



Why There Are No Excuses for Men

Gloria wrote a book called “No Excuses” for women and now she’s thinking it might be time to write one called “No Excuses for Men.” In this episode she speaks about men’s important role in eliminating sexual harassment, violence against women, and the pervasive gender inequality that still holds many women back professionally.

Gloria Feldt: Guess what? You can listen to Power to You on your smart speakers. Just say, “Alexa, play Power to You Podcast on Apple Podcasts,” and you can work out, do chores, or lean back and relax as you take in my weekly power tips. It also works on Google. Just say, “Hey Google, play Power to You with Gloria Feldt Podcast.” On both devices, the latest episode plays first, and then you can skip forward, pause, or rewind as usual. And now, on to the episode.

Hello, and welcome to Power to You. I’m Gloria Feldt. I’ve spent my entire career advancing women’s rights and equality from the boardroom to the bedroom. I co-founded Take the Lead because I figured out how to crack the code that has been holding women back from equal leadership and pay, and now I want to give you all those secrets and tools to prepare and propel you with training and coaching to harness your incredible power to in your professional lives.

Like I always say, change is hard and nobody relinquishes power easily. As you may know, I wrote a book called No Excuses for women, and as I was on a very long flight recently, chatting with a friend, I realized that maybe I should write a book called No Excuses for men. Now, I realize I am mainly talking with women and female-identifying people in this podcast, with the exception of I know a few of you men, like Pete, and Bob, and Jim. I’m looking at you, because I know you all listen to this podcast, sometimes along with your female partner. But whatever your gender, you know I’m passionate about sharing the message.

And you know, we often hear that we should pity the poor men whose lives have been complicated by women seeking to work without being sexually harassed. If you’ve been in the world of women’s rights for more than a minute, like I have, you know that for every step forward women make in the workplace or society, there will be an attempt to push us back to a more comfortable past for men, and just as surely, we women will be blamed for causing the discomfort that social disruptions inevitably trigger. And this is despite the fact that we really actually seek only for men to, as Sarah Grimke, the abolitionist, and later, Supreme Court Justice Ruth

Bader Ginsburg both famously said, we just want men to take their feet from off our necks and permit us to stand upright.

It wasn't long after women began declaring that they weren't going to tolerate harassment in the workplace, or the Me Too movement began, that articles began to appear in which men are portrayed as the victims of the sea change being wrought by women who seek merely to be allowed to pursue their professional ambitions and earn a living on an equal playing field, without being sexually harassed.

The Me Too movement was initiated by Tarana Burke in 2006, and it exploded in late 2017, first by allegations of sexual abuse and harassment by Harvey Weinstein, and that was followed by a landslide. I mean, it just kind of opened the door to a landslide of allegations of sexual misconduct by powerful men in all industries. One after another, powerful men toppled as women gained the collective courage to use their voices and to come forward. This, in turn, prompted the Time's Up initiative, and all manner of symbolic declarations that this is a new day for women in the world.

Sorry, not sorry. It's not totally a new day yet. Darn tootin', men's behavior has to change. I mean, the logic that because men must reevaluate and alter behavior that was accepted in the past, they're now justified in, say, refusing to meet with or mentor women in the workplace simply won't wash. I recently was asked to make a speech about after Me Too. I asked the audience these questions: Number one, would the women who have never experienced sexual harassment or abuse stand up? Only one did. Number two: Would the men stand up who can say you have never, ever engaged in any behavior that could be considered sexual harassment or more? Only two or three did. This was an honest group.

So, here's the deal. When men assume a level of privilege that leads to misuse of power in the form of sexual harassment, the consequences for women are profound. We stand back and self-limit. We devalue ourselves, because we have been devalued, reduced to pieces of meat or eye candy. Sexual objectification, harassment and abuse are about power, not sex. I can't overemphasize that, because sometimes those definitions get really warped. Sexual objectification, harassment and abuse are about power, not about sex. I just had to repeat that, because it took me a long time to understand it.

