

Empowering women in tech

Speaker 1 00:04

It all started with one woman, Ada Lovelace is considered to be the world's first programmer. But now, women only make up about 28% of the tech workforce. According to a report by the World Bank, when it comes to advancement in tech roles, only 52 Women are promoted to manager for every 100 men. And while this is a significant improvement from the early 2000s, when women only made up 9%, there's still a long way to go. I believe that one of the most effective things we can do to improve diversity and inclusivity is to learn from experts on the topic. Hi, my name is Will Newsome, and you're listening to tech start. In this show, we explore the reality of change careers and getting into tech. My guest in this episode is Sharahn McClung. She's a career coach at TripleTen. But before that, she's worked as an actor in code debate teams for a while. So when it comes to self representation, she really has a lot of valuable hands on experience, but I let her tell her own story.

Speaker 2 01:06

I have found it most fascinating to work with career pivot errs, people in career transition. And I think that's twofold. I think that's people who are like completely switching careers, or people who are in a particular role and want to aim higher in their their company or their industry. And I find this of interest should be no surprise. As an actor in New York City. I had lots of jobs. And I always use the example that when we think of ourselves changing, think of like an actor, you know, when you see Helen Mirren, it's Helen Mirren. But all of the different roles that she's played, they're believable, you still know it's Helen Mirren. But she calls on different aspects of herself or calls attention to different aspects of herself, for you to see that she is aligned with the experience of that character. And I think it's the same thing in a career, when you're job seeking or when you want to switch roles, right? You're the same you and you want to show the alignment through skills, transferable skills, and through expertise and experience to shift into a different point of view with the same same person. Okay, in terms of gender representation, would you say that the tech industry stands out as its as its own thing? Or is it part of a larger phenomena, like, maybe women in STEM, I think it was built in, if I'm citing my source correctly, that said, like, in 1970, women made up 8% of roles in STEM. And now it's 27%. I can say from anecdotally, from the personal experience of having worked in the bootcamp space for about five years now. I don't walk into a room with a cohort, that's all women, and there's one man, in fact, it's most often the opposite.

Speaker 1 02:57

Are there any major trends revolving around like maybe women in tech that you want to mention? Well,

Speaker 2 03:05

Well, I think this is a trend. Overall, I'm specifically interested in how it plays out in tech, but watching women claiming their motherhood we've gone from, don't mention that you took a break from the workforce to raise a family to leading with that there's choices on LinkedIn. Now, that's like, if you want to put in your, I think one is called the pregnancy, pause, the one to put in the time that you spent, here's actual icon that you can use and accompany so that it comes up as a company. And I've had

people who've used it say, you know, actually, the interviewer said to me, Oh, I hadn't heard of this company, and then come to realise that it's a company that gives women the opportunity to say, I took a break from the workforce, but I did not take a break. And the work that I was doing is directly relatable to the tasks that you're asking me to do here. And here's how a colleague of mine, who's a coach, also in the boot camp space says, Well, you know what they say, if you want to get something done, ask a busy mom. Yeah. And technology changes quickly. Children change a lot faster, right. So something that you knew six weeks later toss it out. You gotta come up with a whole new process. Products, languages, literally. So I'm excited to see that trend. Oh, what do you think are the main like institutional gatekeepers that are clearly like filtering women out from like STEM jobs for the stem industry? I found this fascinating because I when I work with my clients and students, again and again, and again, we come back to negotiation, right salary negotiation, and I hear a lot. Well, I don't know how to negotiate or I'm not good at that. All right. And a lot of times in curriculum that'll kind of come at the end. We're looking at the job search and negotiation comes at the end. I love to flip that on its head and say it comes at the beginning. Because the first words out of your mout, right, the first words off the page and whatever correspondents email letter resume, have got to show your professional value proposition. But if women have been socialised not to do that, because they don't want to upset the balance, and men have been socialised to absolutely get in there. Right, throw it down, and let's let's compete and find out who's the best, then women are at a disadvantage with that socialisation. And what I'm really interested in is, if that's the case, how can women use that to their advantage? Because what's the flip side of that? Women have to be good listeners, you have to pay attention to all types of who is the alpha check, right? What is the language in this group? What are the secrets in this group? And to really, then I turn that around for those that are like really not comfortable, they think it's bragging to talk about themselves, to turn it around and say, Okay, well, what are the skills that that you have honed? And how can you then lead with that? You're incredible at active listening, you're incredible at conflict resolution? I think there's a whole list of of skills that come out of that. But yeah, so as far as an institution, I think that's what that's what can hold us back.

