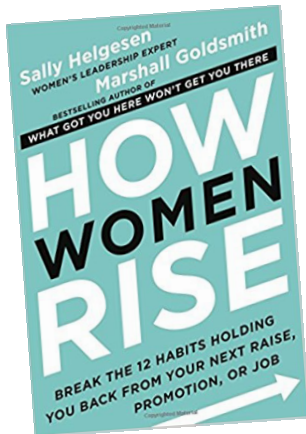


How Women Rise—Break the 12 Habits Holding You Back from Your Next Raise, Promotion, Job

Sally Helgesen and Marshall Goldsmith, Hachette, April 2018



Sally Helgesen is widely regarded as a gold standard author and speaker for women in leadership. Her first book *The Female Advantage: Women's Ways of Leading* has been continuously in print for almost 30 years. Marshall Goldsmith is a world-renown executive coach whose book, *What Got You Here Won't Get You There*, focused on helping men overcome the distinctive behaviors that hold them back or even derail their careers. Friends over twenty-five years, Sally and Marshall have now teamed up to publish *How Women Rise*, combining Sally's experience and insights with women in leadership together with Marshall's framework for identifying and overcoming personal, self-limiting behaviors. Both believe that though women and men do share some challenges in common—given basic gender distinctions and proven cultural realities—the thinking and behaviors that commonly hold back women in their careers are distinct from those that block the progress of their male co-workers. This is a book that is full of remarkable insights for men but, it is focused entirely on providing women with world-class coaching for reaching their full potential in 21st Century business and non-profit enterprises. The fact that both authors are executive coaches fills the book with deep insight, compassionate awareness, and keenly practical advice for stepping toward personal transformation.

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Part 1—On Being Stuck

The authors are well aware that the majority of their female readers work within corporate cultures that have been created by men, in the image of men, and function in ways that reward male thinking and behavior. These realities create gender-specific barriers to many women's progress and success. But rather than addressing these external realities, the authors have decided to focus on the personal thought processes and behaviors women can control, adjust, and even replace as needed to move forward in their careers. Chapter by chapter, the book provides insights and examples of how a woman can clear her path of *self-imposed obstacles* to her career success.

The authors demonstrate their awareness that women frequently define career success differently than men. Even so, many women still report feeling stuck. They may sense that (1) something is preventing them from moving forward or leading the life they are supposed to be living, or that (2) they are unable to break through circumstances that are conspiring to hold them down or (3) as if their contributions are not being fully recognized, appreciated, or rewarded, or that (4) people around them have no idea of what they are truly capable of achieving (pp.16-17). Whatever a woman's own self-assessment may be, the authors are convinced that it is possible to break through these barriers by identifying old, self-limiting habits and eliminating them. Some of the old habits the authors address may have helped a woman launch her career and move ahead at lower levels in organizational life. But not now—not as she's rising through the organization. To continue moving up, these familiar habits must be identified, examined, and discarded. The good news is that these ways of thinking and behavior are just habits—nothing more than old habits. Neither a woman's gender nor her personality is to blame for her being stuck. This is good news; breaking habits is doable! Like Ellie, Carrie, Miranda and a dozen more women whose stories fill these chapters, female readers have the power to be who they are while they shift, grow, overcome, and surge ahead in their careers.

Before stepping into a discussion of the 12 habits that keep women from reaching their goals, the authors address the reality that women (along with men) sometimes experience deep inner resistance to personal change. Why? To begin, human brain function can make any habit hard to break! But, these particular habits may be harder to break because they have served a woman well in the past or in other environments. These behaviors may even be character virtues within personal and family relationships outside of work. Nevertheless, at this point in a woman's professional journey, they have become self-sabotaging behaviors. Another reason a woman may feel resistance is because she has become worn down by the daily pin pricks she experiences in a male-dominated culture. Weariness and resentment can stir resistance. Interestingly, the authors end by pointing out that three beliefs commonly shared by many women can also be part of this

inner resistance. Many women have defined ambition in a way that makes ambition seem like a fault, not a strength: “a desire to maximize your talents in the service of work you find worthwhile and rewarding” (p. 41). In addition, many women believe that to be a good woman—a wonderful person—they should never disappoint or challenge others. And finally, many women believe they should always behave as an inspiring role model other women, acting in ways that our culture has defined as appropriate for all women everywhere. The authors believe that these three common beliefs are rooted in the cultural expectation that women should always put the needs of others ahead of their own.

Part 2—The Habits that Keep Women from Reaching Their Goals

The authors launch into this section by noting that this collection of self-sabotaging behaviors is not true of all women and is not true of women alone. Men may struggle with these same behaviors. And yet, the authors appeal to social studies, their own life-time of coaching experience, and the client stories they include in each chapter to assert that these behaviors do seem to challenge women in ways that are distinct to their gender. The authors also point out that some of these self-limiting habits are actually authentic, gender-specific strengths that are being overused. Strengths, overused, become constraints! The authors invite their female readers to pause, celebrate who they are, and decide not to be too hard on themselves—an exhortation woven throughout the book.

Habit 1. Reluctance to Claim Your Achievements. Here’s the truth: on the whole, women deliver great work. And yet, many women struggle to draw attention to their achievements and successes. Some find it hard to accept praise; others make a habit of turning the spotlight of attention on everyone but themselves. Perhaps its because they don’t want to seem like a self-promoting blowhard or because they assume that everyone around them *should* notice. Whatever the case, this kind of *either-or* thinking hurts women. “*Moving ahead—rising—requires bold action.*” (p 66). The authors warn that if women do not communicate the substance of their work and the value of their achievements— especially to the people above them—they may be thought to lack confidence in their abilities or be ambivalent about rising through the organization. The authors end the chapter by urging women to think about their value to the organization, why their success matters, and what greater good they can do if they are able to rise to higher positions of influence and impact.

Habit 2. Expecting Others to Spontaneously Notice and Reward Your Contributions. This habit has similar roots to the first habit but different effects. One effect is that a woman may be passed by for promotions (simply because she seems content where she’s at); a second effect is that, apart from appropriate recognition and reward, she may lose her sense of fulfillment in a job she otherwise enjoys. The authors encourage women to prepare a sixty second ‘elevator pitch’ that passionately conveys what they do (their distinct skills), the difference they are making, and where they are going in their career. A short, impassioned pitch can be used anytime someone innocuously asks a woman about her job. Used effectively, a memorable pitch can alert listeners to a woman’s solid self-confidence and inspiring ambition.

Habit 3. Overvaluing Expertise. “*Trying to master every detail of your job in order to become an expert is a great strategy for keeping the job you have. But if your goal is to rise to a higher level, your expertise is probably not going to get you there*” (p 86). The authors reflect that a woman’s expertise in lower level jobs may have gotten her to where she’s at but, “*the top jobs always require managing and leading people who have expertise, not providing expertise yourself*” (p. 87). Women on the rise need to acquire four kinds of power and, expertise is only one kind of power. Along with expertise there is the power of connection (the power of who you know), the power of personal authority or confidence—a strong presence, and the power of holding a senior position. Mastery of tasks is vital to a woman’s rise, but the power of expertise alone is not enough to open doors to an organization’s top levels of leadership.

Habit 4. Building Rather Than Leveraging Relationships. Many women—perhaps most—share the ability to build strong personal relationships. Men are often envious. But this gender strength may not help them advance in their careers if they are unwilling to leverage their relationships for mutual benefit. The authors declare, “*Most great careers are built not just on talent or hard work, but on the mutual exchange of benefits*” (p 97); that is, men and women on the rise ask their peers for help, favors, support, and introductions that empower them to advance. And, they return this service to their friends. That’s right, these individuals actually *use* their friendships for personal benefit. While this may sound crass to some women, the authors once again warn against either-or thinking (a common theme in the book). Authentic friendships can have intrinsic rewards and extrinsic, win-win benefits for both partners.

