

DEVELOPING *female* LEADERS

NAVIGATE THE MINEFIELDS AND RELEASE
THE *POTENTIAL OF WOMEN* IN YOUR CHURCH



KADI COLE

PRAISE FOR *DEVELOPING* *FEMALE LEADERS*

“In *Developing Female Leaders*, Kadi Cole gives leaders a virtual master class on women in leadership. This is a must-read for both men and women. Kadi dives into some of the most sensitive issues leaders face about men and women in the workplace with wisdom, insight, clarity, and accuracy. You’ll find this book tremendously thoughtful, practical, and helpful.”

—**Carey Nieuwhof**, founding pastor, Connexus Church;
author of *Didn’t See It Coming*

“*Developing Female Leaders* is the book for this time for all leaders. Practical, well researched, honestly facing the nuances, and written in a compelling and powerful style that if followed will define the church of the future.”

—**Jo Anne Lyon**, ambassador, general superintendent emerita
for the Wesleyan Church

“At a time when leadership is at a premium, there is a wealth of talented women ready to lead. Kadi shows us how to maximize their potential by offering readers a practical, balanced approach to equipping and empowering the next generation of female leaders.”

—**Jerry Hurley**, team development leader, Life Church,
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

“I first met Kadi in a roundtable environment of senior leaders of the largest churches in America. As the only non-American, I stood out. The other person who stood out was Kadi, because she was the only woman in the room that day. As a church leader for nearly three decades it is very obvious to me that the landscape of women in leadership is changing. Kadi’s life, her stories, and the stories of others she has gathered will inspire you.”

—**Pastor Joel A’Bell**, lead pastor, Hillsong Church Australia

“The church has never needed women leaders more than today. Kadi Cole is bringing wise guidance to a crucial area.”

—**John Ortberg**, senior pastor, Menlo Church;
author of *Eternity Is Now in Session*

“How I wish this book had been available decades ago when I began to lead in the local church! I highly recommend this tool for church leaders who know we can do better, who believe that God’s best is for men and women to serve with mutual respect in healthy cultures where all of us can thrive.”

—**Nancy Beach**, leadership coach, Slingshot Group; author of *Gifted to Lead: The Art of Leading as a Woman in the Church*

“Kadi Cole has provided an excellent resource that can help any organization more effectively and intentionally identify and develop what is sadly an untapped source of leadership in many Christian organizations. The last two chapters alone are worth the price of the book for any leader. Practical, insightful, and healthy, *Developing Female Leaders* is a guide you and your ministry will reference for many years to come.”

—**Bill Willits**, executive director of Ministry Environments, North Point Ministries; coauthor of *Creating Community: 5 Keys to Building a Small Group Culture*

“Kadi has given us a gift that every leader needs: the tools to develop women leaders. Written with courage, honesty, and insight that comes from years of experience, *Developing Female Leaders* is a book we can’t lead without.”

—**Sherry Surratt**, executive director of Parent Strategies at Orange Ministries

“Kadi was one of the trailblazers for women in leadership at Christ Fellowship. We credit Kadi with helping us make God-given vision a reality around here. Every time I travel, I run across people who mention how much they admire Kadi. It makes me so proud to have supported her to be all God ordained her to be as a woman leading the way in ministry today. This book will be a game-changer for you and your team.”

—**Tom Mullins**, founding pastor, Christ Fellowship Church

“We can not ignore the need to more intentionally develop female leaders, especially in our churches. Kadi provides valuable perspective and insightful research that will expand your thinking. The tone is gracious but not apologetic. Men and women need to heed the stories and employ the best practices outlined here.”

—**Jenni Catron**, leadership coach, author, and founder of the 4Sight Group

“Kadi Cole has written a valuable book that meets a clear need. She confidently, yet with great respect, acknowledges the deficit in developing female leaders and then uses story to offer practical solutions to meet the need. This book will give you valuable insight and help you lead and develop your female leaders.”

—**Dee Ann Turner**, vice president, Chick-fil-A (Retired), author of *It's My Pleasure: The Impact of Extraordinary Talent and a Compelling Culture*

“Candid, insightful, and practical! A straightforward look at a relevant topic that deserves our attention. Regardless of your theological position, Kadi has written an excellent and thought-provoking resource that will help you develop a healthy and productive team.”

—**Dan Reiland**, executive pastor, 12Stone Church

“Kadi Cole’s words will help bridge a serious gap for the church today. I’m grateful she had the desire and tenacity to complete this book that should be read by all.”

