

Disrupt Yourself Podcast

EPISODE 229: SALLY HELGESEN

Welcome to the Disrupt Yourself podcast, where we provide strategies and advice on how to climb the S curve of learning™ in your professional and personal life. I'm your host, Whitney Johnson.

When I first started working in New York and was trying to figure out how I was going to make it on Wall Street, I discovered the book *The Female Advantage* by Sally Helgesen. Imagine my delight when a few years ago I had the opportunity to meet Sally via Marshall Goldsmith. And then to discover that the two of them had co-authored a book for women who want to advance in their careers but aren't quite sure what's holding them back. This book has also turned out to be a book for men who want to support women but have had that gnawing feeling that what worked for him won't work for her. That's what they talk about in their book, *How Women Rise*, and that's what Sally Helgesen is here to discuss.

Whitney Johnson: So, tell us about the book, the gist of it, and what caused you to write it?

Sally Helgesen: That book came about through my own experience. In the 1980's, I was working in corporate communications. I worked in some really good companies. But it was very apparent to me that these companies had absolutely no idea of how to value female talent, especially when it came to strategy, ideas, will contributions. I saw really talented women. I knew what I could do, but I didn't see any real path for some visibility. So, I decided I had the bright idea that what I would do was write a book about women who were very successful leaders. And I thought that companies would pick up on that and say, oh, okay, this is what we can learn from women. That's not exactly how it turned out. The companies in 1990, we're not desperately looking to promote their women, but it had a big impact on women. Just like you. It had a big impact. I started hearing it was mostly letters then from day one, from women saying, "you describe my leadership style." I became a kind of phenomenon. And I think it really it was because it was the first book that looked at what women had to contribute as leaders rather than how they needed to change and adapt. So, it really launched things for me.

Whitney Johnson: You know what's interesting about that, Sally, is I'm remembering in college, and I'm sure you know this book, I had a professor recommend a male professor actually recommend I read *In a Different Voice* by Carol Gilligan. And I think what's so interesting about your book and fascinating within that particular instance is that, like you said, you gave women a voice and a way to articulate our experience and what we could feel somehow in this inchoate way. But we had no way to describe it.

Sally Helgesen: Where you really put your finger on it. Because the way I thought of my book as I was writing it was Carol Gilligan for the average woman in the workplace. That's how I saw it, because that had she'd had such a profound impact on me as well.

Whitney Johnson: Oh, I love that. Carol Gilligan for women in the workplace. Okay, Carol Gilligan, we hope that your ears are ringing somewhere as we praise you and honor and are grateful for her paving the path for us.

All right. So that's 1990. Fast forward nearly 20 years. Yeah, 20. No, 30 years. Right?

Sally Helgesen: Almost 30, yeah!

Whitney Johnson: I can count. You wrote another book titled *How Women Rise*. And so, tell us about how that book came about. So, a lot happened in those 30 years and maybe there's an important formative moment that you want to share leading into that. But how did this particular book happen?

Sally Helgesen: Well, as a result of *The Female Advantage*, I not only went on to write five more books before *How Women Rise* that we're in the field of women's leadership and inclusive leadership. But I did thousands of workshops, women's leadership workshops all around the world. So, I had a pretty rich experience and understanding of what was getting in women's ways. And so, when Marshall, our colleague Marshall Goldsmith, published his book, *What Got You Here Won't Get You There*. I was very, very influenced by his overriding idea, which is that the same habits that can serve you well early in your career can be the very ones that trip you up as you rise to a higher position with more authority and influence. I saw that every day.

What I didn't see was so much overlap between the primary habits that Marshall focused on in that book. So, on very much from his coaching practice, which was he told me about 80-85% male. I didn't see the overlap. You know, he had habits like learn to apologize and made me laugh because I do these programs. And by the time I'd been there fifteen minutes, I'd had nine women apologizing to me for things that had nothing to do with that were not their fault or within their control. Don't always talk about how great you are. Not much of an impediment for most of the women I knew. So, I suggested to Marshall, who had been a friend and colleague at that point for about 20 years, since 1994, I suggested that we collaborate on a book that took the premise of *What Got You Here / Won't Get You There* but looked at it specifically about the habits and behaviors most likely to get in women's ways. And that book is *How Women Rise*.

