

# Are We Really Closing The Gender Gap In Tech?

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Mar 3, 2021, 09:20am EST

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For as long as I can remember, there has been a struggle to attract more women into science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) careers. And while I'd like to believe that our collective efforts have helped to increase the percentage of women, particularly in leadership roles, a recent study concluded that the

gender gap for women in technology as a whole is actually worse today than it was in 1984.

BETA

The study, led by Accenture and Girls who Code, showed that 50% of women abandon technology careers by the age of 35 and that women are leaving tech roles at a 45% higher rate than men. Only 21% of women in the study said they believed the technology industry was a place they could thrive; sadly, that number falls precipitously to 8% for women of color.

A global pandemic — where working women are shouldering more of the burden of juggling their career, remote learning, and caring for children and elderly parents — is only conspiring to make the situation actually even worse. In August and September of 2020, 865,000 women left the workforce, compared with 216,000 men. According to a recent report by Women in the Workplace, one-third of mothers face opting out of or scaling back their careers. This may include reducing work hours, shifting to part-time work or a less demanding role, taking a leave of absence, or leaving the workforce entirely. Experts point to the loss of support systems such as child care and in-person education as two main reasons for the mass exodus.

What does this tell us about the technology industry's efforts to be more inclusive and diverse?

We have a lot more work to do not only to attract but keep talented female professionals. And we have much more to do if we are to go beyond the gender gap and make the industry more diverse across the board.

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While there are many ways to improve inclusion and diversity in tech, here are three areas where I would like to see us focus our efforts:

**1. Create a culture that values inclusion and diversity — and then measure progress.**

It’s no surprise to me that the Accenture/Girls who Code study found that 37% of respondents cited company culture as the reason for abandoning a career in tech.

As a woman of color — and one of the only black female CEOs in the technology industry — I know how it feels to often be the only one in the room who looks like me. That’s why creating a workplace where everyone feels that they can bring their true selves to work is a personal passion of mine.

Truly inclusive organizations for women in technology must start by helping women feel empowered to make decisions and feel their voices will be heard. But the desire to be more inclusive and diverse must go far beyond a stated vision.

There are two concrete steps tech companies can take. First, enact candidate slating guidelines, which, for example, require at least one woman to be included in the final pool of candidates for any management-level role and above. The second is to set corporate inclusion and diversity goals that are transparent and measurable. Create a culture of accountability as you look to make progress against those goals.

**2. Flexibility is key.**

Even before a global pandemic made it more critical, I've long believed that flexible working is the foundation of the workforce of the future. I also think it's an important part of attracting and keeping talented women in the world of tech.

I am focusing intently on building a flexible working culture that empowers our people to work in a way that fits with their lives. This may mean working with an alternative week schedule, completing the remote workday in a nontraditional manner, or splitting time between early mornings and early evenings with a gap for personal time during the middle of the day.

### **3. Support networks, training and mentoring are critical.**

Providing women with workplace support, including mentors, networking activities and employee resource groups is another key tool at our fingertips.

I credit my journey to CEO to my ability to find and work with mentors throughout my career. When I moved to Seattle, far from family and friends, I sought out an employee network for Black and African American colleagues who helped me get connected and feel more at home.

### **What we do to help make tech more inclusive for women will help us be more inclusive overall.**

No doubt, we must double down on our efforts to inspire women in ways that make them want to come work in tech and lead fulfilling and challenging careers. We must also remember that the same principles we use to attract and retain more women in tech can lay the groundwork for our inclusion and diversity efforts as a whole. I'm a firm believer that "a rising tide lifts all boats," meaning that when we focus on including more diverse representation in the technology sector, we all benefit.

While we're intentionally expanding our inclusion and diversity priorities beyond gender parity, we know we're closer to the beginning of our journey than the end. As a woman of color and a leader in an industry that I love, I'll work tirelessly until we get much closer than we are right now.

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