—**Mallory Bassham**, associate senior pastor, Gateway Church

“Most books about women in leadership are more of an apologetic for a certain theological viewpoint than a practical primer on how to unleash the God-given giftedness of the women in our churches. Kadi Cole breaks that mold. Whether you’re a woman seeking to determine your role and how to best use your leadership gifts or a man seeking to help the women in your life and church become all that God has called them be, this is a book you not only need to read—you need to mark it up as well.”

—**Larry Osborne**, pastor, North Coast Church; author of *Lead Like a Shepherd*

“Kadi’s passion to see others fulfill their leadership potential is reflected in every page of this book. Her firsthand experience as a woman in church leadership offers hard-earned wisdom and practical tools for pastors and leaders. This is an important book for the body of Christ in this season.”

—**Todd and Julie Mullins**, senior pastors, Christ Fellowship Church

“Kadi’s powerful book helped me hear firsthand what it is like to be a woman trying to navigate leadership in ministry. This book is full of practical ways that we can all help build on ramps for women in leadership. The kingdom of God will move forward and take new ground because of this book.”

—**Lance Witt**, founder, Replenish Ministries

“Kadi Cole skillfully lays out the critical issues the female leader faces. She challenges ministry leaders to wrestle with their theology and practices of developing and engaging females in ministry leadership roles. The result of your journey with her in this book will lead you to establishing your own best practices in placing females into leadership. Enjoy the ride.”

—**Doug Randlett**, senior associate pastor, Thomas Road Church;
associate professor, Liberty University

“Kadi’s extensive experience leading at very high levels in the church make her uniquely qualified to speak into what I believe to be one of the biggest issues facing the American church. If you value the gifting of women to lead in the context of your church, I highly recommend this book.”

—**Geoff Surratt**, Church Multisite Coach; founder of Ministry Together

“Kadi’s leadership as a nurse, higher education professional, and long-time executive leader in the church lends a wealth of experience. Her insights, along with those of the thousands she has interviewed, provide clear understanding and practical tools. Kadi’s book will guide you along a pathway to exponentially increase the leadership potential of your church.”

—**Greg Ligon**, chief operating officer, Leadership Network

“This powerful book is unique, well researched, and desperately needed. I love my friend Kadi Cole’s spirit in how she writes. Her candid stories and practical advice made me uncomfortable in places, but I kept reading because, frankly, I needed it. The chapter on best practices for developing female leaders is worth more than the price of the book.”

—**Warren Bird, PhD**, author or coauthor of thirty-one books, including *Hero Maker*, *Teams That Thrive*, and *How to Break Growth Barriers*

“Culture changes through conversations. Kadi Cole’s *Developing Female Leaders* equips church leaders with the tools to further those conversations. Her meaningful insights gained from years of personal experience can be the catalyst for the body of Christ becoming more whole and complete.”

—**Kevin Penry**, directional leader of operations 2000–2017,
Life Church, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

“A groundbreaking resource that will become a foundational building block for churches and ministries who seek to raise up gifted female leaders. Kadi is an outstanding practitioner who offers tested leadership principles and insightful research along with very practical ideas that can be put into play immediately. You will keep this book close to your workspace and refer to it over and over again for many years to come!”

—**Jon Ferguson**, cofounder, Community Christian Church and NewThing

“Regardless of your view of the role of women in the church, this book is a helpful guide on how to relate to and develop the women leaders in your congregation. Kadi Cole addresses the stereotypes, misconceptions, and abuses that women church leaders have endured. More importantly she offers practical help in creating healthy church environments and relationships for female leaders to flourish and grow.”

—**Jim Tomberlin**, pastor, author, founder of MultiSite Solutions

“A brilliant and timely must-read for all Christian leaders regardless of your theological viewpoint. Kadi Cole brings needed clarity and practical insights that will help us better value, respect, and mobilize at least half of those who attend our churches.”

—**Steve Stroope**, lead pastor, Lake Pointe Church; author of *Tribal Church*

“What a timely book for the church! This is a super practical book for women trying to find their place in leadership. And it is also a book for those who are helping women develop their leadership capacity. Get this book, read it, and unleash the potential of the women in your church!”

—**Jim Sheppard**, CEO and principal, Generis

“An extremely practical and balanced approach to taking on what can sometimes be a hot button issue. Every pastor and ministry leader who is serious about incorporating the equal gifts and holy calling of women in our churches should read, learn from, and consider these best practices.”

—**Jimmy Scroggins**, lead pastor, Family Church

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KADI COLE



THOMAS NELSON
Since 1798

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About Leadership Network[®]

Leadership Network fosters innovation movements that activate the church to greater impact. We help shape the conversations and practices of pacesetter churches in North America and around the world. The Leadership Network mind-set identifies church leaders with forward-thinking ideas—and helps them to catalyze those ideas resulting in movements that shape the church.

