

A Second, Quiet Revolution

By Dan Mulhern, first gentleman of Michigan, author of “Everyday Leadership: Getting Results in Business, Politics and Life,” and radio talk show host

I am profoundly grateful that women fought for the right to live and lead in the public spaces outside the home. The struggle has been epic, fought on many fronts—political, academic, economic, and more—over more than a century. And it’s working! Women have been liberated and the country has been blessed with an extraordinary influx of long-lost talent.

The pioneers gave my wife shoulders to climb—to break through the glass ceiling that kept women out of offices like the one she occupies as governor of the State of Michigan. Like most guys who have experienced a daughter, mom, wife, or friend excel in this way, I thought this was awesome. I’ve had my moments, with my (male) ego struggling in the shadows of a great woman. I learned what “first ladies,” executives’ wives, and just about every girl or woman on the globe felt for decades when someone looked past them as though they weren’t there. These moments helped me appreciate the ways in which we marginalize people and why inclusion is not only nice and just but makes incredible sense.

I look forward to the unfolding of a second, quiet revolution. Women are now free to live in the public world, but we men are not inquiring about (let alone demanding or fighting for) the corresponding freedom to do “women’s work.” We did not shout: “Why can’t I raise the kids?” Or, “Why are we stereotyped as aggressive, testosterone driven, and incapable of answering questions like ‘how do you feel?’” Why does society still belittle those men who care deeply about fashion or aesthetics, food or relationships? Why do we still socialize men to

not feel the vulnerable emotions that come with their lives every bit as much as women's lives: sadness, empathy, whimsy, silliness, or fear? Most emblematic: Why are men not allowed to cry?

My dad suffered with lung cancer. The way he'd been socialized—the oldest son, Korean War vet, corporate manager—made it nearly impossible for him to deal with all the emotions churning within him: regret, joy, sadness, love, and of course fear. The male socialization that blocked access to his feelings also made it so hard for him to receive and validate and share the intense feelings of my mom—her sadness and fear as well as her depth of love.

Women have won a new opportunity not only for themselves but for men. Men now have the chance to be great supporters of powerful women, to relate to them in whole new ways, to nurture and empathize with our children, and central to it all, to develop our own full humanity. So, I say thanks to the feminists, the suffragettes, the quiet courageous women, and the good men who opened two-way doors to exciting new worlds.

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