

# The Gender Divide: Women in Tech

How to overcome sexism and optimize mentoring opportunities



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**In this e-guide:**

**When women take the initiative to seek out the mentorship they deserve and organizations invest in preparing high potential female employees for greatness, everyone wins.**

**In this guide, we look at:**

- **Cracking the gender-diversity problem in IT**
- **How to deal with sexism in a frat-boy office culture**
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## How can a female junior software tester survive in a sexist startup?

Gerie Owen, Contributor, SearchSoftwareQuality

**I'm a woman and a junior software tester at a startup. I put up with the language and the innuendo, but it's starting to get more serious. What can I do?**

It's very stressful to go to a job every morning knowing that you're subject to a hostile work environment. You can't do your best junior software tester work if you're always looking over your shoulder waiting for the next snide remark or unwanted advance.

Regrettably, many [startup cultures](#) have devolved into a frat house environment, with all of the negative connotations of that phrase. When a mostly homogeneous, young, male employee base works long hours in an informal and often alcohol-fueled environment, appropriate business behavior is the first thing to go. That seems to have been the predominant [approach at Uber](#), led by Founder and Lead Frat Guy Travis Kalanick, who recently stepped down, largely in disgrace.

Thanks to veteran tech women, like [Susan Fowler](#) and [Ellen Pao](#), the covers are starting to come off of this type of poisonous culture. But it's not clear how fast change will come, if at all.

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I won't kid you. You may have to quit your junior software tester job and perhaps leave behind potentially valuable stock options. But you might have some junior software tester peers that you trust. Chances are they are just as uncomfortable as you. If you approach management together, there may be a **louder voice in numbers**. You might also attempt to educate your peers about the recklessness of this type of behavior, although they likely also find support from their male peers.

It is possible to file federal complaints regarding harassment. Most women understandably don't want to go through that process and are frequently discouraged from doing so by employment agreements.

The fact of the matter is that you are employed as a junior software tester by a business, and it should require business behavior. If management -- and most importantly, human resources -- don't want to treat is as a business, there is probably little you can ultimately do. It is not college, and you didn't join a frat house. If your management doesn't realize that, the company will likely fail anyway.

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## Effective approaches to mentoring women in tech

Daisy McCarty, Contributor, TheServerSide.com

Everyone knows that mentoring is an important factor in career success. But when I ask female leaders and entrepreneurs about the role of mentorship in their journeys, the answers are very interesting. Men often experience mentoring in a traditional "master/apprentice" relationship that lasts over the long term and is highly focused on the professional sphere. In contrast, women seek mentoring across areas from career to education to marriage, parenting, and work/life balance. They choose which mentor to speak with depending on the particular challenge they face. Here are some additional trends I've noticed in interviewing women about the role of mentoring women in their lives and careers.

### Mentors and mentoring women

- Women [seeking leadership roles](#) often report a lack of good mentors as an obstacle to their career growth. They may perceive it as difficult to find a mentor. Women may feel they are less likely to "be chosen" as a mentee by those higher in their organization. They have to ask directly for mentorship.

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Meltem Ballan, Ph.D., a data scientist at consulting firm [Clarity Insights](#) who has a strong [knowledge of big data problems](#), spoke about the challenges she has faced in finding good mentors. "I never had a mentor strongly standing behind me. I once had a female mentor but she didn't offer much support. I think she was afraid of someone taking her job. I've actually received more support from men. In particular, there was one older gentleman I would talk to if something went wrong or to figure out how to get around a problem and turn things around. But I've found it difficult to get the same mentorship men do." Ballan concluded that the most important step women can take in getting a good mentor is to reach out and ask.

**Mentorship is about getting things done**

- Women tend to have many mentors throughout their lives rather than one or two long term engagements lasting through the decades. Mentoring engagements are often short term and highly focused on a particular outcome.

