



Spanning Generations as We Journey Ahead

From the book, "The Female Factor: A Confidence Guide for Women"

By Joanne T. Flynn

Part 1: Joanne's Journey Through the Decades

A recent report stated that it will take until 2095 for women to achieve workplace equality. The pipeline theory, used for decades to justify and rationalize the current lack of workplace equality, is no longer a demographically sound argument. There must be a change in approach.

Women have been active in the professional levels of the workforce for over 50 years. However, women's movement up the organizational ladder has been sluggish. We have trusted that organizations will be responsible for correcting this issue. Sadly, that has not been the case. After 50 years, pay is still massively unequal. Women are stranded on glass cliffs and glass ledges continuing to hit our heads against glass ceilings that haven't moved. Never forget that the number of women in upwardly mobile positions does not represent the number of women in the workforce, overall. ***Why has it taken so long to achieve so little?***

It's Time to Accelerate

Women can no longer rely on organizational beneficence. Acceleration requires a two-pronged approach: 1. Sincere and honest sponsorship of women's workplace equality initiatives at the highest company level; and, 2. savvy, skilled women who proactively take charge of their own careers from the moment they enter the workforce. When women's issues are left to organizations, results are lackluster. Women, it's time to stop playing the victim and become the lead actor in your movie. You need to rethink



and reframe how you approach and define career success. If you don't, no one else is responsible for doing this for you.

It's Time to Take Control

Will this be easy? No, but, person by person, each of us can move the needle on the dial of women's workplace equality. If women don't take on this role, what's the alternative? Time has proven it will be more of the same.

A Multi-Decade Perspective

Let's review the multi-decade journey to fully appreciate the 50-year backstory. I've had the privilege to be a player and spectator in this grand drama.

Ladies of the 2020's, you need to understand the social and corporate history behind the generations of women who preceded you. Why? To appreciate and embrace this movement, not when it's easy, but when it's difficult.

The 60's

Men worked, women stayed at home or may have been nurses, secretaries or teachers until they got married and then stayed at home. Those were our choices and these were our roles.

Glimpse from the Past - Mid-60's

If it's the Science Award, it Must Go to a Boy!

As an 8th grade graduate in 1966, I qualified for the Science and History Award. I could only select one. Following my Chemist mother's footsteps, I accepted the Science Award. One of the nuns,



who loved teaching boys, told me that the Science Award should go to a boy. I should accept the History Award instead. I complied and the Science Award went to the boy who was less qualified in Science than I was. (Does this resonate?)

The early 70's

In 1972, Helen Reddy recorded the song, "*I Am Woman Hear Me Roar*". That song was our anthem. More than a song, it symbolized a movement, our time of awakening to our potential power. *(It would be decades before we could exert that power.)*

As women, we felt we had made great strides and had come so far. Comparatively speaking, we had. While society had changed, the choices for women of my generation had not kept pace. And that's important, because it marks the beginning of the workforce gender gap that continues to this day. ***We had so much farther to go!***

Glimpse from the Past - Early 70's

Is that all there is?

My high school career counselor recommended nursing, teaching and secretarial jobs. When I considered those choices, my immediate reaction was, "None of the above, please, what else is there?" Home Economics!!!!

The late 70's

Our generation was the first generation of women to enter the workforce with the intention to stay for a while. We graduated from college and were hired into credible, entry-level jobs. It seemed like we were on our way and the world was our oyster.

Glimpse from the Past - Late 70's



Was it Luck or Opportunity?

I was one of the lucky ones. Why? Because I had no career plan. In fact, the word 'career' was never used. We talked about 'jobs' which was an important distinction. We did not have a career plan guiding us. We were happy to have a paying job that justified the price of college tuition.

In 1974, my first job is where I got lucky and was given a great opportunity. I was required to pursue an MBA and began to think of a business career. My expectations were not focused, but I was certain that I would have a business career.

The 80's

Where did the optimism go? It was quietly replaced with the carefully-cultivated illusion that companies were promoting women. They were, but only at entry levels. The glass ceiling had yet to be conceived. I still recall saying that, "I had dents in my head from hitting walls that would not move." Glass ceilings were beyond our imagination.

The 80's were a time when overt bias was replaced with unconscious bias. It continues today, operating in the shadows, but still directly impacting women's upward movement. The lack of women in the pipeline legitimized and justified women's inequality issues. Our voices were silenced by unconscious bias!

