



Are You an Iron Butterfly?

By Dr. Birute Regine

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| What is an Iron Butterfly Anyway?..... | 2 |
| Redefine Leadership: The Five Traits of Iron Butterflies | 3 |
| Redefine Success..... | 6 |
| Redefine Power | 8 |
| Redefine Vulnerability | 9 |
| The Power of Vulnerability | 10 |
| Transforming Ourselves: How do I become an Iron Butterfly? | 11 |
| Transforming the World..... | 12 |
| Iron Butterfly Mantras for Success..... | 13 |
| Iron Butterfly Circles | 14 |
| About the Author..... | 15 |
| About the Book | 16 |

Women's leadership potential remains largely **untapped and unrealized**. Iron Butterflies are very effective leaders and there is even a science to explain why. Let's maximize your leadership!

What is an Iron Butterfly Anyway?



Painting by Mara Friedman

Sixty successful women. Eight countries. Many walks of life: a Noble Peace Prize laureate, a famous novelist, a federal judge, lawyers, CEOs, entrepreneurs, artists, CFO, doctors, nurses, educators, aboriginal elder, governor, Prime Minister and even a wine maker in Tuscany. What did they share in common? They are all Iron Butterflies. I spent many hours in conversation with each of these remarkable women, hearing their struggles as well as their triumphs.

I learned much from them, and so can you, in my book *Iron Butterflies: Women Transforming Themselves and the World* (Prometheus, 2010).

Iron Butterflies:

- Have a **will of iron and the touch of a butterfly**; determined and nurturing, strong yet vulnerable.
- Like the monarchs that fly 2,000 miles to their destination, they **persevere through difficult times**.
- **Have all experienced injustices**. Many have been neglected, sexually, physically, or emotionally abused. Some have been robbed, assaulted, raped. Others have been anorexic, alcoholic, depressed, drug addicted.
- **Don't let themselves turn into victims**. Rather they have become kinder, stronger, and wiser.
- Are leaders who transformed themselves and are transforming the world, whether it be within their families, their communities, their organizations.
- They are **midwifing a new era of cooperation and collaboration**.

Are you an Iron Butterfly?

Redefine Leadership: The Five Traits of Iron Butterflies



Courtesy of www.tomsoter.com

Iron Butterflies redefine leadership. Leadership has been masculine-infused, a Lone Ranger, command-and-control, do-it-my-way, follow-me, I-have-the-answer kind of leadership. Instead, leadership traits of an Iron Butterfly includes:

1. Paradoxical ways.

Iron Butterflies are tough and empathic, flexible and orderly, patient and timely, diplomatic and candid, competitive and collaborative, driven and humble. Iron Butterflies *embrace opposites*. Rather than "either/or" it's a "both/and," approach that contributes to a wealth of resources being at their disposal.

List some of your own personal traits and then list their opposites. Are both true? How do you feel about the paradoxes in your life? **Welcome the paradoxes that you hold** because they create a tension from which new possibilities and creative solutions emerge.

2. Community building

Iron Butterflies strive to bring people together.

- Are you a **connector** who loves putting people together? Or really good at finding the common ground for **building a consensus**?
- Are you an **empathizer**, someone who can get people on board the mission because you're able to put yourself in their shoes? Or able to **build bridges** over big divides?
- Are you an **effective collaborator** and **team player**, who knows that so much more can be done by many rather than by one?

It's time to give these skills the credit they deserve. Instead of rewarding the lone rangers, **let's start acknowledging and rewarding the gatherers.**

3. Holistic thinking

Holistic thinkers see the **writing on the wall**, the **big picture**, but more importantly they see beyond the obvious by seeing **the connections between things**.

Iron Butterfly leaders invite the **whole person to be present** at work: business is personal as well as professional. This is not only a humane thing to do; it's also a **smart thing to do** because it is a **powerful way of building trust**, a **key element in creating a successful, productive and creative culture**.

4. Relationally intelligent

Iron Butterflies hold high standards of behaviors for themselves and for others. They see that the integrity of relationships is everything.

How is your relational intelligence?

- Are you sensitive to context? Are you good at reading body language and picking up social mood?
- Are you the one who is often clarifying issues?
- Do people tell you that you are a good and deep listener?
- Can you be both compassionate and confrontational in the quest for truth and understanding?
- Do you aim to leave a path of good will with those with whom you differ?

All these behaviors increase your capacity to connect with others and a connected leader is a powerful leader.

