



Suppressed, Forced Out and Fired: How Successful Women Lose Their Jobs

Martha Reeves

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So entrenched and powerful is the patriarchy within organizations that women have serious difficulty acquiring positions of real importance, even when it is in the organization's best interest to use their talents fully (and reward them equitably). Reeves surveys the structural obstacles to women's advancement and argues that successful women executives threaten their male counterparts and their patriarchal culture, which responds by punishing them. Unlike other studies on the topic, Reeves explains the mechanisms by which gender discrimination operates—the dynamics of discrimination and the processes by which women in business are marginalized, subordinated, and excluded. Her book combines theory with first person case study accounts of 10 women who were suppressed, then fired. The result is a fresh, compelling argument that, despite claims to the contrary, the glass ceiling still exists. The patriarchy has simply devised subtle new ways to circumvent the legal remedies meant to crack through it.

Reeves reviews statistics on the role of women in work, patterns of horizontal and vertical segregation, and differences in the experiences of men and women, then turns to an assessment of the theories of women's subordination. She profiles each of her 10 women subjects, explains their education, career trajectory, and accomplishments. Their experiences reveal various mechanisms through which the patriarchy operates to subordinate successful women, such as communication patterns among men that minimize women's contributions, withholding of information, denial of status to women, intimidation tactics, and the double bind that women find themselves in when they seek fair treatment. After analyzing the women's termination in detail, Reeves discusses how each woman's personality played a role in her termination. Reeves ends by drawing conclusions on what the present and future seem to hold for women's progress in organizations, and particularly in publicly held corporations.



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