Being selective and strategic in mentoring women is essential. [Tanis Cornell](#), Principal of TJC Consulting, pointed out that mentors can become friends. But that's not the point of the relationship. "When you are looking for mentors, think about what you need to learn, not just who you like." CeCe Morken, EVP and General Manager of ProConnect at Intuit, agreed that choosing mentors based on how they can help you develop is the smart move. "Be specific about what you are trying to grow and find people who are the best at it."

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Women see value in being mentored by both sexes

- Women report positive experiences with both male and female mentors. While female leaders can certainly offer deep insight into how to succeed as women, men offer value as well.

Charlene Schwindt, a software business unit manager serving the construction sector, offered her perspective on the benefits of having men as mentors, which is very likely given the gender gap in IT. "Interestingly, I've always had male mentors, which gave an alternative perspective." Getting a sneak peek into the minds of men at work proved invaluable. "When it comes to business, men can be thinking in a different way in approaching problems. Women tend to be more collaborative. Men are often more prone to strict decision-making and less likely to seek input." For Schwindt, understanding that men may need additional input but are not necessarily open to receiving it helped her learn to "manage up" more adroitly and grasp the politics at play in certain situations. She learned to finesse her communication to help those above her be more open to changing how they approached issues.

How can men be better mentors for women in tech?

Many women in tech feel a sneaking suspicion that they aren't receiving the same development as their male counterparts, but they can't quite put their finger on what's missing. I can relate. At one point in my own career, I

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worked in a primarily male department. My manager was absolutely terrific at *managing* women. But he hadn't figured out how to *mentor* them. He made sure the women who reported to him felt supported and heard. He did his best to reduce their day to day stress. He ensured they were happy. But how he interacted with the guys was completely different. He challenged them, pointed out where they could be better, showed them how to be tough enough to get things done. In short, he took a proactive role in developing the men who reported to him. It didn't surprise me that women would invariably transfer to another department when they were ready to advance their careers. It's doubtful my boss even realized he wasn't treating women and men the same way. He was simply doing his best to keep things running smoothly, but clearly [workplace changes](#) were needed.

## Benefits of mentoring women

As a result of this experience, I asked my interviewees what men can do to be better mentors for women. Cornell mentioned Susan Colantuono's TedX talk on "The career advice you probably didn't get" as a wonderful resource for understanding how to close the gender gap in leadership. Like Colantuono, Cornell believes that strategic, business, and financial acumen are the aspects of mentoring that women are missing out on the most. Men just assume people already know this foundational information because they were taught it as a matter of course by their own mentors. In contrast, women are being told they need to work on things that, while important, are not as fundamental.



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Cornell described the conundrum this way. "Soft skills only matter when that foundation is in place. We seem to be focused on teaching women to be confident versus teaching men the business. Women sometimes think they just need to have more confidence. But when you speak up, you need to know what you are talking about." In Cornell's case, a male mentor did take the time to teach her to read a profit and loss statement and to understand key metrics. To this day, she considers that lesson to be one of the greatest gifts she has ever received to help her career and to help her [break into male-dominated industries](#).

When men open their eyes to the potential for development in the women around them, it's actually a growth opportunity for everyone involved. According to Schwindt, "I think if men would reach out to someone with potential and ask 'What do you think about this?' or draw out the women in the room, both would learn a lot."

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## How can women make the most of mentoring opportunities?

From being viewed as a rising star worthy of personal investment to deriving the greatest value from every minute spent with a mentor, here are a few parting pieces of advice from women in tech.

**Don't be shy:** Julie Hamrick, Founder and COO of Ignite Sales, pointed out that [getting noticed](#) by potential mentors may start by being willing to do something noteworthy. "I know many women who are early in careers and

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may be more introverted. They do fantastic work but don't reach out as much. Women should ask for something else to do, try to get on the good projects, speak up if they have something valuable to say, get noticed and known."