Whitney Johnson: Don't Apologize. Right? That's fascinating because, as you said, it sounds like 15 minutes. You said women were, "I'm sorry for this. I'm sorry for that. I'm sorry for the other thing." You're like, wait a second, there is something here that is not applicable. There's this disconnect, it is what it is men are from Mars and women are from Venus? No. Yeah, right? That's what was happening.

Sally Helgesen: It was happening to a certain extent. And what was really fun is that this was sort of new to Marshall. It's like, oh, really? Oh, women apologize. Listen, they've been apologizing to I'm willing to bet for the last 20 years, you may not have noticed it, been sensitized to it. So, it was a really fun, interesting collaboration from which we both learned a lot.

Whitney Johnson: What's something else that Marshall repeatedly said? Don't do X, Y or Z. And you're like, no, wait a second. Actually, women don't do that. Is there something else that just really stands out for you?

Sally Helgesen: Well, sure. There's a whole complex of behaviors that are around. Always talk about how great you are, always having to win. That was another thing, I find that women, and I've interviewed and worked with thousands of extremely successful women, but I've rarely heard them say I scored, I did this, I won that. You know, they take a more collaborative approach. They are good at representing what their part is in it. They don't let themselves get run over. But that idea of winning too much, which is one of his classic behaviors and not listening to anybody, again, those did not seem to be habits that really resonated in my experience of at that point, 28 years of working with women all around the world.

Whitney Johnson: What I would love to do is talk about two habits that women typically say, oh yeah, I do that. Oh yeah, I do that. What are those two that women raise their hand and self-identify as being something that's holding them back?

Sally Helgesen: Well, I really have a good way of judging that, because when I do programs and I do, I'm not doing a full workshop or only covering a couple of the habits. So, I send out a behavior sheet and ask the company to ask the women rank, what are your primary behaviors? So, I can say this pretty clearly.

The first is really the combination behavior of reluctance to claim your achievements and expecting others to spontaneously notice and value your contribution, which is sort of becomes your default because you don't want to have to find a comfortable way of claiming your achievements yourself. And I hear women, you know, how can I talk about my achievements without anybody ever on Earth thinking I'm too ambitious and too aggressive on whatever they get spooked by the feedback they've had? And actually, you probably can't. Let go of putting that privileging that concern over representing what you've done, otherwise you will get run over. So, there's that concern that people might think that you're ambitious or aggressive that holds people back. I hear a lot. How can I talk about my achievements without being like that jerk down the hall, who is always talking about what he's done? So, it's looking at a kind of an either-or either I just completely hold back or I'm like that jerk down the hall. I can't stop talking about how great I am. And the other one is I hear a lot. This was a team effort. I'm not comfortable talking about what I did because our team did it. Again, as if you couldn't say something like our team was able to achieve this, that and the other. This was my contribution. So, because you can't really find a way of doing that because you see it done badly, because you've had pushback when you spoke before, you draw back from it and your strategy of a losing one becomes. Well, I believe that if I do great work, people should notice, and they probably should. But guess what? They, they often don't.

Whitney Johnson: Sounds like what you're seeing women do is set up this this false paradigm, this either-or as opposed to this is a both, and. And you started to say something and let me just see if I picked up on this correctly, is our team was able to accomplish X, Y and Z. And here's the part that I played in this happening. Is that what you said?

Sally Helgesen: Exactly. Here was my contribution. I find women are very comfortable using the language of contribution rather than the language of achievement or scoring a win. But also that phrase that you just reiterated is a way out of the either-or it's not either your team or you. It's, as you say, both. And so, finding a way to always represent that is a way of making yourself comfortable, but being clear about what you have contributed. Because, again, if you don't do that, it's very hard to get noticed or get credited. And you'll see people who have not contributed as much, begin to rise because they made their accomplishments. You know.

