

Gifted to Lead: the Art of Leading as a Woman in the Church,
Nancy Beach (Zondervan/Willow, 2008)

In 1996, Nancy Beach was speaking about the arts in worship as part of a leadership conference. The audience was predominantly male, but a woman handed in a question, and Beach was asked to respond to it. The note said, 'Help, I'm a leader trapped in a woman's body.'

Her response: 'No mistake was made in heaven when God gave you a gift of leadership or teaching.' This book provides a more thorough response. It does not unpack biblical texts – the reader is referred elsewhere for that - but it is designed to help women leaders to negotiate some of the challenges they face.

The book looks at the following areas: 'Welcome to the boys' club': how to cope with being the only woman in a group of men, with lack of role models, and the sense of exclusion; 'Doing the work': leadership style, and how to work well with men; Running with the big boys': leading up, handling ambition, power and authority, and how to deal with clip-on microphones, what to wear, and pumping breast milk!

The next chapter is 'Then we had kids', which explores stories of three women leaders and how to handle life choices; 'Finding your voice': what it means to find one's voice in a predominantly male environment, and tools for communication; and 'Leaning into your tribe': how we relate to other women, how to handle problems of envy and coveting, and the need for mentors.

The book concludes with several appendices, including a statement on men and women in leadership from Willow Creek Community Church, which would make interesting study for church leaders, a chapter by Jane Stephens on finding your 'voice', and some interesting FAQs, such as how to handle resistance to your leadership from a man, and how to encourage a young woman with leadership gifts.

One of the most powerful chapters is chapter 7, which is headed 'An open letter to male pastors and church leaders.' This is a passionate plea to men to study the issue of women in the Church, to make this a 'front-burner' issue, and to be the strongest advocate they can for women with leadership and teaching gifts, since men so often hold the key to pivotal roles. The chapter unpacks these areas, with plenty of practical suggestions, so I hope this chapter *is* read by male leaders.

The conclusion of the book reminds women that leadership is not usually an easy path, but as Paul tells Timothy to 'fulfil your calling', so 'we must not allow hardships to create excuses for becoming less than God designed us to be.'

Beach is the leader of a ministry (albeit in a very large church) rather than leader of a church. The book is written for a North American free-church audience (do they more readily refer to men as 'boys'?) but most of what she writes is transferable, as with most Willow Creek material. With those small caveats, I found this an inspiring, human and readable book, full of practical wisdom and encouragement, especially for women who may feel marginalised or discouraged. It's also a nice hardback for only £8.99 – and complements my book *Growing Women Leaders* well!