



Watch Out for Pebbles!

On your power journey, you'll easily see the mountains ahead, but it's often the small pebbles on your path that can really trip you up. Gloria unpacks this metaphor to prepare you with actionable advice on how to approach these inevitable moments as you grow in your power.

Gloria Feldt: Hello, and welcome to Power to You. I'm Gloria Feldt. I've spent my entire career advancing women's rights and equality in health, education, Corporate America, politics, and every other area from the boardroom to the bedroom. I'm so proud to have co-founded [Take the Lead](#), which prepares and propels women with training and coaching in how to harness your incredible power in your professional lives.

Like I always say, it's not the mountains that trip leaders up, it's the pebbles on the path. After tripping on a pebble while hiking and breaking my wrist recently, I thought about how it's never the mountains that trip you up, because you can see them easily. It's the pebbles on your path. Things you can't see coming, even though they're right in front of you. Impediments that don't catch your eye because they're so small that you're unaware of them, or you're very aware and pay no attention.

In leadership terms, your blind spots, your tin ears, your fatal flaws. The moments when privilege or power trips, or too much hard-driving focus on goals over relationships can cause even the best of leaders to fail to see the pitfalls that shock the heck out of them. Sometimes you can pick yourself up, and dust yourself off, and keep going. Other times require pivots in one's perspective. A different direction in life or career.

Sometimes, it feels like the whole world is crashing in, and even the best orthopedic surgeons can't patch up what's broken. Many books and articles laud people who have failed before they succeeded. That's not exactly what I'm talking about. Those examples abound, like J.K. Rowling, author of the wildly successful Harry Potter books started out as a single mom on public assistance. Arianna Huffington's second book was rejected 36 times before she went on to found a media empire. Personally, I needed to be reminded of this today as I'm seeking to get my next book published.

Even President Abraham Lincoln lost his first election and experienced setbacks in business. We love those heroic stories. The moral is always that redemption is

possible, and success will come if we only stay true to our dreams and keep trying. Indeed, there is a gift in every failure: the gift of learning if we're open to it.

But I'm talking about something different. The bigger they are, the harder they fall. My daddy took me to the Golden Gloves boxing matches when I was maybe six or seven years old. There was a match between two boxers who were noticeably disparate in size. The odds were all in favor of the larger man, who came out prancing in white, making him look even heftier. The shorter man knocked him out in the first round. My daddy turned to me and said, "The bigger they are, the harder they fall."

I had no idea these words of wisdom weren't original with my father, who loved giving me such aphorisms. Boxing champion Bob Fitzsimmons made it popular in the mid-1800s, based on the biblical story in which the giant, Goliath, was defeated by the boy, David, wielding only a slingshot. The more successful one is, the further one has to fall, and the more easily one is blinded by assumptions of his or her own invincibility or power. The greater the success, the greater the potential for failure.

I wasn't paying attention. I probably felt somewhat invincible. Walking along a gentle mountain trail, chatting with a friend and enjoying the beautiful day. And when I apply the principle of the pebbles in the path to leadership lessons I've learned, I have to admit that inattention to potential stumbles has tripped me up more often than I would like to acknowledge.

You see, I am very goal focused, and one of my greatest strengths is that I believe all things are possible. And usually I do accomplish what I set out to do. I'm always telling my team and people in my leadership development programs the world turns on human connections. But I've become aware through hard lessons that sometimes I don't notice when I haven't given adequate attention to a relationship with someone who can derail me. Failing to nurture a relationship with one member of a nonprofit board to which I report, not my current board, let me be clear, can make my life a living hell. That's a story for another day, but yes, it has happened.

So, let's talk about some solutions. How to guard against being tripped up by the pebbles in your path. Aside from wearing really good hiking shoes, which I was chided for not doing by the hospital emergency room nurse, here are some tips I've learned the hard way for avoiding being tripped up by those pesky pebbles at work: First of all, have someone on your team or among your close circle of trusted friends who's job description includes telling you the truth before you make a mistake, or hear from others that you have done so. This is different from someone who simply "has your back." I'm talking about someone who will look you straight in the eye and give you unvarnished feedback. You don't have to take the advice, but you must listen to it.

Secondly, if you don't have someone on your team who can do that, consider getting a coach strong enough to speak truth to your power to hire or fire her.

Thirdly, this is really important, own your mistakes transparently, and take responsibility for them. We all make mistakes. If you're in a position to make amends, do that immediately, before anyone else suggests that you do. This is not only good practice for yourself, but it sets a role model for others. Above all, don't be like former BP CEO Tony Hayward, who following the Deepwater oil spill disaster in 2010 not only distanced himself from responsibility, but whined about wanting to get his life back. Poor fellow.

So, I want you to practice your power to this week by doing these things. First of all, if you don't already have a truth teller on your team, seek one out. Possibly you can help someone else, too, by fulfilling that function for them. Make a tradeoff. You can ask five people for feedback on where your pebbles might be, and listen to them without comment, even when your natural tendency will be to explain yourself. And finally, pick up three actual pebbles. Name each one. Yeah, I mean that. Give it a name of a behavior, a vulnerability, a mistake, or a characteristic that you want to avoid. When you name something, you have the power to change it, so keep those pebbles in your office as a reminder for yourself to do just that.

I'd love to know how it goes for you if you try these tips. Let me know how it goes by 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 about Take the Lead and our courses and coaching services, go to taketheleadwomen.com, and follow us 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 on your favorite listening app, and please leave a review on Apple Podcasts, as those really help us know what you like about the show. Thanks.

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