Speaker 1 06:17

Do you think boot camps have affected like the trajectory upwards and making it like less discriminatory towards women?

Speaker 2 06:25

I think there's less barriers to getting in, there's less gatekeepers, right. So I think there's some freedom in that. And I mean, I'd have to think back like anecdotally, to the CES programmes that I've seen, and what's the what's the statistics on how many women are enrolled in those from, again, anecdotally, I can say that it's very male dominant. But I think that offers a freedom. It also offers a flexibility, which I think is interesting. And Gallup a couple of years ago, I think 21 had an article read some research they've done about, like, what, what's bringing women to work? And out of the questions that they asked what scored the highest for women was work life balance. And I think what boot camps offer is that flexibility to make work life balance in the work, in this case being education. But to make that more possible. I don't know how many times actually, in the past couple of years, I've been talking to somebody, a woman, and she says something like, oh, yeah, well, I'm having the baby next week. And I've like, what, what?

Speaker 1 07:36

Would you say that like the Big Five like alphabet, Amazon Mehta, or big tech in general, like hire differently than, let's say, a middle sized company, or startups?

Speaker 2 07:46

I was actually just talking to someone at Android. I was asking Where where's the difference in between, like entry level, and the recruitment process for like, mid to senior. And it was so interesting, I get this response all the time, when I asked people if it's a big company, or medium or the smaller, what's the thing that you're looking for? Like, what's that thing that you're like, Ah, I cannot find anyone to do this thing. And it always comes down to communication skills. Oh, my God, that's interesting. The thing you will find on any job description, ever. They all say communication skills. Have you seen some companies, tech companies specifically that are better with gender representation? Oh, I have. Because I have clients and students that really run the gamut from transgender very out, not out. I will say others. Okay, I think we all are other somewhere. Yeah. And I tend to work with people who are other and layers of other or multiple other, right? So for instance, women of colour who are gay, like there's an intersection there, right, but I call it other. So I have seen companies big and small, and nothing really stands out that I'm like, Oh, if you want diversity, I think, I mean, you can obviously tell like, once you start talking to the people of the company, you can see if they're diverse or not, you know. That's a great thing about LinkedIn, you know, you see if you see a whole bunch of dudes and suits, and that's it, well, guess what they're, you know, but and maybe that really aligns with your core values there. So I invite everybody to really investigate and research and find out what is a day in the life of that place. I haven't given this guidance in a while because it's a lot of remote and virtual work. But I used to say, as I used to do this myself, it's like when you're really interested in a company, go there, go to the location, hang out outside. When everyone breaks for lunch, go to the place where they go for lunch and observe. Right, you're gonna learn a lot more. Where do they hang out? Yeah. If everybody's right into a bar, yeah. At two o'clock in the afternoon, and that's not how you roll. You know, maybe you can look at the the marketing all you want, but if you see what the actual life is like at the company, so I asked everyone to like look at the social media feeds fine. If somebody wrote posted an article on Medium go read it, you know, look at their LinkedIn profiles, look at the groups, really ask yourself like what, what is the environment? And it might actually it might surprise you where you find yourself to be comfortable that you may not have thought.

Speaker 1 10:29

As far as approachability Are there any areas in tech that have more women than men?

Speaker 2 10:34

I will say I do tend to see. So from from my point of view, I see more women in UI UX. in product design, I I did see a fair share of of women in cybersecurity, I will say I did notice that t hey were not American. That may have been specific to the company. But I did notice that there seemed to be very European, Asian and African population there. Yeah, but I definitely have noticed before that, that, especially UI UX I saw a lot of well, I mean, with the pandemic, I definitely saw an increase in people coming from health care, a lot of time that was then nurses, which traditionally is very populated by women, although I will say it's now that that's, that's not necessarily the case, right? You're gonna walk into a situation and find a man identifying him as himself as a nurse as much as we will women. But I

