



WIPP WORKS IN WASHINGTON - March, 2013

Lean In? New Term. Old News. By Ann Sullivan

As we celebrate Women's History Month, an age-old discussion about the role of women and the workplace has dominated the news cycle. The discussion was started by the release of a book written by Sheryl Sandberg, COO of Facebook, [Lean In](#). The book's title was quickly adopted as a new term—meaning “let your voice be heard.”

A few things strike me about this discussion from a woman business owner's perspective. First of all, I have yet to meet a woman business owner who has to be told to “lean in.” Maybe the women in corporate America have trouble expressing their opinions in meetings, but NOT women business owners. That's because we are “leaning in” all the time. It is incumbent upon us to promote our companies, take risks and make business decisions. No one else can do it for us. Sure, our teams can help, but ultimately, the buck stops with us. In fact, women business owners have leaned in to the tune of \$1.2 trillion, according to the National Women's Business Council statistics.

Second - the group of one million women business owners that WIPP represents have “leaned in” when it comes to advocating for public policies that affect their business. For the last 25 years, the women's business community has been advocating for policies that enable women's business growth. The passage of H.R. 5050, 25 years ago, was really the beginning of the advocacy. Passage of the law established women business centers, the SBA Office of Women's Business Ownership, and the National Women's Business Council. It required that the Census Bureau include C Corporations when counting women-owned firms and it eliminated all individual state laws that required women to have a male relative co-sign a business loan.

We've come a long way since the passage of HR 5050, 25 years ago. Today, women entrepreneurs have benefited from a new procurement program put in place so that women owned companies can bid for contracts with restricted competition—opening up a public market important to their success. Access to credit is still an issue but credit is no longer based on gender. The women's business centers have been converted to a permanent program although the funding should be higher. And, if the new marketplaces to buy insurance succeed, women business owners will have fewer barriers to providing health insurance to their employees. Given the privilege to represent WIPP in the halls of Congress, the White House and the federal agencies, our team is required to “lean in”. And, “lean in,” we do.

“Lean in” is really old news to us. WIPP's daily advocacy on behalf of women business owners, and WIPP's members themselves, cannot afford to be passive or let a good idea go to waste. If corporate women spent a day in our shoes, they would truly grasp the definition of “lean in”.