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Why Sports and Business for Women?

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Never stop working, wanting, or dreaming.

—NANCY LIEBERMAN

How does a poor girl from Far Rockaway, New York, defy the odds and become a Hall of Fame basketball player, coach, author, television analyst, entrepreneur, and mom? The simple answer is luck, and in many cases, I created my own luck. However, the complete story about how I got from there to here involves love, passion, faith, vision, fearlessness, and a stubborn will to succeed.

I've lived my own *Playbook for Success*, and it comes naturally to me. Now I'm putting it all down in this book to share what I've learned with you: the secrets and steps that will take you to new levels of success you didn't think were possible. Well, they are! I know this from firsthand experience. My life has been about overachieving and showing people that they, too, could do anything they wanted to do—*if* they had a plan and were willing to put in the hard work.

The streets of New York gave me a toughness that has helped me to survive and keep moving forward when everything seemed hopeless. If not for the playbook provided to me at a young age by Lavoiser Lamar, one of my coaches in Harlem, you might not be reading my book—or absorbing and utilizing this plan for your own personal growth and success.

My days on the courts proved invaluable in developing my competitive spirit. They taught me not only how to win but also how to use my losses as tools for evaluating myself, zeroing in on my weaknesses, and turning them into strengths. I had to be honest: Did I make myself and others around me better? Now, you might be shaking your head and wondering, “How does athletic experience translate into business success?” Well, whether you're a female doctor, lawyer, stockbroker, sales or marketing associate, business

manager or owner, it's still a man's world, and we women must be able to communicate, interact, earn respect, lead, and impact everyone who comes in contact with us. *Playbook for Success: A Hall of Famer's Business Tactics for Teamwork and Leadership* will let you in on something men have been doing for a very long time: connecting through, and using what they've learned by participating in, sports, to get ahead in the business world.

I made history as the youngest Olympic basketball player ever, but that wouldn't have happened if I hadn't played in the schoolyard against the boys. They pushed me, made me work harder, and taught me to show up—and toughen up, both mentally and physically—if I intended to play in their game. Man, did I take some bruises to my body and ego early on! But those lessons taught me to keep coming back and get better. Along the way, I developed a successful strategy for self-improvement—one that I still utilize today.

Want to know how I always got into the basketball games at Harlem's Rucker Park? Simple: To be allowed to play, you had to hit your foul shots. The first 10 players to do so were automatically in the game. Well, I couldn't dunk, and I wasn't as fast or as strong as the guys, but I could hit my foul shots. When the baddest dudes with all the talent couldn't, I *could*. That, my friend, is what got me on the court time after time, and left those guys who threw up the bricks from the foul line sitting in the stands waiting for their turn to play. I found my strength and a strategy, and I used them to be successful. I didn't know at the time that I was using a *Playbook for Success*, but I was.

Once I proved myself to be a worthy contributor, the guys began to respect me, protect me, and share with me what they knew about the game. To this day, so many of those simple but vital strategies I learned back then play a huge part in my interactions as a business leader—with both men and women. I'm in the business of sports, a multibillion-dollar industry; in fact, it's the fourteenth largest-grossing industry sector—larger than the steel and railroad industries. My point is, love and/or knowledge of sports can bring

you into the loop and help you to generate trust, close a deal, and build lasting friendships. Sports can teach us girls that we can do anything. Vice President Joe Biden made that point in an interview on ESPN, given when he attended the 2010 women's basketball championship game between Connecticut and Stanford. He sat a couple of rows from the floor, at center court, with his two young granddaughters. When asked why he was there, Biden replied: "I tell my daughter and my granddaughters they can do anything a boy can do. Sports gives you overwhelming confidence."

Sure, I played the game, but even those who didn't can use the same strategies and techniques I developed as an athlete to conduct business on an equal playing field with both men and women. How did my involvement with sports contribute to my successful business development? Let me count the ways:

1. Leadership skills
2. Discipline
3. Ability to participate on a team
4. Communication
5. Self-confidence
6. Goal-setting skills
7. Vision
8. Positive attitude
9. Perseverance
10. Resilience
11. Healthy competitiveness

Wow, that's a long list. And let me add that you find your love and passion in sports; they teach you how to read people and stand shoulder-to-shoulder with them in the trenches.