**Seek constructive criticism:** Cornell explained that being a mentee involves admitting there are things you don't know that you need to learn. "You have to have mentors you can be vulnerable with. Ask questions. Don't be needy, but have an ongoing dialogue. Ask how you are viewed by the organization. Men in particular are sometimes fearful to give a negative critique. Give them permission by asking questions like 'What can I improve on?' or 'How am I perceived?' Be specific."

**Always follow through:** Morken voiced frustration about mentees who ask for help but fail to continue with the journey. "Don't make the relationship episodic where you just check in after six months. Have a plan, document what you want to accomplish, be deliberate." Also, don't be shy about giving feedback. "Let your mentor know how they are doing." At Intuit, mentoring has been built into the development of male and female employees and monthly check-ins are the norm. It isn't left to chance. This may be one reason that the company is an industry role model for having a high percentage of women in technical and leadership roles. Morken revealed that this achievement wasn't easy. "It was hard to get there." The company had to take consistent, intentional action to narrow the gender gap. Based on the outcome so far, it was worth the effort.

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*As women take the initiative to seek out the mentorship they deserve and organizations invest in preparing high potential female employees for greatness, everyone wins.*

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## How women in IT influence today's workforce and tomorrow's technology

Daisy.McCarty, Contributor, TheServerSide.com

What would the tech world look like without leaders, visionaries, and entrepreneurs like Satya Nadella, John Ives, or Elon Musk? What about the contributions of the other seven men who complete the list of "The 10 Most Influential Leaders in Tech Right Now" according to Juniper Research? Would the world be a poorer place without these powerful, intelligent, and insightful men bringing their minds to bear on the problems facing the world today? I think so.

Now imagine a world in which at least half of the names on that list were female. That's a day that many [women in the technology](#) sector look forward to with anticipation. In my interviews with women across the tech spectrum, I certainly heard stories of obstacles and discouragement. But the overwhelming outlook is positive. It's only a matter of time until the full impact of women in tech begins to be felt at all levels, adding depth and richness to a sector that is geared for an incredibly exciting decade.

I asked my interviewees to tell me about women they admire in their industry, what they believe women have to [offer the tech world](#), and what the future will look like as our influence grows. Here's what I found out. First, women aren't tearing one another down. They are definitely cheering each other on.

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## Who do women look up to in tech?

It's great to have role models at [top levels of leadership](#) in the technology field. Meg Whitman was a name that came up more than once in conversation. Julie Hamrick, Founder and COO of Ignite Sales, pointed to Meg's early success at the helm of the world's leading auction site. "For me, it's the fact that she grew eBay to become a household name." But it's not just the wins that people find compelling about Whitman. It's her attitude about adversity and challenges. CeCe Morken, EVP and General Manager of ProConnect at Intuit, also spoke about her admiration for the current CEO of Hewlett Packard Enterprise. "She so embraces learning from failure. One of the things she told us is that she now celebrates failure as much as she celebrates success in her all-hands meetings. These are just fast failures, experiments they learn from."

But most of the women I spoke with didn't choose a big name as a "shero" they look up to the most. They told me story after story of women they know personally [who have inspired them](#). Charlene Schwindt, a software business unit manager at Hilti, put it simply. "I most admire some of the women I see and work with every day. When they complete a successful project, have big wins, get major status or an executive position on a board, that's a huge achievement."

Julie mentioned Valerie Freeman, CEO at Imprimis, as a role model. "She is one of those people who is doing well in business and doing good in the community." Mary McNeely, Oracle Database expert and owner of McNeely Technology Solutions, spoke highly of peer advisory facilitator and talent

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development consultant Tanis Cornell as someone who showed that hard work and self-belief really can pay off. "She didn't start out in tech, but she moved to technology sales, pulled herself up by the bootstraps, and overcame barriers to succeed."

