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INTENTIONING
with Gloria Feldt





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KAY MCDONALD

Honored. Excited. Those were the emotions I had when I was asked to write a story about Gloria Feldt. She's an author, thought leader, activist, and entrepreneur. Gloria inspires women to understand their power and use it for the good of the world and humanity.

I am fortunate to know Gloria as a client and friend. We met over 30 years ago as students in a course we were taking at ASU. Later, Gloria and I reconnected at a non-profit conference when she was spreading the word about her new initiative, Take the Lead Women. Gloria loved the idea of a custom-made charm for a bracelet to honor the graduates of the 50 Women Can programs that she offers through Take the Lead. She and I both embrace the power of symbols, and we saw the impact the charm bracelets would have for Take the Lead graduates. After that meaningful exchange, Gloria and I collaborated on several projects—and on this interview.

During our discussion, Gloria detailed how exchanges between women themselves have evolved over time. Many women grew up giving attention to competition (which prevailed for centuries in many cultures). Today there is a growing culture of cooperation and sisterly support for one another. Women are showing everyone how such compassion applies to every person, no matter their gender identity.

Gloria's latest book, *Intentioning: Sex, Power, Pandemics, and How Women Will Take the Lead for Everyone's Good*, launched in autumn 2021. "When I started writing," she said, "my intention was simple: To provide women with a thinking process and the tools to achieve their highest intentions. I had already interviewed over a dozen inspiring women when COVID-19 brought the world to its knees. Soon, the murder of George Floyd ignited a long overdue recognition of the racial injustice pandemic. And I realized my book had to take all that into account. We are in a time of disruption. We are in a time of rebirth. The two have much in common. They give us the opportunity to rethink, retool, reimagine everything."

This interview with Gloria Feldt is a powerful exchange.

McDonald: In addition to creating a non-profit, *Take the Lead Women*, you are also an accomplished speaker and author. Your first book, *No Excuses: 9 Ways Women Can Change How We Think About Power*, was trailblazing. Will you share the nine ways?

Feldt: Sure. 1. Know your history to create the future of your choice. 2. Define your own terms before anyone else does because whomever sets the terms of the debate usually wins it; by redefining power from "power-over," to "power-to," or leadership, you shift from a culture of oppression to a culture of positive intention to make things better for everyone. 3. Use what you've got and know that what you need is almost always there; see it and have the courage to use it because power unused is power useless.

4. Embrace controversy because it gives you a platform, nudges you to clarity, it teaches, and provides a source of strength; it is your friend, especially if you are trying to make change. 5. Carpe the chaos—change creates chaos, and today's many gender roles and economic turbulence can feel confusing, but it also means boundaries become more fluid and people are open to new ways of thinking, to innovation, and to new roles for women. 6. Wear the shirt of your convictions, and ask yourself to define your core values, your vision, and the actions you must take; stand in your power and walk with intention to make it so. 7. Take action and perhaps create a movement; things don't just happen—people make them happen in a systematic way, and you can change systems. Apply the three movement-building principles of Sister Courage (be a sister, act with courage, put them together to create a plan) and you will realize your vision at work, at home, or in public life. 8. Employ every medium by using personal, social, and traditional media every step of the way as your "power-to." 9. Tell your story; your truth is your power and telling it authentically helps you lead (not follow) your dreams and have an unlimited life.

McDonald: Thank you. In your new book, you give nine new power tools.

Feldt: I wrote *No Excuses* because I was obsessed with finding out why women had opened doors and changed laws. Women were now being the first at almost everything. At the point that I wrote *No Excuses*, women were earning 57 percent of the college degrees. That has been consistent for over three decades. So, we're prepared. In business, it was clear that companies that had more women in their leadership made more money or were more profitable.

Women have the power of the purse. We buy, or we make buying decisions for the family, which equates to about 85 percent of the consumer goods and products that are sold. We weren't using that power because we didn't know we had it. It just freaked me out to figure that out. I found the biggest challenge now is in our own heads. It doesn't matter if there are all of those statistics about how much capability and power women have. If we don't know it ourselves, then it doesn't do us any good.

So, I did a lot of research. I found that most women had less ambition than men, and that was why women hadn't achieved parity in leadership. Ten years ago, we were at 18 percent of the top leadership positions in every single sector—seriously, every single sector that has been evaluated. Over 25 sectors were looked at and women were also already half of the workforce. So it wasn't that there weren't enough women in the workforce, that wasn't the problem. There just weren't enough leaders. So, what happened was, it was like women are doing all the work and the men were in the leadership positions. I thought, "What's going on with this?" I didn't believe that it could be true that women had less ambition than men. But what I found was that women had been socialized differently about power." Then I asked them to redefine power as being the power to innovate and create and make life better for their families. All of a sudden it opened up a whole new way of looking at life. For women, it sounds so simple, but honestly, it's the most profound thing that ever happens in the courses that I teach.

