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Advancing Women In Leadership

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From the beginning, women have lived narrowly defined and restricted lives in roles submissive to male dominance, and outlined with barriers and guidelines that limit freedom to express and live openly. It takes special women to bring it upon themselves to break these barriers for the good of all women, sacrificing themselves so the future generations of women that follow can live in a world where they are not forced to believe in male superiority. It takes a special woman to create enough impact to serve as a role model for women of the future. There have been several such women in history who have fought for what is right and what they are passionate about, and who have risen up, despite the rest of the world pushing them down. The lives of Harriet Tubman and Susan B. Anthony were dedicated to the truth and belief in equal rights for all races and genders. These legacies prove that they were women of vision, women of strength, and women of courage.

Born a slave, Araminta Ross, later known as Harriet Tubman, experienced first hand the terrors of slavery. At the age of thirteen, Harriet was beaten on the head with a two pound weight after disrupting her supervisor from punishing another slave. This experience caused Tubman's life to be laden by frequent blackouts, and contempt for her white suppression. Tubman believed all slaves should enjoy the taste of freedom. There was no justification for the evils of slavery which lay in front of her. After escaping from Bucktown, Maryland to her own freedom in Philadelphia in 1849, Tubman vowed to help other slaves escape from slavery's grasp. Tubman saw the passing of the Fugitive Act of 1850, which outlawed assisting in slave escapes, as a signal to act on her promise. Bravely, Tubman returned to Maryland. Using the Underground Railroad, she assisted in transporting many slaves to free states or Canada. Tubman totaled nineteen trips back to the south and helped more than 3,000 slaves find freedom. Tubman's efforts prove capabilities of women. Her undeniable strength and commitment illustrate a woman of great bravery, a woman willing to risk everything for others, a model of humility.

Another such woman was born in Adams, Massachusetts in 1820. Susan Brownell Anthony came from a strict home where order and discipline came before play and enjoyment. Her father pulled her out of public schools when a teacher refused to teach her long division. He set up a school in their house and brought in a teacher by the name of Mary Perkins. Perkins gave Anthony and her sisters a new perception of womanhood, and image which later inspired Anthony. After completing school, Anthony became a

teacher at an all female boarding academy named Eunice Kenyon's Quaker School in upstate New York. In 1849, Anthony retreated with her family to Rochester, New York to settle down. It was there that Anthony began to speak up on her crusade for women. The temperance movement was the first expression of feminism in the United States and Susan B. Anthony was one of the first involved. In 1849, Anthony gave her first public speech to the Daughters of Temperance group about the danger of alcoholism and its destructive effects on families. From then on, Anthony wrapped herself in many campaigns, dedicating herself to such causes as anti-slavery, women's civil rights, and her signature movement, women's suffrage. Anthony demanded that women be granted rights given to black males in the 14th and 15th amendments. In 1872, she led a group of Rochester women to the polls to vote in a local election. Anthony was arrested and while awaiting her trial, attempted to vote in another election. Susan B. Anthony was convicted of violating voting laws, but continuing her objection to these laws, she refused to pay her fine. The rest of Anthony's life was devoted to women's suffrage until her death in 1906. Sadly, Anthony never got to witness the ratification of the 19th amendment in 1920, granting women the right to vote, but it is obvious that her hand played an enormous role in its passing. Anthony believed that women were not what the world has led them to think. She did not feel that women should be confined to the home and repressed by their husbands. Anthony stood up for herself and fellow women in the face of adversity and harsh criticism. Forsaking her reputation in order to act on what is right. Susan B. Anthony gave all women a voice, an amazing privilege that has left generations of women forever indebted to her efforts.

These women sacrificed their whole lives for their causes; a testament to the power of the female. The fruits of their labor are not only accomplishments for themselves, but for all humankind. But women such as Harriet Tubman and Susan B. Anthony still live today. Their spirits are captured in every woman trying to make her way in this decade of challenges and setbacks for women. Today's women live in a world shaped by unspoken gender lines. They must deal with a society that views the "perfect woman" as a 110 pound beauty, whose worth is measured in weight and appearance. Women today must face sexual harassment, unequal pay, degradation, and sexual discrimination. Today's women dare to play sports, join the military, or take on traditionally male occupations. These women must prove the old female stereotypes wrong and through their words and actions, and show the world that the female spirit is one that should not be ignored and will never go away. Everyday, the female work force wakes up to these conditions and everyday they are reminded of today's guidelines. But these women are our doctors that saving lives, teachers that are educating our children, and politicians that are shaping our country. With strong wills and open minds, women set out to make a place for themselves in this society, shipping away at the barriers surrounding them. Harriet and Susan would be proud, for like them, today's women are making things happen and refusing to believe that they are or ever were inferior to men. Like them, we are all women of courage.

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