



Are Women Better Than Men at Leading Through Crisis?

It's probably safe to say that most of us have an opinion on this matter. But let's set that aside as Gloria takes us through her own thinking and evidence-based analysis of what it means to truly lead through an unprecedented set of events.

Gloria Feldt:

Like I always say: “Never” and “always” are words to be used judiciously, because hardly anything lives up to either one.

Hello and welcome to Power to You. I'm Gloria Feldt, 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'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. 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 always share specific tips that will help you lead and succeed.

Musical interlude.

So, the question of whether men or women are better at leading through crises has been bubbling up everywhere. It's a question that in a way makes me smile. Because it hasn't been that long, historically speaking, that we've even had enough women in visible leadership roles that we could make a comparison. Or at least, in recorded history. There are those who would argue that in prehistoric times, many civilizations were matriarchies or goddess cultures...but we'll leave that conversation, as intriguing as it may be, for another day.

The meme showing that female leaders in Germany, New Zealand, Finland, Taiwan and [others have handled the pandemic better than their male counterparts](#) has spread rapidly because it certainly rings true in this instance. New Zealand's [Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern](#), declared by The Atlantic as possibly the most effective leader in the world, has become the avatar for the [characteristics that many assign to female leaders](#), such as empathy and humanity.

Ardern, who became the world's youngest female head of government in 2017 at age 37, offers words of hope and guidance on Facebook Live chats—often in a worn sweatshirt from her bedroom no less. In that particular Facebook Live video, Ardern said she had just put her toddler to bed. She also applied a bit of wry wit, assuring the children of the country that the tooth fairy

and Easter bunny were essential workers. She exemplifies my own core lessons about transforming the use of power from oppressive “power over” to generative “power to.”

Closer to home, I am sheltering in Arizona because I was here when all hell broke loose in my other home of New York. I had a chance to observe female mayors of large Arizona cities follow the science and set rules for social distancing and shutting down businesses with deliberate speed, while the male Arizona governor dawdled and diddled and declared nail and hair salons essential services along with grocery stores. Those mayors are [Kate Gallego of Phoenix](#), who is one of only two women leading the 12 largest cities in the US; [Coral Evans of Flagstaff](#), and [Regina Romero of Tucson](#). The governor eventually had to follow [Mayor Gallego’s leadership](#). [And I loved her comment](#) that it’s better to save lives than have a good manicure. Though I could really use a good mani-pedi right about now.

So what do you think? Are women better than men at leading through crisis?

I don’t know about you, but my mind immediately goes to all the practice I had handling my children’s spats, injuries, and crises real or perceived. I am pretty sure that experience prepared me well to handle what I call crossroads decision moments with a cool head, empathy, and reasonably good judgment in my professional life; from an employee dying of a heart attack at work to 9-11 and its direct impact on thousands of individuals in the organization, as well as the city, state, and country.

We know that [female legislators pass more bills](#) and that they’re more likely to work across the aisles to get the people’s work done. We know that companies with [more women in their leadership make more money](#). We know that diversity, in general, makes for better innovation and [greater alignment with the marketplace](#).

Yet, no specific leadership behavior is hardwired or inherently gendered. Most of our behaviors are culturally learned. Still, studies such as the [extensive research](#) done by Harvard professors Jack Zenger and Joseph Folkman have found that women rate higher in 17 out of 19 leadership skills identified as the most essential.

Paradoxically, the [implicit bias and discrimination women have endured](#) has, I believe—and I know this is a bit radical—I believe it has acculturated superpowers into our thinking and behavior. So our leadership styles tend to be more acutely aware of the human side of events, as well as the economic factors. We can hold multiple tabs open in our brains while calmly taking care of problems, because that has been our survival mechanism.

The data shows that women tend to be [more philanthropic](#). In a pandemic that matters. You know, I watched a conversation with the female CEO of Duke Energy, [Lynn Good](#) and was super impressed with her thoughtful attention to details of how to bring people back to work safely, rather than pushing the imperative to get them back as fast as possible.

At the same time, the nation has seen [New York’s male Governor Andrew Cuomo exemplify great leadership](#) in the state with the most COVID hospitalizations and deaths in the United States. Every day, he speaks to his constituents straightforwardly, not glossing over the seriousness and even horror of the situation, giving the facts calmly but with empathy, showing his own vulnerability and humanity when his brother became ill with COVID, and telling stories

about his big Italian family along with delivering the facts.