5. Strong

What does it mean to be a strong woman? Iron Butterflies are strong in their:

- **Openness** and their willingness to be influenced by others
- **Inclusiveness** by inviting opposing and diverse points of views.
- **Determination** to take their place but also make room for others
- Willingness to be outrageously **honest** and at the same time considering their effect on others
- Not taking themselves too seriously. They're **fun!**
- **Full-bodied, bawdy laugh**, and that they sometimes like to swear.

- Ability to transform vulnerabilities into personal strengths
- Care, compassion, and courage. They are heart warriors
- But most of all, Iron Butterflies are **paradoxically strong enough to be vulnerable**

Do some of these traits characterize **you**? **Welcome to the club!** You *are* an Iron Butterfly.

And if they don't, are you open to finding your way there, are you ready to emerge from your chrysalis, spread your wings and fly?

Redefine Success



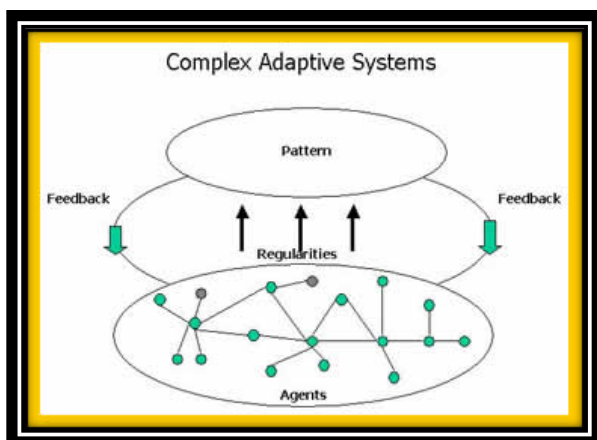
Courtesy of www.bradoxelrad.com

Why do the above leadership attributes contribute to a woman's success? Complexity science explains why.

You might have heard of complexity science, but even if you haven't I can tell you that you already *know* what it says about the world, because it is a very feminine science, very intuitive. Here's the "equation" that's at the heart of complexity science:

- In complex adaptive systems, agents interact and when they have a mutual effect on one another something novel emerges. Anything that enhances these interactions will enhance the creativity and adaptability of the system.

- In human systems this translates into agents as people and interactions being relationships that are grounded in a sense of mutuality: mutual respect, influence, and interest. Relationships are the bottom line and the nexus of change. Anything that enhances the relationships will enhance the creativity and adaptability of their organization.



In other words, relationships are the bottom line in affecting positive change in an organization. Paying attention to and developing relationships is often dismissed as a waste of time, but actuality it is your best investment of time.

The five Iron Butterfly traits all serve to enhance and create positive connections between people.

Here are the Iron Butterfly traits, this time framed in the context of complexity science:

As *paradoxical leaders*, they engage nonlinear processes by:

- Giving direction without being directive
- Being authoritative without being controlling
- Being strong while being vulnerable and human
- Allowing uncertainty without being doubtful

As *gatherers*, they:

- Invite **diversity**
- **Create opportunities** for those **unexpected connections** that can lead to unexpected results.
- Are eager to **connect people** to each other

As *holistic thinkers*, they:

- See the organization as a **whole entity**
- Are aware of the connections and **potential connections** within and beyond
- Recognize that a **small change** in the system can have a **ripple effect** on everything else

As wielders of *relational intelligence*, they:

- Know how to **positively connect to a variety of people**
- Realize that an organization with strong positive relationships is an **adaptable organization**.

As *strong women*, they:

- They show us there is a difference between being strong and being hard
- Their strength **attracts talented people**, which makes for a **robust organization**.
- As *heart warriors*, they invite not just the minds but also the hearts of their people.
- Care deeply. Genuine care deepens a **sense of community**, and this engages what I call "**the soul at work**,"* people's deep desire to contribute and give their best and be part of something greater than themselves.

What does success look like to you? Despite all the diverse ways people may define success, I bet that for a majority of women it includes engendering happy, healthy relationships, and engaging the soul at work.

* *The Soul at Work: embracing complexity science for business success*, Birute Regine and Roger Lewin, Simon and Schuster, 2000.

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Redefine Power



Courtesy of www.krdys.com

The late US Congresswoman Bella Abzug said that in the 21st century "*Women will change the nature of power, rather than power changing the nature of women.*" And this is exactly what Iron Butterflies are quietly up to.

For thousands of years we have been a **domination-based society** that has used **power over others**. This use of power generates hierarchies, a frontier mentality, a **Lone Ranger-style leadership** and a command-and-control approach that reveres "masculine" qualities of independence, autonomy, and individuality.