Glimpse from the Past - 80's

The Paradox: You Have No Limitations vs. the Limitations of the Pipeline Theory

When I arrived at Goldman Sachs in 1980, I never thought about career limitations. But, as I seriously thought about a career instead



of a job, I immediately began to see the barriers. Goldman Sachs was a great place to work but not a great place for women. During my nine-year tenure at Goldman Sachs, there were no female partners. A career journey was one step forward, two steps backward and a few steps sideways. There weren't enough women in the roles that mattered to be taken seriously. The 1980's were a paradoxical combination of great personal growth and great career frustration.

The 90's and 00's

Women finally arrived in the workforce in numbers that mattered. When you went to meetings, women were there. The question for the 90's and the 00's was, how long did women stay in the corporate world? Not long enough. Women, with educational credentials, finally had choices. And they chose alternatives to the corporate workplace.

Glimpse from the Past – 90's – 00's

And so, the corporate career of Joanne Flynn started in the mid 70's with so much enthusiasm and positive expectation. That corporate career ended 15 years later, ending in a sex discrimination lawsuit against Goldman Sachs.

I entered the 90's with a great corporate pedigree and made what many thought, was a risky choice. I started my own consulting practice, Phoenix Group International, at the age of 36.

While this was risky, staying in a corporate environment was even riskier. The risk of starting my own consulting firm was mitigated by conscious choices I had made during my career at Goldman Sachs. While there, I developed an acknowledged expertise in all things related to sales and business development. I was all set and ready to go on my own and sell my knowledge and expertise to the competitive marketplace. That was 28 years ago.



For the first time, I was now in full control of my own life, career and choices giving me the power and confidence to continue to shape my future on my own terms, my choices and my control, finally!

Part 2: The 4C's - Fundamentals for the 2020's Career, Choices, Confidence and Control

Choices and Control are the result of what you do with and to your career.

1. Do You Want a Job or Do You Want a Career?

They are two different things! A job is what you do. A career is who you are and what you aspire to be in the future. Your career must always have a plan. A goal without a plan is just hope. You should never ask, "How did I get here?" or "How did this happen?" Embedded in these questions are:

- Did you plan for your future or did you let someone else plan it for you?
- Did you give up the power to control your future?
- Did you ever exert any career power?

What does all this mean?

Every decision you make regarding your career will have consequences. Some decisions are wise and deliberate and take you exactly where you want to go. Some decisions may derail your career by years. Every career decision you make or don't make will have positive or negative consequences. There is no longer room to be a victim. It's time to take charge of your career, choose it, own it, and control it.

2. It's NEVER too early to start managing your career

Start at the beginning of your career or you may never catch up.

On the topic of why women are left behind in the career marathon, we



often find it starts with the very first job! This is how it works:

1. A female and male start jobs at the same time.
2. An excellent assignment comes up and the male is selected.
3. During the assignment, he starts to build relevant experience.
4. This is the point of departure. The female performs routine work in the talent pool which is consistently ranked excellent.
5. Another excellent assignment comes up. The male with relevant experience, is selected. He will gain more experience.
6. The female works in the talent pool producing excellent work.
7. 3 months later, a high-visibility assignment develops requiring someone with relevant experience. The male is again selected based on experience. (This becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.)
8. The female continues to receive consistently high praise for her routine work.
9. 1 year later, both employees are considered for promotions and raises.
 - a. Male is promoted based on more relevant experience and receives a 20% increase.
 - b. Female is not promoted because she lacks relevant experience. Despite excellent ratings on routine work, she only receives at 5% average increase.

This pattern of inequality began at Step 2. Within one year, the female, doing great but routine work, had the reputation of 'Worker Bee'. Unless the female changes her operating style and becomes more proactive in managing her career, she will be out of promotion contention within a few years. And the pipeline theory is once again rationalized.

Was the female too trusting of the system? Did the female believe that good work alone would be noticed and rewarded?

Nothing 'just happens' in organizations for women. There is too much institutionalized bias embedded in the system, leading to Point 3.



3. If you don't take control of your career, don't expect others to do it for you.

If others control your career decisions, it's for their benefit - not yours. Guaranteed!

Changing Paradigms - Power and Control

Power is like energy. It is neither created nor destroyed. It just moves around. The question for you is: When power comes to you, do you seize it and use it, or do you squander it?

What gives you Power? You give yourself power. Realizing you have value gives you power. Recognize when power comes to you, it's time to proactively use it. Use the power within you to influence, persuade and negotiate your way to the career of YOUR choice. Power doesn't wait for you to be comfortable using it. If you don't take it when it arrives, it will move away to someone else.

