

"This book is so incredibly necessary because it teaches leaders everywhere that it is possible to build a successful business that is not only profitable, but also fosters connection and innovation."

MEL ROBBINS, bestselling author and host of the award-winning *Mel Robbins Podcast*

CAPITALIZE ON THE POWER OF WOMEN'S

PSYCHOLOGY FOR SUSTAINABLE

LEADERSHIP

THE

SIXTH LEVEL

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***The Sixth Level: Capitalize on the Power of Women's Psychology
for Sustainable Leadership***

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Carrying the Torch

By Dr. Stacy Feiner

THE JOURNEY OF *The Sixth Level* began when, in high school, my mother introduced me to Dr. Jean Baker Miller and the Stone Center scholars at Wellesley College, where I learned that women’s psychology develops differently than men’s psychology and that women are complete human beings with undeniable qualities that foster potential in others. The powerful lectures and groundbreaking research ignited my career and passion to bring this psychology to business systems—to unleash the potential of leaders in ways that defy conventional narratives.

I bring this perspective to my work as a business psychologist to leaders of complex systems. Time and again, I collaborate with women and men leaders who are building inclusive cultures that people inherently want to join. Rachel Wallis Andreasson proved to be one of those leaders; she entered the scene in 2013 amid important leadership transitions in her family’s business. She is a testament to the power of connection.

Through years of collaborating on projects and traveling into various settings with feminist ideals, we shared a leadership compass that brought us to 2021, when we asked, “What if?” What if we could

crystallize decades of conversations and research, which have been sidelined, into a leadership movement? What if we showcased brilliant leadership rooted in the psychology of how women lead? What if we could eradicate the bias against women as emotional, risky, and complicated and instead prove these are the very qualities that allow women to lead better with a win-win-win formula? This framework we began to shape aimed at empowering people rather than controlling them.

I knew, based on years of coaching, that specific psychological qualities in women were elevating business performance and sustainability. I also observed that most male leaders gravitated toward this thinking once they saw how it worked. Conjuring business advisor Jim Collins, a student and teacher of what makes great companies, I also had collected a library of case studies and research-based insights from my own coaching. Themes about women's leadership surfaced and were proving successful in the business sector, but they were not broadly recognized or credited in the vast ocean of leadership books.

So Rachel and I started the work of writing a book. Rachel ignited the fire of collaboration. During this process, Rachel kept us laser focused on our shared goal while intuitively providing us the room for things to unfold.

We called on Kathy Overbeke to join the project because of her research expertise, entrepreneurial experience, and transformative powers. From entrepreneur to mother to academic, Kathy has conducted doctoral research that shines a light on the shadows of sexism that persist in family businesses. During this process, Kathy asked penetrating questions that got us to the heart of the matter.

Then after a series of conversations with Jack Harris, we were excited when he agreed to offer an expert male voice on the topic of gender relations to round us out. He was my beloved and inspirational college professor of sociology at Hobart and William Smith Colleges, where he

inspired me to push the limits and reach my potential. For forty-nine years, he has guided students through the intricacies of sociology, and with colleagues established the first men's studies degree program in the US. During this process, Jack expanded our thinking while sharpening our findings, often referencing his exquisite work of rejuvenating state and local government agencies.

Together, Rachel, Kathy, Jack, and I converged our experiences and merged our passion projects, which set the stage for what ultimately became this book. *The Sixth Level* is a collaboration of four authors' life work and evidence of the magic that happens when a collective of committed individuals join forces. Each of us brings a unique perspective to weave into the model you'll read about here.

The contributors, an astounding group of women leaders, have provided real, raw, and authentic stories to illustrate our thesis. They show how they used unconventional leadership qualities at pivotal moments in their companies that improved employees' experiences and yielded greater results. They took a leap of faith, engaged fully and authentically. They realized there are many women leaders, like them, who have embraced *The Sixth Level*. *The Sixth Level* elevates leadership and offers a new paradigm.

This book is a manifestation of our shared vision of leadership for the future. Please read these pages with an open heart and embark on a journey that explores the remarkable influence social psychology has on elevating leadership. You will discover the power of shared vision and the allure of collaboration. And you'll see how thinking differently about leadership—focusing on our best human qualities—can transform individuals, teams, families, and communities. As Rachel always says, people come into your life for a reason. Thank you for inviting us into yours.

How to Use This Book

What to Expect

The book is a jumping-off point. The Sixth Level is a bold new leadership framework that challenges conventional assumptions about leadership. We invite you to carefully consider the leadership and relational gaps that may exist in you, your leadership team, and your organization whether you are looking from the top down or the bottom up. This new framework is a litmus test for a new standard of leadership that will better serve organizations and humanity.

The time is right. There is an energy for change, and there is a groundswell fueled by four intense global systemic disruptors: the health pandemic, ethnic and racial unrest, global economic distress, and an environmental crisis. The data is clear: we are in an incredibly unstable, unsustainable state. Our lives are emotionally, socially, and relationally strained, which skews the ways in which we engage the world and ourselves. People are ready to seize a new level of leadership.

The Sixth Level points the way. This book is educational and practical. On the educational side, you will learn the impact of leadership models that are defined and dominated by a patriarchal system. You will see the invisible rules that define, direct, and cloud the way we live and

lead, and you will begin to recognize how self-actualization, the fifth level of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, is not enough. We will introduce a new level of actualization: Self-in-Relation, which is based on human connections. We will immerse you in the research and theories that support this framework in Chapter 3 and throughout the book.