Some good things have come from this use of power: the industrial revolution, modern

technology, medicine and architecture.

But if you think of **the woes of the world**—sexism, racism, terrorism, genocide, war, environmental degradation, sex slave trading—what do they share in common? A use of **power over others**. A power that is no longer sustainable.

Iron Butterflies are **midwifing a new era of cooperation** by exercising a collaborative style of leadership that **transforms the meaning of power** from **power over** to **power with and for others**.

Think what you could do with power. Power to make sure women get equal pay for equal work? Power for plenty of affordable, great quality day care? Power for great elderly care programs? Power for great education for all?

We know that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. But that depends on **what you mean by power**. When you use your **power with and for others**, you are fulfilling Bella Abzug's prediction: power isn't changing women, women are changing the nature of power.

Redefine Vulnerability



Courtesy of www.nearfamous.com

What's your reaction to the word "vulnerability?" Negative, right? Vulnerability gets bad billing in a domination-based society. No wonder. Vulnerability is seen as weakness and an **opportunity to diminish another** in order to elevate yourself. Admitting vulnerability is all but **taboo**, especially for men.

But there is another way of thinking about vulnerability, one that carries opportunities for growth. I think of vulnerability as a *profound openness with an element of risk*. Like a two-sided

coin, on one hand, you could be demeaned or hurt; on the other, it can offer an opportunity for a **depth of connection to yourself and to others that is not otherwise possible**. These deep and enhanced connections are a source of **great leadership power**. Iron Butterflies recognize this well-kept secret: **business is personal** and they enthusiastically embrace it.

- Can you remember a time when you opened yourself up to a person and it transformed the situation, it transformed a life?
- Do you allow, accept, and address vulnerability in yourself?
- How do you feel and react to vulnerability in others?

Remember this simple secret of success:

"Embracing vulnerability in yourself and in others, transforming it from a weakness into a strength, is a powerful leadership skill."

The Power of Vulnerability

- *Connects us to our shared humanity.* Deny your vulnerability, you deny what makes you human
- *Is a key to personal transformation.* Vulnerability connects us to our authentic self.
- *Is a key to social transformation.* People connected to their vulnerability are more willing to collaborate
- *Is a force that helps us evolve.* People who are not connected to their vulnerability become rigid.
- *Can guide us to developing new strengths.*
- *Develops our capacity for compassion and empathy.* When you accept your own vulnerabilities you are more accepting of them in others.
- *Is a doorway to change*
- *Is radical in a culture where vulnerability is all but taboo*

Ask yourself:

- Are you strong enough to be vulnerable?
- How willing are you to admit being wrong, or making a mistake, or not knowing?

Go forward and be courageously vulnerable



Courtesy of www.professornerdster.com

Transforming Ourselves: How do I become an Iron Butterfly?



Here are 4 Cs (foresee) to help you emerge from your chrysalis.

1. *Connect to Your Passion*

It's important to connect with something you are passionate about, even if it is as a hobby. When you are connected to your passion you are a leader. We all need you to be doing your life's purpose.

2. *Collaborate with Women as a Way of Healing*

When women collaborate they model a different way of being together that helps heal old wounds of distrust among women, When women work together, they become bolder and not so quick to hold themselves back.

3. *Feminine Power is a Collective Power*

True collaboration requires a certain courageous vulnerability: a lot of self-reflection, openness, trust, going beyond

yourself and seeking the common benefit for both. Women have never fully realized their collective power, but we are reaching a tipping point and we don't have to do it alone. In fact, we need to do it together. Successful influential women always have a large support network.

4. *Caring Community*

Iron Butterflies or Iron Butterflies-to-be, you are not alone on this journey. Know that you are part of a larger movement that is underway. Watch out for like-minded sisters and when you have an opportunity stand with them and support each other. Together we'll spread our wings and learn to fly.

Transforming the World

Women are in a position to lead. Why?

- In the relational world of complex systems, feminine skills are powerful
- Feminine skills include relational intelligence, holistic thinking, empathy, intuition, and consensus building—often disparaged as “touchy feely”—are the most effective skills for dealing with an interconnected world
- Feminine skills are needed to create effective collaborations and successful organizations, at all levels, from family, to corporations to nations.
- Feminine skills facilitate the emergence of collective intelligence, according to studies.



Courtesy of www.wellmamaoregon.com

Poet Matthew Arnold wrote in the 1800s “If ever the world sees a time when women shall come together purely for the good of humanity, it will be a power as the world has never seen.”