Why do I use a playbook analogy? Because, throughout my life I have lived the connection between sports and business. Women who never played sports or who aren't interested in them often find themselves relegated to the sidelines and lacking vital knowledge. That's why I believe strongly that all businesswomen need my

Playbook for Success. So many of us were given the chance to participate in sports in our youth—and it was the purest form of competition. We played with and against one another in the neighborhood. We watched sports together on television. I remember to this day getting chills when the New York Knicks won the NBA title in 1970 against the Los Angeles Lakers. I can recall injured team captain Willis Reed limping out of the tunnel for his dramatic entrance for game 7 of that series. Similarly, I can still see Michael Jordan hitting a buzzer-beater to win a game.

Sports stir emotions that connect strangers to each other. Just think what that same experience can do for you in a meeting, with a key client, or among your staff. It reinforces success for both men and women; it's an economic force. It can help you communicate, relate to clients, and grow your sales.

Consider a survey conducted by Oppenheimer Funds a few years ago that surveyed 401 female senior executives. The results found that 82 percent of them had played organized sports after elementary school. Coincidence? I don't think so. When asked, the respondents claimed that their experiences playing team sports contributed significantly to their business success and provided them with leadership skills, greater discipline, and the ability to function well as part of a team. They also said sports helped them deal more effectively with failure and gave them a competitive edge.

No doubt about it: The workplace favors athletes, whether male *or* female. A sports background enhances your passion for winning and teaches you “soft skills,” such as how to read nonverbal clues, focus in the midst of chaos, and support others. I know this because I have more than 35 years experience playing and coaching basketball, starting and running several successful businesses, and working within ESPN and other major companies. Thanks to these experiences, I have developed a passion for winning and working at a higher level. In this book I want to teach *you* the “plays” you need to master to reach that same level of success—no matter how big or small the league you're playing in.

Being able to communicate and bond in the workplace is absolutely critical, and I assure you that two of your greatest assets will be developing an appreciation for sports and understanding their connection to business. Yes, sports! Reading the red (i.e., sports) section of *USA Today*, for example, is a great way to bond and develop friendships before any deal is ever discussed. Think about it: Don't you enjoy working with people you like and connect with? More important, if you can hang with the boys, you can sell to the boys!

When I emphasize how important sports are to your career, I don't just mean being able to participate in the discussion about the big playoff game the night before (though that always helps); I am talking about competition in a larger sense—being able to apply to the workplace the valuable lessons of teamwork and leadership we can learn in sports. I firmly believe that success flows from becoming the best you can be, from constant self-improvement, and from the pursuit of personal excellence. This is the philosophy that underlies every play in this book. Once you tap into the ability to recognize your own potential, the rest of the plays will follow.

The workplace is as competitive as any playing field, and knowing how to compete is a big part of learning how to win consistently, and can give you an immediate advantage over a colleague who never set foot on a soccer field, wielded a lacrosse stick, or dribbled a basketball.

But what if that nonathletic colleague is you? Never fear! That's what *Playbook for Success* is designed to do: arm you with the sports-themed tools of a professional athlete, no matter what your sports background. You don't have to be a player to understand and use sports to get ahead in business. You can be a fan—anyone can. Whether it's your hometown team, or the team in the city in which you do business, sports talk is a great icebreaker. It can be exactly what you need to start a conversation that bonds someone to you and ends with you getting the job, the client, or the next big order.

Discussing sports also can be an effective equalizer, giving you the chance to connect with someone you've never met, as well as a

reason to connect again. However, women frequently don't know how to start this type of casual conversation, so instead they head right into the thick of negotiating. Believe me, it's easy to pick up a few sports-related tidbits on your car radio; or glance at the sports section of the local newspaper; or turn on *ESPNNews* to get the quick-hit headlines of the day; or log on to one of the numerous sports sites on the Internet. Do you want to know how many people have been hired in business because they are alumni from the same school as their employer? That's called loyalty, and it happens in business all the time. You'll have a definite advantage with someone in a position to give you a job if you are able to "speak the same language," share common memories, and be a fan of teams from your mutual alma mater.

Honestly, you don't have to be a former player or sports fanatic to learn how to use sports as a tool for winning in your business. Anyone can be a winner by having faith, self-confidence, and the correct mind-set. Muhammad Ali has said many times, "It's lack of faith that makes people afraid of meeting challenges, and I believed in myself." Sounds awesome, doesn't it? You have the opportunity to practice success each and every day. Own it!