On the practical side, we discover through the narratives of seasoned leaders that their experiences and leadership approaches achieved significant results utilizing four Core Differentiators: Mutuality, Ingenuity, Justness, and Intrinsic Motivation, which set the foundation of The Sixth Level.

What This Book Is

This is a leadership book that describes a mindset and accompanying behaviors that transform the conventional paradigms of leadership.

It challenges us to find our authenticity in relation to others. It rejects formulaic scripts and roles; it embraces a “feeling intellect” (Rieff 1975). It connects and appreciates others, dispels fear and alienation, and fosters a sense of belonging and partnership.

The four Core Differentiators, when practiced together, elevate individuals, teams, and organizations through unifying principles that serve human interests. We explain the definitions of these in Chapter 1 and share examples of them in Chapters 5 through 8.

What You Will Discover

- A critique of the patriarchal paradigm that has systematically rendered invisible and rejected critical forms of women's leadership that contribute to more just communities.

- Strategies and techniques for the workplace that embrace Dr. Jean Baker Miller and the Stone Center scholars' theory on women's social psychology.
- Models of Sixth Level leadership through exemplary cases by women leaders.

Based on women's social psychology, *The Sixth Level* argues that women have more often and characteristically demonstrated forms of leadership based on human connection, which are Self-in-Relation. The characteristics of such leadership stand in contrast to leadership based on forms of domination and control. You will see these differences as you read each contributor's narrative in Chapters 5 through 8.

Our contributors lead organizations that collectively represent over \$18.7 billion in annual revenue and over 47,000 employees. Each narrative recounts a specific point in time when the leader faced a challenge or opportunity that impacted their entire organization. Each leader reveals her principles and practices that enabled her to tackle the challenge or leverage the opportunity using unconventional and sometimes less tested strategies. These narratives illustrate a leadership approach to sustainable and profitable operations and change. Embedded in these illustrations are leadership principles that have improved the performance of the company organizationally and/or financially. In many of the cases, the exemplars express what they wanted the people in their workforce to experience.

The chapters also describe successful outcomes and how they served the entire organization. For example, what worked for Andreasson's situation wouldn't have necessarily worked in Slesh's, but lessons from each can be applied to any workplace.

What This Book Is Not

This is not a “women’s book.”

This is a book for all of us who want to bring vitality to our organizations that is generative and affirming. Such leadership rejects hierarchies of power that are primarily transactional rather than relational.

This is not a “blame game.”

There is a difference in identifying and critiquing systems versus blaming people. In this regard, we contrast conventional leadership, which is entrenched in the patriarchal social system, to Sixth Level leadership. Both men and women are harmed by the worst of patriarchy and have been subject to its socializations. We did not make the system, but we are in it, we sustain it, and we have a hard time breaking through barriers because we are immersed in it. We have adapted to its demands or risked suffering stigmatization. But we are conscious and self-conscious beings, fully able, once we see it, to move toward our own health and the health of others. If you see that harm has resulted from your leadership practice, there is an alternative. The contributors’ narratives provide all of us with an awareness that there are different and better, healthier, and more sustainable ways to lead.

While we can each do our own individual part, together we can move more quickly and create an effective movement toward a new paradigm. *The Sixth Level* makes us ask tough questions of ourselves, our leaders, and the people in our organizations.

This does not solve all the world’s problems.

When we stop and consider all the world’s problems, from politics to the environment, for example, we can easily be overwhelmed. As such, the book limits its subjects to leadership and business. However, this book is a gateway, and when applied, the principles and processes can inform and facilitate the success of every healing cause and movement. We know that collectively we can do more than individually.

This is not a wait-and-see book.

This is a book that will make you think about the paradigms within which you live and how you might be contributing to our paralysis. We challenge readers to reflect on collective human history and think about our current state. Understand The Sixth Level and how each of the core differentiators work so that together we can create a movement, an ingenious way to move forward.

What Are the Takeaways of Each Section?

This book is set up to educate, offer viable and practical solutions, and prompt action through reflective exercises and activities.

Section One: Capitalize on the Power of Women’s Psychology for Sustainable Leadership provides the reader with an understanding that the cause of our crisis is systemic. Looking from the outside in, this book calls out a system that has infiltrated our thinking and our ways of living and has clouded our vision on what it takes to be a caring leader.

To achieve our collective goals for creating sustainable communities that reach better financial returns, the reader should understand the psychological concept of toggling and how this activates the four Core Differentiators that lead to Sixth Level leadership.

Section Two: Case Studies of Sixth Level Leadership provides powerful personal narratives from seasoned leaders who demonstrate how Sixth Level leadership has achieved better outcomes for their organizations and their people. With a synthesis of lessons learned about the Core Differentiators, readers will have models and tactics to practice themselves in their own organizations.

Section Three: The Sixth Level Advantage summarizes the model that produces better outcomes. The afterword shares a vision of what is possible when The Sixth Level is understood, adopted, and

implemented. You will achieve compounded value using the reflective exercises that can help you be a more effective leader, create more unified teams, and build more sustainable organizations.

Call to Action

Each one of us has amazing power to influence and engage those around us. *The Sixth Level* demonstrates that a Self-in-Relation mindset combined with strong mutuality yields sustainable change and gains momentum for a movement.

PAUSE.

Think about what is at stake.

Feel the energy for change.

NOTICE.

How the system distorts our humanity.

How much further our shared humanity could take us.

ACT.

Be better. Do better. Together.

NOW!

This is a call to action.