

## **Women of Influence, Women of Vision: A Cross-Generational Study of Leaders and Social Change**

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203 pages

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**W**arren Bennis' claim on the back cover that this is "the single best book on women and leadership" whet my appetite. However, as a leadership book, I found ***Women of Influence, Women of Vision*** to be very disappointing.

If you read only the ninth chapter "A Leadership Legacy, A Leadership Resource" you would think this book redefined the study of leadership. It sounds quite impressive. I wonder if Bennis and the others quoted on the cover were only able to read this chapter. Having read the whole book, I feel the authors wield hyperbole a little too freely in this chapter. Claims are made that are not supported by the rest of the work.

The authors claim to study a broad range of women leaders, positional and nonpositional. But they later admit that those they interviewed are "quite homogeneous in their professional base and education." The authors divided their sample into three "generations"—Predecessors, Instigators, and Inheritors. Do not confuse these "generations" with the more common Veteran, Boomer, Xer labels! These generations each represent more-or-less a decade of the women's movement: the Predecessors led during the 1940's and 1950's; the Instigators during the first decade of the movement; and the Inheritors were coming to leadership in the second decade.

One of the major shortcomings of this book was in the area of leadership succession. The authors claimed this was one of the five key elements of the conceptual framework they devised. They did mention some of the leadership succession that happened between Predecessors and Instigators. However, the quotes of those interviewed and the authors themselves indicate a growing concern of the "graying" of the movement. If the movement is not attracting and developing younger leaders, can it really be doing a good enough job with leadership succession to help create a framework for a study for others to use?

While this book fails in furthering the study of leadership, it does a wonderful job of shedding light on some of the essential players in the women's movement. I have a much better understanding of the historical context of the social change feminists brought about in a mere thirty years. I now know what Executive Order 11246 is and why it is important. I am glad the authors were able to put this valuable information in print.

There are some relevant points that can be extrapolated for students of leadership. The authors stress that the women they studied viewed power as an expandable resource

“that is produced and shared through interaction by leader and followers alike.” I found that viewpoint to be refreshing in a world where power is often seen as something to be grasped for like the brass ring on a carousel.

Flowing from that view of power, the authors continually noted the social networks maintained by the leaders they interviewed. Despite the loneliness that leaders often feel, these women worked hard to create a network of peers to support each other and be change agents. I think all leaders could learn from this.

I *am* glad I read ***Women of Influence, Women of Vision***. I do not think it is as revolutionary as the cover claimed or the authors might have hoped it would be. The book succeeds as a wonderfully personal history of women who have brought about great social change. I wish it had been marketed as such. Maybe it was and I just missed it.

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