

How men can help women lean in

By [MaryAnn McKibben Dana](#)

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I [wrote a post last week](#) about Sheryl Sandberg's new book [Lean In](#) and said in part:

There is still a tremendous gender gap in ministry. By and large, women are the associate pastors and solo pastors. Men are the tall-steeple preachers. (Men of my generation are very sad about this, and they lament it—sincerely, I believe—but will gladly move into those prestigious and well-paying positions even as they tilt their heads sympathetically and decry the patriarchy.)

My friend [Andrew Taylor-Troutman](#) commented on Facebook:

I appreciate (and am convicted by) your point about men lamenting sexism while benefitting from it. As an ally, I wonder what the image for privilege would be. Leaning back? Or, as you point out, support is key. Leaning in together? Lean, mean fighting machine?

If my comment convicted him, then his sincere question convicted me: What would I ask of my brothers who are in positions of influence and privilege? That is an excellent question. Here are the first things that come to mind:

**Don't be a jerk.** I guess that's not very useful advice, because jerks either don't know or don't care that they are. But basic kindness and empathy go a long way. If you see a woman "leaning in," don't push her over. But don't hover around, ready to catch her if she falls either. That's annoying. And patronizing.

**Name it when you see it.** That thing where a woman makes a suggestion and it gets ignored, and then a man suggests it and people fall over themselves to praise it? It's happened to me. It's happened to virtually every woman I know. It's nice when women aren't the ones to point it out.

**Advocate for decent parental leave, even if you don't need it.** Maybe you aren't planning to have kids, or maybe your kids are grown. All the more reason for you to get into the game—it's not personal. When I was pregnant with my second child, I helped the church I was serving put together a good parental leave policy, which they didn't have. They were great about it. There was not a lot of pushback. Even so, it's an awkward process. Help a gal out.

**Cut the macho stuff.** If you are eligible for parental leave and the situation arises, take it. See also: vacation, study leave and for heaven's sake, days off!

**Recommend us for stuff, and mean it.** I'm not looking to move into a new call, but I appreciate that people put my name in for pastoral positions that open up. And don't give up just because it's not the right time. Someday it could be.

What have I missed?

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