Whitney Johnson: The other thing that's interesting and I'm finding myself curious about Sally, is that when we go to that that false paradigm, that either-or that's actually a signal for us that something is amiss. Because if we go too far on the team, did it, we are at some level negating ourselves and our existence and our being. And so that's an important signal for us. And as you said, if we go too far to, I did X, Y or Z, we're negating the work of other people. But I love this idea of if you're not doing both, that is a signal to you that something is off and there are some, some inner work that needs to be taught. What are your thoughts?

Sally Helgesen: Yeah, that's exactly right. In fact, I could even expand that. I would say whenever you find yourself, you hear yourself either in your mind or to someone you're talking to, articulate an either-or. I either have to be like that or have to be like this. That should be a little bit of a trigger that says to you, okay, I need to think this through. I need to get a little help with this. I need to get somebody else's eyes on this. I need to ask a colleague that I admire. I'm having stuck. I feel a little bit like claiming my achievements. We're talking about the team; I feel like it's a little bit of an either-or. How do you deal with it? So, it is kind of a I think it should be a trigger to let you know that you need to broaden your thinking and find something that works. The idea here and this has been in the work I've done now with women, it's 32 years. The whole idea has been getting comfortable with your own style but making sure that that style serves you in developing to your full potential.

Whitney Johnson: And you know, the other thing that I thought of when you said that is, is what would you do asking other people for advice? I had in my mind this picture, and I think in the best of situations, it would look like

this where someone could go to their manager and say, you know, we did all of these things and I'm really struggling with this. Can we metaphorically sit on the same side of the table and have a conversation? And can you coach me on how to talk about my contributions?

Sally Helgesen: It's a great thing to do. And I will tell you from personal experience, there are many leaders, mentors and managers who are itching to do just that, to help women do this. I hear this from them all the time. I just wish she could get a little more comfortable talking about what she's achieved, of what she wants to do, where she wants to go. I've worked with women who didn't make partner and they were so disappointed they were leaving the organization and they they told their practice had done. And I'm talking about law firms this happens a fair amount of time. They told a practice, I'm thinking about taking this job as general, the general counsel's office at some company. And I said, well, what can we do to keep you? What if we made you partner? Yeah, I had thought I would be made partner. Well, you never said you wanted to be partner. We've got guys you have been talking about making partner from the day they got here. And there are, the women, I expect that they'll put two and two together. She's working 80 hours a week. Maybe she wants to be partner, but it's not a great strategy.

Whitney Johnson: So, the things that women identify then are this reluctance to claim their own achievements. There's an expectation that your contribution will be valued. Let's now flip it. And what are men saying about when they look at this list of 12 things from a gender perspective? What do men say? You know, women need to really work on these two habits. What are you saying?

Sally Helgesen: I think the two habits that I hear most about from men and I'm really glad you asked this question, nobody's ever asked this question before, that I hear most about our one overvaluing expertise. And what I mean by overvaluing expertise is feeling that in order to do a satisfying job, you have to be an expert in absolutely every aspect of your job that that's the primary thing you will be judged on, not also your visibility and your connections and overinvesting in developing your expertise, but also also very importantly; Letting that over that high value you place on expertise hold you back from considering other jobs.

I, probably a week doesn't go by where some male executive or whatever doesn't say to me, you know, I recommended this woman for this job. She's so ready. And she said to me, I don't have the skills. I don't feel ready. I'm still working on my skills in this job. That reluctance comes through this overvaluing expertise. And if I could tell you a quick story.

Whitney Johnson: Yes, please!

Sally Helgesen: That will really help me understand this. I was doing a program at a huge health care company in Chicago. We had about 500 women there. It was a big Women's Day deal. And the Women's Network sponsor, who was a guy who was head of operations for the Americas at this company. So really big job and talk about overvaluing expertise. And one of the women raises her hand. She says, "well, Sally, how many if an if a job posting lists six qualifications, how many do you need to have? Do you need to have, is five okay? What about four?" And so, I'm thinking how am I going to answer that question. There's not a specific number.

