



COVER GIRLS

► Download all four Big Fashion
Special cover stars here

THE SUNDAY TIMES

Men behaving domestically

A book demanding our other halves pull their weight at home has become a bestseller in America. It is now out here. The Facebook boss Sheryl Sandberg explains why it really matters

Sheryl Sandberg Published: 1 September 2013



Sandberg in her Facebook offices (Steve Schofield)

Twenty-five years ago, if you had asked me about gender inequality, I would have declared that the problem had been solved. When I entered college in 1987, I believed that the feminists of the 1960s and 1970s had done the hard work of achieving equality for my generation. Classmates of both genders seemed equally focused on pursuing challenging careers, and none of us thought we'd have to choose between careers and family. We all happily assumed that we could have both.

As I entered the workforce, I saw that entry-level employees were a balanced mix of men and women. Almost all of the senior managers were men, but I figured that was due to historical discrimination against women and it was just a matter of time until my generation evened out the leadership ranks. With each passing year, though, fewer of my colleagues were women. More and more often, I was the only woman in the room.

In corporate America, women have topped out at less than 15% of C-suite (the group of officers of a business with the word "chief" in their title) jobs and board seats, numbers that have stagnated over the past 10

years. This pattern is repeated in almost every field. In the United States, women became 50% of the college graduates in 1981; today, women are outperforming men academically, gaining about 57% of undergraduate and 60% of master's degrees. But success in the classroom is not translating into success in the upper echelons of power where decisions are made.

There are many reasons for this disparity, including both internal and external barriers that hold women back. The main one is that we can't make real progress toward full equality in the workplace until we do the same at home. This is the issue that Joanna Strober and Sharon Meers tackle in their book, *Getting to 50/50: How Working Couples Can Have It All*. We continue to believe that men can have both a successful professional life and a fulfilling personal life, while many of us buy into the widespread assumption that trying to do both as a woman is difficult at best and impossible at worst.

Given the division of labour in most homes, this is often true. According to the most recent data, when a husband and wife in America both work full-time, the mother does 40% more childcare and about 30% more housework than the father. "Women have two jobs," Gloria Steinem once explained, adding: "Now we know that women can do what men can do, but we don't know that men can do what women can do."

Fortunately for all of us, Meers and Strober love working as much as they love being mums. Rather than accepting the conventional wisdom, they decided to take a closer look at the facts. What they discovered should trigger a cultural revolution. The research shows that not only can women combine both career and children successfully, but they can thrive while doing so. Sharing financial and childcare responsibilities between parents leads to less guilty mums, more involved dads and, most important, happy and healthy children.

I devoured this book when it first came out in America, stopping constantly to read passages out loud to my husband. We have two children and we aim for a 50/50 split in childcare and household duties. Even though my husband, Dave, and I are lucky and can afford exceptional childcare, there are still difficult decisions about how much time our jobs require us to be away from our family and who will pick up the slack when the other can't be there.

We are rarely at 50/50 at any given moment — perfect equality is hard to define, or sustain — but that remains the goal as the pendulum swings between us. We have a long way to go before we achieve equality. A 2009 survey found that only 9% of people in dual-earning marriages said that they shared the housework, childcare and breadwinning evenly.

Men doing half the childcare and housework makes so much more possible for women, giving them greater choices and flexibility. And the bonus of men doing their share is not only felt by women, but extends to the men themselves and their children as well. This means that, in many cases, getting to 50/50 is not just the fair thing to do, but the better thing to do for a family. I believe that this book will inspire many with its practical advice. And I hope that change will take place, couple by couple and family by family, to create a better, more equal world.

Next week: the easy steps to get to 50/50 and how it will help your career.

Extracted from [Getting to 50/50: How Working Parents Can Have It All](#) by Sharon Meers and Joanna Strober (Piatkus £13.99). To buy it for £12.59, inc p&p, call 0845 271 2135 or visit thesundaytimes.co.uk/bookshop

The women behind getting to 50/50

Sharon Meers and Joanna Strober are professionals, wives and mothers, with five young children between them. Their mission is for working mothers to tap into their most powerful resource: the man they married. Getting to 50/50 is a new approach to home life. It's about sharing childcare, chores, admin and all the rest of it, so that neither mum nor dad is 'primary parent' or 'breadwinner'. Behind 50/50 is the idea that children with two working parents thrive, that women gain from working motherhood, and that husbands of working wives also win. And, crucially, success needn't mean working every hour of the day and night — for mums or dads.

These women should know. Strober is one of the few females in private equity in Silicon Valley, while Meers leads global business development for X.commerce, part of eBay. For Getting to 50/50, they interviewed hundreds of working parents to find out what works. Among their real-life solutions are 'baby boot camp' for new fathers, a guide to negotiating maternity leave with your boss, and how not to fall behind when you return to the office.

Foreword © Sheryl Sandberg 2013. Book © Sharon Meers and Joanna Strober 2013

1 comment

livefyre 



Getting to 50/50

2 people listening 

+ Follow		Post comment

[Newest](#) | [Oldest](#) | [Most Recommended](#)



Paul Jackson

I wish

13 days ago

[Recommend](#) [Reply](#)

[Livefyre](#)