Habit 5. Failing to Enlist Allies from Day One. The authors warn that when stepping into a new job, women may struggle with the “impostor syndrome.” Fearing that they may not actually have what it takes to merit their position, they may isolate themselves in a period of anxious research and study. This strategy is misguided. Women learn faster, find meaningful support, and lighten their load when they begin seeking out allies from day one—partners above, around, and even below them. “*The more inclusive your ally web, the more robust your support*” (p 108). Dianna’s story—this chapter’s front-line illustration—is compelling. Making a variety of interesting observations, the authors conclude by suggesting that forming allies is often a more effective strategy for women on the rise than seeking out a senior level sponsor. Allies can become a vital part of a rising woman’s personal brand.

Habit 6. Putting Your Job Before Your Career. When women begin to feel stuck in a position while they see others—notably, men—advancing, they may adopt the strategy of doubling down on their daily work to the neglect of working on their careers. The authors suggest that becoming great at a job may actually keep a woman stuck in it, as people take note of how dedicated she is to her position and how good she is at it. But the primary reason that women stay in a job too long is a strength overused: *personal loyalty* or *overcommitment* to her team—the kind of loyalty a woman might show toward her family. The authors urge women to assess potential jobs and to choose specific tasks in terms of how any given job can serve their self interests—that is, their careers. Of course they should give their best work to their organization, their specific job, and their team. But they should also do their best to have a great career and a great life. Once *again*, either-or thinking can create a trap for women who hope to rise to higher levels in their careers.

Habit 7. The Perfection Trap. Within our culture, the authors suggest that many girls grow up being affirmed for their precision and correctness while supporting others. Boys, on the other hand, are often celebrated for daring individual exploits, competitive prowess, and winning—even in families that pride themselves on gender equality. In a clever turn of words, the authors declare that in order to rise, women have to lay this burden down. The cost of perfectionism is often personal stress and rigidity as well as being over-controlling or judgmental with others. Perfectionists are generally risk-averse, something top-level leaders cannot be. The authors conclude this chapter by urging women with perfectionist tendencies to become “healthy perfectionists” by learning to prioritize their essential responsibilities and delegating non-essentials to others.

Habit 8. The Disease to Please. This chapter is for chronic pleasers, women who are “*always trying to split the difference among competing needs in hopes of creating consensus or avoiding giving offense. This can impair your judgment and leave you vulnerable to manipulation by people who know how to use guilt to get others to accommodate their needs*” (pp. 136-137). The authors suggest that in male-dominated workplace cultures, women may even be rewarded for a tilt toward people pleasing. “*Even women at senior levels tend to be most highly rewarded when they fulfill expectations and act in ways that others find pleasing rather than when they act boldly or assert independent views*” (p.138). This trap is clearly rooted in cultural expectations for girls and is being deepened by the increasing expectations being placed on women by suggestions that they should be able to do everything and have it all. The authors urge their readers to think long and hard of about their personal priorities, not what will please others.

Habit 9. Minimizing. The authors suggest that women may unknowingly minimize their presence and impact simply by moving aside in meetings to make room for others—a considerate action that may be construed as a submissive behavior. Women may unwittingly be making themselves smaller by squeezing into a circle (when men allow others to adjust) or by using soft language: consistently saying “we” instead of “I,” starting statements with “just” (as in “I’m just thinking . . .”), or stating “I feel” instead of “I think” or “I propose”, or taking time to explain (justify) why they are speaking up at all. In an interesting insight, the authors suggest that a penchant (or habit) for multi-tasking can create fragmented attention and keep a woman from being *fully present* in meetings and conversations, such that she loses authority and credibility in the room. These are not character flaws, but *minimizing, softening, shrinking, and ceding space* are habits that can hold back a woman on the rise.

