



## Book Review of *Take Back Your Power: 10 New Rules for Women at Work* by Deb Liu

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### Introduction

*Take Back Your Power: 10 New Rules for Women at Work* by Deb Liu, Zondervan, 2022, ISBN 10: 031036485X, 240 pages.

The struggles women experience in the corporate workforce are neither new nor deniable. The topic of the causes, effects, and structures of gender inequities that often sacrifice merit at the altar of power is therefore a frequent foray for introspection and speculation. Liu, the debut author of *Take Back Your Power*, is one of the latest women to acknowledge the persistence of the problem that men have more power at work than women. She knows enough to emphasize that the power imbalance will not stop anytime soon or reset automatically. But she offered a shrewd assessment of the corporate powerscape that celebrates the new and upgraded privileges for women in the workforce, while showing how the slowly evolving changes can be accelerated in the present and for the future.

### Review

Liu distilled her experiences with power in the world of work through persistent inequities and her growth journey. She outlined her mentorship experience as a newly minted professional who was uncomfortable with power, unhappy with the setbacks of not having it, and uncertain about how to get it. As the recipient of mentorship, the author highlighted the changes that helped her evolve into a better professional and the kinds of mentors that reshaped her perception about using the power that she had to get there. As the respected mentor that she has become, Liu offered 10 simple rules in her book to spotlight the challenges, ease the pain, and chart pathways that more women can take to influence needed change in the workforce.

The author established her credibility to address the issues in her book through multiple means. First, she is currently a CEO and hirer of top talents. Second, she described her professional experiences as a top tech female talent who rose through the ranks. Further, she is a woman who has had to juggle maternity experiences with fast-paced work projects and a healthy innate desire for career advancement. Liu pieced together recollections of her experiences in the trenches of learning to use her own power as a woman who has

career contributions to make, the education to back it up, and the experiences that have helped her hone the power she has to effect change. She wove stories of other women from disparate backgrounds and settings into her own thereby ensuring that women of different races can relate to the stories of what women who look like and have similar backgrounds as them have modeled as how they use their power. The stories she chose paint complete overviews of what was and what is for her characters, while effortlessly transitioning to what can be for readers.

Liu is a woman who is courted as a mentor, coach, and sponsor with a been-there, in-there, done-that, and doing-that platform both online and in-person. Using her knowledge and experience, she dissected the corporate system that she has been a part of with analytical precision in *Take Back Your Power*. She relied on statistical evidence of the skewed ratio of women to men in leadership at reputable organizations to make her case. She presented case studies that showed some of the negative experiences that women overwhelmingly have to deal with at work. She described how only tough and desperate women last longer than 3 years in certain professions while many equally competent women are forced out. With the changes in the world, the problem of power imbalance along gender lines in the workforce ought to have become a historical reference. But it remains a current reality for many women in many industries and organizations. Liu took elaborate pains to open that Pandora's box. Deliberately. In her words, her intentional foray into the persistent reality that men still get more promotions and compensations at work than women was intended to get readers angry and determined to become a part of the solution, not remain a part of the problem.

*Take Back Your Power* is targeted primarily at women as a mark of solidarity and empathy forged in the multiple experiences of being a woman in the male-dominated tech space. But Liu made it clear that her wider audience includes men, especially the ones whose actions make life challenging for women at work by ignorant, arrogant, indifferent, or cruel abrogation of power. Her goal, as she unequivocally declared throughout the book, was to enlighten and equip anyone who seeks to see and help women live up to their potentials get their rightful opportunities to shine and receive the credit and compensation they deserve at work.

