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In A Male-Dominated Tech Industry, We Need A Female Perspective

The data is indisputable. Diversity in the workplace boosts innovation, financial return and employee engagement. The Harvard Business Review found that organisations with a diverse, inclusive culture are 70% more likely to capture a new market in a year. So, given the clear benefits of a diverse team, why aren't there more women in tech? In 2015, across all of the major tech firms, only 30% of women were looking at either a technical or leadership role.

Chimeren Peerbhai, our London Tech Week panellist and a product director and thought leader specialising in wearable technology, AR and VR, passionately believes that we need more of a female perspective in a male-dominated tech sector. Recently, Nicoll Curtin went to an event at Westminster University to hear about Chimeren's experiences as a woman in technology.

At Hackathons, Chimeren is used to being the only woman in the room. Of the four she has attended, she has been on the winning team at three. Chimeren's Hackathon wins are microcosmic proof that diversity leads to higher levels of innovation.

“Diverse perspectives and voices result in diverse ideas. In a male-dominated tech industry, that female perspective often isn't there. That advantage is something that's missing in tech. We're building products for a population, half of which is female, but the people building those products aren't reflective of that. We need a female perspective” – *Chimeren Peerbhai*

In the late nineties, having convinced her father that the internet wasn't a fad, Chimeren moved into studying multimedia. As one of the only women in her class, this marked the first time she felt the isolation of being a woman in technology.

“It was hard being the only woman on most projects. It doesn't matter how good you are, or even if your colleagues respect you. Eventually you get tired of being the odd duck” – *Kieran Snyder*

Following the success of her own creative agency VeraStyle, Chimeren became a software developer at a Fortune 500 MedTech Company. She joined at the same time as her male colleague, with whom she was going to be working on the same project at a slightly lower level as her male colleague. They had the same amount of experience and a similar skillset, yet she was awarded a 40% lower starting salary. Besides a sector experience gap, Chimeren attributes this to a lack of confidence. Her male counterpart stated his desired salary and, following his offer, negotiated his way up. She did not. This isn't unusual – the “confidence gap” is a key contributor to the gender pay gap. Half of male graduating MBA students negotiate their job offers, as compared to only one eighth of women. A 2006 survey found that although 80% of women felt underpaid, two-thirds had never asked for a pay increase. Those who had said that it was one of the most anxiety-inducing things they'd ever done.

The aforementioned male colleague of Chimeren resigned and Chimeren took over his role, taking on all of his responsibilities as well as her own. A year later, Chimeren was given the biggest pay rise that division's marketing department had ever awarded; a payrise that awarded her a salary 25% less than her male colleague was being paid a year earlier for the exact same job

The UK is not in the top twenty countries for gender equality. This year, new legislation will require companies with over 250 employees to publish their pay for men and women. This will help with awareness, but there is far more to be done.

As well as the pay gap, there is also a startling position gap. Barring project managers, women and men in tech work in very different roles, with men typically in the higher level roles with higher pay. For every woman who is paid the same as the man doing her job, there is a man who has the exact same qualifications and history as her, who has climbed up two or three rungs of the ladder before her.

“If your boss came over to your desk and said: “From the beginning of November, we're not going to pay you for the rest of the year. You'll be working an hour and 40 minutes a day for free, or 57 days a year”. Would you accept that? The pay gap for non-management in 2014 was 14.2%. Every year you age, you continue to earn less than your peers. If you're a woman at the senior management level, you're going to have to work to the age of 80 in order to earn the same amount of money that an equivalent man would earn by 65” -

Chimeren Peerbhai

Only 18% of women opt for roles in the tech sector as a first post-MBA job. Of those that do opt to take a tech role, half of them leave the sector. Women in tech are more likely, even if they have the exact same degree and diploma, to start in a low-level position. 73% of them will feel like an outsider while working in the tech sector. This doesn't paint a great picture for tech.

“Picture in your minds what these two people might look like. The first person is a software application developer. The second is a receptionist. What are you picturing? Most people imagine the receptionist as a woman, and the developer as a man” - *Chimeren Peerbhai*

Chimeren says that there is, however, cause for optimism. A great benefit of tech is that the nature of the work allows you to work remotely and flexibly, which is great for stay-at-home moms or dads. It is also a space that is growing massively with emerging tech – wearable tech, smart-watches, the Internet of Things, augmented virtual reality, et al. There is a world of opportunities in tech, and a world of incredible female mentors to learn from. Once Chimeren moved into a role where she had technical female bosses for the first time, their success empowered her and gave her the confidence to strive for more. Their mentorship and guidance led to her promotions to more senior roles, this, she argues, stresses the crucial importance of positive female mentors in the workplace.

"Think about what you can do to make tech the best sector for women to work in. Tech is a wonderful industry. It allows women to work remotely. To work flexibly around childcare. The pay is becoming more equal. There's going to be huge growth. We need female mentors to help us close the position gap. To help us get promoted faster. To enter at the right level. To guide us to negotiate better. Then we can close that gap" - *Chimeren Peerbhai*