Now is the time, and we are the women!

Iron Butterfly Mantras for Success

The following wisdom emerged from a panel discussion at a Women's Leadership Exchange summit in New York, June 2010:

- If you don't ask, you don't get
- Listen to your body
- Collaborate with women
- Go with your gut
- See crisis as an opportunity
- Look at vulnerability as your guides to developing new strengths
- When someone zigs, you zag
- Remember: women are leaders, feminine skills are powerful
- Use power with and for others, not over others
- Be grateful for family support
- Pursue your passion, even as a hobby
- Keep your integrity
- If you can't get in the front door, there's a back door or, a side door or find a ladder and climb in a window. Persevere!
- Lead by example
- Surround yourself with spirited, dedicated, intelligent and competent people; then delegate responsibility
- Do your homework--educate yourself
- Protect yourself
- Don't fall into the intimidation trap of legalese. Make sure you understand everything you sign
- Communicate. Communicate. Communicate.
- Balance realism and optimism
- Balance collaboration with solitude
- What you permit, you promote
- Every day tell yourself you love you
- Count your blessings
- Dream big
- Express appreciation
- Be welcoming

Iron Butterfly Circles

Want to be part of the Revolution Hidden in Plain Sight and take your place as a leader within a community of women?

Start an Iron Butterfly Circle! (IBC) and become part of the Iron Butterfly Community.

In addition to the face-to-face meetings, IBCs will be able to continue their conversation exclusively between meetings at an online Iron Butterfly community site. Here they will have an opportunity to connect with other IBCs, create special interest IBCs, participate in events, become change agents and more!

To learn more:

www.ironbutterflies.com/ibcs



Courtesy of The Key West Butterfly and Nature Conservancy
www.stores.floridakeys.com

The circle is open but unbroken

About the Author



Photo by Annie Holt

Birute Regine EdD is a developmental psychologist and a life and executive coach who earned a bachelor of arts at Boston College and a master's and doctorate of education in human development at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. While at Harvard, she collaborated with psychologist Carol Gilligan, author of *In A Different Voice* and served as a project director at the Harvard Project on the Development of Girls and Psychology of Women. Dr Regine was also a teaching fellow for Pulitzer Prize-winner Erik Erikson. She spent two years as visiting scholar at the Center for Research on Women at Wellesley College and as an affiliate of the Stone Center. In addition, she has trained in gestalt therapy, family systems theory, and attended the College of Executive Coaching. She blogs for Huffington Post and Forbes. As a speaker and facilitator she inspires women to take their place as leaders.

We are sisters on a journey
Shining in the sun
Shining through the darkest night
The healing has begun, begun
The healing has begun.

We are sisters on a journey
Speaking now as one
Remembering the Ancient Ones
The women and the wisdom
The women and the wisdom.

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About the Book



Wings. All women come into this world with the potential to grow them. Some let prejudice, discrimination, manipulation, or the expectation of others thwart their development. But some draw on an iron inner strength to unfold their potential and transform themselves. And the world.

'Iron Butterflies deploy the power of feminine skills: their holistic view of the world, their relational intelligence, their tendencies toward collaboration and inclusion, their capacity to empathize. The very qualities that once sidelined women from the mainstream now empower them into the center of the current where they can exert leadership and affect change.

In this book readers will watch countless women grow strong wings without compromising their womanhood. Iron Butterflies tells the stories of a diverse group of women, whose accomplishments illustrate overarching themes so critical to women's lives and to our times. They come from an astonishing range of experience, from all races, from every corner of the world—US, Canada, England, Italy, Australia, Cuba, Colombia, Israel, Lebanon, Iraq—and from all walks of life including doctors, artists, a federal judge, a prize winning novelist, businesswomen, a Congresswoman, educators, nurses, a winemaker, a priest, CEO's, housewives, a Nobel Peace Prize laureate, a governor. Their lives validate women's experience and embolden them to follow the examples of women who have transformed themselves and their world. An easy task? Not at all. Even the most successful women struggle as we all do, but by looking at situations through the powerful lens of vulnerability, they find the opportunity and the courage to think and act in concert with their truest nature.

Through their personal stories of individual and global achievement, women will see how they, too, can unfold their wings and join the kaleidoscope of Iron Butterflies that are gathering and transforming our world; and men will learn that everyone wins if males encourage the women they love to join the flight.

Get the first chapter of Birute Regine's book: Iron Butterflies, FREE! Click here and get [INSTANT ACCESS!](#)