When I was a first-year law student in 1982 I read Carol Gilligan's In a Different Voice, in which she studied adolescent girls and boys and concluded that girls were more likely to gravitate toward an "ethic of care" and boys were more likely to express an "ethic of justice." Gilligan's point, then and now, is that both perspectives are equally valid and equally essential to human existence. Her findings interested me. But what rocked my world was her description of two different concepts of power, contrasting a ladder and a web. As she explained, if you live or work in a hierarchy, then the position of greatest power is at the top -- the first rung on the ladder. On the other hand, if you live or work in a network or other horizontal community, the position of power is in the middle, the hub of the wheel or the center of a web. The two visions do not fit well together: being at the top of a ladder translates to being on the periphery of the web; being at the center of the web becomes the middle of the ladder. But each is unquestionably a power position in their respective environments.

I was electrified because I suddenly understood my own impulses. I had never been particularly attracted to being king (or queen) of the mountain, on top of everyone else handing down commands. Indeed, even today, after fifteen years of leading various organizations of different sizes, I instinctively resist saying that someone is working "for" me in favor of working "with" me. On the other hand, I have always wanted to be at the center of things. Being connected, connecting others, knowing what is going on and sharing that information throughout a network, mobilizing action by power with others more than power over others: all of that has always come very naturally to me.

Suddenly, reading Gilligan, I realized that I was a "web" person rather than a "ladder" person. She argued, and I certainly have plenty of personal examples, that the web perspective better captures the complex set of relationships that define so many women's lives, as compared to the struggle for dominance that characterizes so many men's lives. But that may well be socialization. And in any event, the gender dimension really matters less than knowing that these are two equally valid way of understanding the world around us and exercising power within that world.

Thirty years later, we live in a "flat" world. Hierarchies are giving way to networks in industry (think value chains and the Star Alliance), civil society (global human rights and environmental networks), and government (the G-8 and the G-20 versus the UN Security Council). The ability to operate effectively in a horizontal web of relationships (a network of networks) is more important than ever. So why is it that the metric of success is still "getting to the top"? Don't get me wrong: I would still like to see 250 women CEOs in the Fortune 500. But I would equally like to see men defining success as building coalitions and networks to solve problems, organizing volunteers, creating public-private partnerships, and connecting and mobilizing alliances of many diverse actors to turn talk into action. That is every bit as much the exercise of
power and leadership as sitting at the top of a vast hierarchy hoping that orders get transmitted properly to the levels below.

I was very struck by Carolyn Buck Luce's lovely account of her and her partner's decision to climb Mt. Kilimanjaro and their realization that they "were not there to get to the top -- but rather, to find the center. The essence of strength and human limits, of love and partnership." Compare this to McKinsey senior partner Joanna Barsh's concept of "centered leadership." In her book How Remarkable Women Lead, based on extensive field research with successful women leaders, Barsh writes: "... it is the centered woman or man who sustains a successful leadership journey. These leaders thrive when things go well and adapt to significant change without losing their way, because they are centered -- not just emotionally, but also intellectually, socially, and physically...what's more, they liked themselves. Sure, they took wrong turns, made mistakes. But still they were happy."

Finding new metrics of success is not just for women. It is for women and men who want to be whole, centered, and happy human beings. That means being whole in mind and body, reason and emotion, work and family. It's time to change the game, for everyone.