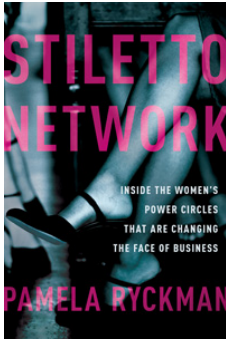


# Maureen Langloss

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## Project Eve, Meet the Stiletto Network



Before you even finish reading this paragraph, walk your fingers over to your Amazon cart and drop in Pamela Ryckman's *Stiletto Network: Inside the Women's Power Circles That Are Changing the Face of Business*. Why is it a must-read for all "Eves"? Because it is about you: women who band together to help each other develop businesses, careers and better selves. Ryckman has identified female business networks as a powerful, new social phenomenon. And after reading her book you will feel proud to be a part of this exciting movement.

Ryckman's insightful, upbeat book is a quick read full of super-charged prose. She interviewed dozens of extremely successful women to find out how female networks have helped them rise to the top, and it is Ryckman's colorful business biographies of these amazing women that make her book sing. From Kim Moses, the TV producer and director, to Carole Hyatt, who began her own market research business in the 1960s when female entrepreneurs were an aberration, to Shauna Mei, Goldman Sachs class of 2005 and founder of AHALife, to "trailblazing technology entrepreneur and venture capitalist" Heidi Roizen – these women will inspire and teach you.

Some of the most interesting life lessons Ryckman gleans from her subjects are:

- You must be purposeful in creating your networks. When Kim Moses created "The Vault," a group of uber-successful women who meet regularly for dinner, she was not bound by her own place of employment. Successful networks draw from women in different industries, of different age groups, in different cities, at different seniority levels. This allows for "cross-pollination" across industries and greater access to more diverse opportunities.
- Geraldine Laybourne, Nickelodeon's powerhouse founder of Oxygen Media, explains in the book, "I don't believe women need lifelong mentoring, like a crutch. They need a jolt every so often, a spark where someone believes in them, energizes them to better themselves or think differently."
- Mentoring, assisting those less senior or doing favors for other women is in your own self-interest. Mentees widen your own network and often come back to help you in unexpected ways.

- Investor Abigail Disney explains to Ryckman: “Women have to get a little less afraid to talk about money altogether. We need to be less apologetic about money and power.”
- The ranks of successful female entrepreneurs are growing, they have money and they want to invest in businesses started by women. There is a lot of capital out there for you Eves to go after.
- If there’s someone you really want to meet, learn from or ask a favor of, don’t be afraid to ask. Odds are good that she will say yes.
- Networking is fun. Ryckman sums it up: “Never has the Women’s Movement felt less like a jaundiced faction and more like a party. Female entrepreneurs are having a rollicking good time.”

Indeed, Ryckman focuses on the good times. She pays her respects to Anne-Marie Slaughter’s ground-breaking 2012 *Atlantic* article “**Why Women Still Can’t Have It All**,” but she doesn’t dwell on the difficulties women have faced in getting ahead, on the hurdles that networks have not helped them surmount, on the side effects big careers have had on women’s personal and family lives, on the women who haven’t made it big. Like Sheryl Sandberg’s book *Lean In*, Ryckman’s book is giving women a shove in a different direction, in a positive direction. She quotes Heidi Roizen, “I have definitely been to some meetings in the past where I felt like it was a bunch of women in the room complaining about why they didn’t have it as good as men. That’s a nonstarter for me.” I enjoyed this fresh approach. Let’s find a way to move forward together, to solve problems instead of complaining about them.

But do we have to lead the charge in stilettos? The only aspect of Ryckman’s “rollicking good time” that concerned me was the shoes. The Manolos. The over-the-knee stiletto boots. Even the flip-flops in the book are adorned with “little golden skulls” and pedicured toes. One of Ryckman’s subjects schlepped a bag of stilettos to a new CEO gig in Alaska. *Alaska*. Another turned shoe shopping into an event on the schedule at her law firm’s retreat. The women in this book can shop; many dress well and expensively. They are described with terms like “knockout,” “gorgeous,” a “little blond thunderclap,” “a cross between Julia Roberts and Hilary Swank.” Ryckman gives appearances a lot of face time.

For Ryckman, the fashion is most certainly a positive; these women are not afraid to act like women. However, I felt the shoe-fixation raised the troubling thought that maybe women still need good looks, great legs and stylish clothes to get ahead. Of course, this criticism comes from an admitted non-fashionista, book-geek who falls down in stilettos and puts shopping on the same rung of the pleasure/pain ladder as dental work.

Fashion aside, we are at a pivotal moment in the women’s movement. Post-feminist women are making inroads into the business world in astonishing new ways. Tens of thousands of

female entrepreneurs like you are visiting a website like this one. You are your own market! Yet when Anne-Marie Slaughter wrote that women still can't have it all (big career and family too) at the same time, she struck a nerve. Not only did her article land her on the cover of the *New York Times*, but she received so much commentary that she had to shut down her email account. She felt moved to start feverishly write an entire book on the subject. Meanwhile, the world is buzzing about Sheryl Sandberg's *Lean In*, which urges women to try even harder, to not pull back from the work world.

Ryckman's book is solidly in the mix of this back and forth. She makes a strong case for building your networks, not only to grow your business or your career, but also to help you better negotiate family/work issues, to make the career changes that you might need at different stages of your life and to improve your life generally. She articulates very well why the changing face of business is a major opportunity for women. And she gives a fascinating analysis of how business trends on the West Coast are, in particular, paving the way for women to lead more realized lives.

Whatever shoes you're wearing, please join the debate. Where do you think women stand in 2013? Where do you stand? Has starting your own business given you more family flexibility or money or power or happiness? What shape is your female network in? When was the last time you asked another woman for a business favor or mentored another Eve?

*[This review was written for the Book Club section of ProjectEve.com and originally appeared on May 10, 2013.]*