At nine years old, I walked into our kitchen in Far Rockaway, New York, and had a conversation with my mother, Renee, that changed my life. She told me that little girls didn't play sports, because it wasn't a ladylike thing to do, and that I would never make anything of myself if that's all I cared about. I looked at her, stood up, put my hands on my hips, and said, "I am going to make history. Get used to it."

I have no clue now where that assertiveness came from and how I found the chutzpah to say that to my mother, in *her* kitchen, at nine years old. But I can tell you that that was what was in my heart. And still is.

To be the best, and be perceived as the best—whether in sports or in business—you're going to have to face a lot of competition. I look back on my basketball career now and I can see that it has always

been about execution. It's no different today: writing this playbook is an expression of my desire to share with you how to execute the winning plays so that you can consistently achieve high levels of success at whatever you choose to do in your life. Doing so brings me great joy and personal satisfaction. I was told a long time ago that if you have something good, you should share it with others. My life has been about dedicating myself to and accepting any challenge placed in front of me. Learning how to work well with others, help make them better, and not be afraid to fail, is what it's all about. No matter what happens in life, in business or on the basketball court, you must learn to execute in tandem with other people.

Often, success on the court requires a teammate doing the grunt work for you by setting the monster screen to get the shooter open. No job is too big and no job is too small. So ask yourself: Have you been there to help a coworker lately? Have you shared a great strategy or leadership skill with others around you? Do you give more than you take? Do you smile a lot? Working together and executing ideas as a team are critical to success in *any* business, not just sports.

We all have epiphanies in life. I had one in 1974 at 15 years old, when I was chosen to try out for the U.S.A. National Basketball Team. Forty women were flown in from all over the country to Albuquerque, New Mexico. Of those 40, only 10 would be chosen to attend a training camp under renowned coach Alberta Cox.

The second day of tryouts I had my ribs broken; the next day, I was on my way back to Far Rockaway. Coach Cox was sitting in the front seat of the car that was taking me back to the airport. From what I remember, she was from the Midwest—Missouri—and fairly stern. Now imagine me, a kid from Queens with my harsh New York accent (an accent that, later in life, I paid a speech coach \$2,000 to teach me to lose, for a job at ESPN—true story!) So, we're in the car, and Coach turns to me and says, "Now, honey, we're going to need you in 1980, because you're going to be a very important part of U.S.A. basketball."

I looked at her and said, “Coach, you know I’m not real smart or nothin’, but I do know ’76 comes before ’80, and I am going to be on the ’76 Olympic team, so you’d better get used to me.” (This conversation took place in 1974, so apparently I hadn’t changed much from the day my mom and I had our conversation in the kitchen in Far Rock.)

Coach looked at me like I was crazy—as though she couldn’t believe what had just come out of my mouth. But that’s how I felt.

All the way back to New York, I was thinking, “How dare the coach of the U.S.A. National Team tell me what I *can’t* be?” This woman should have been telling me what I *could be* and encouraging me, instead of taking my hope and my dream away.

At that point, Alberta Cox became the single most important person in my life, simply because she was the person who thought I *couldn’t*. Even when I was tired, didn’t feel well, wasn’t motivated, didn’t think I had it in me, I would go to the park and I would work, every single day. I would practice, over and over and over again, all of the things that I knew could make me better.

To be the best in business, you have to execute just like that—every single day. You have to deal with people in the field and in your office, with your clients, and your peers. Part of winning and using the lessons of sports involves encouraging others to be better than they ever thought they could be. You have to be the hope-giver; you have to empower people by motivating them to do things they didn’t think they could do. You also have to teach them that failure is a noble trait, in business, life, and sports. We all are capable of trying to achieve something at a higher level when we are willing to take ourselves outside our comfort zone. In essence, we have to stretch the possibilities of who we are and what we can be.

A wonderful thing happened to me in July of 1976. At just 18 years old, and a senior in high school, I stepped up on a podium, bent over, and felt the amazing sensation of an Olympic silver medal being placed around my neck. I was, and to this day remain, the youngest basketball player in history—male or

female—to win an Olympic medal. But my greatest satisfaction that day was running back to the Olympic Village in Montreal, grabbing the telephone off the wall, and calling Alberta Cox—collect—to say, “Coach, thank you! Thank you for making me more than I ever thought I could be.”