Together with HarperCollins Christian Publishing, the biggest name in Christian books, the NEXT imprint of Leadership Network moves ideas to implementation for leaders to take their ideas to form, substance, and reality. Placed in the hands of other church leaders, that reality begins spreading from one leader to the next . . . and to the next . . . and to the next, where that idea begins to flourish into a full-grown movement that creates a real, tangible impact in the world around it.

NEXT: A Leadership Network Resource
committed to helping you grow your next idea.

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This book is dedicated to
The women who modeled godly female leadership for me . . .
My mom, Harriet. You are one of my richest blessings.
My spiritual leadership mentor and lifelong friend, Jill Brandenburg.
My favorite kick-butt female boss, Dr. Marianne May.
And the men who went out of their way to
open leadership doors for me . . .
Pastor Gale Fister, Jim Kuffel, Bob Woods, Dr. Doug
Randlett, Pastor Jeff Bogue, Pastor Todd Mullins,
and Greg Ligon. There are no words.

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WELCOME

You have really nice birthing hips.”

That was my introduction to ministry leadership as a female. I had recently moved across the country for my first job after college and was volunteering to lead the name tag table for my church’s singles ministry picnic. I was energetic, naive, hopeful, and ready to share Jesus’ love with everyone I met. That creepy forty-five-year-old divorcé took me completely by surprise.

I had no idea what to do. Was he joking? Did I somehow send a wrong signal? What is the right way to respond to this?

I awkwardly tried to laugh it off in the moment, but I’ve never forgotten how suddenly out of place and vulnerable I felt. Thankfully, I had some great leaders who came beside me, rolled their eyes with me, and helped me find other avenues and experiences that were the exact opposite—affirming, uplifting, and a whole lot of fun. Had they not, I am pretty sure the “birthing hips” guy and a handful of other unfortunate encounters would have derailed my passion for serving in ministry and eroded my trust in the people who make up Jesus’ church. Oh, how much I would have missed out on.

I am not the only one with these kinds of stories. In fact, the more female ministry leaders I meet, the more incredible stories I

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hear. Some are hilarious, some are ridiculous, and some will make you cry. There is great power in remembering and sharing our experiences—especially for young leaders coming behind us.

Some amazing leaders (both male and female) did that for me, so this book is my attempt to get powerful stories to more churches, more leadership teams, and more up-and-coming female leaders to encourage, inspire, and challenge all of us to fully fulfill our callings.

I realize that females in church leadership is a controversial topic, and although I am not normally one to engage in such an emotionally charged debate, this one continues to bubble up in almost every conversation or leadership engagement I have. Because I come from a spiritually rich and eclectic Christian church background, I have grown to love, understand, and appreciate people and ministries on all sides of this theological issue.

I grew up in the mountains of Montana, where gender roles are not very traditional—men often cook and garden, while women frequently hunt and know how to change their own oil. But most of the women I saw in our small mission church served only in traditional female roles, such as in the nursery and the kitchen. In college I was part of a Lutheran church near Seattle where women were fully ordained and no one ever gave it a second thought. I have been part of a Baptist church in the South where I watched a highly educated female staff member consistently hesitate in giving her full perspective to the senior pastor, even though he asked for her honest opinion. And I have been on leadership staff at a church that started out on one side of this issue and transitioned to the other side. They were all wonderful places to grow, contribute, learn, and lead.

Now, in my work as a church consultant and leadership coach, I get to see God working in a lot of different contexts and approaches. I love them all, and I honestly respect everyone's view on this issue. But something has shifted recently in my work with church leaders.

Usually when I speak at a conference or lead a training at a church,

it is the female leaders who are excited to connect and talk about my personal journey, especially how I ended up leading at high levels in churches that were not publicly open to having women in positions of leadership. But more and more lately, I have been approached by male senior pastors and executive leaders asking me questions about what they can do to help develop the young female leaders on their staffs and in their congregations. I talk about pipelines and trainings, getting women leaders out of administrative/secretarial titles, and how to cast vision and provide clarity about the issue with their teams.

As we talk, they will typically nod and take notes. Usually they will have a couple of follow-up questions, and sometimes offer a description of the existing women on their team and an explanation of what they have done so far to help them grow as leaders. That's when it will get weird. I actually hear things like:

- "I promoted her to my assistant so she can sit in on the executive team meetings."
- "I assume we will only have her for a couple more years until she starts having kids."
- "I asked my wife (who does not work at the church) to start mentoring her."
- "She comes on a little strong, which makes our team nervous."
- "I talked with her husband to see if she'd be willing to increase her hours."
- "I didn't want her to feel awkward being the only girl, so we didn't bring her."
- "We have a big women's ministry, so she gets what she needs spiritually there."
- "We were going to give her a promotion, but she became pregnant, and we didn't want to overload her with a baby on the way."

