Facebook Exec's New Book Urges Women to 'Lean In'

BARBARA ORTUTAY, AP Technology Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — For a book that has yet to be released, Sheryl Sandberg's "Lean In" — part feminist manifesto, part how-to career guide — has got a lot of people talking.

In the weeks leading up to the book's March 11 release, pundits and press hounds have been debating its merits. New York Times columnist Maureen Dowd called Sandberg a "PowerPoint Pied Piper in Prada ankle boots," and countless bloggers have suggested that Facebook's chief operating officer is the wrong person to lead a women's movement.

"Most of the criticism has to do with the position she is coming from," said Susan Yohn, professor and chair of Hofstra University's history department.

Sandberg, 43, hopes that her message of empowerment won't be obscured by the lofty pedestal from which she speaks. But is the multi-millionaire with two Harvard degrees too rich to offer advice? Too successful? Does her blueprint for success ignore the plight of poor and working-class women? Does the book's very premise blame women for not rising to top corporate positions at the same rate as men?

And just how big is her house?

The questions keep coming largely because few people have actually read the book. But in it, Sandberg seems to have foreseen much of the criticism. The book acknowledges that critics might discount her feminist call to action with an easy-for-her-to-say shrug.

"My hope is that my message will be judged on its merits," she writes in the preamble.

Sandberg recognizes that parts of the book are targeted toward women who are in

a position to make decisions about their careers. Still, she writes, "we can't avoid this conversation. This issue transcends all of us. The time is long overdue to encourage more women to dream the possible dream and encourage more men to support women in the workforce and in the home."

Published by Alfred A. Knopf Inc., "Lean In: Women, Work and the Will to Lead" will be launched Thursday with a reception in New York City hosted by Mayor Michael Bloomberg and Arianna Huffington.

It's true that Sandberg is wealthy. She also has a supportive husband. Mark Zuckerberg is her boss. And, yes, her home is a 9,000 square-foot mansion in Menlo Park, Calif.

But as a woman in Silicon Valley, Sandberg hasn't exactly had it easy, and her tale shows she's no armchair activist. After all, not many women would march into their boss' office and demand special parking for expectant mothers. But Sandberg did just that when she worked at Google. Company founders Larry Page and Sergey Brin complied.

After Sandberg moved to Facebook in 2008, she became even more outspoken on the issues facing women in corporate America. At a time when other executives, male or female, have largely stayed quiet, Sandberg has delivered speeches on topics such as "Why we have too few women leaders."

And she's no workaholic. In an age of endless work hours, Sandberg is famous for leaving the office at 5:30 to spend time with her family. She does admit, however, to picking up work once her kids have gone to bed.

Of the many inspirational slogans that hang on Facebook's walls, her favorite asks "What would you do if you weren't afraid?" ''Lean In" is about pushing past fear.

"Fear is at the root of so many of the barriers that women face," she writes. "Fear of not being liked. Fear of making the wrong choice. Fear of drawing negative attention. Fear of overreaching. Fear of being judged. Fear of failure. And the holy trinity of fear: the fear of being a bad mother/wife/daughter."

Sandberg peppers the book with studies, reports and personal anecdotes to back up her premise — that for reasons both in and out of their control, there are fewer woman leaders than men in the business world and beyond. For example, the Fortune 500 has only 21 female CEOs. Sandberg is among the 14 percent of women who hold executive officer positions and the 16 percent of women who hold board of director seats, according to Catalyst.org.

For minority women, the numbers are even bleaker. Women of color, she writes, hold just 4 percent of top corporate jobs and 3 percent of board seats.

"A truly equal world would be one where women ran half our countries and companies and men ran half our homes. I believe that this would be a better world," she writes. "The laws of economics and many studies of diversity tell us that if we

tapped the entire pool of human resources and talent, our collective performance would improve."

At less than 200 pages, plus a good chunk of footnotes, "Lean In" does not purport to be the end-all solution to inequality. It deals with issues Sandberg sees as in women's control.

"Don't leave before you leave" is one of her catchphrases, aimed at successful women who gradually drop out of the workforce in anticipation of children they may someday bear. "Make your partner a real partner" is another. She says everyone should encourage men to "lean in" at home by being equal partners in parenting and housework.

"Lean In" is, by and large, for women who are looking to climb the corporate ladder (which Sandberg calls a jungle gym), and ideally their male supporters. She hopes it's the start of a conversation. To that end, Sandberg plans to donate all of the proceeds to her newly minted nonprofit, LeanIn.org.

Sandberg's book shares personal details that reveal a fair share of stumbles and lesser-known tidbits. Did you know she was an aerobics instructor in the 1980s —big hair, silver leotard and all? The book paints a picture of an exceptionally successful woman who admits to lacking confidence at various points in her career.

Sandberg writes about the "ambition gap" between men and women in the workplace — that while men are expected to be driven, ambition in women can be seen as negative. She writes about parents' gender-based approaches to child rearing that teach girls to be "pretty like mommy" and boys "smart like daddy," as she's seen on baby onesies sold at Gymboree.

And she writes about "feeling like a fraud" — that insidious notion, felt largely by women but men as well, that success is due not to her own merit but to some sort of gross oversight or accident.

Sandberg's book comes half a century after Betty Friedan's "The Feminine Mystique," which identified "the problem that has no name" among largely white, suburban housewives who felt unhappy and unfulfilled in their roles at home. Friedan, too, was criticized for focusing on a privileged swath of womankind.

"Lean In" is a call to action to make it easier for women to become leaders. It's a call for women to take space at the table, raise their hands, speak up and step up. It's a personal account of a woman who, through a mix of talent, luck and ambition, but also with plenty of internal and external obstacles along the way, managed to do that.

Feminist icon Gloria Steinem, whom Sandberg thanks in the acknowledgements and cites as inspiration, praises "Lean In" on her Facebook page, saying that it "addresses internalized oppression, opposes external barriers that create it and urges women to support each other to fight both."

She adds that even the book's critics "are making a deep if inadvertent point: Only in women is success viewed as a barrier to giving advice."

___

Follow Barbara Ortutay on Twitter at https://twitter.com/BarbaraOrtutay [1]

___

Online:

Lean In the nonprofit: www.LeanIn.Org and facebook.com/leaninorg [2]

Video of Sheryl Sandberg's 2010 TED talk that is the basis of her book: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=18uDutylDa4 [3]

Source URL (retrieved on *12/22/2014 - 3:37pm*):
http://www.wirelessdesignmag.com/news/2013/03/facebook-execs-new-book-urges-women-lean?qt-blogs=0

Links:
[1] https://twitter.com/BarbaraOrtutay
[2] http://www.LeanIn.Org%20and%20facebook.com/leaninorg
[3] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=18uDutylDa4