Feldt: My definition of intention takes it beyond being a noun to the gerund form of a verb—intentioning. I kept looking for one word to be the title of that book, and I couldn't find it. I wanted to signify that intention was the thing I was looking for, but I needed to imply it as also being an action.

It was also important to me to distinguish between ambition and intention. I read research that said women have less ambition and thought it was not true. But...what is true is that women have less intention.

Ambition is: "I wish..." and "I want..." and "I hope..." and "I have this idea/dream..." Intention takes that ambition and uses it as fuel. Intention is: "I'm doing..." and "I can see myself doing..." and "I can see a higher opportunity for myself than I would have ever imagined..." and "I am going to make it happen..." and "___is going to happen..." and "I can already see ___ happening..." and "I'm going to do it..." and "I'm going to stick with it until ____ happens."

I think that men and women are still socialized in different ways about power and action. I want to say it gets a little better with each generation, but it still seems that little boys jump out of the womb knowing they own the world, because there really are no impediments that anybody gives them. It's fine for them to be noisy and troublemakers and whatever...they don't need to always stay in line. All little girls are still talked to from the perspective of having the locus of power outside of themselves. People comment on how they look, how they're behaving, if they are being nice, and observe how they care about what other people think of them. Those are good characteristics. Women shouldn't lose those characteristics, but we need that source of pain to have a sense of the power that's inside of us. We are our main power source. When we don't feel that power source inside ourselves, we cannot have the high level of intention or see opportunities to do whatever we decide we're going to do.

I'm not Pollyannaish about this because no one gets to do everything they want to do in life. Lots of stuff happens, and along the way you deal with those things and learn how to include them in your skills, your courage, your ability to actually move forward on your intention. You have to learn how to take the setbacks and use them as ways to go forward.

McDonald: Let's look at your nine new tools and how they will help all people (not just women) embrace the act of intentioning.

Feldt: Yes, there are nine new tools listed in *Intentioning*. I call the first nine leadership tools and the second nine intentioning tools so that I can distinguish between the two. The number nine has no relevance whatsoever. It just happens that in both cases, I thought of nine tools. People have assumed there's some magic ingredient there. There really isn't. It's just that it has happened. That being said, each set of nine tools divides into three categories that helped to define those tools.

In *Intentioning*, I went deeply into how we need to uncover our true selves in order to be able to be at our best as leaders. For women and people of color, this is particularly important because we have tried to maneuver ourselves into a system, a culture, that wasn't designed by us. The workplaces as we know them today were designed by men for men who had women at home, and perhaps servants at home who were taking care of their daily needs. Hardly anybody lives like that anymore, and most households where partners live bring in two paychecks, and if there's only one adult in the household, there's one per-

son bringing a paycheck, and the person is usually a woman, perhaps a woman with children.

Our institutions need to better adapt to that reality because women and people of color have been trying to make ourselves fit. We "cover." Covering is a psychological construct—it is what people do to try to fit into a place where they are not inherently part of the power structure.

The first thing we need to do is uncover ourselves and be willing to share ourselves with the world. Then, the next thing we need to do is dream even bigger.

By the way, each of the tools in the book *Intentioning* is woven around a woman's story and a woman's true experience. That was very deliberate on my part and how I really wanted to write this particular book. I feel like we learn best through stories, and we learn best through the experiences that other people have had.

McDonald: Are you saying that women need to engage with each other now more than ever, and build each other up with their strengths?

McDonald: Confidence must be a tool, then.

Feldt: There's a whole industry selling women courses in how to be more confident. You don't want to be immobilized by a lack of confidence, but you also don't want to be a person who thinks that all is right with the world. If you don't have a need to get better, then you don't need to learn more. Confidence grows when you actually do things. I recommend that women modulate confidence. What does that look like? Well, don't let a lack of confidence keep you from trying something. Go ahead and give it a try. You may fail but you'll learn something in the process. You always get more courage, and you'll get more experience.

McDonald: What about happiness?

Feldt: Don't listen to the man behind the curtain who's saying you should be unhappy. It's the narrative again! We have to buck the narrative. We have to be counterintuitive on this because the narrative we have been given is "you can have it all—career, motherhood, marriage, your own happiness." Nobody has it all!

All people have to make choices every single day about how they'll spend their 24 hours. There are times in life when some things are more important than others. Take, for example, the woman who decides it's important to step out of the workforce for a couple of years because she has the luxury of being able to be home with her young children. Good for her—but should that decision be a liability? Any stay-at-home parent will tell you they learn more from raising kids than almost anything else.

McDonald: One of your tools is about being unreasonable. What is that about?

