



Breadmaking and the Art of Leadership

Baking is among the most popular activities right now as people find ways to cope with being at home most of the time. But Gloria has been baking and building community along the way for many years. In this personal episode she looks back at the bonds she built and strengthened thanks to a certain challah recipe.

Gloria Feldt: Like I always say, there is nothing as comforting as the aroma of freshly baked bread, especially during a pandemic. Hello, and welcome to Power to You. I'm Gloria Feldt, and I'm here with secrets and tools to prepare and propel you with training and coaching to harness your incredible power to in your professional life. I spent my entire career advancing women's rights and equality from the boardroom to the bedroom. I cofounded Take the Lead because I figured out how to crack the code that has been holding women back from equal leadership and pay. My mission now is for women and men to hold equal power, pay, and leadership positions by 2025. At the end of each podcast, I'll share specific tips that will help you lead and succeed.

To tell you the truth, I haven't always said that about freshly baked bread during a pandemic, because after all, this is my first experience with a pandemic, and I imagine it's yours, too. But I have baked a lot of bread in my life, and no, this podcast isn't turning into a cooking show, though I do promise to share one of my best bread recipes with you at the end of the episode.

I was scrolling through my Instagram feed and I noticed that Ivy Slater, whose podcast, "[Her Success Story](#)," I had the pleasure of appearing on recently, had posted a picture of a large and perfectly braided loaf of challah. She explained that she and her daughter had made it, and it was a first for both of them. My mouth was starting to water just looking at the picture. I couldn't resist complimenting her. I told her that I had learned to make challah long ago as a young wife and mother. What I didn't tell her was that one of the things the beautifully braided bread represents to me is the power of diversity and the art of leadership.

Soon, I noticed another friend, epidemiologist [Dr. Joynicole Martinez](#), was posting pictures of her prolific breadmaking. She had whole wheat loaf with everything bagel seasoning, cinnamon rolls, and sourdough rolls with garlic and rosemary.

Does that just make you hungry hearing it? The sourdough rolls rose thanks to homemade yeast, called starter, that she had coaxed into being herself, a living, breathing act of co-creation.

You know, I had been reading that [many people were baking](#) as sort of therapy while in quarantine or sheltering in place, and that yeast bread in particular was becoming almost a spiritual experience for many. [Breaking bread](#) equals connectedness, coming together across whatever lines might have been separating us.

So, I became curious to explore this baking phenomenon further. I [posted on Facebook](#) this question: Are you baking bread in the pandemic? Well, immediately responses came from several people who posted pictures of their first ever breadmaking adventures, including one who had been unable to find yeast at the store, so she, like Dr. Martinez, had diligently worked on creating her own starter until she had perfected it. So many people were making bread that yeast and flour has become scarce in the grocery store.

I'm convinced that there is something so generative about making yeast bread that it is the perfect metaphor for how we can purposefully approach the process of recreating ourselves and our world during and after this pandemic. Now, it wasn't long before both relatives and friends started responding to my Facebook post with their vivid memories of my challah, for which I had become sort of semi-famous during my West Texas young wife and mom days.

Challah is a light-textured bread, almost cakelike. In Jewish tradition, it's typically made for Sabbath or holiday meals. But it turned out to be the most ecumenical recipe I've ever made. Religion aside, everyone who tasted it wanted the recipe. I gave it to so many people that some days I thought everybody in Odessa and Midland, Texas was baking what in my yellow, dogeared copy, handwritten on lined paper, is titled, ["Mom's Challah"](#) – so named because it came from a friend's mother.

And what is the most accessible part of any culture? Of course, it is the food, and so the women of our small congregation in West Texas had begun to prepare and share traditional Jewish food, largely of the Eastern European variety, since that's where most of our parents and grandparents had come from. What began as a lunch for a few dozen friends turned into a community-wide happening, attracting hundreds of people of every race and religion each year. The sharing of cultures became one of my most prized values, and I think something that is important for every leader to have. What better way to foster mutual understanding and respect for diversity than breaking bread together?

I feel really blessed that I've had the opportunity in my life to absorb the cultures of rural Texas and the deep South, the black and Hispanic cultures, the Native American cultures of Arizona, and as my own family expanded and became increasingly diverse, food was always the bridge. Especially bread, because every culture has its own classic bread. Bread is the universal language. Bread is a

metaphor for sustenance. In common parlance, bread is money. Same thing, same concept. In times of high anxiety about our physical and financial future, breadmaking and the art of leadership have much in common.

First, there is having the vision of what kind of bread you want to make. You must amass the ingredients then, and the techniques needed to produce the outcome that you desire. But you can't just throw it together. There is a sequence to producing a great product, and if you skip steps, you risk failure. Dr. Martinez said it took a week for her starter to develop properly, and that the more you bake in your kitchen, the more the starter gains experience with your air, and the stronger it becomes. Just like developing people.

There's a science, but also an art to producing excellent bread, just as there is both a science and an art to leadership. The yeast mixture can't be too hot or too cold, or the bread won't rise. Then you must have the strengths to combine the elements of the bread into a dough that will require deft handling, kneading it gently and then more vigorously until you have a silky smooth, slightly elastic ball, ready to rise. You must have patience to allow the dough to reach its full potential, but not to rise so much that it falls and becomes too tough or flat.

When you're dealing with an organic entity that has its unpredictable moments, just as in leadership, there are unpredictable events that must be problem solved so as not to deter you from your mission. Most bread has very few ingredients, actually. Mostly yeast, water, flour, oil, salt, sugar, maybe eggs. Yet like human beings, with the right nurturing and the right handling, it has the capacity to deliver such a glorious outcome. Perhaps this is a life lesson in simplicity and its beauty. And perhaps this is a leadership lesson in skill, and strategy, and intention.

Dr. Martinez observes, and her tips perfectly recap the leadership lessons from breadmaking that I want to share with you, "This is how we grow our business," she says. "You start with raw inputs and materials. You allow experience and a healthy environment to develop your goals into something unique, and it serves as a foundation for growing new projects, developing other leaders, and building the bottom line. Start with quality, move in time, and you'll end with excellence. Let's get positioned higher."

Those are Dr. Joynicole Martinez's tips, and they are so wise that I am sharing them with you instead of my own tips this week. But don't forget to download the recipe for [Mom's Challah](#). Everyone will love you for it and you will love it, too. Let me know how it goes for you, both the leadership lessons and the bread, by sharing with me on social media @gloriafeldt, or emailing me at powertoyou@taketheleadwomen.com.

Until next week, Power to You.

Power to You is produced by Lantigua Williams & Co. Cedric Wilson is our sound designer. Emma Forbes is our assistant producer. For more about my work, please visit gloriafeldt.com, and follow me on social media @gloriafeldt. To learn more

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