4. The Keystone to All Things Career – The Power of Your Brand

Adjust Your Mindset – Your brand value in the marketplace allows you to think:

“the company owes you – NOT the company owns you’!

Your career brand is like any product brand in the marketplace. Your brand says who you are based on your complete personal and professional combination of education, skills, background and experience. When you put that combination together:

- Are you differentiated relative to your peer group?
- Do you stand out when someone reads your resume?
- Have you acquired special skills that get noticed, that make people say, I need to meet this person?
- Are your skills relevant and ahead of the knowledge curve?
- Are your skills, experience and background so special in the



- marketplace that you can command premium pricing (salary).
- Are you potentially in such demand, that there could be a bidding war for you?
- Is your brand appreciating, stagnant or depreciating?

Remember, there is brand power in knowledge and expertise and they are gender neutral.

Your career brand does not exist in isolation.

When you aspire to another position, either in your current organization or in the marketplace, your career brand immediately kicks in. The more powerful your career brand, the better off you are.

If you have an average career brand, you can only expect the marketplace to hire you into an average job with an average salary. If your brand is special with relevant skills, experience and knowledge, your career brand is high and you can demand higher pricing (salary) and better terms.

Why is career brand important?

It's everything. The better your career brand value, the more likely you will have more career choices and more control over your future.

Whose job is it to manage your brand?

It's your job, and only your job. If you give that task to someone else, like your boss, you have lost control. It's your job to take credit for a job well done and to let people know what you have accomplished. I once had a boss who gave me great advice which I have passed on. The advice was, "If you don't toot your own horn, nobody else will, and it is your job to remind me of the things you do well, because with everything else going on in my world, I will likely forget." (*Brand management*). Never forget, it's your job to manage your own message. It's your source of power, and therefore, control and choices.



Build a Career Brand That Has Value in the Marketplace

Be careful making career choices. Always be savvy about the positions you take. Just because you are asked to take on a task, ask yourself, "Is this a role that will be understood by the outside marketplace"? Will another employer wonder why you took this position? Sometimes it's good to decline a position, if it's going to confuse your brand in the marketplace. If you do need to accept this position, have enough career brand and power to bargain and negotiate a benefit for yourself for taking on a brand-depleting role. It can potentially hurt your brand and, therefore, your brand value, causing career damage that can take years to correct.

Always know your market value. Always monitor your brand value to determine if it is appreciating or depreciating. Stay relevant and upskilled - that determines value and value gives you options. Be willing to take a risk. Remember, you mitigate risk with career brand value.

5. Career Choices – Beware of the Glass Ledge

Steer away from the glass ledge if you don't want to be 'career stranded'.

The Glass Ledge is the place where you 'park' your career at the senior staff level. While you progress upward, the Glass Ledge is an off ramp taking your career away from the career ascent. While the glass ledge seems safe, it's not! Once on the glass ledge, it is very likely you will not get off. The off ramp to the glass ledge is littered with "Special Projects" and staff jobs (*albeit senior but none the less, staff jobs*). When it's time to be evaluated for a top-level position, you **MUST** have operating experience. Very often, staff jobs do not give you the operating experience required for the top job. Staff jobs are very important to an organization, **BUT**, they will rarely take you to the top. In an operating role, you are managing strategy and risk, and you have responsibility for the bottom line. If your position is supporting these operations but not directly running them, you may have disqualified yourself from top-position consideration. For decades, women have excelled at these special projects or staff jobs only to be stranded on



the glass ledge. Only you can decide if a job is going to take you up to the top or off to the side. Be careful of ledges.

With the Glass Ledge, the Pipeline Theory has been legitimized. (*That pipeline theory gets a lot of mileage.*)

6. Nothing replaces a title

Don't get 'job sidelined' with promises or money. Titles are the only thing the marketplace recognizes. If a job doesn't make sense to the marketplace - don't take it.

Stop being the good corporate citizen taking any job you are given. If it's taking you away from your core career skills – you will end up being 'career diluted'. The marketplace will penalize you.

Be ready to walk if you need to. Stop thinking, "they will *eventually* take care of me." With every *eventually*, you are moving backward relative to your male counterparts. Avoid getting comfortable!

Part 3: Molly's Journey - Seizing Control and Leaping from the Glass Ledge

Career and Choices

There is no doubt that I was successful during the first 13 years of my career. I had varied roles and worked with phenomenal people. Working diligently but without a true plan, I was given roles that no one else could do and became known as someone who could do anything. I was the classic example of "plug-and-play". Over time, however, these non-traditional roles deviated from my core strengths minimizing me and adding little value to my personal career development.