did notice there was like, the more front end of things seemed to be a came into contact with more women as opposed to like the back end of things. What are some challenges that women have faced on getting an interview, I think that hurdle is like the funnel, I tell everybody, I'm like, it's just like a sales funnel, it's an interview, the more you got going in, the more you're going to have coming out. So you really got to let go of the preconceived notion of like cherry picking. Unless you're really good at the cherry picking. There's a phrase that I hear it coming up again, and again, and again. And I haven't heard it. I've heard it more in the past couple of years that I've heard in, kind of like our career, and that's people pleasing. And people grabbing on to this. And I hear it a lot from women, like I'm a people pleaser. And I always want to dig into that and say it's so when you're introducing yourself, or when you're worried about introducing yourself, right, we'll get to that block of like, alright, I see that you only contacted like two people to have an informational to ask them like how it is they got in their role, and oh, well, I don't want to bother people or I don't want to, you know, I don't want to like that becomes a barrier, right? And when we get into it, it comes back to a lot of times this idea of like, oh, well, I don't know what to say, to be the perfect counterpart in the conversation. And this comes from, oh, this comes from a colleague or named Nina Dibner. She runs a company called power tools. And she said, women are socialised to get the the mate, right. There's the perfect mate, and go through extraordinary measures and spend a lot of money on extraordinary products to make sure that we can get that one person, right. But men are socialised to fail, you're going to crash and burn, right? It's almost a joke, right? You got yet your wing man, you're going to crash and burn, you're going to tell the tales, right until you find that one. And then also, when you find that one, if that person is saying, No, you know, it's the chase. It's the whole point of the chase. And I, when I heard that, I thought, wow, so in order, there's such anxiety about just connecting with somebody and saying, Hey, I saw that you had a fascinating journey. I wonder if you have 20 minutes to talk, you know, or going up to somebody an event and saying, Hi, you're here. I'm here. So what brought you here? Right, that barrier of like, I have to find someone actually said to me, I get anxiety when I go to a networking event? Because how do I know which one is the person that's going to help me? You don't! You never know. I worked in speech debate. I saw hundreds of competitors in a weekend. And I started to notice the girls, we'd ask them to introduce their names. And they would Hi I'm sure on and it was an up inflection. And I thought was going on there at the boys, you know, my name is Will you know, I probably should have let you do that. But I thought what's going on there? And I thought wow, even with the sound of our introduction, we are asking to be accepted. And I decided to experiment and to tell the girls on my team and myself I said let's try introducing ourselves with a down inflection and see what happens. And it was it was an interesting reaction. I got I probably went a little too far. I was like Hi, I'm Sharon. Like, oh, she's angry. She's very mad but we tried to mirror the boys to see like what was what was the reaction? So I'm those kinds of things fascinate me like both in the cerebral of like what's going on? What's the data, but then the somatic of like, what we actually trained to do in our bodies and with our voices that reinforce these narratives that were, you know, their cultural that came from our families, but we carry around with them. And when we repeat them all day, every day, and then we want to unravel them, like we have so much work to do. So what I really like to do when I work with people is look at little ways that we can chip away at that. And so that it's not such a heavy lift. In the moment when when is actually in an interview, or talking about habits. Are there some trends that women usually go about, like when they apply for jobs? Like maybe like, they don't apply it, they don't fully qualify for that strenuous list of excellent question. Well, so when I first came to New York City, our our job board was a newspaper, and it came out on Wednesday. So you'd see actors clamouring to the news stance. On

Wednesday mornings, if there was one place in the village that put it out Tuesday night. So my friend and I would go and get it, you know, to get a headstart. And I remember sitting with him one night, and I was going through the paper, and I was circling the things that I thought I aligned with right roles that I thought I could play, he was going through the paper, and he was crossing off the stuff that he wasn't interested in. And I remember thinking in that moment, something is going on here. I, I don't know what I'm observing, but I think I'm looking at this the wrong way. And then years later, I find out that the percentage of a job description that the average woman says, Okay, I'm going to proceed. It's between 95 and 100%. The average man 60%. So what I had witnessed years before was him like, yep, nope, yep, no, and really the mindset of like, I'm going to go for what I can other stuff I'm not going to focus on. And I just remember, he had like this bulk of opportunities, and I had like, two.

Speaker 1 16:58

Let's talk about that. I mean, I know we said earlier, like, women in tech, over the last think it was 50 years, maybe increase from eight to 27%. So I'm gonna fact check this. But how about the pay gap? Is that growing, closing? Should I say.