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It always takes me by surprise. These are really amazing men—the highest-level leaders in their churches. They are intelligent, love the Lord, have great people skills, and are trying like crazy to make a way for the female talent they see on their teams.

But here's what I have come to realize: they meant well, but they simply did not know what they did not know. I am calling it “lovingly ignorant.” How could these leaders be expected to do things differently if they did not understand *why* these perspectives and actions are not helpful?

That is why I wrote this book. I hope to highlight the issues and help church leaders think more critically about what they believe and how they can be even more intentional about elevating and empowering the female leaders serving on their teams and sitting in their congregations.

Throughout this book you will find a collection of stories, experiences, research, interviews, perspectives, advice, warnings, wisdom, and candor gleaned from

- more than thirty executive and high-level female ministry leaders in a variety of settings, including some of the world's biggest and most influential churches;
- more than one thousand female leaders from churches across America and in several other countries who completed our survey about developing female leaders; and
- a handful of brave male leaders from some of America's most influential churches who are actively engaging this issue and seeing the fruit of releasing women to contribute their all in ministry.

There are discussion questions at the end of the book that you can work through by yourself or together with your leadership team.

My only intent is to help. If you are someone who is open, curious, hungry, passionate, or perhaps even determined to move this topic forward in your church, I pray this book will serve as a conversation catalyst, a useful tool to help you make changes, and a source of encouragement and inspiration for “what could be.”

FOR CHURCH LEADERS

I hope you will begin to see the talented, gifted, and anointed women God has brought to your church in a new light. I pray you will catch the vision God has for how you are to equip and empower their dormant potential so your whole church might benefit from their impact and fulfill the mission you have been called to lead.

FOR WOMEN EARLY IN THEIR LEADERSHIP JOURNEY (REGARDLESS OF YOUR AGE)

I hope you learn from these storytellers and wisdom-givers. Be inspired by their courage, tenacity, mistakes, victories, calling, and sanctification. I pray you begin to see your potential and your pathway more clearly, as God sees it.

FOR SEASONED FEMALE LEADERS

I hope this book is a confirmation that your faithfulness and presence in ministry makes a difference. It matters that you keep showing up. It matters that you keep learning and growing. And it matters that you begin to raise the dialog, educate the leaders around you, invest

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in the younger female leaders coming after you, and leave things better than you found them. You matter.

The positive evidence for diversity of all kinds on our teams and in our workplaces has been clear for a long time: higher productivity, enhanced culture, increased talent retention, more innovation and creativity, greater social impact, and improved leadership decision making.¹ And that's just in the business world. What could our churches be like if we got better in all these areas? What kind of impact could we see for the kingdom if we embraced the power of diversity?

I hope we get to find out.



Best Practice #1

SEEK TO UNDERSTAND

Where are all the ladies?” asked Pastor Joel A’Bell, the lead pastor of Hillsong Church Australia. Everyone looked around the room sheepishly. A couple of leaders chuckled under their breath. I tried to smile politely but avoided eye contact with anyone.

This wasn’t the first room of church leaders in which I was the only female. Nor was it the biggest. But it was, hands down, the most intimidating. And it had nothing to do with being a woman.

This was the annual gathering of executive pastors of large multisite churches. They had met through a Leadership Network¹ community in the early 2000s, when multisite was a brand-new concept, and no one had yet heard the term *campus pastor* or was using a matrix organizational structure in a church. They continue to meet every year to learn from one another, share what they are working on, and encourage one another in the work of ministry around the globe.

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That year my home church was hosting it, and my executive pastor, who was recruiting me to come back on staff as part of the executive team, had invited me to join in for a few days to “get a taste of what I would be a part of.” (Not a bad recruiting strategy, right?)

Pastor Joel eyed the room as if he actually wanted an answer. Being from another country and working in ministries around the world, he was not used to this kind of homogeny. What seemed “normal” to us raised a red flag to him. None of us had any good answers, especially me. I was just thankful to be in the room.

Another male executive pastor put it this way: “There are all these talented women in our congregation, but it’s like they can’t break through, even as volunteers. We want them to, but we just can’t seem to figure it out. I come from the corporate world, and this is just baffling to me.”

Baffling is a good word for it. It can be confusing for pastors who are open to women doing more in their churches but find there is this invisible barrier to recruiting and retaining high-quality female leaders.

What is it? If we clearly have needs that a female leader could fill and we have qualified women available, what is the holdup?