So, the guy raises his hand and says, "let me tell you. The job that I had before this, I wanted because I believed it would lead to the job I have now." He said, "I really wanted it. I looked at the criteria, the qualifications. There were six. I had two. So, I figured that what my job was, was explaining why I would be a fast learner on the other four. And I did a very good job of that. And I got the job that I wanted" and the gasp from the women in the room that this guy had had the confidence, and the self-belief and the tenacity and the desire for the job that he applied when he had two of the six. They were floored. And I try to tell that story as much as I can because I think that if women can get a better understanding of that, you can't be an expert in something when you haven't had the job. So, your job is explaining how you could do that. It was really a great day for learning.

Whitney Johnson: Oh, interesting. So, Sally, do you think that, you know, there's been research done that says women are judged on track record and men are judged on their potential? Do you think that that ability to explain can close that gap?

Sally Helgesen: I do. I mean, I think that their unconscious attitudes are presumptions which I prefer to call them, then on unconscious bias. Those attitudes exist. They really do. And we get evidence of it in our careers, but we cannot let that hold us back. If it just is not an effective way of trying to deal with it. So, I think that here, recognizing that men tend to be judged on their potential and women tend to be judged on what they've actually achieved and done that, the best way to deal with that is to think through what's my potential? What could I be good at? Where can I be making a bigger contribution? How would the team or the organization or the world benefit from that? And then talking about that, so that we see the environment with an understanding of what our potential actually is. And we become the sort of publicity people or the salespeople for our own potential. And I believe that that will begin to change things because there is a lot of recognition above some unconscious presumptions. And I do think in excellent organizations, people want to deal with that.

Whitney Johnson: It's a reminder that the importance of actually learning, like you said, to advocate for yourself and talk about and be able to talk people through. I mean, one of our accelerants historically in this framework of personal disruption is about battling this sense of entitlement and this idea of when you want to do something new, you need to be willing, you want to *Disrupt Yourself*. But you're asking your boss or your manager or anybody else around you to *Disrupt* themselves to by allowing you to do that, you have to pack that parachute for them by giving them the data that makes sense for them to do. And so, yes, there are presumptions. Yes, there are things systemically that are not fair and yet you still have responsibility for your own career.

Sally Helgesen: Exactly. And that's the whole idea of *How Women Rise*. It's not pretending. And sometimes I hear people say, why did you write a book about what women do wrong? These are cultural and and system wide issues, but most women aren't in a position to address that, to completely shift the culture in their organization or put in a new a new structure. So, what can we do? What lies within our control? We can look at how we can be more effective. So that's that's really the idea.

Whitney Johnson: Any quick thoughts on underrepresented women? So, women of color, for example, anything that you're saying that particularly stands out?

Sally Helgesen: Two things. First of all, what constantly amazes me about this book is how much people from extraordinarily different backgrounds resonate with it. I hear from these people every single day. You can't really see it. But up behind that ginger jar there, is my Mongolian edition of *How Women Rise*. I've gotten letters from women in Mongolia, from Ulan Bator. Oh, this really describes me. I did a Japanese tour. Oh, we thought these habits were just Japanese women. So, this is the cultural resonance across cultures just astonishes me. But that said, yeah, because there are certain perceptions that, for example, women of color have to battle, I hear from women, white women, in organizations, "if I talk about my achievements, I'm seen as too aggressive." What I hear from African American women is "if I let out a peep about what somebodies presented, even if I know that it's inaccurate, someone comes up to me and says, you seem pretty angry." So they're dealing with that angry black woman stereotype. So, the stereotypes can be different, but the actions and the impact and the steps we can take to remedy them are pretty similar.

Whitney Johnson: The principles are the same, even though there are going to be different circumstances for people

Sally Helgesen: In the different circumstances are often the perceptions that people have, that they have, that you're being forced to manage. And then we all cultural bias that that definitely exists. But again, what's in your circle of concern? What is in your circle of control? You need to address what you can control and be clear about it and be strong about it and enlist others to help you, enlist others to help you.

Whitney Johnson: So, if someone says to a woman, you sound like you're an angry black woman, you would recommend something very similar of sitting down with your manager or your boss and say, hey, I'm struggling here because I think you value my mind and you want me to contribute. And yet I'm in this bit of a double bind of because of the biases that are out there. What do you suggest that I do to state my opinion in a way that people can hear it? Is that what you're saying?