Jen Voecks is the founder and CEO of the tech startup Praulia, an online service that matches brides with wedding vendors. For her, the most inspiring thing to see is other women creating something new in the industry. She pointed to Molly Cain, former Executive Director of Tech Wildcatters, as an inspiration. "She built a lot of things herself." Today, Cain is the acting Deputy Director of Digital Innovation and Solutions/Venture Relations at the DHS. Quite a remarkable achievement and certainly one that will make her a role model for many more women throughout her career.

## How do women change the game within tech organizations?

There's simply no substitute for having more perspectives for both innovation and problem solving. Charlene has seen the benefit of a diverse team in determining how to develop the projects under her direction. "What women bring to the table can be different. Often, consideration of how people work with technology is not really coming into play as it should during the development process. Even if you have people talking to the customer about what they want, everything is based on interpretation. With a [cross gender team](#), you get a different result by having multiple views on the same thing."

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This is something Julie found true as well. "I've noticed when we have women on our teams we have better follow through and more creativity. They are good at filling in the gaps. Amidst all the ones and zeros, women see more of the gray, more depth." That's not just good for short term improvement. It's also essential for long term viability. Tanis Cornell pointed out that economic and financial experts are catching on to the fact that women are good for business. "It's been shown in study after study now that companies with a better gender balance on the management team perform better financially. Meryl Lynch and other firms are starting to pay attention. They are investing in and recommending companies with more balanced leadership at the top. It's simply a good business decision."

**How will women influence the future of technology?**

Women are bringing their power to bear in leadership, innovation, entrepreneurship, and more. The days when tech was developed through a primarily male lens are fading fast. That shift is bound to have an impact on what happens in the next five to ten years. Many women I spoke with mentioned the subtle but potent effect the female touch may have on the direction of tech. According to Julie, "I think things will become more friendly and useful. They will have more care to them, even in technology. Tech is more utilized by everyone these days. Going forward, there will be even more self-service, but the experience will have a more satisfying, human feel." Mary echoed this sentiment, in terms of what it will take to succeed in the tech field and the world in general. "As the world becomes more

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roboticized, there's also going to be a counter trend. Good intuition and people skills will become even more critical."

CeCe Morken offered this advice for the current and coming generations of female innovators. "Look ahead and be aware of what's coming. It's changing faster than ever before and you need to find a way to grasp it." Morken put her money where her mouth is recently by purchasing the latest virtual reality tech for employees to experience at work. Intuit is not looking to launch any products using that technology right now, but CeCe wants her people to be familiar with what's available so they aren't playing catch up later as innovation continues to accelerate.

Jen highlighted the importance of tech for [changing the future of women](#) as well. "Tech gives you a new platform. It allows you to reach a broader audience. As an inventor or business owner, you have the opportunity to grow faster and meet partners." In essence, tech is democratizing the entrepreneurial space even more than before, ensuring that women can advance on their own terms even if the corporate world continues to change more slowly.

## Women in tech must keep reaching for their dreams

Data scientist Dr. Meltem Ballan has faced her share of challenges in building a career in tech. But she offered encouragement to other women in their quest to rise to the top. "It's not insurmountable. There is no ceiling.



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Just keep on going out there and doing it. Learn to network well, and have the courage to take that next step." Mary McNeely agreed that the future is there for the taking. "What we get next is whatever we want. We are educated and empowered. Our star is rising."

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## Workplace changes called for to place more women in IT jobs

Jason Sparapani, Features Writer, SearchCIO

Organizations today are having a tough time finding and keeping talented technology workers to run cloud, big data and cognitive computing systems. They're also doing a poor job of putting women in IT jobs, especially leadership positions, a business researcher affirmed at the recent MIT Sloan CIO Symposium in Cambridge, Mass.

Kristine Dery, research scientist at MIT's Center for Information Systems Research, headed a panel on attracting talent in a digital world where experience in the latest technologies is in short supply. She said 40% of women who start in entry-level positions in companies never get past the middle-management level.