### **Why You Need This Book**

There is a problem with the way women are perceived in the workplace and how they show up, are treated, compensated, and respected. Men are the instigators, sometimes without malice aforethought, but almost always because of gender enculturation, societal acceptability, and female acquiescence. Liu's goal in writing this book was to present evidence that men and women are still not being treated equally at work. Causes of this inequality include cultural and family upbringing, as well as professional norms and policies that overlook, downplay, and make invisible the experiences and capabilities of women. The effects play out as overt acts of undermining, micro aggressions, and outright attacks on women. Largely, women shrink from outright confrontations of the problem that can lead to them being perceived as aggressive, dramatic, or emotional. Instead, they learn to swallow their discomfort with hostile actions that affect them and brace in anticipation of their next encounter with the insidious problem of being and feeling powerless at work.

Liu opens up these uncomfortable truths in *Take Back Your Power* to acknowledge their existence, unfairness, and unlikelihood of cessation in the current generation, if more intentional efforts are not taken. She highlighted various forms of the devastation the problem causes for women at work. Using different expressions and repetition to highlight the magnitude of the powerlessness of women at work, the author advocated a proactive plan of action that would equip women. First, to anticipate the retractable problem. Then, to contemplate multiple scenarios of its manifestation and strategize with tested actions and reactions for different configurations of the problem.

Directing her attention to her primary audience, Liu unabashedly stated that her reasons for writing the book were to help women who chafe at:

1. the shattering of their childhood illusion that equal opportunities exist for women to compete at work with men;
2. the perpetual unfairness of skewed credit/compensation models that shortchange women while rewarding the men they outrank or outperform;
3. the unchallenged indoctrination by women that “power” has a negative connotation that they should leave to the men to manage while they helplessly bemoan not having it;
4. their secret longing for a rebalance of the power dynamics between men and women in the workplace that is automatic and smooth; or
5. the preconditioning by men and women to tolerate limited participation of women in top management.

*Take Back Your Power* pulls no punches about how women must take the initiative to understand the biases at the core of the disempowering systemic inequities in the workforce that limit them. That way, they would learn to win on the uneven field they play in while working towards empowering systems. The author delivered on her promise to equip women with knowledge each can use to reshape their realities. Perceptive readers will find no less than 50 practicable steps that even the most timid woman can start applying from the first chapter of the book to begin the journey of building up her power muscle. Liu was clear to state that taking those steps could enlighten, empower, and equip each woman to thrive within a system that’s stacked against her. However, no one should be deluded with unrealistic expectations that their efforts will erase systemic inequities overnight. Thus, with no guarantees offered, readers who are ready for positive change in their own workplace experiences will find the rules in *Take Back Your Power* a realistic roadmap to using more of their power as it is advertised to be.

### **Should You Get the Book or Is This Another Tired Harping on a Topic That’s Not Going Anywhere?**

The book was written by a woman in a male-dominated workplace culture. Readers may find the contents familiar, but the messaging is not trite. In part, strains of the book’s core message will continue to ring out from different voices as long as the problem persists for a significant portion of the population. Those, like Liu, who take up the challenge to reiterate the need for change and proffer possible solutions should be applauded for their efforts. It should come as no surprise then if women of different ages, races, career stages, and professional backgrounds commend her for the clarity and guidance with which her book equips them. Also, she revealed many sides to her that diverse readers will find appealing. Hence, even those in male-dominated professions who have Liu’s level of career aspirations are likely to find her genuine contributions to this important topic inspirational. Likewise, women with similar experiences of managing an intergenerational family life may find strength from her testimonials that she emerged on the other side of years of simultaneously caring for toddlers and aged parents while tending to the grueling demands of work.

Wherever a reader falls in the mix—whether as a woman who feels powerless at work while deftly juggling massive responsibilities at home, or as a man who can ensure that competent professional women receive their just due of commendation, compensation, and promotion at work—Liu has offered a blueprint. The overall message that objective readers will walk away with is that each person—men and women—has the power to change the world of work for themselves and for women everywhere. Liu’s clarion call is that you become the woman that takes back your power at work. Or that you become the man that supports women to level the playing field for men and women in the world of work. So, read the book for yourself or buy a copy for someone else who needs the equipping and empowering that its content provides.



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