

[MUSIC PLAYING]

VALIAN:

I want now to talk about the accumulation of advantage and disadvantage because I think, especially at this point, it's tempting to think, look, each of these things is so small. Okay. Somebody looks at you. They don't look at you. They frown. They don't frown. They smile. They think you're at the head of the table. They think you're a leader. They don't think you're a leader.

Aren't these just tiny little problems that women could learn to ignore? And indeed, women's well-intentioned colleagues may say to them when they bring up things like, I made the suggestion. Nobody paid any attention to it. This is probably women's favorite thing to not like. 10 minutes later, Joe made the suggestion, and everybody paid attention to it.

And when women comment on things like that, they can be told by their well-intentioned colleagues, don't make a mountain out of a molehill. And that's where the accumulation of advantage comes in because what it says is mountains are molehills piled one on top of the other.

There is a nice computer simulation that demonstrates this principle. This was done by Martell and his colleagues. They simulated an eight-level organization with a typical pyramidal structure. Very few people up at the top, a lot of people at the bottom. And they staffed it equally with males and females. At every level, it was 50% male, 50% female.

They then instituted a promotion process with a bias toward men that accounted for only 1% of the variance in determining who would be promoted to the next level, a minuscule, one might think, nugatory effect. They did that repeatedly until they had completely turned over the staff of this fictitious organization.

And at the end of that period, the top was now 65% male and 35% female. A very small but systematic difference that happens often enough results in a mountain of disadvantage to one group compared to another.