To answer that question, you have to get a little inside a woman’s head. I know that’s a scary thought, but bear with me. If you want to understand the holdup, you must understand the pushback. You have to learn what many of the women in your congregation are battling internally so you can encourage and challenge them in the right ways.

Obviously, every woman is different. But following are the most common challenges or paradoxes that the women we interviewed and surveyed are facing. I encourage you to ask some of the women leaders on your team and in your congregation for their experiences and perspectives around these concepts. You may find that many of them are true and the learning will be worth it. Without a deeper understanding, you will stay baffled, and they will stay underutilized.

CONDITIONING

As I have talked with male leaders about this subject, it has been hard for me to find the adequate words to describe the effects that many cultures have on a woman's view of herself, her role, her calling, and her potential. Many things influence this during our growing-up years—our family dynamics, the area of the country in which we lived, the type of school we attended, and the culture of our church. Most women who are over thirty-five likely grew up with parents of the Boomer generation (born between 1946 and 1964), in which gender roles were clear but were being challenged in progressive ways. If they grew up in the church, however, these traditional gender roles stayed strongly in place for another twenty or thirty years.

Now, I love being a woman, and I really love the men in my life. I would not want any of us to give up our gender identities or the God-ordained uniquenesses they express. So when I'm talking about gender roles, I am not talking about actual gender or the beauty that God reveals in men and women. But I am talking about the stereotypical roles we easily assign to people based solely on gender. Things like these:

- Men are better at science, technology, finance, problem-solving, and video games. All men enjoy working on cars, fixing things around the house, politics, sports, and outdoor activities like fishing and hunting. Men are sloppy, lazy, and do not cook or clean. All men are competitive and natural leaders.
- Women are naturally talented at teaching, organizing, cooking, cleaning, and relationships. All women enjoy kids, fashion, spending money, decorating, shopping, and dancing. Women are neither technical nor able to fix things such as cars or household appliances. Women avoid physically demanding work and

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prefer not to sweat. Women are relational peacemakers and natural followers.

Each of us has grown up connecting with some of the stereotypes of our gender and some that do not fit us at all. I know many men who feel insecure that they aren't good at sports or that they can't fix things around the house. What a shame! God hand-makes each one of us and gives us a unique style to fit our specific calling. Stereotypes hurt everyone. Wherever she adopted hers, the effects of these messages over decades greatly influence what a developing female leader thinks about herself, how she can please God, and what she can offer in service at her church.

The best way I know to describe it to someone who has not experienced her gender be a leadership liability is to flip the table on the guys. To get a better understanding of what this would feel like, the following is a spoof on gender equality that I first heard at a conference for higher-education professionals. This is not meant to be insulting to anyone's theological position, but I do want to challenge you to think about how you would view your leadership capacity differently if this is what you heard on a weekly basis during your formative growing-up years.

10 Reasons Why Men Shouldn't Be Pastors, by David Scholer²

10. A man's place is in the army.
9. For men who have children, their duties might distract them from the responsibility of being a parent.
8. Their physical build indicates that they are more suited to such tasks as chopping down trees and wrestling mountain lions. It would be "unnatural" for them to do other forms of work.

7. Man was created before woman, obviously as a prototype. Thus, men represent an experiment, rather than the crowning achievement of creation.
6. Men are too emotional to be priests or pastors. Their conduct at football and basketball games demonstrates this.
5. Some men are handsome, and this will distract women worshippers.
4. Pastors need to nurture their congregations. But this is not a traditional male role. Throughout history, women have been recognized as not only more skilled than men at nurturing but also more fervently attracted to it. This makes them the obvious choice for ordination.
3. Men are overly prone to violence. No “manly man” wants to settle disputes by any means other than by fighting about it. Thus, they would be poor role models, as well as being dangerously unstable in positions of leadership.
2. The New Testament tells us that Jesus was betrayed by a man. His lack of faith and ensuing punishment remind us of the subordinated position that men should take.
1. Men can still be involved in church activities, even without being ordained. They can sweep sidewalks, repair the church roof, and perhaps even lead the singing on Father’s Day. By confining themselves to such traditional male roles, they can still be vitally important in the life of the church.

Crazy, right? To think of sending young men these messages goes against everything we have been taught. Yet women receive these messages all the time.

- A woman’s place is in the home.
- Women are physically and mentally designed primarily for childbearing.

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- Women are highly emotional and have a hard time making clear decisions or communicating effectively.
- Women, especially beautiful ones, are a temptation to men and cannot be trusted to maintain appropriate boundaries.
- Women are secondary and find their value through the men in their lives.