Feldt: I don't quote too many men in the book, but I love this quote from George Bernard Shaw: "The reasonable man adapts himself to the world. The unreasonable man expects the world to adapt to him. Therefore, all progress depends on the unreasonable man." I think he was actually enough of an early feminist that he would include women in that if he were saying it today.

People who make big systemic changes have to be unreasonable! Look at Elon Musk—how reasonable is he? You just have to be unreasonable if you want to do big things in the world.

McDonald: Is your message of empowerment relevant for all generations of women, and how do males feel about this growing movement regarding empowerment?

Feldt: I don't think about generations when I write because I find that the need for tools of empowerment is universal.

I do teach this course at ASU from time to time. In the last few years, I've wondered if young women students would think of this material as passé, but they never do! They are still dealing with so many of the same things as their mothers and grandmothers.

Also, because this course is co-listed with the business school, a lot of men take the course and they begin to realize how empowerment affects the women they know and their own household income. Suddenly, it becomes very relevant.

Instead of focusing on one generation when I'm teaching, I adapt to the profession, the sector, and the age group. I make the principles in Intentioning relevant to each group.

McDonald: Give us a success story and tell us how it impacts the future.

Feldt: The most powerful program at Take the Lead is called 50 Women Can Change the World. We do it with cohorts of 50 women, and we bring together women in a particular sector, or a particular field. The reason we started doing this was so every woman could make her own strategic leadership action plan. Now we also ask the cohorts to create a cohort plan as a way of teaching them the power of working together.

As members of 50 Women Can Change the World, participants learned how to advance in their professions. The first time we did the 50 Women Can Change the World Program, we noticed on their Facebook group page that they were reaching out to each other when they needed help with events. They were hiring each other. They were asking each other for advice.

I wish I could say this was my brilliant idea, but it came from the group. I thought, "Oh, why didn't I think of that?" and it made me determined to build that support into the program in an intentional way.

The 50 Women Can Change the World Program is by far the most powerful thing that we do ...we love it. We've done three cohorts of women in nonprofits in Phoenix, Arizona. We've done healthcare, media and entertainment, and two cohorts of journalists. Our goal—I have to take a deep breath here because the pandemic caused us to lose a year of fundraising—is to do 20 cohorts by the end of 2025. We're planning to do a big fundraiser in 2022 to get this off the ground and to tackle some of the sectors that have been the hardest for women to advance in, like finance and tech. Because women entrepreneurs are going gangbusters right now, we want to add a cohort for them. And, because of my history as an advocate, I want to do cohorts for women in public service.

It would be ideal to do a 50 Women Can Change the World cohort for a whole company, but we haven't had a chance to do that yet.

I'm intentioning for companies to pay for 50 Women Can Change the World cohorts. I've had to raise charitable donations to support doing the cohorts for groups of individuals. Although these cohorts work best when done in person, we have been able to pivot completely to virtual meetings.

McDonald: What is your vision for humanity 100 years from now after Take the Lead will have taken the lead?

Feldt: My intention is that it will be much sooner! The reason that the title of my book says that women will take the lead for everyone's good is because men and women will share equally in the power, in the pay, and in the leadership positions. That will bring about a healthier, more equitable, and actually more profitable world. It will be for your good as an individual, for the good of families and communities, for everyone, for the good of the world, and for good as in forever.

That shift is needed now to create more balance and harmony in our society and enable everyone—no matter their background, gender or any other characteristic—to learn as much as they can and be able to contribute their highest and best gifts to society. That's what will make the world a better place. My vision is really that we're making the world better for everyone—forever.

McDonald: This interview will be complete after we've discussed symbols. Every culture has their own symbols. And there are even universal symbols. My book, *The Power of Charms* is about wearable symbols.

Feldt: The ninth power tool in Intentioning is about claiming your symbols! As humans, our brains work in pictures—symbols. We get so much information that symbols provide the means to organize it. Symbols allow us to figure out what something means. One of the best leadership teachers ever was Warren Bennis because he said that the primary function of leadership is the creation of meaning. We create meaning in our stories by sharing symbols that people remember.

For more information about how you can get involved furthering Gloria Feldt's mission, she created a mini workbook, with each one of the nine tools included in her book Intentioning. Find and download this workbook for free at www.gloriafeldt.com/intentioning.

The free workbook is valuable whether or not you read the book. Gloria Feldt—compassionate leader that she is—wanted people to have full access to her most important teachings.

Thank you, Gloria Feldt, from all of us, and on behalf of those people who will benefit from your good works for generations to come.

*Kay McDonald is the founder and CEO of Charity Charms, one of America's first socially conscious brands. She is the author of *The Power of Charms* and is considered a maverick in the world of cause and product marketing, with years of experience in the retail and wholesale industry. Enjoy a FREE Download of her book *THE POWER of CHARMS*. Contact kay@charitycharms.com*