

## Book Review

**Grace & Grit: My Fight for Equal Pay and Fairness at Goodyear and Beyond.** Lilly Ledbetter. 2012. New York: Crown Archetype. 288 pp. Price: \$25.00; hardback.

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“On January 29, 2009, President Obama signed into law the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act” (Pastrana, 2009, p. 16) which was the first piece of legislation enacted during his administration. The act “amends Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967, and modifies the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973” (Pastrana, 2009, p. 16). The key issue that the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act changed is the time frame in which one can report discrimination in pay to include each time his or her wages, benefits, or other compensation is paid, not just the most recent occurrence.

Many human resource classes and books discuss employment discrimination and the acts that seek to eliminate it. While it often appears that the acts are solidly protecting employees from discrimination, unfortunately that is not always the reality. As seen in Lilly Ledbetter’s employment, there are holes in these acts that are navigable by attorneys and which may allow employers to circumvent the intended protections provided to workers. Reading this book, one gets to see first-hand the realities of gender discrimination and sexual harassment.

In 1979, at the age of 31, Lilly began her dream job at Goodyear as one of two female managers. Goodyear was known to hire females only as secretaries until Lilly and another woman were hired as managers. Beginning with Lilly’s first day at Goodyear as a manager, many of the men in the plant would verbally attack her gender. Later, these actions would manifest themselves as sexual harassment laced with vulgar threats and suggestions.

The monumental Lilly Ledbetter Act actually began with a note that was placed in Lilly’s mailbox. The anonymous note stated that Lilly was underpaid about \$14,000 per year when compared to male managers. Lilly responded by filing an Equal Employment Opportunity Commission claim the next day. During this same time period, Lilly needed to recover from a work related knee injury and surgery and took some time off to recuperate. However, upon returning to work, she was suspended based on an unsubstantiated performance issue. This ultimately led to Lilly’s early retirement. While at home, the company offered a small amount of money to settle the EEOC claim. Lilly counter-offered, but Goodyear never replied. The following year, in October of 1999, Lilly received her “right to sue” letter from the EEOC and found an attorney to pursue her case.

The case was filed the following month and the trial was scheduled for January, 2003. The complaint dealt with Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Equal Pay Act of 1963, and the Age Discrimination in Employment Act. After a three-day trial, the jury found that Lilly had been paid an unequal salary because of her gender and awarded her \$3.8 million. However,

Lilly would never receive that sum of money because of a \$300,000 cap placed on EEO-based damages and because Goodyear successfully appealed the case in the Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals during the fall of 2005. Goodyear was successful under the premise that the case was filed too late from Goodyear's original decision to discriminate against Lilly. Lilly then appealed to the Supreme Court and they agreed to hear her case on November 27, 2006. This was Lilly's last hope to win the case. However, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the 180-day rule based on the most recent paycheck she received rather than looking retroactively to the first discriminatory payment.

In a dissenting opinion, Justice Ginsburg helped Lilly connect with Congress. She began lobbying for a new bill to be passed in Congress. Her first efforts were unsuccessful; however, the bill was reintroduced and finally won support from the House of Representatives and the Senate. It was the first new law that President Obama signed after being inaugurated, leading to a substantial impact on the ramifications of unequal pay.

The book has high value for a Human Resource Management course because it is written by Lilly Ledbetter herself. This allows for accurate insight and first-hand perceptions. However, the book would have benefited from shifting some of the coverage from her youth and home life to additional detail about the EEOC filings and legal maneuverings. For such a historic event and Act, at times, this portion of the book was somewhat lacking. Furthermore, the Appendix included portions of the Act that are written at a reading level that is incongruous with the rest of the book. A better option may have been to provide a supplemental chapter authored by her attorney, but written in the same voice and style as Lilly.

I have used this book in a directed readings course that focused on (auto) biographies of HR change-makers. The students found it particularly valuable to read the full-length, dramatic factual stories of events leading up to modern day human resource management. Also, the book was very personalized as it described the quality of life that Lilly was born into and hoped to achieve. Lastly, students provided overwhelmingly positive feedback about reading a warm, personalized version of common HR topic found in textbooks that is sometimes presented in a dry, impersonal manner.

## REFERENCES

Pastrana, C. R. (2009). Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act: Signed Into Law by President Barack Obama. *Business Law Development*. Volume 74, retrieved from <http://www.gaclaw.com/CM/ArchivedNewsLetters/GAC-News-Feb-09-LowRes.pdf>