Habit 10. Too Much. At some point in their careers, many women are told that their emotional register is too strong or too intense. “*The upshot is that the whole business of emotional expression can be a landmine for women*” (p. 159). The authors take time to address how to (1) modulate emotion in work settings (“*what you feel is not the problem*”), how to (2) think through communicating what matters most in a succinct manner, and how to (3) evaluate how much personal information is constructive in work settings. The reality is that workplace cultures truly have been shaped by male preferences and distinctions (perhaps even limitations). An over-emphasis on authenticity can make a woman seem less professional or credible among her professional peers.

Habit 11. Ruminating. Ruminating is reflecting, revisiting, and even reliving our weaknesses, hurts, fears, or failures over and over again until this misuse of imagination darkens our moods, gives permanent place to anxiety, and weakens our ability to make courageous decisions to move forward. Men may more typically respond to breakdowns or pain with anger, directing energy outward in blaming others. Women may be more likely to turn pain and regret inward, meticulously dissecting their own mistakes or the failings of others, perhaps because of the high value they place on relationships. The authors assert that rumination is counterproductive because it darkens a woman’s emotional pallet and gets in the way of resolving real problems. Sometimes a simple interruption or a direct challenge can help a woman break free of this habit. At other times, women can take a lesson from men and challenge themselves with some direct self-talk: *get over it and move on!*

Habit 12. Letting Your Radar Distract You. Neuroscientists who study brain activity have discovered that men tend to narrow their focus and zoom in on challenges, threats, and opportunities—like a laser beam. Women, however, tend to take in a wide range of details. They bring a 360 degree *radar sweep* of empathetic awareness to the workplace. These two very different ways of processing information are complementary and essential to great team leadership. But, on their own, both have benefits and costs. The “shadow side” of a wide-ranging radar of awareness is distraction and preoccupation with details that don’t matter to reaching a chosen goal. The authors counsel women to discipline their awareness of what they are noticing, stay focused on their goal, and reframe the stories that give distractions undue

power to shift their focus or break their concentration. One final time, the authors encourage women that giving in to distraction is only a bad habit. It's not a gender specific neurological weakness or a character flaw. With some awareness and intention, women can *"harness the power of their radar to banish its shadow side"* (p.185).

Part 3—Changing for the Better

The authors begin wrapping up with this: *"It's humbling to admit that what used to work for you has stopped working, and a little scary because familiar behaviors can feel like part of who you are. But it's inspiring to consider how much you might benefit from letting them go"* (p. 189). The 12 habits actually form clusters of related behaviors but, it's vital to address these behaviors one at a time. First, state your purpose. Articulate *"concisely and precisely what you hope to achieve, either in your present job or over the long term"* (p.194). Tie your first steps and experiments to this clear purpose.

As you begin to challenge yourself to overcome one habit at a time, enlist help. Picking the right people is vital and, once you've done so, invite feedback and listen well. Thank your partner for being direct and honest with you. Follow-up with her or him to reveal how you're adjusting and moving forward. Once you start making some progress and are feeling good, start enlarging the circle of people you tell about your quest. Engaging with a professional coach can accelerate your progress. Inviting a trusted co-worker into a "peer coaching" relationship may support your growth as well.

Finally, let go of the temptation to judge yourself. The authors suggest that women can be harder on themselves than men generally are. Women need to accept that every human being is a work in progress—a person who needs patience and forgiveness. Eliminating habits is challenging work. Success takes time. Everyone's journey includes trips and falls as well as moments of confusion and feeling lost. If you succumb to judging yourself for struggling or judging others for failing to support you as you would have hoped, your journey will be unnecessarily complicated and stressful.

"Successful women tend to be avid self-improvers" (p. 227). So the authors invest their last few pages in affirming women. Hard work and real strengths have gotten you this far. Don't be too hard on yourself! Watch out for either-or thinking. *"We believe that far more women could and should be in positions of power and influence. We hope that our ideas will ultimately help you rise in your chosen field or organization so you can make even more of a positive difference in the world"* (p. 230).



Advocating for Women in Enterprise Leadership