

America's Leading Ladies

My core belief is that the future hinges upon a more just and gender balanced world. As the beneficiary of the first and second wave of feminism, my mission is to help mobilize significant resources to bring about equality, on my watch and in my lifetime. It is a deep honor to be on this journey with so many awakened women and men who join me in this vision, all of us with unique roles to play.

Including you, Dear Reader.

Why does it matter? In the US alone, women continue to be more economically disadvantaged, experience much more violence, earn less, and are dramatically underrepresented in positions of leadership across all sectors.

But there's good news. As context, we're living in the most important time in the history of humanity. Never have we had so many viable solutions to suffering, poverty, and discrimination. Never have we had so many passionate people equipped to take direct action toward a thriving planet in which everyone can live with dignity.

We are living in the sweet spot of a world and time where women are more fiercely coming into their voice, thereby becoming more fully expressed and more fully empowered. In the US, women now have the economic chops to get equality over the finish line on a global scale.

Everyone is invited into this conversation and this movement, particularly men who are holding up the other "Half the Sky."* In fact, I've noticed many fathers of daughters are some of the fiercest warriors for gender equity. These men encourage their daughters to take their full space in the world as the strong, spirited, dedicated leaders that they are capable of becoming.

It matters for our sons, too, who deserve to be raised in a culture that is free of the myth of superiority. In fact, it is their birthright to live fully expressed lives alongside our young women. To do so, they need to feel safe to be truly seen, heard, and valued as a whole, as well as to be encouraged toward great

depths of thought and feeling. These are the men of tomorrow who will help bring about deep and lasting change.

We all benefit. Where there's more gender equality, there's more peace: Gender equality is a more reliable predictor of peace than a country's GDP or level of democracy. Advancing gender equality will add billions to the US economy. Gender diversity in leadership roles also boosts business performance. And close to home for all of us: Gender equality makes children's lives better. Teens in countries with higher levels of gender equality experience higher levels of satisfaction than teens in countries with lower levels of gender equality.

“If You Want to Go Fast, Go Alone. If You Want To Go Far, Go Together.”
- African Proverb.

How do we get there “*Together?*”

Start Where You Are

No matter where you are or what you have to give, begin there. If you have time, give time. If you have a particular expertise, share it. If you can give emotional support, provide it. Most importantly, now more than ever, all men and women, either formally or informally, have the ability to mentor a young girl or a young woman.

When I had only time to give, I gave that time as a Big Sister. Over eight years I spent countless hours with Yvonne, my Little Sister. It was a profound experience for who I was and where I was in my life. Now in her thirties, she is a happy and thriving wife and mother of three.

With the time and treasure I now have, I am investing differently—more strategically toward lifting up an entire community or moving the needle on a core issue area. Yet it was the time with my “Little” (along with my own experience of growing up in poverty) that fueled my outrage and heartbreak as I watched Yvonne, her sister, and her single mother struggle with basic needs.

This informs my strategic approach to philanthropy today, including founding Black Fox Philanthropy.

Our Deepest Passions Often Spring From Our Deepest Wounds.

Like many of you, I am the beneficiary of the bold movement of feminism that exploded in the 1970s. Yet, at the time, I found it absolutely perplexing and in direct contradiction to the reality I experienced as a female in our culture. My ferocity and vision of women's empowerment stem from the wounds of a confused, frustrated girl whose wings felt clipped at an early age. But like so many women who care deeply about equality, I have transformed those wounds into a source of awakening and power.

If I could change one thing on this journey, it would be to change the view I had of myself as a victim of inequality as I strove to compete in a system set up for me to fail. Instead, I wish I'd shifted that view earlier, and adopted a "Not On My Watch" Warriorship and broken more barriers for myself and for the women who would follow me.

Pay It Forward

If your perspective is more anchored in gratitude, then "pay it forward." We stand on the shoulders of women who had the grit and drive to overcome unthinkable barriers. Perhaps you've been assisted by a country's education infrastructure, parents, mentors, and others. These gifts shepherd us toward a life that affords us the luxury of not only reading, but reading a book like the one in your hands. This basic right is denied to millions of girls around the globe.

Callings Call For Us To Grow Into Them

My strategic brain outperforms my wallet, so beyond my financial investments toward solving issues that are urgent and dear to me, to have far greater impact, I started a fundraising firm serving nonprofits called Black Fox Philanthropy.

Did I know all I needed to know when I began? No.

While I had the "right" professional background to begin the firm, I had to learn, grow, and learn and grow some more. I had my nose bloodied a fair

amount but always strived to make things right, learning even more in the process. I love the imagery of falling flat on your face and after climbing to your feet, finding yourself a full body length ahead of where you were.

There are boundless rewards in taking the risk to respond to your calling. In my case, I'm deeply honored to work in a sector that labors toward eradicating global poverty, particularly because poverty lies beneath most of the world's suffering. I'm inspired weekly — sometimes daily — by the extraordinary visionaries and the missions we serve.

An Invitation

God has big plans for you in this movement toward equality, bigger than you may have for yourself. The world needs your complete voice at the table, in your relationships, and in the halls of power. I invite you to get in touch with your divinity and ferocity, to take your full space in the world as the powerful change maker of which you are capable.

To find your place in the movement and the world, take the first step — no matter how large or small. Your human potential is shaped and expanded as an instrument of service. Through the giving of your heart, time, talent, and advocacy for what you believe in, you'll rise to the challenge of your true calling. And in the response to that call, you'll find that deep happiness and purpose lies in playing your vital role among kindreds toward creating a more just and gender balanced world. Welcome!

* Reference to Mao Zedong's proclamation, "Women hold up half the sky", and the landmark book: Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide by Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn.