:** Articulate your thoughts using key words and phrases that more precisely present your idea. This content will be the foundation and springboard for everything you write and communicate about your idea later on. Don't worry though: in this early stage it's still for your own private use.
- 3. Pinpoint your target market:** Determine whether your idea appeals to the general public, or a narrowly focused audience.
- 4. Explore potential roadblocks in the process.** These can be internal or external. Be brutally honest: examine what could hold you back, then create strategies for overcoming the roadblocks.
- 5. Test your idea.** Testing can be a pilot program in a series of workshops, where you capture before and after feedback. Or, do an informal study or conduct formal research. Your idea may be around creating a special interest community that offers value and benefits not available anywhere else. Whatever your idea, find a way to test it and carry out the test.

Step II: BRAND your idea (1 to 3 months). There are 4 key concepts to keep in mind when branding your idea.

1. Your **brand** is about the intersection of your message; perceptions; reputation; awareness; and who knows what about you
2. **Icon, images, look and feel:** In addition to the words, you'll develop the visual component of your idea. This is a big part of branding, as it gives your idea a recognizable identity.
3. **Trademark/patent:** Because you want to show that you own your idea or process, plan to register your word, phrase, symbol or design with the United States Patent and Trademark Office. Until it's registered, use the ™ symbol wherever your brand appears, including in your writing.
4. **Messaging/talking points:** Building on your draft keywords and phrases for your idea to this point, create a variety of brief conversation "pitches." These are short blurbs and talking points that present the many different facets of your idea. These "messages" are for communicating your idea to others.

Step III: Intellectual Property/Body of Knowledge/Body of Work; Distribution Phase I

(3 months, then ongoing). At this stage you're building a content foundation, developing sub-topics around your idea, establishing content distribution platforms, and finding and developing your "voice."

This is how the world, or your intended market, becomes familiar with your idea. Plan to write articles, give presentations, post to your blog, write a book or more than one book, create videos, podcasts, write papers, special reports, opinion pieces. All these content pieces are rich with relevant topics in your area of expertise that point back to your core idea. Use as many platforms and technologies as needed to reach your target market, and for which you have the "bandwidth."

STEP IV: Distribution Phase II — Overview (up to 15 months)

Steady stream, consistency, build volume

You've already started putting out your idea and messages through articles, white papers, blog posts, and videos. If you've written a book, you've reached the launch date, which means book reviews and promotion.

Even without a book, you're ready to accelerate and amp up your content distribution, getting your ideas and messages to a much broader audience. Your goal is to get out your message about your idea to the broadest audience possible, whether industry or discipline peers, media in your field, or consumers.

Your objective is also to garner a steady stream of media interviews, and to become a media magnet. Being a media magnet means the media seek you out, rather than your needing to knock on their doors. Some of the media opportunities available to you: regular contributor to your industry's most influential publications; topic analyst or regular guest for a cable network; profiles featuring you in mainstream and industry publications; and featured blogger.

STEP V: Distribution Phase III — The true mastery step (ongoing)

Keep up your visibility. Stay relevant. Be a consumer of what's going on around you: Tie your message to trends and breaking news. This last point is key, because these are opportunities whose coattails you can ride on if you can respond quickly to news items.

STEP VI: Ongoing/New Idea: Repeat the process with your new idea. A person who exemplifies this "wash, rinse, repeat" process is Robert Reich.

Although he's male, I wanted a familiar name for this example. Reich publishes a new book every couple of years — he's written thirteen to date. He frequently appears as an invited guest on news talk shows, publishes a weekly opinion piece, and posts to a personal blog. Formerly President Clinton's Secretary of Labor, Reich is a professor of public policy at UC Berkeley.

That there isn't a non-journalist woman known for her ideas who also continues to publish and make new content accessible to a

broad audience, amplifies this clarion call for women to join the ranks of opinion leaders and thinkers.

What's in it for you?

There are 4 compelling reasons for you to intentionally become a thought-leading woman:

1. To make an important contribution and make a piece of the world a better place
2. To leave a legacy of ideas
3. To be acknowledged as one of the leading “go-to” authorities in your field
4. To lead a more fulfilling life

So what does a world with greater numbers of influential women look like? Some of the markers will be more women:

- Writing best selling non-fiction and business books, or influential science, industry or trade books
- Getting opinion pieces (op-eds) published in influential publications
- Featured as commentators and analysts on major news programs
- Keynoting important meetings around the world, in all fields and disciplines
- As delegates to global forums, such as the World Economic Forum

I encourage you to make a commitment to join the ranks of great thinkers. If you have even the seed of an idea — sow it, help it grow, and then go out and tell the world about it.

That's how *you* can change history. And the world will be a much better place because of you!

Note: accompanying Powerpoint slides are available through the IAFFE website

Footnotes are on the following pages.

FOOTNOTES

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(12) *Mastery: The Keys to Success and Long-Term Fulfillment*, George Leonard, Penguin/Plume, New York, 1991/1992

(13) *Why Women Still Can't Have It All*, Anne-Marie Slaughter, The Atlantic, July/August 2012, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2012/07/why-women-still-cant-have-it-all/309020/>

(14) *Hardball for Women: Winning at the Game of Business* (Revised Edition), Pat Heim, Ph.D., with Susan K. Golant, Plume, New York, 2005

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(16) *Women Matter: Making the breakthrough*, McKinsey & Company, March 2012, http://www.mckinsey.com/client_service/organization/latest_thinking/women_matter

(17) *Does Gender Diversity Improve Performance?* Credit Suisse Research Institute, July 31, 2012, <https://infocus.credit-suisse.com/app/article/index.cfm?fuseaction=OpenArticle&aoid=360157&lang=EN>

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