For a young female leader, these subtle (and sometimes not-so-subtle) messages can really wreak havoc on her understanding of who God has made her to be and what He has called her to do.

However, if she grew up in a home that did not live out strong gender-stereotyped roles, chances are she did not absorb the message quite as strongly as those who did. In fact, one of the most surprising findings in our interviews is that, of the thirty high-level female ministry leaders we interviewed, almost all of them grew up without traditional gender-typed females. For example, either both of the leader's parents worked full-time with successful careers, or she grew up with a single mom whom she saw do all aspects of home life, house maintenance, and parenting, or she attended an all-girls school in which young women filled all roles in sports, student government, and academics, including science, technology, math, and engineering. This seems to have built up their leadership skills and confidence in two ways:

- These women didn't know they should not pursue a job or role that seemed interesting to them. They watched leaders around them, and rather than seeing gender, they saw gifting, passion, and abilities. These were the items they used as the basis for deciding if the role would be a good fit for them or not. The question was never, "Will I be allowed?"; it was always, "Do I want to try this?" or "Is this a good fit for me?"
- Since many of these women jumped into male-dominated

environments in school or work early on, they learned how to build relationships, navigate the challenges, and grow a “thick skin” that was incredibly useful for leading in a church led mostly by men. One woman commented that it was so much easier to grow in a male-dominated environment because her leaders and peers were “straight shooters,” consistently giving her clear and real-time feedback on how she could improve. Almost all the interviewees could see this now in retrospect, but at the time they had no idea how God was preparing them for ministry leadership.

Could it be that this “first generation” of female executive-level ministry leaders had a possible advantage because their formative years gave them permission to live beyond gender stereotypes? Perhaps they were able to break through the glass ceiling in churches—often called the “stained glass ceiling”³—because in the foundation of who they saw themselves to be, there was no assumed limitation to what they could do. To me, this has two big implications:

- This next generation of women, who have grown up with a much more expanded view of what a woman is capable of, will bring with them a level of skill and confidence that we have never seen in the church. Think of the potential they have and what we would be missing out on if they only found a place for their leadership skills outside the church. Figuring out how to develop these leaders and empower them for ministry could not be more important, or more urgent!
- Our early discipleship programs (pre-high school) need to include intentional gender-based programming in which little girls and boys get to experience and experiment with all the roles it takes to become and make disciples. They need to see lots of examples of both men and women filling various ministry roles

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based on their giftedness, not just on their gender. There needs not only to be freedom for men to be greeters and women to be ushers, but for men to be behind-the-scenes in the kitchen and women to be up front and onstage. The earlier this starts, the better opportunity we have to support our congregation in discovering and fulfilling their God-given purpose.

In addition to the individual messages a female leader has been given, we also have to remember the bigger American cultural limitations women have faced. Although these aren't necessarily a part of daily life for all women now, our mothers and grandmothers (who greatly influence our thinking about our potential as women) grew up in a very different world. Here's a little perspective on where we have come from as a nation around the equality of women in the last one hundred years.

- Before 1920 a woman could not vote in America.⁴
- Before 1963 it was legal to pay a woman less than a man for equal work (at the time women were paid 41 percent less in the same job).⁵
- Before 1974 a women could not apply for a credit card without a husband or father as a cosigner.⁶
- Before 1975 there were states where women could not serve on juries.⁷
- Before 1978 a woman could lose her job for becoming pregnant.⁸
- Before 1980 there was no definition for sexual harassment and therefore no way for a woman to be protected, especially in her workplace.⁹

My mom has been my biggest cheerleader, but she grew up in a time when women were treated very differently than men. Her

mother had not been allowed to vote as a young adult. My mom was paid significantly less than her male peers and could not have her own credit card until her late thirties. She is the first woman in her family to go to college, but thought her only options were to become a teacher or a nurse. And she lived through decades of unprotected sexual harassment.

So it should be no surprise that when I took big steps toward independence or leadership, my mom, although trying to be supportive, was also very concerned. She didn't want me to be disappointed. She didn't want me to fail. She didn't want me to hit the glass ceiling and be surprised. This kind of concern can sometimes feel unsupportive or as if it is questioning a young woman's ability, which isn't the case at all—a concerned mom is questioning the *world's* willingness to accept a young woman with leadership abilities.

Another way a woman can be conditioned against leading in the church are the often unnoticed, but strong statements about being female that are residual from our society's history.

I heard Julie Roys interview a young woman named Abby Snow on her Moody Bible Radio podcast *Up for Debate*. For Abby, this social conditioning showed up in a seminary class.

I remember being in a [graduate] class and we had read this book with wonderful truths, written by a godly man, but every single example about what not to do in leadership was a feminine metaphor.

