

Diversify Your Technology Force

I was honored to attend several conferences at Illinois Central College this past year focused on women in technology. I have to admit the first time I attended one I was rather confused about this being such a hot topic. In reality, this is an issue as our workforce wants diversity, our workforce is shrinking, more businesses use modern technology than ever before and more business consumers are women owned and run companies.

Business Practice Technology

In the past, only the major corporations could afford a data server able to run computer applications to control their base level accounting, manage their inventory, etc. However, now most companies, even those with one employee, have a computer generating most if not all of the business functions. We no longer have the green accounting ledger paper bound in a book or the piles of binders with inventory sheets.

Every time we go to Wal-mart or even the local ACE store our purchases are scanned and recorded into a system. These systems gathering the information do not make or run all on their own. They require human developers and managers to run smoothly. This is just one piece of technology. In our society information technology is far reaching. There are not only computers, but websites, graphic development to get the information into the format to be used on the computer medium. Further, the telephone system is nothing more than a computer system controlling telephone functions. Again, there is rarely a company, even a small company, which does not utilize most if not all of these technologies.

In an age where technology is driving most of our business functions we are also faced with a shrinking work force. The baby boomers are retiring, or being asked to retire to be replaced with younger workers that have less demands for both salary and benefits. But the systems that are in place still need to be updated and manned. Corporate America needs to educate females that their presence is needed just as much as the males in these currently male dominated fields.

A Desire for Female Presence

Large technology companies, such as HP and IBM, have realized a need to employ women. One reason is that women are the fastest growing segment of business owners. The way that women purchase is different than men. Richard Newton, dean of the College of Engineering at the University of California at Berkeley states "Men are much more attracted to technology just for the sake of technology. Women in general are less attracted to the technology for the sake of technology and more for what it can do to help--to help people, organizations."

Catalyst Group discovered that "companies with the highest representation of women in top management positions delivered 35.1 percent more return on equity and 34 percent more total return to shareholders than companies with the lowest representation." With that return on investment, who wouldn't want to add more women to their workforce?

However, it isn't that simple. Thus the reason large companies join forces with groups such as Society of Women Engineers and Women in Technology, among others, to provide educational opportunities for girls in middle school and high school, plus camps to promote careers in the technology arenas. Some start earlier. For instance, in our community, State Farm has a representative assigned to this task. She attends events at schools and gears her message to girls as young as kindergarten. The message is simple. Technology jobs are not just for boys. They can be fun and rewarding both in salary and flexibility. While the statistics won't show the fruits of these efforts for several more years the efforts of companies like State Farm, IBM and HP will not waiver.

How can you help?

Even with all of the efforts of the large corporations and organizations such as Society of Women Engineers and Women in Technology statistics of women employed in tech jobs is somewhat closely guarded according to Telle Whitney, president of the Anita Borg Institute for Women and Technology. She estimates the number of women in tech jobs at approximately 20%. The STC, Society of Telecommunications Consultants, a national group of shares a similar statistic with 23.5% of their membership being female.

Typically when girls envision their future they are looking for ways to become relevant in society. Most of their career choices revolve around helping others and having flexibility. I believe this is why the female gender is so prevalent in teaching and nursing. Information technology is another way to help people, can provide flexibility as well as high salary benefits. As business managers and owners we must realize that women consumers are different than male consumers. By understanding this and building teams that enhance those differences maybe your product or service can gain an ROI edge just as well as those other Fortune companies.

By educating the youth we are able to shape the coming workforce. Every person is born with gifts and talents. This statistic about women in the technology workforce does not mean that someone gifted in nursing should become a web developer. However, if a girl, possibly a daughter or grand-daughter shows interest in building things, programming computers or other "boy" activities, she should be encouraged to grow those gifts through study and practical application. For more information you may contact the Business & Information Systems Department at Illinois Central College. I am sure they would be willing to lend a hand.