

a good
time
to be a
girl

don't lean in,
change the system

helena
morrisey

Helena Morrissey

A Good Time to be a Girl: Don't Lean In, Change the System

Аннотация

From the founder of the worldwide 30% Club campaign comes a career book for women in a transforming world who don't just want to lean in, but instead, shatter the paradigm as we know it. 'I absolutely love her, I think she's such a force for good' Pandora Sykes, *The High Low* In *A Good Time to be a Girl*, Helena Morrissey sets out how we might achieve the next big breakthrough towards a truly inclusive modern society. Drawing on her experience as a City CEO, mother of nine, and founder of the influential 30% Club which campaigns for gender-balanced UK company boards, her manifesto for new ways of working, living, loving and raising families is for everyone, not just women. Making a powerful case for diversity and difference in any workplace, she shows how, together, we can develop smarter thinking and broader definitions of success. Gender balance, in her view, is an essential driver of economic prosperity and part of the solution to the many problems we face today. Her approach is not aimed merely at training a few more women in working practices that have outlived their usefulness. Instead, this book sets out a way to reinvent the game – not at the expense of men but in ways that are right and relevant for a digital age. It is a powerful guide to success for us all.

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Helena Morrissey asserts the moral right to be identified as
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Dedication

In memory of my wonderful grandmothers, Irene and Amy, who did not have the opportunities we have today.

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Preface

It's a good time to be a girl! In all honesty, I don't think I could have written that unequivocally before now. Of course, I've seen real progress for women over my fifty-year lifetime, thirty-year career in a male-dominated industry and twenty-five years of motherhood, beginning with one son and now (a final tally) nine children, six girls and three boys. It's certainly been – increasingly – a *better* time to be a girl. As you read my story I hope you will see so much to celebrate about this progress that we've already made, and how you can create your own opportunities for success, whatever stage you are at in life. I recognise now that I made some 'lucky' choices along the way; by seeing what works and what doesn't, my hope is that you might leave much less to chance.

But today's opportunity is *so much* greater than the unfinished business of the past – and that's why I've written this book now. Gender equality is a well-worn subject but it is not one we have mastered. Despite the huge body of literature, of advice, theory and opinion, the reality is that still only a small number of women have been making it to the top or feel they are fulfilling their potential. Many more tell me they feel discouraged about their prospects, unfulfilled or conflicted in their multiple roles as mothers or carers with careers. They can't see the linkage between their own reality and gender equality efforts that often

seem targeted at a narrow group of white, privileged and highly educated women, rather than at *all* women.

Companies, too, are frustrated by limited progress in the numbers of senior women after many years of feeling they are doing a lot to encourage their female and other ‘diverse’ talent. Sometimes, the result of all these special initiatives has – inadvertently – been to do more harm than good; *difference can seem difficult rather than desirable*.

And yet, I am more optimistic today than ever before. I believe that we – men and women, working together – have an unprecedented opportunity to create a new, more successful, quite different approach, one that will not just create more possibilities for girls, but more choices for boys, too – a bolder approach to gender equality that’s not aimed merely at training a few more women in working practices that have outlived their usefulness. Those women (and even fewer ethnic minority, gay or disabled people) who have made it to the top today are the exceptions, the ones who have mostly played by the rules of the existing game. We now have the chance to *reinvent the game* – not at the expense of men, but by creating new ways of working and living that fit the world of today and tomorrow, not the past. I have spent years listening and engaging with both women and men who tell me very similar things about the pressures they feel to comply with ‘norms’ that seem habitual rather than right for anyone, or relevant in a digital age.

So our ambitious, shared goal now is to devise ways of

working, living, loving and bringing up families together, as equals. A model of partnership and collaboration, rather than hierarchy and patriarchy.

This is not the approach that has dominated gender equality efforts up to this point. Until now, women and ethnic minorities have mostly been playing catch-up rather than leapfrog. For example, more of us are becoming lawyers, accountants and doctors, but in the meantime men are pushing onwards, upwards and outwards, taking more entrepreneurial, higher-risk routes to success. Start-ups run by women, for example, currently account for only 2% of US venture capital firms' investments. Following in men's footsteps, emulating the boys but trailing a few years behind them, is not the answer. As women, we have our own strengths to offer.