Yes, it’s important to have true belief and inner confidence in yourself, others around you might need to be encouraged by you, especially in a leadership capacity. Have you helped someone around you—perhaps a colleague in your office—become more than he or she thought he or she could be? It took somebody not believing in me for me to believe in myself. If I had listened to what Coach Cox had said to me, I might not be writing this book. She might have thought she was saying something positive to me at the time, like we will need you in 1980, but I took it as she didn’t think I could make it in 1976.

I have a friend who used to say, “I’m the true champion of the world. I whipped Joe Frazier like I whipped George Foreman, like I beat Sonny Liston back in 1964.” Many people know that friend as the greatest boxer of all time—Muhammad Ali. I still smile today when I remember him saying, “It’s hard to be humble if you’re as great as I am. If you’re good, it ain’t bragging.”

We can all be great. We *all* have the ability. It helps, though, to have a playbook: to take the lessons learned in sports and apply them in our lives—at home, at work, even in personal relationships. I’ve dedicated my life to excellence and to empowering others by being a good leader—not just through words, but through the way in which I’ve conducted my life. I am consistent as a mom, friend, business leader, and athlete. I can be humorous, sarcastic, and sometimes even goofy, but I know when I have to be serious about what I do.

We are a society of goal setters. We want to be good at what we do, and we must always be willing to compete. Yes, ladies, it’s perfectly acceptable to compete! And contrary to what my mother told me, it’s *very* ladylike to win!

Even when you're good, don't be satisfied with yourself; realize that you can *always* be better. I tell this to business leaders and players all the time—even the best of the best, like Martina Navratilova, the greatest female tennis player of all time. When I trained Martina in 1981, she told me, “Nancy, I just want you to know, I had more wins last year than anybody on tour.”

I replied, “Great. How many tournaments did you play?” She answered, “Twenty-five.”

I then asked her, “How many did you win?”

She said, “Thirteen.”

“And you're proud of that?” I asked. “If you play, you might as well play to win. Why don't you play 16 and win 13, instead of playing 25 and winning 13?”

Every time you walk out of your office, ask yourself, “How can I improve myself?” Be an inspiration, a shining light to anybody who crosses your path. That is *so* important as parents, coaches, and business leaders. It is our job to inspire and be the eyes of others who can't yet see the level they hope to reach one day. One of my favorite sayings is: *You don't know what you don't know*. If you expect the best from others, you must give them your absolute best. Each day is a new chance to inspire others around us; they see how we walk, talk, and handle the ups as well as the downs, how we face the difficult challenges. Have no regrets, and know that what you did, you did to the best of your ability.

Be Flexible: Don't Play the Play, Play the Game

Before we get into the heart of my *Playbook for Success*, there's one thing you must understand: You don't “play the play” in sports; you play the game. In other words, there might be something in your playbook that says, this is what we're going to do in this particular situation. But change happens, and you must be ready for it. You must be prepared and have viable options when change occurs. When someone takes away your best move, you need to have a

countermove, or a plan B. One of the most valuable abilities you can have in business is to be flexible, so that you can adapt to the changing world around you. Yes, your playbook is your most important tool in being prepared, but it's a *guideline*. Don't adhere to your playbook so rigidly that you miss what's happening in the game. Otherwise, you risk having to make a lot of mea culpas.

Obstacles are actually opportunities, *if* you create a solid plan for success. I have found in both sports and business that if you have performed consistently well over time, you accumulate "excellence equity." Trust has to be earned when you are creating your team's plan for success. You do that by taking ownership of your decisions. Make decisions with confidence, then stand by them! Vision is a must-have. Do you have it in you? In many cases, people don't like to make decisions because they think, "What if I'm wrong?" Better to think, "What if I'm right?"

I got lucky about 21 years ago when my company, Events Marketing—which I started in Omaha, Nebraska—was putting on a tennis exhibition. I was bringing Martina Navratilova and Pam Shriver to play in the event at the Omaha Civic Auditorium. At a meeting I attended, which had been set up with some local business leaders, I was introduced to a young man named Howie Buffett. He worked for the City of Omaha at the time, and as we discussed my event and my vision for what it could do for the city—including giving 20 percent of the proceeds of the tournament to charity—I asked if he could help me find potential sponsors. I jokingly told him that if I wasn't able to get a title sponsor before Thanksgiving (which was two days away) I wouldn't be able to go back home to Dallas for the holiday—and I was a newlywed at the time. I also told him that I planned on staying in Omaha to cram in more meetings, since I didn't intend to leave until I found a sponsor.