Sally Helgesen: That's good. But even better is asking enlisting someone in advance as you're going into a meeting? I've had some feedback. Whenever I say something, people come up and say, you sound angry. You know, they don't usually they're smart enough not to say angry black woman, but they'll just say, you sound like you're a bit angry. You know, if you see that, could you just say something like, that's not how I heard it. I heard it as her being firm. Actually, the conversation sounded much more heated before she spoke up. Just let it go. Are you comfortable saying something like that? So, I think that it's good to enlist allies in the moment when that happens. It can also take away some of the the fear about it. And then also, yes, talk to your manager, say, you know, I'm kind of in a double bind here, classic double bind when I don't speak up. Oh, she just kind of sits in the corner. When I do speak up, people seem to interpret me as angry. Any thoughts, any support, any any ideas from you? I just want to move that.

Whitney Johnson: So, Sally, which of these 12 has been the hardest for you?

Sally Helgesen: I think really the perfection trap, which is sort of the other big one here. I started speaking right away. I got lots of calls, nobody had written a positive book about women in organizations, so companies started calling me. I was totally inexperienced. I had to learn on my own and I became too perfectionistic. I overprepared. I exhausted myself, was sort of rigid and uptight. I just lacked a certain spontaneity when I was presenting, when I was talking to audiences, and that within six months of *The Female Advantage*, I was primarily earning my living as a speaker and workshop person. So that took me years to get over that perfectionism.

And the big aha for me was really realizing I recognized that a lot of the women in my audience had issues with perfection, perfectionism, and I realized that I was representing it to them. They looked at me and they saw, you know, maybe the information was helpful and useful, and they liked it. But what they saw was an uptight, perfectionist woman afraid of making a mistake so it didn't really resonate with them. And I had to get out of my own way on that. I eventually really learned how to give myself a break.

Whitney Johnson: Did you get coaching to help you through that, or is that just something that you sort of worked through to figure that out?

Sally Helgesen: I did get a little bit of coaching. Coaching for speakers back in the 90s was a talk about a big budget item. Everything was priced for corporate, not for people on their own. So, it was mildly out of my price range, but I was able to get about three of them. And the most helpful thing that came out of that was they asked me to think about the last three experiences that I'd had where I felt comfortable. So, I did. And then they said, "well, what did they have in common?" And I said, "well, this is funny. But what they had in common is that they all had a pretty significantly high proportion of African-Americans in them." And they said, "so why do you think that that would make you more comfortable?" And I said, "it's because those audiences are more responsive. If you say something they agree with." "Oh, yeah, yeah. She's talking. Yeah, I hear her. Yup. I had that." They are very responsive. So, what the coach said to me, "you need to create situations where you are eliciting response rather than just standing up there and hoping that people take that." So that was a very, very, very helpful thing for me.

Whitney Johnson: So, I'm going to share ones that have been tough for me. Before we go on to the next question, which is definitely perfectionism. Definitely. Definitely. And the other one that I have struggled with is leveraging relationships, being willing. Something that we see women do very well is to build relationships and to care about people and have them to care about us. And then frequently we'll say, well, I couldn't call that person to do X. And then you think, well, but if you're not going to ever ask them to help you do something and you're not going to help them do something, then do you have a relationship? And so that's one that's been really important for me.

Sally Helgesen: Good. I'm glad that was helpful, that that was something that I struggled with as well.

Whitney Johnson: Something I think you and Marshall have done very effectively is to partner on writing this book. And can you talk about if we look at the partnership that you, you know, you went through in writing this book and crafting this book, what are some things you learned that you can think of as a way to sort of model for other people trying to, you know, women and men working together to advance women? Is there something in there that is a model that we can look to as to help us figure that out and move forward?

