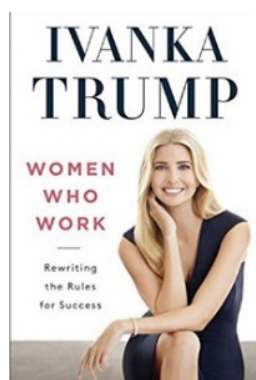


BOOK REVIEW

***Women who Work: Rewriting the Rules for Success***

Author: Ivanka Trump

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On May 2017, Ivanka Trump, the first daughter of the United States of America and advisor to Donald Trump, the 45th President of the U.S., released her second self-help book entitled *Women Who Work: Rewriting the Rules for Success*. Her first book, *The Trump Card: Playing to Win in Work and Life* was published in 2009 when Trump was 28 and single. Unlike its predecessor, *Women who Work* focuses on the aspects of family and motherhood, emphasizing on how women can make the two aspects work while still maintaining success in their career.

At the first glance, the title and the cover seem to imply that inside this book Trump has spilt the secret behind her success being a mother, business owner, and entrepreneur all at the same time. On the cover of the book is Trump herself, in a chic blue dress, smiling broadly on the cover, lending an air of optimism and happiness. On the back cover is a picture of Trump closely embracing her three children. This wholesomeness is also reflected in the aim of the book. Proclaiming herself as “someone who has made it her life’s mission to empower women in all aspects of their lives” (Trump, 2017, p. 211), Trump hopes that this book will serve as a guide for women who work who want to construct “a blueprint for [their lives] that uniquely reflects what matters most to [them]” (Trump, 2017, p. 12).

As the title gives away, this book seems targeted at “women who work”. Written in the first person style, this book is very conversational and easy to read. However, most “women who work” might find it difficult to relate to Trump’s stories and worries, as the content of the book does not resonate with the challenges and needs of regular working women as

strongly as Trump would probably intend. Despite her frequent use of the phrase “we are women who work” to emphasize the fact that she is one of your everyday women who work, Trump’s narrative could not help but palpably display her privilege throughout the book.

There are three things that readers might notice while reading the book. First is Trump’s white feminism. Putting herself on as a champion for women, Trump discusses issues with which women have to deal in the workplace and the society. She begins the book by stating that she is “committed to working harder than ever to help unleash the full power of women and girls” (Trump, 2017, p. x). However, Trump never touches on the specific problems that must be faced on daily basis by women of minority groups. On the front flap, Trump writes, “Our grandmothers fought for the right to work. Our mothers fought for the choice to be in an office or to stay at home.” She turns a blind eye to the fight of African-American women, whose struggle surpassed the hardships of fighting for the right to work. The book talks about breaking through the glass ceiling as if it only takes a set of skill while ignoring the role that society plays in keeping many women from doing so. Trump seems to generalize the figure of “women who work”, assuming that every woman has the same platform as she does to climb their way to success while ignoring difficulties faced by women of minority groups and/or lower socioeconomic status.

Second is her racial insensitivity. In the third chapter, “Stake Your Claim”, Trump writes “Early in our country’s history, as new territories were acquired or opened—particularly during the gold rush—a

citizen could literally put a stake in the ground and call the land theirs. The land itself, and everything on it, legally became that person's property" (Trump, 2017, p. 77). This analogy is drawn to motivate her readers to "maximize [their] influence at work" in order to "carve out a successful niche" (Trump, 2017, p. 77). There are two reasons why this analogy is inappropriately used. One, she describes "staking a claim" as if it is as easy as "putting a stake in the ground" as if success is up for grabs. Two, she tactlessly demonstrates her racial insensitivity against the Native American community, from whom the land she uses in her analogy was forcefully stolen.

In addition to her ignorance of the dark history of the Native American community, Trump also demonstrates her lack of sensitivity for the history of slavery and racism against African Americans in the United States. This ignorance is demonstrated by her decision to take two quotes by two prominent African American authors and use them to support her narrative about something completely different from what the quotes really meant in their respective contexts. Trump uses Toni Morrison's quote about the devastating impact of slavery to set the mood for the fourth chapter, in which she expresses her thoughts on time management in the following words: "Are you a slave to your time or the master of it?" (Trump, 2017, p. 114). In addition, Trump also uses a quote by Maya Angelou, which was originally about the struggle to overcome racism, to talk about pay raise. That being said, Trump does not seem to bother to read the Angelou's book, as the quote presented in *Women who Work* is inaccurate.