If others can objectify you, this gets into your head, and it's what causes us as women to be more risk averse, not necessarily to hold up our hands or raise our authentic voices. I would say that it actually eviscerates our humanity. We'll never achieve equality, because we have that enemy living in our heads telling us that we're unworthy. So, here's the thing: Your power goes from the inside to the outside of yourself in those situations, and it lowers your levels of intentionality, so you have less intention than the man next to you, because he knows he owns the world, and you only know the world's limitations.

So, to overcome this, it's essential that men and women, that all of us work together as the equals that we are in intelligence, in skills, and in capabilities. So, you know, I wondered why men can't simply employ what they learned in kindergarten about how to treat people who are women. Actually, my husband said if I wrote that book I should entitle it, "Keep Your Hands to Yourself."

I talked to an organizational consultant, and a man who I consider a mentor of mine, about these questions that I have been raising how to navigate in the post Me Too world, and how men can actually get beyond where we are right now, and we talked about workplace situations and non-workplace situations, and about power imbalances, and one of the things that Vaughn pointed out is that signaling sexual interest is complex, and it can be misunderstood by either party, and that assigning blame isn't productive, but assuming best intentions can be.

So, in that vein, I'm going to say that I'm actually convinced that most men and women today believe intellectually that defining and outlawing sexual assault and harassment, and giving credibility to women who allege them, is the right thing to do. So, that's a given, but the stuck place that we're in as a society and as individual men and women is often the unwillingness to address the root causes and change behavior.

You may have noticed that companies are now throwing millions at organizations that support women who've been abused in penance for their leaders' bad behavior, but I think that as long as women are looked at as victims, those feet stay on our necks, and women remain in their place, or the place that has been assigned to us by society. So, giving aid to a woman who's been abused is noble, but creating a culture where no man and no woman is ever abused and where women are afforded the respect of mentorship is transformational. That transformation can only occur when women and men see themselves as equals in all aspects of life, and certainly in the workplace.

More importantly, since men do still hold the majority of powerful leadership positions, it's incumbent upon them to lead the way to a more equal workplace. We women can't do it alone. We can do a lot. We can do a lot, but we can't make that fundamental change in the workplace alone. We've got to be in partnership with men. David G. Smith, who is a professor of sociology in the Department of National Security Affairs at the United States Naval War College, and the co-author of *Athena Rising: How and Why Men Should Mentor Women*, explains why in a Harvard Business Review article that I found very helpful.

Sexual tension is real, and you can work together productively, nevertheless. Flash. It is possible to have dinner with someone without hopping into bed with her or him. A powerful man can mentor, advise, or sponsor a woman without harassing her, and if you do harass, it's not her fault! You are responsible for stating your intentions and managing your actions. David Smith offers this tip for men who genuinely want to create more inclusive workplace cultures: "First," he says, "recognize that talented women mentees have to be challenged and need

to receive critical feedback, and that this can be delivered in a way that demonstrates empathy, commitment, and unconditional regard. Finally, excellent mentors understand their mentee's strengths and weaknesses, and work to develop their mentees through providing opportunities and challenges that may be uncomfortable, but that enable a mentee to grow her confidence and grow her skills as she progresses toward her career goals and her dreams.”

Now, that was kind of a mouthful, but how hard is that, gentlemen? I mean, basic respect, recognize that women employees need to be challenged and need to receive critical feedback just like men do. Because if you don't get that feedback, how could you ever improve? So, the feedback needs to be candid. You need to be able to be candid. But it has to come from a place of regard, of respect, and empathy, and commitment. And I highly recommend David's book and his work if you want to pursue this more fully.

So, I tell women that there are no excuses for them not to embrace their power and seek leadership roles, and in that same light, there are no excuses for men not to mentor women, so that women can fully contribute the leadership potential that organizations so desperately need.

I want you to practice your power this week by doing this: If you're a man or a woman, either way, share this podcast with a man, and have a discussion about it, or just use the ideas that I've shared with you to start that conversation. Let me know how it goes for you by sharing with me on social media @gloriafeldt, or emailing me at powertoyou@taketheleadwomen.com.

Until next week, Power to You.

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