

Technology is not a boy's club

Nothing endures but change, mused ancient philosopher Heraclitus. But the poet Maya Angelou said it best: "If you don't like something, change it. If you can't change it, change your attitude."



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Behind the curve

The 20th century was a remarkable era of change for women, who finally acquired indisputable rights to self-assertion and equality. It has been a long time coming, but the 21st century is the next staging ground for women expanding from followers to peers to leaders.

Women in technology garner a lot of attention, perhaps because they work in a sector known for its overwhelming male presence. This despite the fact that some of technology's earliest pioneers were female, such as the inventor of programming, Ada Lovelace, or Hedy Lamarr, the film star and sex icon who also pioneered frequency hopping, used in mobile phones today.

Technology is behind the curve. Though over half of professional occupations in the United States are held by women, a mere quarter of professional technology jobs can make the same claim. Some argue that women are simply poorly suited for technology, lacking the logic and mathematical savvy to compete against men. A few even assert that women are simply riskier.

Self-fulfilling prophecy

Disproving such generalisations is easy, but the stigma is harder to purge. To Patricia Florissi, VP & Global CTO of sales at EMC and a technology polymath, this perception is more about a lack of representation:

“If more opportunities were given to women, especially at senior levels, then you would be able to see more of a sample of female leadership that would change some of the biases. It is a self-fulfilling prophecy: the fewer women you have in leadership, the more biases you create, because you don't have enough samples to create an accurate image of how women act and how successful they can be.”

Under-representation sabotages opportunities for women, said Florissi. But she doesn't pin this on a misogynist culture. People think of those they know and consequently offer opportunities to whoever is front of mind. If an organisation is understaffed with women, odds are that women will not be considered as candidates merely due to a lack of visibility. One could argue that gender should have nothing to do with it, that it is all about the best candidate. This is true, but Florissi warned of a larger danger if diversity is not part of a company's outlook:

“We need to treat women in technology as a real issue, because we're talking about fifty percent of the population, about digital transformation that is suffering from a deficit in intellectual capital and yet we leave half of the population behind. This is a business imperative. Where you don't have diversity, you don't have cognitive diversity, so you are in a position of disadvantage. We can only solve that together.”

The need for diverse, out-of-the-box thinkers has never been greater. Technology needs women: the problems and opportunities of the world cannot be tackled from just one vantage point. Creating diversity in gender and creed is what helps companies evolve and open new channels. Everyone has a role to play in making this shift happen. As Maya Angelou said: “Nothing will work unless you do.”