As I was leaving his office, I turned to Howie, smiled and said, "Thank you for your time. I don't want you to feel any pressure to find a sponsor for me—although you'll be the cause of my divorce if you don't."

The next day, I was sitting in the home of my friends, Dean and Pat Thompson, when the phone rang. Much to my surprise, it was Howie. He said that he had told his dad we had met and that his dad wanted to invite me to Thanksgiving dinner with their family. I held my hand over the receiver, looked at the Thompsons, and said, “Remember that guy, Howie, I met yesterday? He says his dad wants me to come have Thanksgiving dinner with them.”

They said without any hesitation, “Nancy, *go!*”

At this point, I’m thinking, “Dang, y’all don’t want me to have dinner with you? I’ve been uninvited.” But they set me straight, informing me of exactly who I’d be having Thanksgiving dinner with, if I accepted. “Nancy, it’s *Warren Buffett.*”

I blurted out, “The singer, yeah. I know who he is.”

Dean and Pat looked at me as though I was crazy. “No, that’s *Jimmy Buffett.* *Warren Buffett* is one of the wealthiest, and nicest, people you will ever meet. Go!”

So of course I told Howie, yes, and thank you.

What a wonderful time I had: great dinner; warm, caring people—about six of us, including his family members. They made me feel so comfortable. To my surprise, Warren Buffett knew about my career, and me, and we bonded by talking about sports for most of the evening.

A few weeks later, Warren called and asked if he could play in my tennis event in a “celebrity doubles” match with Martina. I responded without pause, “Yes, of course.” He played, had fun, and laughed at himself. And did I mention, his company, Berkshire Hathaway, bought hundreds of courtside seats, sponsored our VIP reception, and helped make our event a hit?

The fact that Warren wanted to play in our tennis event was awesome. He is incredibly knowledgeable about sports, and we have remained friends throughout the years. I’ve asked him many times since then, “Warren, why did you want to play in that tennis event with Martina?”

His answer never changes: “Because I admired the fact that when she was on top of her game—at a point when she had won Wimbledon five times, was number one in the world, and the best at what she did—she was still willing to change her serve to be technically even better.” In other words, she was willing to keep fighting and working to be better *all the time*. This detail, and the fact that she is a kind, warm, and giving person, was never lost on Warren Buffett.

Warren recently invited me to his annual shareholders meeting in Omaha. Martina’s name came up again as we were talking, and he said the coolest thing: “I only met Martina one time in Omaha, but I have always admired how she overcame obstacles and consistently worked hard to be great. I guess you would say she is a heroine of mine.”

Wow! It doesn’t get better than that. For Warren Buffett to hold a woman in such high esteem! He gets it. We all can earn that kind of respect. We *all* should strive to be somebody’s heroine. Unfortunately, people have a tendency to behave like sheep; they like to hang together. They feel comfortable that way, because if an individual messes up, it’s not obvious. They can hide in the crowd. And when somebody breaks away, the herd mentality says, “I don’t like her. I can’t believe she wants to be better than us.”

Leaders, however, are different. They must have thick skins and be willing to stand alone until they can show others why they should follow them. You should therefore strive to adopt a leader’s mentality: to be better and set the bar higher so that the person sitting next to you has to work harder to meet the standards you have set.

And as I said earlier, if you have something that’s good, share it. As we used to say in school, “Don’t hide it; divide it.” Share with one another. Empower people around you to be better. It’s really okay to want to be great, or better than your friends, coworkers, or teammates. It’s okay to want to be the best. It *is* ladylike. You *can* have it all. So when people say, “Oh, you know, girls don’t know how to compete,” show them that, yes, we *do*. We really do.

Succeed Together!

There are more than 65 million women in the workforce today. Collectively, we earn over a trillion dollars. People with vision respect that. Way back in the nineties, National Basketball Association (NBA) commissioner David Stern said to me, “I would like to send you into 25 NBA cities to host working-women seminars. We want to attract corporate women as our fan base, and have them do business in the arena like men do. We think this is an area of growth and profitability for us, in terms of merchandising and ratings.”

David knew how important women were to growing his future audience. He wanted to promote the league brand with women and girls because he knew that doing so would sell tickets and merchandise; but he also wanted to teach them how they could use the arena to conduct business the way men do.

