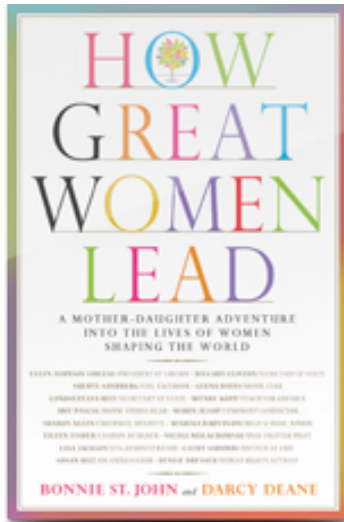


How Great Women Lead

By **Bonnie St. John** and **Darcy Deane**



About the Authors:

Despite having her right leg amputated at age five, **Bonnie St. John** became the first African-American to win Olympic medals in ski racing—one silver and two bronze medals in downhill events at the 1984 Paralympics. She graduated Magna Cum Laude from Harvard University, won a Rhodes scholarship to Oxford, and was appointed by President Clinton to the White House National Economic Council. Today, Bonnie travels the globe as a highly sought-after keynote speaker, leadership trainer, and television personality. NBC Nightly News called her, “one of the five most inspiring women in America.”

Bonnie’s other books include *How Strong Women Pray*

and *Live Your Joy*.

Bonnie’s daughter **Darcy Deane** attends high school in New Jersey as well as the Online High School at Stanford University where she founded a virtual, global Model United Nations club. Homeschooled until sixth grade, she has traveled extensively throughout all 50 states and many countries abroad. Darcy is interested in a career as a linguistic anthropologist and studies Chinese, Spanish and ancient Greek.

Reading Questions:

1) *Darcy and Bonnie often began interviews by asking, “How do you define great leadership?”*

Which themes were recurring throughout responses? Whose response resonated most with you?

2) *This book argues that leadership has evolved from being command-driven to inspiration-driven. Sheryl Sandberg even calls inspiring others the most important, universal principle of leadership. How each of the women inspires others helps define their style of leadership.*

Which women were most accomplished at inspiring others? How did your definition of leadership change after reading this book?

3) Sharon Allen speaks about understanding the difference between managing and leading. Dr. Condoleeza Rice states that they are two halves of the same walnut. How do you integrate leadership and management in your leadership role? How would you like to develop yourself in either?

4) During the interview with Marin Alsop, she states that being a conductor is, “[...] easier for a man. He walks up to the podium and they’re not seeing him, they’re just seeing the music. For a woman, they have to get past seeing her,” (pg 166).

Do you feel this way, and if so, how is this contributing to a deficit of female leadership? Do you believe it is detrimental to focus on someone’s gender as a leader, or important to continue recognizing women as leaders (as emphasized by Col. Lt. Nicole Malachowski, Geena Davis, Sheryl Sandberg)?

5) EPA Administrator Lisa P. Jackson said, “I really believe that it’s mostly in our interest— especially as women—to physically confront people who are trying to attack you in the abstract, or from a distance. It’s much harder for them to be a jerk to you in person. Much harder. And I also think it is harder to attack a woman you know personally. Maybe that’s sexism but it works in our favor.”

As a leader, how do you know which criticisms or critiques to confront and which to ignore? How was President Johnson of Liberia’s perspective different from Lisa’s?

6) Noemi Ocana, Opportunity Director of Microfinance Loans for Nicaragua, said, “I learned how important it is to model good values. I work hard to teach others to take responsibility for themselves and for making their lives better.” In the loan officer meeting, Bonnie comments, “This ‘devotional’ was not a precursor to the work... it was the work!”

How does Noemi instill these values in staff and clients of Opportunity? Are Noemi’s values only a part of her work, or do they influence all of her work? How can we actively incorporate our values in our everyday lives and leadership positions, even if there is not a designated space for it?

7) Noemi’s staff and Opportunity clients reminisce about seeing Noemi selling fish in the market years ago, and her staff states that the clients “are so passionate about Noemi because they knew her when she sold seafood to tourists. They remember her catching the bus with a big bowl of fish on her head!”

Is Noemi successful as a leader, in part, because she is a good example for the other women of building oneself up through hard work? How has her experience and community involvement contributed to her success as a leader?

8) Motherhood, mentoring and working together as a family were themes each woman emphasized in their own way. Indeed, the mother-daughter relationship tied each interview to the next, while almost every woman credited their husband, mother and father, or family for their success.

What attributes of motherhood help make these women good leaders? How can husbands and wives work together to nurture one another's careers, while sharing the responsibilities of raising children? Why are families important units in producing strong leaders?

9) Share a time when someone gave you an opportunity that changed your life? How would your life be different without that opportunity?

10) How have your female mentors affected the way you lead, and the way you view leadership? If you currently mentor a younger woman, how do you model leadership to her?