It was the “nagging wife.”

It was an “old wives’ tale.”

It was the “mother hen.”

So I brought it up in class and I said, “You know, I see these biblical truths and I want to accept them with humility and wisdom, but it's very hard for me to see myself as a leader when all the negative examples about what you don't want to do in leadership

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[are] feminine.” So I brought this up to my professor and he’s a good man and he said, “Oh, I never noticed that.”¹⁰

Danielle, a young female community pastor, described her experiences with gender roles to me like this:

I had a couple early experiences where either a teacher or a coach or someone like that in school would call me up or place me in some sort of position of authority over my classmates, but without a title or anything, just, “Will you take care of this?” or “Will you explain this to that group of people?” I’m guessing they saw ability in me, but at the time it was very awkward and uncomfortable. “Why would you expose me like that in front of my friends who don’t really want me to take charge or lead them in any way?” I can see now that they saw something in me or a certain skill set, but I didn’t necessarily have a warm association with my gifting in the beginning. And then, on top of that, everything I had seen in my life thus far, when it came to gender and leadership, fell into two frameworks.

One was that I had a lot of females in my life, whether it be my mother or my grandmother or even people at church, whose gifts seemed to be beautifully demonstrated in gifts like mercy and hospitality and helps. And here they were flourishing in their gifts, and I could clearly see the mark of God on their lives. But when I tried to associate with that, it didn’t feel like it fit. So I was like, “Oh well. I mean, helping people is nice, but I don’t necessarily feel like I’m running in my lane.” But because all the females in my life are doing this, I thought that was what femininity looked like.

But on the other side, I had male leaders in my life, including my father, who, I now recognize, had a gifting actually quite similar to mine—a gift of leadership or gift of wisdom or teaching. But I really only saw men, in my early stages, operating in these gifts,

so I thought these gifts were masculine. So there was this confusion of what good femininity or masculinity were. But, in reality, it was seeing what my gifts and calling are and how that plays out in different genders. So I spent a lot of years not necessarily thinking that I was much of anything or a very good female or a very good leader.¹¹

These experiences are not unique. If the women in your church are hesitant to step into higher leadership roles, accept a specific title, or take a seat at the table, there's a good reason. As you come alongside a woman, ask questions, listen, and learn about her unique viewpoint, you'll be able to uncover any misconceptions that are holding her back. You also hold incredible power to help her see herself differently, realize the potential that she does have, and open doors of opportunity that she might not otherwise know exist for her.

STICKY FLOORS

Remember that executive pastor roundtable where I was just thankful to be in the room? I look back at that now and have to laugh at myself. I made all the classic mistakes a female leader tends to make that hold herself back, often unknowingly.

- I was cautious about speaking up in any of the formal conversations. I remember sliding notes to my pastor with points written on them so he could add them to the dialogue. I even whispered a joke to him that, when he delivered it, got a big laugh from the whole room. (He graciously tried to give me credit, but somehow that never really works.) The one time I did offer my thoughts myself, I raised my hand and asked if I could say something. Why did I not think that my experience

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and perspective could stand on its own? Why did I assume I didn't belong there? Later I learned that I actually had as much multisite experience as many in that room, sometimes more, but at the time I couldn't even fathom that idea. I walked in assuming I knew less and had less to offer.

- I was intimidated by the leaders in the room and found it awkward to strike up any sort of personal connection. What in the world could we have in common outside of work? Plus, I had learned how cautious ministry leaders are when it comes to male-female interactions, so I waited for someone to talk to me. Why did I allow myself to miss out on these world-class leaders?
- When there was a lull between sessions and I was unsure what to do, I started picking up dirty plates and empty cups from the tables. Why did I not feel I could simply walk up and join in on one of the coffee-break conversations going on around me?
- When asked what I did in ministry, I fumbled over an explanation. How do I explain my "girl title" without droning on? Do I just re-create a title so that they understand what I do, hoping this isn't really lying? Why had I not spent any time figuring this out beforehand?
- And, of course, I was overly concerned with how I looked and the image I was projecting. Perfectionistic tendencies get in the way all the time for women, especially when it comes to appearances. We are conditioned to believe this is where much of our worth is derived. Why couldn't I just be confident in myself and authentically connect with these fellow leaders? Did they actually care about (or even notice) what I was wearing?