Sally Helgesen: I think there are a couple of things. The first one has to do exactly with what you were talking about, leveraging relationships. I had this idea, Marshall and I should collaborate on a book about, you know, what the habits get in the way of women. And, you know, it was just kind of a dream. And I thought, oh, we would want to do that and going to think I'm trying to ride on his success and blah, blah, blah. So, I had all that in my mind. And we were at a retreat together and we were doing an exercise where you went up to somebody and made a request. And I got paired with him and he said, "Sally, how can I help you?" And I said, "Well, actually, here's how you can help me. We can collaborate on a book that takes the model of blah, blah, blah. What got you here, Adapted to women." Wow, what a great idea. And then I followed up and it took a little bit of following up to keep it on his radar screen, but he saw it as a win-win. So, the first lesson was I was willing to leverage a relationship that at that point 2015 I've been building for 20 years.

Sally Helgesen: So that, I think is a great model to begin with, especially for a woman who has a problem with that. And then I think the other thing was looking at what are our individual strengths and how can we use those collaboratively? My strength was writing and writing the book, and so that's how we did it. I, I would sit down and write, and we talk through the behaviors and then I go write it and then I'd say, what do you think of this? And he says, let's add that so that I took responsibility there. And I was very, very fortunate to work with him because I learned so much about marketing books effectively, which I had always felt that I wasn't, you know, I had this picture of myself. Well, I'm just a writer and I, I really learned how to do that from Marshall.

So, we had complementary strengths. We spelled out our process before, what it was, that that I would be doing the writing and we would be collaborating through conversation. And it was it's just been a fantastic partnership. And we've done we have especially have fun when we speak together, which we've done about maybe 30 times. And it's blast.

Whitney Johnson: Oh, I love that. All right. So, so it started with that willingness to say I have this relationship. I think this could be a great idea. And just saying the idea out loud and then when there was this is interesting, that willingness to stay and stay and follow up and continue to nurture that.

Sally Helgesen: Yeah, I think the persistence, you know, I'm going to tell you that even five years before, if I had broached that to him and he'd said yes. And I had had to work to follow up on it, I would have thought, oh, he doesn't really want to do it, he's just trying to be nice. I'm not going to hound him, et cetera, et cetera. And I think that I've gotten to the point in my life where I didn't care that much. I was hoping we could do this book and I really felt it would be fantastic. And my commitment to that was strong enough that I kept pushing. And finally, finally, we were doing it.

Whitney Johnson: I love it. You didn't tell yourself stories that weren't true.

Alright. So, as you know, in my work, I talk about the S curve of learning™ as a way for us to think about growth. So, you've got you've got the launch point of of a new role of a new job where you're figuring things out and then you get into the sweet spot, you're completely in the groove, and then you get into mastery where you figure things out. You're really good at it, but you probably need to figure out something new to do around that or jump to an entirely new S curve.

I would love to hear your thoughts on how is it different for women versus men. And I will start by telling you my supposition and then you can riff on that, as it's something that you said earlier. When you have a woman who is at the top of an S curve and it's time to do something new, her manager may say to her, hey, you should jump to this new S curve and she'll say, no, no, no. I'm going to cling to the one I am on. I am not ready to jump to that new S curve. And so, so that's that's one thing that I would posit to you. It sounds like based on what you said, that would be correct.

Sally Helgesen: That is correct. In my observation. That is correct. There is not that recognition that. Well, OK, now now where else could I take this? And one of the things that often gets in the way is this feeling of loyalty to team or boss. I hear that all the time. We've got such a great team. I couldn't leave this team. People would be devastated. I want to show my boss that I'm really loyal to him, even when he's pushing me to try to get something

new. So, if this misplaced understanding of loyalty and in some ways maybe your team would benefit more if you were in a higher position and then they would know you, they would know someone at your level, that's one way you can think about it. And certainly, boss understands he or she didn't get where they were by perceiving everything as a loyalty test to save. So, I think that you're exactly right on that.

I do have one other observation, and that has to do with the sweet spot. I think women are much later at recognizing when they've hit that sweet spot, they're still feeling as if they're feeling their way and they've got to do more. And, oh, I'm just a beginner and I don't have time to build all these relationships because I need to really keep my head down and and master this. So, I think in my observation, women tend to get to that point of the sweet spot, which is the comfortable spot, which is, hey, you know, I'm in a groove here. They tend to get to that later. And it would serve everybody themselves, in particular if they were able to recognize that earlier.