"All of us are experiencing a shortage. All of us have got problems attracting and retaining the right people," Dery said. "Do we need to actually rethink the whole environment that [IT people] are working in and the nature of these roles?"

IT and other executives on the panel exchanged views on the longstanding gender-diversity problem in IT and ways they're trying to puncture it in their organizations.

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## Having it all

Panelist [Julia Davis](#), senior vice president and CIO at Aflac Inc., is among the [19% of female CIOs](#) at top U.S. companies today. She said it's a challenge making sure the right people at the Columbus, Ga., insurance company get promoted, trained and primed for opportunities "because it may stop somewhere in the process."

For example, women in IT jobs who want to step out of the workforce to raise a family shouldn't worry that they won't be able to step back in. Davis said she gets asked by young women how she was able to "have it all" -- high-paying job and a family.

"The fact is I didn't do it. I didn't have it all. I don't have children," Davis said. In the early years of her career, "that was not expected if you wanted to make it up the ranks."

It should be a different story today, she said, not just for women but also for men who decide they want to balance family and a high-power career. "We should be able to accommodate that," she said.

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## Wanted: Nontraditional candidates

At Schneider Electric, 40% of IT executives reporting to the CIO are women, said [Amy deCastro](#), vice president of human resources for IT at the France-based global energy management company. The IT organization as a whole,

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though, is just 27% female, so the bench is not deep -- but "we're making progress," deCastro said.

Putting more women in IT jobs is a top personnel goal at Schneider. The company recently launched an "unconscious bias" program for hiring managers and have asked talent recruiters to make sure there is a certain number of female candidates during initial resume reviews. And the CEO, Jean-Pascal Tricoire, has worked with the United Nations on diversity programs and [in 2015 was recognized](#) for putting in place policies designed to help women advance in the workplace.

"When we see the leadership walking the talk, it's much easier then to get the organization to grab on to that," deCastro said.

[Jim O'Neill](#), who goes by "entrepreneur in residence," evaluates workplace and workforce technologies at HubSpot. The Cambridge, Mass., software marketing company was [born digital](#), so it competes for talent with higher-paying, household-name giants like Google and Facebook by touting career-growth opportunities for Millennial workers. It has also made searching for a diversity of candidates a priority.

"We look for talent that is nontraditional, because if we just look we're going to find people that look like me," O'Neill said.

[Eric Sigurdson](#) said organizations looking to his employer, executive search firm Russell Reynolds Associates, for help in finding talent also want gender and ethnic diversity in candidates.

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"Some of our clients even go so far as to say they only want to see diversity candidates," said Sigurdson, a managing director at the firm who recruits IT execs. "We're not allowed to do that."

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## 'A profound problem'

[Catherine Thomas](#), a conference goer who attended the panel discussion, said the lack of gender diversity in IT is a "profound problem" that won't be solved by mandates and quotas or even training.

"It's not just mentoring in your own company," said Thomas, president and CEO of Kinetix Technology, a McLean, Va., consulting outfit that helps companies with [big data](#) technologies and [software development](#). "Are you mentoring in the community? What are you doing in the schools? What are you doing for women and girls? What are you doing for other women in technology?"

The roots of the problem, Thomas said, begin in grade school, where girls start falling behind in science and math, and many don't develop an interest in technology. Indeed, though her small company has a "really diverse workforce," few consultants there who advise on hard-core technology are women, she said.

"We have to address the issue in the schools and with our children -- and it starts in fourth, fifth, sixth grade," Thomas said. "It's a much bigger issue. So I think it has to be addressed in a wholesale way."

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We are an online community for developers, architects and executives interested in building high-quality software, or are involved in software project management, software testing and quality assurance, application performance management, and application lifecycle management.

We provide in-depth coverage on how to ensure application quality using different development process models and methodologies, like DevOps and Agile development, and we're home to countless white papers and Webcasts to address the newest trends, problems, and solutions in software quality.

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