These and several other tendencies women have of holding themselves back from growing into leadership have become known as the "sticky floor."¹² The glass ceiling is one thing, but the sticky floor is often just as limiting, especially in ministry circles. These

are the attitudes and learned behaviors that women do *to themselves* that keep them from growing in their leadership abilities and opportunities for advancement. Some “sticky floor” challenges that often hold women back include not leveraging mentoring relationships, not learning how to present themselves effectively, waiting for their hard work to be recognized by someone else rather than confidently articulating it for themselves, and not knowing how to confidently negotiate for their own value (such as schedule, salary, and benefits).¹³

Insecurities also play out in many unfortunate ways for female leaders that are helpful for you, as an organizational leader, to know. For example, if there is a job opening available, research has shown that a man will apply for that job if he is 60 percent confident that he can perform the job well. He knows he can likely figure out the other 40 percent as he goes. On the other hand, if a woman looks at a potential job opening, she will wait until she is 100 percent sure that she can perform the job well *even before applying*.¹⁴ This has a double impact: not only does a woman miss out on opportunities to grow and become better, but her leaders never know she is interested in advancing in the organization.

It’s not uncommon for me to hear from church leaders that they have job openings and have told their team that the role is open to both men and women, only to have no women apply. For most men, this seems like a mystery, and unfortunately it’s easy to assume that women aren’t interested in that type of role. But if you know about the 60/100 tendency, you can talk to your up-and-coming female leader about what new opportunities are available to her and why you think she would be a good fit. You can clearly explain that you don’t expect her to be perfect from day one, but over the course of six months or a year you will be training her, giving her feedback, and allowing her to grow into the job. She may need more encouragement and even a little “loving push” to go for a new

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opportunity, but as she grows in her abilities, gains confidence, and experiences successfully growing into a position, she will be less hesitant next time.

Here are some other “sticky floor” tendencies that limit women’s leadership success:¹⁵

- Women will often use softer words that minimize their impact (“I feel” instead of “I think” or “I know”). This can inadvertently communicate that they aren’t sure if what they are saying is accurate or not.
- They’ll apologize for having an opinion or for something that happened that wasn’t their fault. (“I’m sorry, but I don’t think your calculations are correct.”)
- Women often ask for permission to give their opinions or perspectives, even if they have a clear seat at the table. This sends a message to others, and themselves, that they are not really supposed to be there.
- Self-deprecation can be a helpful tool for a strong leader, but women tend to use it more often and in more personal ways. This can communicate a lack of self-respect or an inability to see your own strengths. Playing helpless to ease the insecurity of a male leader may help you in the short term, but it simultaneously discredits the male leader’s view of you in the long term.
- Women often automatically shy away from seeking out opportunities or will even turn down an invitation because they are not sure if they can deliver without failing on another responsibility. Many women need to be coached in how to lead at a *higher* level, not just add more to their already full plate.
- Although women tend to set a lot of goals for themselves, they are often either too realistic or completely unrealistic. Neither accomplishes what a healthy goal should: to stretch you to do

and be more than you think you can, without setting yourself up for failure.

- Because there is a pressure to “do it all,” women often don’t think about asking for help—even if they clearly need additional resources or staff to help them meet their responsibilities. This is exacerbated in the ministry and nonprofit sectors, where budgets are often tight, resources are scarce, and women feel they should just be thankful to be a part of the work.

If you keep these tendencies in mind, church leaders have an incredible opportunity to challenge and encourage women leaders to communicate more accurately in meetings, to extend a personal invitation to a woman leader to apply for a promotion by explaining why you think she can do the job, and to help her problem solve how to take on new opportunities without dropping any of the balls she is already juggling. You also can be ready to give her extra resources or take something off her plate that she likely wouldn’t ask for on her own.

HOW CAN YOU LEARN MORE?

The key to this issue is to “seek to understand” on an individual basis. Take the time to have a conversation with the female leaders you have on your team and in your congregation. Ask them about their stories and how they have impacted their view of themselves as leaders.

Learn about their experiences at your church by asking intentional questions such as these and listening closely.

- Have you ever tried to lead anything at our church?
- Do you enjoy leading here? Why?

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- What opportunities do you think are available to you?
- What roadblocks have you come up against when you've tried to lead?
- How does your own internal thinking impact what you lead?
- How can we, as pastors and church leaders, support you in your leadership?

On more than one interview, the female leaders we talked to emphasized the need for men to listen well. In fact, three of them said it in almost the exact same way: "Men need to ask questions and then listen . . . *really* listen." This is the first and best place to start.

The beautiful part of being in that intimidating room of executive leaders was that two executive pastors sought me out, engaged me in conversation, asked my perspective, included me in chitchat, and were complete gentlemen. I did take the job and got to spend the next six years meeting regularly with these incredible leaders, seeing more women join the group, and several of these original leaders graciously allowed me to interview them for this book. I'll be forever thankful for the time they took to reach out, get to know me, understand my story, and continue to cheer me on in personal and practical ways.