Finally, it is impossible to overlook how irrelevant and out of touch Trump's "manual" is to the problems faced by most women who work. To begin with, Trump writes in her introduction about her soul-searching hike through Patagonia, during which she contemplates "taking the leap" and join her family business. To be sure, "taking a leap" is a challenge that every person (not only working women) faces on daily basis. What might be problematic is the leap that Trump is contemplating. Trump further describes her troubles, "Could I thrive in an environment where there were such high expectations, tied to the most personal of relationships? Was this unequivocally what I wanted to be doing? What would happen if I performed poorly? Or what would happen if, in spite of excelling, there wasn't great professional chemistry?" (Trump, 2017, p. 1). How much of a leap could she be taking when the worst that could happen

is that she stops working for her father and easily starts a new business of her own? The challenges Trump is facing and describing are more of speed bumps when compared to the hurdles that average working women have to overcome. Unlike those hurdles, Trump's speed bumps are virtually risk-free.

In Trump's ideal world, success should not be difficult to achieve. She writes that "when you're passionate and you work hard, you can achieve great things" (Trump, 2017, p. 38) as if these are the only things that guarantee success. Yes, of course, in order to succeed we must work hard and be passionate about what we do—there is no denying that. However, for most people, it takes more than just hard work and passion. While these two factors might be enough in Trump's world, average people (not just women) must fight to overcome external factors that they cannot control. Especially for those who have to struggle just to make ends meet, there is not a minute to spend not working hard, and, for most, passion is unaffordable.

Women who Work emphasizes the importance of being present in all aspects of life—work, family, and self-care. When discussing how to balance work and personal life, Trump writes that "we are prioritizing our passions and families alongside our work without apology" (Trump, 2017, p. 133). She encourages her readers to work for companies which "allow enough flexibility that you could be a hands-on parent and succeed professionally" (Trump, 2017, p. 134). While in an ideal world this should be applicable to every working person, most people do not really have the privilege to choose which company will employ them or how much flexibility the company allows. This might be easily manageable when you are in a strong enough position in the company (like Trump is), but otherwise, this is regrettably still a far-fetched ideal in the real world.

This sense of tactless "out-of-touchness" is also demonstrated in the way Trump shows us how she manages to juggle her life as a mother, career woman, and, now, politician. Trump describes the "survival mode" that she had to endure during her father's campaign in the following words: "I worked and I was with my family; I didn't do much else. Honestly, I wasn't treating myself to a massage or making much time for self-care" (Trump, 2017, p. 146). In addition, on how to "stay connected [with her children] during the day", Trump reveals that "some of [her] best photos of the kids were taken by [her] nanny during the day" (Trump, 2017, p. 154). Readers who are average working women might not be able to

relate to this experience, as “survival mode” for most means barely able to pay the bills. Furthermore, these remarks illustrate how astoundingly unaware Trump really is of the conditions and problems faced by working women outside of her bubble of privilege. In my opinion, the problem with Trump’s way of seeing the world is that she believes her situation applies to everybody else. She has always had more control over her life than most women, and she has never experienced life in any other way. It is all that she knows, and this is probably the reason that she is blind to how privileged she really is.

Overall, although Trump made some points that generally are true, such as the importance of effective communication, leadership, and authenticity, she fails to deliver what her title promises—rewriting the rules for success. *Women who Work* looks more like a collage of inspirational quotes and wisdom, and a display of Trump’s privilege as heiress, rather than something that will help women achieve success. More often than not, the advice in the book is given from the point of view of a privileged white woman. So, if you are not one, do not feel bad about not being able to implement it in your real life. Sure, Trump makes it all sounds easy. But, remember that she has her father’s money and a whole helping staff at hand to help her live her lifestyle the way she is.

For some readers, reading this book cover to cover might be difficult—not because of the language, but because of the blatant ignorance that Trump frequently reveals in her narrative. At least I know this happened to me. So, my suggestions for readers

who are curious about the content of this book is not to think of this book as a manual containing knowledge shared by a successful, experienced person that will help you achieve success in both career and life. Sure, *Women who Work* is aimed at guiding “women who work”. However, once you are able to set aside Trump’s purpose in writing the book and think of the book as a tale of how an oblivious privileged woman uses her privilege to build her life and career, you might actually be able to finish the book and get something out of it.

Lastly, I would like to point out that at the very beginning of the book, Trump immediately establishes her position as the first daughter and, on that basis, as an “advocate for change” (Trump, 2017, p. ix). She is basically saying that her new status will give her a better platform for her to do her work in “inspiring and empowering women who work” (Trump, 2017, p. ix). Despite her failure at delivering her promise, her position and potential power must be acknowledged and be held accountable. That being said, Trump’s publishing of this book raises the question of how Trump will use her current position to take practical measures to help working women of all colors and socioeconomic status overcome the obstacles in their way.

REFERENCE

Trump, I. (2017). *Women who Work: Rewriting the Rules for Success*. New York: Penguin Books.