So I went into 25 NBA cities, and we taught Basketball 101. No question was a bad question. Women in these meetings might ask me, “Is there a five-point shot?” I would explain, “No, but there is a four-point shot, if you make a three-point shot and get fouled and make your foul shot.”

That experience was a good example of why it’s important for women in many situations to talk to other women. That way, if you ask what’s perceived as a “silly” question, you won’t feel embarrassed or disrespected. It is also a prime opportunity to mentor one another, to empower the very people who need you most. Every day is an opportunity to teach and tutor!

Consider this, ladies: Who makes most of the decisions about which products end up in our homes? *We* do. Just ask my son TJ. He’s a huge fan of mine, but not for being a Hall of Fame hoopster. If he wants something, he knows who he has to lobby! Who picks out the furniture? Mainly women. Guys may be responsible for choosing the La-Z-Boy recliner so they’re comfy when they’re watching the big game. (Now that’s not a bad thing, because I like

a good chair myself.) I think you get my point: We matter in a *big* way—and that translates into the power of the dollar.

When you see other people who are successful, who have made it to the top, it's very important not to feel something we call "HATERADE." *Support* the people at the top of the mountain; find out how they got there, how they became successful. Another great saying in sports that you can use in business: "Don't hate the player, hate the game." Better yet, find out how the game is played, so that you can become a contender yourself!

The players, the people who want to be successful, should be commended. On the way to the top, there are going to be a lot of naysayers. You've got to be strong, and you've got to be confident. You have to develop that lockdown mental toughness and make sure that you keep your eye on the bigger picture.

Accept All Challenges

I used to attend Michael Jordan's basketball camp in Chicago. On one particular day back in 1993, I found out that Michael was not only one of the greatest players of all time, but a great teacher as well. I was on the court giving a lecture to the camp attendees on a jab-and-go move. Out of nowhere, Michael walks onto the court and says to all the kids, "Today, Nancy and I are going to play one-on-one."

My first thought was, "You've got to be kidding me!" Why would he, my friend, want to humble me in front of 300 kids—not to mention *NBA Inside Stuff*, which was filming this event, as was some local media? NBA Entertainment, the production arm of the National Basketball Association, was there as well. I'm thinking, *why would Michael Jordan want to embarrass me in front of all these people?* I mean, he's a three-time NBA Most Valuable Player, three-time World Champion, and now he wants to play one-on-one against *me*?

This is where our game became an excellent teaching tool. The odds looked insurmountable for me, but when Michael came out on the court to play—the minute I accepted the challenge to play

him—I automatically became the winner. How? I had to play at a higher level and maintain my sense of concentration and focus. It was *mano à mano*—if I might call myself a *mano* for the purposes of this discussion. In other words, I had to “come with the goods” against someone who was the greatest. I had to come with my best. You, too, have to come with the goods every day—no matter who you are or what business or market you’re in.

So it was game on. My goal was to score and make his bald head sweat. I have honestly never played that well in my life or with the kind of focus I had that day on the court with Michael Jordan. When I tell this story to kids or adults, and ask them, “You want to know what the score was?” I wait for them to yell all kinds of one-sided scores back at me. Then I tell them, “Michael barely beat me. It was amazing. He won, 10 to 2.”

Usually, the people I tell this story to start laughing (rough crowd!). But I tell them it was the two best points I ever scored. Because they were on *Michael Jordan*.

So often society tells you that if you have more money, you’re a better person. If the scoreboard says you have more points, yours is the better team. But you know what? I had something far more valuable that day. I went out there and played better than I ever thought I could, and I was better for it. So, in reality, I *did* win, because I had improved. The lesson here is: Find the best people you can, and surround yourself with them. Always challenge yourself so you can push to the next-higher level. Each day, we have a chance to strive for intentional greatness.

It always helps to have a mentor or champion or someone who can help guide you to that next level. I’ve been fortunate to have had that someone many times in my life, in both sports and business.

Title IX Creates Equality

Women in business remind me somewhat of the notion behind the famous legal initiative called Title IX. Although a lot of people

seem to have an opinion about Title IX, I always say that Title IX is not an opinion. It's a law. Affirmative action isn't an opinion either. It's a law. I often find that many women don't even know their legal rights!

Title IX is about opportunity and proportionality. It was enacted on June 23, 1972, and states that "no person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving federal financial assistance."

It's probably no surprise that a lot of institutions are not in compliance with Title IX. Many businesses and corporations, for that matter, aren't in compliance either. As women, we need to give them a reason to hire us, trust us, and follow our lead. But shouldn't women who are qualified have an opportunity to freely move up the corporate ladder into decision-making and upper management positions?

