



Know Your Name

Picking out a name is a powerful and consequential process. Names convey and create meaning. They reveal something about who we are, where we come from, and where we're headed. But is a person, business, or idea given a name because of who or what they are? Or do they grow and stretch to fit the name they were given? In this episode Gloria muses about the connections between choosing and using a name, claiming an identity, and creating a mission, and offers practical advice for maximizing the power of naming in your work and in life.

Gloria Feldt: Like I always say, there's power in naming and power in knowing your name. 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 have spent my career advancing women's 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 pay, power, and leadership positions by 2025. At the end of each podcast, I'll share specific tips that will help you lead and succeed.

The first getting to know you exercise I always do in my [Nine Leadership Power Tools training](#) is to ask participants how they got their first name. Do you know how you got your first name? If you don't and have the opportunity to ask a parent, stop here. Take a moment and do that. You'll usually find out something very interesting. The latest experience of doing that was at the kickoff event of the 2020 cohort of Take the Lead's 50 Women Can Change the World in journalism. Some people have powerful stories about family history, or being named for a goddess, or a movie star that their mother identified with, or being a given name that combined names liked by their fathers and mothers. Sometimes it's simply, "Because my parents liked that name," and that's that. And sometimes a woman has chosen her name that is not her birth name, as Harriet Tubman did in shedding her birth name of Araminta to signify a rebirth that raised Tubman up from slavery's social death.

The Navajo give their children names that represent qualities they want the child to have and only use it in ceremony. Every time we do this how did you get your first name exercise, we learn so much about each other, but more importantly, we

learn about ourselves. And sometimes we keep learning. What we thought we knew turns out to be not exactly the story. Like for example, my grandmother told me that I was named for her mother, whose name, she said, was Olga. I believed this all my life, even though I could never figure out how in the world they derived Gloria from Olga.

Recently, as a result of some genealogical sleuthing by a relative, I learned that my great grandmother's name was actually Golda. I have more digging to do to figure that one out. But this I do know. Being named for a beloved ancestor, even if the story was a little wonky, gave me a sense of history, continuity, and consequence.

Similarly, my middle name is the same as my grandmother's and my mother's, and I also passed it on to my daughter. The Ann line, as I call it, is a strong connector to personal history. The point is that knowing one's name is powerful in the deepest sense of one's identity.

[“Say his name,”](#) is chanted to insist that George Floyd, the African American man recently the victim of lethal police brutality, be recognized as a man, a human being with an identity who deserves respect. [Women's names](#) have so often been rubbed out, left out, not credited in history. [The story of Martha, known as Marty, Goddard](#), who invented the rape kit, deserves a Pulitzer in my opinion. It's incredible reporting by Pagan Kennedy, and it's based on dogged investigation and a nose for finding the story within the story. It covers an abundance of issues that relate to who gets to name and who gets to claim inventions, how women's inventions so often get credited to men, how personal experiences drive lifelong passions, and how deep-rooted misogyny results in equally deep systemic injustice.

Goddard had herself been raped. When she realized that unlike with other crimes, law enforcement personnel rarely collected forensic data that could be used to identify and convict rapists, she spent her life devoted to rectifying that injustice. Yet the name of the male police sergeant with whom she worked to create the kit's prototype is unfairly recognized as the sole creator. Sadly, Goddard felt she had to allow that to happen in order to get those rape kits into mainstream use. I am so glad that her story has been told now, and that now more people will know her name and the real inventor of the rape kit that has enabled so many more women to bring their perpetrators to justice.

Chanel Miller was known only as Emily Doe during the high profile trial of the Stanford University student who sexually assaulted her. Supposedly for her protection she was given that pseudonym, but Chanel came to believe that instead, it erased her as much as the experience of being assaulted had erased her self-esteem. She proceeded to turn her trauma into an exquisitely detailed recounting that revealed her personal truth and lets us understand her as a full human being. The result is the [best-selling book, Know My Name](#). Know My name, I love that. The name of the book itself describes Chanel's defiant point exactly.

Quoting Toni Morrison, Miller emphasizes, “When you know your name, you should hang onto it, for unless it is noted down and remembered, it will die when you do.”

So, here are some tips for maximizing the power of naming in your life and your work. First of all, know your own name. Know yourself, of course, is what I’m talking about. [The most highly respected leaders always are those who know themselves well.](#) They know their strengths and they know their weaknesses, so they can build on their strengths and bring in others to fill in where they know they are less capable. For example, I know that I’m strong at setting a vision and strategy, and securing the resources to make it happen, but I’m weak when it comes to establishing processes and procedures for getting the work done. I have to have on my team people who can translate vision and strategy to specific processes and tasks that can guide other individuals on the team. People who have worked with me often refer to the Gloria in my head. My worst mistakes occur when I try to be somebody I’m not.

Secondly, name your business with care, for its name is its identity. It’s your first elevator pitch, your first impression, that determines how people will react to you. Choose a name with an available URL and ideally one that you can register as a trademark. When we named Take the Lead, we could tell by the way people reacted to it viscerally that it told our story in a way that attracted support and interest in our mission. Naming creates meaning even as it describes meaning. That’s one of the primary responsibilities of leaders. Now, the downside of Take the Lead is that while the idea resonates, it doesn’t tell people exactly what we do. That’s why we added the tagline, “Purpose, power, parity.” Still, we’re a work in progress as we work to communicate to companies that we can solve their diversity and gender equity goals. Perhaps you can help us create a name that will work in one or two succinct but descriptive words. Email me at powertoyou@taketheleadwomen.com or tweet me @gloriafeldt with your recommendations. The best one will win a signed copy of my book.

Thirdly, name your projects and products with equal care. The story you tell with the name of a project helps people understand their roles. It should always tie in with your mission in some way. That infuses what may be routine work with meaning. It inspires people to take pride in their work. It helps them to understand how their work fits into the whole, and why their diligence and attention to quality work inures to their own benefit, as well as the benefit of the company. It also motivates teamwork and a sense of belonging to the team and the organization. Remember in elementary school, when you were either a red bird or a blue bird? Well, that made you part of a team, but it didn’t imbue the team with meaning.

Depending upon the nature of what you’re trying to achieve, you can elevate your team’s aspirations by associating a project with a relevant mythical figure, an animal, or perhaps a shero or hero. For example, some efforts to get more girls into STEM fields take the name of mathematician Ada Lovelace. Lovelace, whose algorithms underlie computer programming as we know it today, is of course yet

another woman whose work was attributed to a man with whom she worked at the time, and I am really glad to see her name resuscitated, so I'm particularly glad to speak her name here.

Use your power of naming and know the power of your own name. That's my Power to You tip for today. Until next week, Power to You.

Power to You is produced by Lantigua Williams & Co. Cedric Wilson is our sound designer. For more about my work, please visit gloriafeldt.com, and follow me on social media @gloriafeldt. To learn about Take the Lead and our courses and coaching services, go to taketheleadwomen.com and follow Take the Lead on social media. You can also send me comments about the show and questions on leadership and power to powertoyou@taketheleadwomen.com. I might even use them on future episodes. Be sure to subscribe or follow Power to You on your favorite listening app, and you'd make me so happy if you would leave a review on Apple Podcasts, as those really help us get to know what you like about the show. Thanks.

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