The XX Factor

How to attract game-changing women to the tech sector

We identified five themes based on the feedback you provided on how to create greater gender parity within the technology space.

Job Description

Job descriptions need to be more gender neutral and incorporate language that is female friendly. This will attract a more gender balanced pool of candidates and not inadvertently be biased towards a particular sex.

Research shows that women are more risk averse and if they can't do all the tasks on a job specification they may be less likely to apply. This is compared to men who may only worry that they can do some but not all of the listed tasks.

Employers should not assume that their job descriptions are fine, they need to be reviewed. This will also include reviewing the interview process with a focus on managing candidate expectations and the experience that they may receive.

Ensure that all tech jobs have a purpose and value behind the work and are linked to the objectives of the business and not just list the specific day-to-day requirements. This will attract more people than those focused primarily on coding. Having and promoting female role models within the company is a great encouragement to potential female applicants, as well as providing forums for women to find their voice.

Education

A government initiative to fund work places within tech companies with limited budgets would be very beneficial for both disadvantaged people and tech SMEs. This would be of most value to young people who typically struggle more to achieve the same level of entrance into the tech world.

Having large, well known businesses sponsor science fairs at schools and competitions with both male and female winners would be a very high-profile and worthwhile way to raise interest and attract female applicants. This would couple well with better career advice for young people, which would help encourage females into tech roles. Aptitude tests steering people towards exploring careers in tech would do a similar thing.

Educating and encouraging women to be more assertive and empowered in the workplace, would be very effective at nurturing those who wish to thrive and get ahead. Addressing the gender imbalance at a young age provides a good foundation for going forward.

Popular social media app companies can do more in the UK to engage with their young users to promote what technology, research and skilled people were needed to create their apps. This would encourage sector interest and can work well in tandem if they also played an active role in providing career advice in schools and universities. Some are very good at this already, but most are not. These two methods could cause much larger numbers of young people to enter the tech space.

Finding a way to improve the supply of women moving from education into technology is of paramount importance.

Unconscious bias: challenging perceptions of both external recruiters and internal HR towards returning mothers to work will also support a more diverse workforce.

Collaboration

Making men part of the solution is a great way to both combat part of the problem and have more people working on bringing a resolution to gender imbalance. It is not just women who feel 'put off' by some roles, so encouraging men to take on more traditional female roles (for example midwife, childcare assistant, etc.) is a good way to break down stereotypical barriers.

Finding a way to create advocates for female employees is another major step which can be done on a range of scales both in and out of the workplace. Employers need to be proactive in ensuring these advocates are seen, heard and most importantly, supported in making change happen.

Policy

Does a company's HR policy align with their drive to promote equality and a more balanced workforce? Promoting flexibility should be a target for companies of all sizes. For women going on maternity leave, is her work and potential return to work being managed efficiently and with understanding?

Are companies making the most of remote working and making it accessible to all?

A strategy of fairness and equality for both men and women can set the foundations early on in a person's career, so that it is the norm going forward. An acknowledgement of overtime for part-timers such as an app or time card is also a good way to keep things equal, in addition to a flexible working environment.

Help and advice with life planning such as where employees can find local childcare services are a great way to promote equality in the workplace, and is also a good part of letting women know that a healthy work/life balance is important.

More job sharing in the sector and flexible working for all employees is another step forward for equality. Better paternity policies are also a good method.

Mentoring

Use the role of a mentor to challenge perceptions and challenge norms to breaks down barriers to change. There needs to also be greater support for those changing from non-tech to tech roles and an encouragement for Open University-esque retraining days at school or work.

Offering a 'parent mentor' instead of or as well as a professional mentor also provides vital soft skills. Businesses should try and ensure that there is a mixed pool of male and female mentors which will encourage a diverse range of mentees.

About Empiric

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