Whitney Johnson: And based on what you've said in the conversation, it would suggest to you that women, when they get hired, are actually already further along. So, if you've got the curve like this, if they feel like got to have four or five qualifications versus two, you're going to come in and you're going to actually hit that sweet spot faster because you're going to be more qualified than your male pure right out of the gate.

Sally Helgesen: And that is exactly what I hear from leaders in organizations, are women do incredible work and yet they lack confidence in how incredible their work is. Whereas sometimes we have guys here who think they're doing a great job. And they're not.

Whitney Johnson: What was most useful to you in this conversation?

Sally Helgesen: Your question about Marshall and I don't think that I'd ever thought of it so much in the context of my being willing to leverage that relationship. So, articulating that was helpful to me in terms of seeing the kind of progress I made. And then the other thing was certainly your question about the S curve because that is, I hadn't thought of that. And I think there's some real interesting applications about how that S curve plays out. I'd love to see some graphs of that curve and look at the point to women reach the different points and when men do I think that there would be some differences and that understanding that could be very helpful to organizations, trying to support women and help them reach their full potential.

Whitney Johnson: Hmm, maybe we should write something together. So put a pin on that and revisit that topic. Alright. So, any final thoughts as we wrap up?

Sally Helgesen: Well, you know, really, yes. I've been doing this a long time, and people often ask me, you know, you've been at this for for 32 years working around issues of women's leadership. What has changed? And the three big things that have changed that I've seen as number one, women are more confident now. We still have the S curve behind the S curve, but they say it's exponential. How much more confident women are than they were when I started this doing this research back in 1988.

Secondly, and this is really important, is there's much more solidarity among women and much more recognition that we bring each other along and support one another and that there's tremendous value in this. When I started doing women's leadership conferences, you go into the company and none of the senior women wanted anything to do with it. They'd say, I want people here to think I'm a leader, not a woman, and good luck with that. But it was, they didn't want the almost the taint of women who weren't at their level. I don't hear that almost ever anymore that solidarity is good.

And then the third thing has to do with men's greater willingness to be allies and to step up and support women and and see it as a good thing for their organizations and identify it with of creating a world in which their daughters have better opportunities. So those three things, those are big and those have changed. So, people will often say, oh, nothing's changed in the last 30 years. You weren't there, you don't remember. But those three things have changed significantly.

Whitney Johnson: That's really encouraging to be able to look at it over those three decades and say we have a long way to go, but we've made a lot of progress. And that's so wonderful.

Sally Helgesen, thank you so much for being with us.

Sally Helgesen: Whitney. I just love spending time with you. Your questions are terrific and really enjoyable collaboration.

Four takeaways.

Number one, there is a glass ceiling, there are systemic problems with bias, but there's another ceiling and that one is in my mind, it's in your mind this unwillingness to advocate for ourselves. And Sally just gave us some great tools.

Number two, sometimes we won't jump to a new S curve out of loyalty to our manager or to our team. One way to help us get over that, because contribution does matter is to consider that if you do jump, you're not only opening up possibilities for yourself, but for other people because you're going to be in a more elevated position.

Number three, I am fascinated by the idea of a difference between men and women on the S curve, what that looks like that woman struggle to identify when they're in the sweet spot and in mastery. Maybe I want to be persistent about co-authoring something with Sally.

Number four, we have made progress. Yes, there are still challenges, but women are advancing. We're helping each other advance. And the men in our lives are helping us advance. And that is a really good thing.

What did you hear? What did you find interesting? I would love for you to email me at WJ@whitneyjohnson.com And tell me what's on your mind.

Thank you again to Sally Helgesen for being our guest. Thank you to you for listening and thank you to our team, Matt Silverman, producer, Whitney Jobe, audio engineer and editor. Steve Ludwig, production coordinator, Maddie McDaniel, production assistant.

And to me, Whitney Johnson, because I'm claiming credit for being the host.

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