Women in Technology – The Importance of Female Leaders



While women continue to make a noticeable impact in the technology sector, they still face barriers fully breaking into the industry and making their mark. These barriers might be societal expectations and beliefs about their leadership abilities, stereotypes, perceived stress levels and much more (Catalyst, 2020). Tracy Chou, the CEO and co-founder of Block Party, a start-up working to address online harassment, faced these types of challenges, like many other women. Chou is graduate of computer science and electrical engineering from Stanford, and is co-founder of Project Include, an organization aimed at increasing diversity and inclusion in the tech industry (Lee, N., 2019). Although Tracy's resume includes stints at Facebook, Google, Y Combinator and Pinterest, Tracey stated that she still didn't feel as if she was getting the respect she deserved in the industry.

A global study by Frost and Sullivan found that men in the cybersecurity sector were nine times more likely to hold managerial positions than women and four times more likely to hold C-level seats. The trend is similar on a broader scale across the technology industry, according to a global survey report from ISACA, a non-profit association that provides guidance and globally-accepted best practices for information systems.

Despite the clear opportunity for growth in the technology sector, a study of nearly 3,000 technology professionals worldwide from, Harvey Nash, a technology staffing agency, suggests that 53 percent of technology hiring managers say they're still facing a skills shortage in the technology industry. The question is: Why does a "skills shortage" exist when women have repeatedly proven they can be movers and shakers in the industry? The answer, at least according to the Harvey Nash study, may be a simple one: workplace culture—or a lack thereof.

Diversity and inclusion go hand-in-hand. It's great if you get more women to have a seat at the table, but if you don't ask them to share the meal, what's the point? It is easy to feel intimidated by colleagues in the industry when you don't have a sense of belonging. If workplace culture does not support the success of women in the workplace the social environment can become very disheartening for individuals who are trying to grow in their career. If women do not feel supported, then what reason do they have to stay?

The technology sphere has been particularly slow in closing the gender and inclusion gap. Women make up 50% of the available workforce, however few companies have an

employee base that looks like that. If you need convincing that the time is ripe for companies to focus on diversity, consider this quote from Warren Buffett:

“It’s one of the things that makes me optimistic about America because when I look at what we have accomplished using half our talent for a couple of centuries, and now I think of doubling the talent that is effectively employed – or at least has the chance to be – it makes me very optimistic about this country”.

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When women and other diverse team members have a seat at the table in any industry, they represent their organization. Customers want to see and be heard by people just like them. When diverse individuals come together to discuss ideas and propose solutions, the team gains unique insights associated with differences in gender, socioeconomic status, age, tenure, etc. Not only does the team benefit by considering the perspectives of others, they can also learn different ways to approach the same challenge and broaden their own skill set.

Having diverse teams elevates your workforce dialogue and takes innovation to the next level. Studies by (McKinsey & Company, 2017), have also found that security executives are actively promoting and recruiting women because they recognize the correlation between diversity and business success.

Lift As We Climb

Driving positive change in the industry for women in the security field may be slower than other sectors but it is not impossible. In my experience, some of the strongest advocates for hiring and developing women is other women. What would it be like if you made a monthly commitment to meet with an up-and-coming female professional and then took five minutes to tell someone else about her accomplishments? Consider taking on a mentee to share your experiences and help someone develop. Think about coaching a woman on your team in the areas of “executive presence” and confidence. Commit to having at lease one female finalist for each of your hiring processes. You don’t need to have a complete diversity program to get started.

What Can We Do About It?

Gender equality is no longer a nice to have; it’s a business imperative if you want to win the battle for talent and attract newer generations that value diversity in the workplace. In addition to the suggestions above, here are some additional actions to consider when trying to attract and retain women in your organization:

- Measure where you are today. How many women in your total workforce? How many in management? Once you start putting some of these actions in place, you want to see the needle move in the right direction.
- Be sure that your organization is paying men and women in similar roles similar rates of pay.
- Re-write your job postings using gender neutral or female friendly language and keep them short; data has shown that women will only apply to a position if they feel 90% qualified. There are several tools available to make your postings more gender neutral. Highlight family-friendly benefits in literature you share with prospective candidates (flexible schedules, paid parental leave, private lactation rooms, etc).
- Consider unconscious bias training. There are many vendors who can offer this.
- Encourage women employees to join networking groups within your industry.
- Consider college and high school outreach efforts to get more girls and young women interested in technology careers.

These are just some of the many things you can do to get the conversation started about gender diversity in your organizations. If you are interested in learning what Axis Communications is doing to promote gender diversity, please reach out to me via LinkedIn – I'd love to hear from you.

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