After Title IX was enacted in 1972, over 90 percent of the head coaches for women's teams and about 2 percent of the coaches of men's teams were females. In 1970, just two years before the law went into effect, there were only 2.5 women's teams per school in all divisions. In 1978, the year of compliance, there were 5.61 women's teams per school. Thirty years later, in 2008, that number had risen to 8.65 teams per school.

Unfortunately many of these inequities graduate from college directly into the business world. We women are still in the initial stages of making our presence felt and appreciated in the business world. Far too many of us are still intimidated by the competitiveness, assertiveness, and self-assuredness of our male colleagues. We're flustered by the attitude a lot of men seem to display—that they have the *right* to succeed. In contrast, women seem to be constantly apologizing and asking permission for that right.

Why are men like this? *Because they played sports!* No one on a sports team *asks* for permission to hit a home run, apologizes for

snatching the rebound, or behaves tentatively in *any* move they make. Yet that's just what too many women do.

Part of the problem is that before Title IX became a reality, few women had the opportunity to be a part of a team, to learn what it means to focus on winning, or to shrug off defeat, to strategize with people who are your friends one day and your opponents the next. I always ask moms and dads whether they support Title IX. One hundred percent of them should—that is, if they want their daughters, nieces, or granddaughters to have the same education and athletic opportunities in life as their sons, nephews, and grandsons. If you can't answer yes to that question, you have a lot of explaining to do to any young girl in your life!

I had (still do) the kind of personality that wouldn't take no for an answer. I forced my way into the world of sports, despite being told again and again that I didn't belong and "that's not what girls/women/*ladies* do!" Being able to leverage my experiences in the world of team sports has proven more valuable to me in the boardroom than any college degree I could earn. In *Playbook for Success* I want to share these skills with women who never had a chance to compete, or who, even if they did play sports when they were younger, have forgotten the important lessons they learned. They are the lessons of self-confidence, of believing in yourself, of making others around you better so that you—and they—are able to win at the highest levels.

As women, we must develop these skills if we expect to compete on a level playing field with men in the workplace. We need to hone these abilities if we're ever going to make up more than 2.8 percent of Fortune 500 CEOs or 6.2 percent of Fortune 500 top earners. We need these skills if we're ever going to fill more than 15.2 percent of Fortune 500 board seats, or if we're going to achieve success in the boardroom. These are skills we can use no matter where we are in the business world. They are necessary to provide us with the foundation to grow.

I *know* that sports are critical to success in the working world. I'm evidence of it. Under ordinary circumstances, I would not know Warren Buffett, Donald Trump, Kevin Costner, the late IMG super agent Mark McCormack, the Jackson family, and many others— incredible people in the business and entertainment worlds. It was sports that brought us together, that enabled us to form incredible friendships and develop trust.

Survey after survey shows that women at the top of their fields attribute their success in no small part to their early experiences playing team sports. Sports provided them with leadership skills, discipline, and the ability to function well as part of a team. One study from the University of Virginia found that *80 percent* of the top women in the Fortune 500 had played sports. These women cited their experiences in the sports world as having helped them succeed in the competitive corporate arena.

The connection between sports and success is undeniable: Women who competed are far more likely to be successful in the workplace. They have confidence, they learned how to improve their existing talents, and they know how to turn their weaknesses into strengths.

The proof is in the paycheck, too: 41 percent of the women surveyed in that University of Virginia study—physicians, lawyers and CEOs earning \$75,000 or more—described themselves as “athletic,” compared with just 17 percent of women overall.

So ask yourself, “Am I a hard worker? Do my coworkers believe in me? Can I communicate well with my colleagues, clients, and potential customers?” If the answer to any of those questions is yes, then this book will show you how to take those skills, expand them, and consistently use them to win the “championship game,” the corner office, the CEO title, the seat on the board. On the other hand, if the answer to any of these questions is no, you *really* need to keep reading!



Plays to Remember

- *Failure is noble.* Have the courage to come up with noble failures. This means being willing to try something new and to move outside of your comfort zone.
- *Be flexible.* Have a plan, but be open-minded, in case you have to use plan B. Be alert and ready for change.
- *Strive for intentional greatness.* Give your best *every day*, not just on the days you feel good. Don't get comfortable. Push yourself.