So it must be acknowledged that there are good, mediocre, and bad leaders regardless of gender. It oversimplifies things to say that women are always better leaders in a crisis or any other time.

And the culturally learned assets women bring to leadership also have their flip side: being more tentative in our language, and often more risk averse for example. Being thoughtful and getting the facts is good. But leadership always involves having to make choices from imperfect solutions with limited resources and usually less than enough information. So women need to exercise the kind of confidence and courage to take action and own it that men are more likely to do. The more one exercises those muscles the stronger one gets.

My own challenges through the pandemic have required me to flex my entrepreneurial muscles more than ever. Take the Lead has been an entirely virtual organization run by independent contractors from the get-go, so nothing has changed about how we work on a daily basis. That said, the pandemic has disrupted everyone's life in some way. We have parents who now are also teachers, entrepreneurs who have lost clients, people whose friends or family have had COVID, and the same general anxiety that washes over the rest of the country. So we now start every team meeting with a round of questions about how people are doing emotionally as well as physically. And we share ways of coping that we have each developed.

That said, I made a point to change the framing on an agenda item someone had posted from "Coronavirus response strategy" to "revenue generating strategy." You see, people tend to be in response mode unless a leader—regardless of gender—helps them reframe to an intentional and positive thought process where we create our own opportunities or take advantage of the opportunities that are in front of us.

We are pivoting all our offerings to virtual and emphasizing earned revenue for the foreseeable future. We have the advantage of great leadership training and coaching content that can be done virtually. We will launch a new, improved [9 Leadership Power Tools to Accelerate Your Career online](#) self study course in June, with a goal to reach 10,000 women in the next year with it.

I'll be sure to put a [link](#) into the show notes so you can find out more about it.

And I attribute being in the midst of a pandemic that has made it harder for us to raise philanthropic funds to helping me realize that this course is an incredibly valuable asset that we really hadn't been leveraging but can also offer it to companies as a cost effective way to keep preparing their female talent to move up the leadership pipeline during a time when they're trying to watch their budgets.

We are partnering with other organizations to leverage our constrained resources. For example, we have done virtual workshops with Luminary, the coworking community, and we are planning a webinar on building a better future for the legal profession in partnership with the Center for Women in Law. We will launch our immersive [50 Women Can Change The World in Journalism](#) on schedule in mid-June but in a virtual format for the first time. We only have half the

funding we need for the program, but I made the decision to proceed because I have faith that the rest will come.

I WILL use the word “always” in this instance, to say that there is always a way to achieve one’s mission. Sometimes we have to think very creatively to find it, but it’s always there, sometimes right under our noses.

So, here are three tips to help you use the best of the characteristics that are often, but not necessarily, always identified with female leadership:

1. **Empathy:** Take out a sheet of paper and list all the ways you notice people exhibiting empathy during this pandemic. Then ask yourself, how can you tap into the power of this well of empathy to inspire yourself and the people you work with to come out of the pandemic stronger, caring, and more prosperous. These are not antithetical characteristics.
2. **Collaboration:** If you work with other people, ask them to do the same exercise independently of you. Then compare notes and look for the nuggets of gold in the pearls of wisdom you have amassed. If you work alone, gather several peers to do this exercise with one another. Ask if there are opportunities to collaborate profitably or to leverage resources within the ideas that you have surfaced.
3. **Have a little less ego in decision making:** Get comfortable with the fact that there are problems and there are predicaments. Problems have solutions. Predicaments require you to make decisions from imperfect options. And the more you do this, the more you know you can make a decision that doesn’t pan out well and you can survive. In fact you will learn from it, and do better the next time with a mindset that is open to learning. In this [Fast Company article](#), Lorten Pratt, co-founder and chief scientist at Quantellia, a firm that makes decision intelligence software, says to start with the desired outcome and work your way backward. When your ego is strong enough to be guided by your core values and mission, yet not so overzealous that you can’t acknowledge fault, you will be able to keep your eyes on the outcome that you want and that will increase your chances of getting that outcome.

Let me know how it goes for you by sharing with me on social media at @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 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 Power to You on your favorite listening app, and just please leave a review on Apple Podcasts, as those really help us know what you like about the show. Thank you.

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