What makes me so confident? – and so out of sync with many commentators, who routinely despair at everything from President Trump to gender pay gaps and the litany of revelations about sexual harassment? The irony is that the new opportunity I see arises from the very state of flux we find ourselves in. Today's upheavals are unsettling in so many ways and may result in setbacks, but they also open the door to a whole new level of progress. That's not wishful thinking. My experiences have shown me that people become receptive to new ideas at moments of dislocation in a way that's very unlikely in stable times. That's a rational reaction: when the path is smooth, there is little incentive to consider a different route, but where there is turbulence, we

need to explore new concepts that might show us a way through. The key is to seize the moment.

Today's challenges are certainly immense, driven largely by technology, which is rapidly undermining traditional power structures, changing the nature of leadership, the future of employment, and threatening our physical security. There is no playbook to consult. Leaders – in business, politics and communities – see the need for new thinking, but are grappling with what that looks like.

This book explains how gender balance is an important part of the solution, not – as so many see it – another problem to solve. If we can connect the two, the prize is very great, for each of us as individuals, for equality and for our ability to solve increasingly complex problems. The stark reality is that if we are going to resolve the big disconnects, we need to re-engineer our collective thinking, and that means involving more women. Feminine traits – empathy, collaborative behaviour, the ability to connect emotionally with those we are seeking to influence – can help us find answers.

Of course, men can have those feminine attributes too; what is important is to move on from the macho command-and-control regime that we have become used to for centuries. Today, as politicians are realising, people will not be told what to do by leaders who don't connect with them and they don't trust. That goes for customers as well as voters.

So amidst the current upheavals, we have the chance to

develop a new, shared understanding of what's needed to be successful, in our family lives as well as our careers; what's needed for men as well as women to have more freedom in how they live and for these positive changes to affect many people. This is *not* yesteryear's battle of the sexes. Happily, in my experience many men in many countries around the world now want gender equality too – and that's key to consigning the whole topic to the history books. Short of a revolution, people on the outside need those on the inside to help them progress. 'He for she' (and 'she for he') is the right approach.

I have seen change happen once many people start to share the desire to reach a certain outcome, and then work together towards it. A multitude of individuals taking small steps together in the same direction creates a powerful momentum. Years of glacial – or no – progress can be followed by rapid advances. Look at what happened in the aftermath of the terrible revelations about widespread, long-running sexual harassment in Hollywood and beyond, catalysed by the Harvey Weinstein allegations. We can understand why those who suffered harassment did not speak up at the time: they felt alone; the 'system' was omnipotent – but today's social media enabled them to join forces, to amplify their voices to change the way this issue will be seen from now onwards. Leaning in to a corrupt system may have seemed the 'only' option – now, together, we can challenge and transform that system.

What happens next is very much up to all of us – and that

includes you. You don't need to choose between focusing on your own career and creating the conditions for broader progress; increasingly, those goals are linked. This book will show you how to make the most of today's new opportunities, whether you are still at school, starting out in your working life, looking to progress at mid-career or already at a senior level, whether you are a daughter, son, parent, mentor, mentee, teacher, pupil, CEO or apprentice.

I'm not complacent. In my own lifetime I have already seen many stops and starts in the journey towards gender equality and of course there were very many years of effort long before, including the sacrifices made by women who had to fight hard for the right to vote a century ago. Even since I started writing this book a number of critical developments have occurred – and will continue to occur – because great change involves challenging episodes, lurches forward, steps back and the inevitable sense that we are faltering. But this is a necessary part of the process.

And today's great opportunity is far from universal, with terrible atrocities against women and girls even on our own doorsteps: in England, a case of female genital mutilation (FGM) is discovered or treated every hour and child trafficking referrals (often involving girls for sexual abuse) hit a record high in 2017. Even equality for many will be a hollow victory if these crimes continue. We must also ensure that white, disadvantaged young men, who now have the lowest educational attainment levels of any group, aren't left behind as we push on towards a world of

greater opportunity for bright young women.

These are real challenges but they remind us of the need to improve the whole, not just the outcomes for a few. I am excited about exploring new ways of working that will enable more women to fulfil their potential, more men to play a greater role in their children's lives, better thinking to solve today's problems and broader definitions of success. A time when my six daughters not only can be but need to be themselves and when my sons have more choices than their father's generation, too. A time when, as Lord Browne, former CEO of BP, who came out as gay after forty-one years in business, says, 'women don't have to be honorary men, blacks honorary whites, gays honorary straights'.

At which point, we'll look back and wonder how we got so accustomed to anything else.

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