Speaker 2 17:14

This is a pet peeve of mine, I think I get, I get really unpopular, but I wanted to challenge everyone I'm like, you know, when things are gonna change is when we put our salaries in our email block in our signature block, when your salary is there, like we're busy declaring, like our title, our identities, and like, but when we start to see the money, and it's transparent, yeah, that's when things are going to change. Yeah. And I think to those, there's those videos, we all have to watch coming into companies about, like, you know, what, what's discrimination? Or what's microaggressions? In the office or whatever. And I always noticed that like, the more often than not, although I have noticed that now the bad guy, right, is different people from different others, right. But previously, I was like, are we not going to discuss that we just watch this example of the 35 year old white guy, inadvertently saying something that was a microaggression? And now we're learning how we deal with it within state legal standards, right? But are we going to discuss the fact that statistics, data, all the information say that he's making more than everybody else? So he thinks he owns the place? Like, why? Why are we not making this correlation? So I think as long as we're still hearing these stories of like, these inner inner workplaces, whatever want to call them misunderstandings, I think we're still snowing like, Well, why is that? Why did everybody show up today? And somebody feels totally put upon? I have seen some situations where women have found out like, now that companies are like, a little bit more transparent, right? Yeah, I say a little bit more, because come on now. Not everybody's using the same, it's very opaque, some people's transparency, right. But if flat out found out and set, like I have the same role, what happened? And there's tonnes of statistics about how that then, like, plays out over a lifetime? Yeah. And then I go back to what I was saying about negotiation and where negotiation starts, and how in control women are of their professional value proposition and where it where it starts, and having that clarity about what are those tools that you are bringing to the table? How are you unique, so I have hope, I have hope that those will level out. I think the other thing we're going to see is like a talk to a year ago, someone who actually runs an agency that's like agents, actors have agents, you know, and this is for people in tech to have agents. And he specifically said, like, I think we're gonna see tech salaries starting to come back down to the planet, right. They've been exorbitant. So I'm wondering if that will help.

Speaker 1 20:02

Could you give some advice for women maybe looking to break into tech or maybe even interviewing now from every step of the way from learning maybe a specific niche in tech to actually working at a company. And just some advice that you would give to, maybe when I'm looking for a job.

Speaker 2 20:19

Absolutely work backwards. This is advice that I got, when I was in undergrad from my mentor. She said, don't recreate the wheel. Somebody has had success doing what you want to do. And the more people that you find that have had that success for that match what your idea of success is, absorb their, their failures and successes, like use them as stepping stones. So working backwards, what's your long game? What's a goal? You know, what is when you're I do this with my clients, we do a 10 year vision, but I we're our bonus question is at when you're at, what do you want to say you did? Because when you pick the goal, and you look at where you are now, well, then you can make really informed decisions about what steps you need to take to get there. And no, right? No, wrong. I mean, yes, there's some things that that are wrong. There's some decisions. There's some ways about going about things that don't work, but I say no, right and wrong. Because I think every single person I have met introduces themselves by saying, Well, I've had a very non traditional career path. Okay. Everybody's had a non traditional career path, right? No, right? No, wrong. Yeah. What skills? Do you need to sit in the chair that you want to sit in? You can get them in many different ways. I remember talking to person who is shifting into UI UX. And she said, Well, I don't you know, this is also new to me. What's your background choreographer for like 15 years? And I said, Hold up. So you spend your time talking to the the tech, the production staff, talking to the dancers, you're very specific about what they do their body movements and everything. I said, now, aren't you just telling the code where to go? And she thought, oh, I said, You were user experience for the audience. Isn't that user experience? As you're setting up your wireframe? Oh, you know, so don't discount anything. But how you make those decisions about what to pay attention to what not to pick that guiding star, put the goal out there so that all questions answer to that, that core purpose. And that's really, that's my advice to anybody but definitely the women.

Speaker 1 22:38

Thanks to Sharahn McClung for sharing her insights, the road to equity and inclusion in tech is an ongoing journey, one that is continuing to evolve to look at the topic from a different angle, and the next episode will talk to Deena a recent TripleTen graduate and mother of three, she will share her story of breaking the tech stay tuned. This podcast was brought to you by libo/libo studio in partnership with TripleTen New episodes are coming out every Thursday. In the meantime, the tripleten.com/blog For more career tips.