

THE ISSUES FACING WOMEN IN TECHNOLOGY Question and Answers

by Sherry Roberts

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AT&T – Account Director - Sold internet access in 1994, early days of the Internet in Silicon Valley.
Mannesmann Accor – Product manager, rolled out the first Internet access by call product for the German market, opening up the entire German market to use internet. - 1996–1999.

Lycos Europe – MD for Mobile, Board of Directors UK – launched the first free SMS service, creating then movement for SMS in the UK 1999-2002.

Symbian OS – Business Development Director – Took the first smartphone operating system to network operators and managed Vodafone global. Today we have Android and iPhone, Symbian was the first. 2002-2008
Presently, she runs The Longest Stay, an online ecommerce retail store, where she was the first to deploy “shoppable content” in 2013.

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1. Gender inequality in the technology industry - why is it that men dominate this industry?

This is an issue across all industries not just the tech industry. According to Sheryl Sandberg's book *Lean In*: “21% of Fortune 500 CEOs are women and women hold about 14% of executive officer positions, 17% of board seats, and constitute 18% of elected congressional officials.”

Despite this, many female leaders have beaten statistics, and have become outstanding examples of successful businesswomen in traditionally male-dominated industries.

However, the deep-rooted inequality in the tech industry does exist. Although some people will deny there is inequality, there is. According to the Guardian's article “Women in technology: no progress in 10

years” women taking on more roles in technology has remained at a static 14% for the past ten years. In Europe it is worse with 11.2%. Some male leaders that do recognize it believe they can solve the problem like fixing the mechanics of a car.

I was once at a party at the Spanish Embassy in London and had an endless debate about how women are not treated the same as men in employment. This debate was with a fairly young male professional executive who said “We all know women are smarter and better in business. I don't know what the issue is anymore because in my organisation they get the raises and praises like all of us.” When I told him some of the statistics and that women were actually still underpaid for the same roles, he denied it. When I asked him how many women were in management in his company he said “two very impressive women.” “How many employees?” I asked, he quipped “about 1,000.”

The problem is even if you state facts nothing seems to resonate. There is a distorted view that because a few women are in management that means no inequality exists. Like the box has been ticked.

From my experience, the other problem is that unless women ask for that raise and really fight for the promotion nothing happens. I've been told "if you get a promotion everyone just assumes you are having a relationship with the person who promoted you." Less women at the top mean more men dominate the industry. In many cases it is just assumed that if you are a women of childbearing age then you automatically want a child, and if you indeed do then can she take on the new role? Or will she disappear and go on maternity leave?

If you are in a sales role as a women you have it far easier to demonstrate your contribution because no one can argue about who is bringing in the revenue, it is very clear. My father always said; "Be in sales", now, whether that is because that's what he thought I was good at, or he knew I could make it in the corporate world that way, it was the right path. I never had to justify my results when I made my sales quota. I learned valuable skills that to this day have carried me throughout my career and helped me overcome some of the barriers one faces in the corporate arena as a woman.

I believe Carly Fiorina climbed her way up the ladder in the corporate world because she came via the Lucent sales team. She proved herself with her sales results, eventually landing in management and then more senior roles.

I have worked in tech for over 15 years across several countries, before setting up my own venture. I had to work 10 times harder to be heard and rewarded in my

corporate career. As an entrepreneur in Europe who has had to raise money for my business, it has been the hardest thing I have done, especially when I tried to raise it in any technology investment group. If you look too feminine they all want something more with you and if you look too masculine they're afraid. It's a tough balance. Most of the time I get asked, "How old are you?" or "Do you have children?" Finally, when I state "I am a widow" They sound relieved, "Ok, you will give it your all." Unless they think I am open to dating them.

My late husband use to come home from Hewlett Packard and say "they really want me in top management but, I'm unsure I want that responsibility right now." He was an overachiever and not to say he didn't deserve the promotion, however, that never happened to any female colleague or me. I was the one to have to fight for it and it never came easy. Definitely, back in the 90s I didn't hear in Europe any of my female colleagues being pursued to climb up in a company.

2. Challenges facing women and how these obstacles can be overcome.

I see the challenges facing women as follows:

- Ensuring your results can be measured so there are no issues about what you contribute to the business. Ensure KPIs are written clearly and documented so numerous parties can witness this. So, when it comes time to review them there are no discrepancies.
- Guaranteeing companies accept women are not treated as equals in the workforce. This means getting a group of people around this subject and bringing it to the forefront of your HR department. For instance, an actionable outcome could be an employee newsletter with a feature on

'How Women Contribute to the Advancement of the Business or Workplace'. Raise awareness, but then make sure it is followed up like any project.

- Uniting women to work together to help face challenges. We all know about the boys club, we need a joint club. We are so used to having to fight and work so hard in a men's world that we naturally think another woman is competition. Instead, we can work together to support each other. Campaigning to unite and support women in business would make us a far more successful gender.

As my business continues to grow, it is part of my strategy to have a fund that backs female entrepreneurs on the premise that a woman will back another woman in business. I suggest every successful female entrepreneur does the same. I once pitched my business at a women's investment fund and 50% of the women liked my business, the other 50% didn't. As opinion was equally divided, they said; "We can't let you continue." That was a sad day for me. Nonetheless, I did get my funding.

On another occasion, I had the female head of a women's government venture fund in the UK, tell me that my business couldn't be funded unless I had the backing of a specific male led VC. How surprising, that she couldn't make a decision about backing a female entrepreneur unless a VC, run by men, endorsed me.

3. Closing the gender gap and finding out what women want?

Women want to be respected, treated equally and taken seriously.

- The gap will only close, when women demand their promotion and their pay-rise.
- Help raise awareness in their own organisations by pointing out facts and instances where gender inequality exists and moving it forward like any project.

4. How can we spread this knowledge and ensure more young women are exposed to the opportunities available in tech?

It all starts with education. Girls must to be encouraged to study science, math and apply for degrees in computer science, economics and business overall. Slowly we are seeing that even big toy manufacturers are moving away from stereotypical dolls for girls that portray women as fashion-loving-make-up adoring creatures and moving into producing dolls that show, Barbie for example, as a scientist. But it's not enough. Attending tech seminars or conferences such as Mobile Congress in Barcelona, or the Web Summit in Dublin. Keeping our finger in the pulse with tech blogs like Tech Crunch, Wired, The Verge to name a few. Alternatively, many universities are now building relationships with top Tech firms like Google, Amazon, Apple and Microsoft so they are in the know-how of job opportunities in said companies.

5. Who is responsible for inspiring young girls/women?

Every woman has role to play in this. It isn't just about the celebrities, political figures, Olympic athletes, or CEO's. Each of us should encourage girls to push their boundaries, fight the status quo and never settle for less. If each woman, mentored one girl and encouraged them to be whatever they wanted, to study subjects that normally they may not be encouraged to do such as science or math, this could make a difference. But, we have to start with the youth and nurture this process like a growing plant. Let's not forget men, there are many fathers that want to see their daughters be all they can be and take on major roles in the world. Fathers have an even bigger role to play by ensuring

their daughters feel worthy to do anything and never take anything less than what they deserve. Or put up with being discriminated against. In the end, if women are achieving great successes in their roles, it benefits society as a whole. I believe everyone has a responsibility towards humanity - to accomplish the best we can for this world.