I now realize that I didn't consider the importance of making choices that would benefit my career, rather than the company. I was a 'pleaser' and did what people asked. My male peers were thinking strategically, saying yes to roles that made career sense and no to those that didn't. Though I



appeared to be on a good career path, I eventually I found myself on the “glass ledge”, stranded in “the land of the worker bee” where the company wouldn’t (or couldn’t) see my value in a leadership position. I ended up with a ‘mish mash’ resume that was very difficult to explain in the marketplace. I had done so much, in so many areas, however, my great experience was never legitimized through real titles or positions that people could understand. I hadn’t self-promoted, planned my career journey appropriately or made the right choices for me. After 13 years, I was unhappy and frustrated. Remembering how my male peers promoted themselves, negotiated (expected, demanded, fought for) their promotions and compensation, I wonder how things might have been different had I taken a similar path.

Choices were always there, but I made choices for others’ benefit. I didn’t exert control. How could I go wrong doing what the company ‘needed’? I naively assumed I would be rewarded and taken care of. Without a doubt, “every decision you make regarding your career will have consequences.” My most significant consequence was finding myself in positions that didn’t add value to my career story only to face more of the same. My background and resume were difficult to explain. I could only see it getting worse. I had a job, not a career. I needed to seek out new and different opportunities

*Should I stay or leave? It was clear that I would not be offered an appropriate position or promotion. I received too much ‘comfortable’ advice from people encouraging me to stay because I had a ‘great job’ and compensation package. It was in agony. I could comfortably stay or I could venture into an undefined and scary world. I was inspired by the quote, “**A comfort zone is a beautiful place but nothing grows there**”. Finally, I decided that if I wanted to do big things, find growth opportunities, round out my experience in a new, positive, supportive environment, I had to leave. And I did, without even the prospect of a job. I decided to take a chance on myself and see if I could truly make it happen!*



Confidence and Control

*Some called me brave. Others said I was foolish. I took encouragement from those who told me I was brave (even when I didn't feel it). I was lucky to have time to find the right opportunity on my terms. **My terms had never existed for me before.***

*With steadfast perseverance and determination, I set out on a path of discovery. That included self-discovery, assessment of the market, potential job fits, networking and developing and pitching my **"brand"**. I had to figure out who I was, develop the confidence to market myself and regain control of my career.*

During my four-month journey, I was disciplined, controlled my job search, relied on selected mentors to help me find the confidence I needed, tested out my brand and my 'pitch' and ultimately found an opportunity that brought my career back on track. As the CFO of a start-up, I thought I had landed the perfect opportunity. It allowed me to get back on track, prove my worth in a senior leadership position, and gain traction in the marketplace. I learned more about my brand, what I stood for and what I wanted out of my career. I used the experiences, good and bad, to solidify what I wanted, and, what I didn't want. Choices were made at every turn, but those choices were for me, not for others.

After realizing this new company was not a good career fit, I seized control again. No more "toughing" it out and losing career years. I was ready to do something that seemed unattainable before I had ventured out. I created my brand and gained confidence and control. By seizing confidence and control rather than squandering it, I have chosen to pursue a path of independence, working with the clients and people I choose.

*Now, I carefully manage my career options deciding what's right for me. My own battle will not be won **"by waiting and hoping"** or by allowing someone else to control my career. I will create my own 'corporate ladder'*



and avoid those “**glass ledges**” while staying relevant and being **decisive, tough and committed** to my career and myself.

Part 4: As We Pass the Torch

By giving you insights from a 50-year perspective, I hope you appreciate the workplace equality landscape with all the twists and turns we have faced. Understand how fragile our newly-won victories are. In this journey, we all need to play both an individual and collective role designed to accelerate the speed toward our goal. This battle will not be won by waiting and hoping. Each of you who truly wants a career must be committed to managing your career journey on your own terms, and, you must own it! It will not be easy, but it will be worth the effort.

When I started this journey 50 years ago, it was because of my mother who inspired me and for my daughter who I hoped would have a better future. Now it's for you and your daughters and granddaughters to continue the journey with choices, control and confidence.

Acknowledgments to my mother, Helen Marth Toth who was my role model, my daughter, Elyse Flynn Meyer, who is my inspiration, and my husband, Stephen Flynn, who supported me unconditionally. A special thank you to Molly Underwood who graciously shared her story.

Questions or Comments?

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