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3 ways women can shape the future of tech

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By Julie Elberfeld, senior vice president of shared technology at Capital One

We've all seen the headlines about women leaving the tech industry. They're true, but they are also only part of the story. Roughly 56% of women leave the technology industry by the mid-level point in their careers, according to a [2008 Center for Work–Life Policy study](#). These women are who I call “pipeline victims,” driven out of a promising career because of barriers like sexism and advancement difficulties. Their stories are

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real. Their experiences are valid. And their challenges deserve amplification.

My question is: What about the other 44% who stay in tech?

The laser focus on departures can have an undue effect of scaring off younger women and future generations from staying or pursuing an otherwise great career choice. There are incredible women technologists across the industry who are creating, making, innovating, excelling – and are role models who can shape the future of tech if we tell their stories.



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At Capital One where I lead a complex portion of our cloud technology journey, I am inspired by the many women technologists and allies thriving in tech positions. As we continue in a digital revolution, the technology industry is in critical need of diverse talent that will elevate team effectiveness and mitigate unintended bias in machine-learning driven products. With a continued spotlight on the significant issues facing our country's technology workforce, we are investing in local and national initiatives to help girls and women in all stages in their technological journey.

As sustained awareness about the lack of diversity in tech takes the form of viral hashtags, online petitions, and working groups, it heartens me to know there are dedicated forums — like the Grace Hopper Celebration of Women in Computing this month — that elevate women in tech and cultivate a culture of role-modeling for the next generation. The incredible growth of that event — by thousands each year — is a testament to the need for forums for women in tech to connect and thrive.

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Here are three pieces of advice for women in tech:

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Get in and stay in

As it stands, many professional industries fail to reflect the diversity of the United States. Within technology, women make up half of the college-aged population, but they earn only 18% of Bachelor's degrees in the computer sciences, according to a collaborative [2018 study](#) from the Kapor Center, Arizona State University, and Pivotal Ventures. While women of color make up 39% of the female-identified population in the United States, the same study revealed another shocking discrepancy: Women of color make up less than 10% of all Bachelor's degrees earned in computing.

These stats need to change and the change can begin right here. Your presence alone as a female technologist creates natural role modeling. That's not to add additional pressure to what you're likely already feeling — it's not all on you, but it is on *us*. That's why community is so important to succeeding in tech. Surrounding yourself with peers and allies who share your passion and push for equality is critical. The more we talk about diversity and inclusion at work or at school, the more comfortable people around us will feel using inclusive language and asking new questions. By being a part of the 44% who stay in tech, we can keep moving that number higher and change the perception of who belongs in tech.



Do meaningful work

To truly keep doing your best work, choose and ask for meaningful assignments. Present equal opportunities to your coworkers and teams to be visible and work on meaningful projects as well. People who commit to fulfilling projects are more likely to stay engaged, and happier people are 12% more productive, a 2015 [University of Warwick study found](#). Knowing that you're a meaningful member of a team can also generate better team outcomes. The best groups include people with greater “[social sensitivity](#),” or individuals who are good at reading between the lines and focusing on non-verbal cues. Women [score higher](#) on this metric of emotional intelligence and groups with more women have better team dynamics.

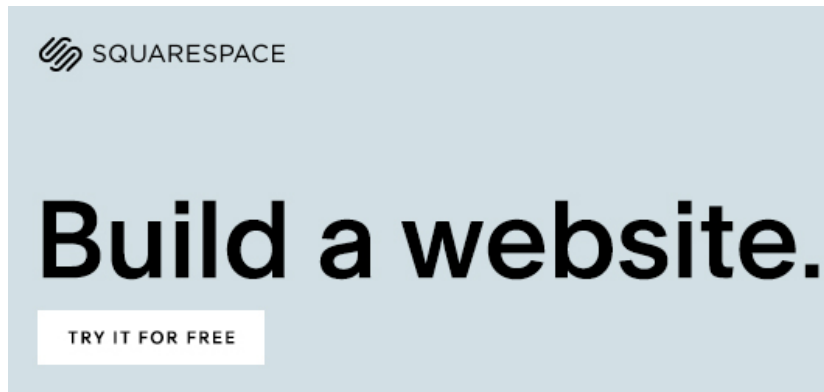
Leading diversity initiatives is incredibly rewarding work. But when you have challenges, look to your support network for encouragement. Surround yourself with positive people who believe in you and reinforce your value and abilities. Ultimately, your amazing work will make a difference in an industry so in need of diversity. We are making progress, even if at times it may seem incremental.

Find the peers and leaders who can amplify your voice

When you return to work from a conference that invigorates you, like the Grace Hopper Celebration, use that as motivation to implement new practices in your workplace. Pull up with your team to share takeaways and use the conference learnings as a starting point to bring up important issues. Make the people in your life aware that diversity and inclusion is everyone's challenge to solve. Invite and empower them to join your efforts.

If you want to start a new diversity initiative at your company, identify senior executives who will support you and elevate your ideas. When two software engineers, Kaylyn Gibilterra and Katie Thompson, came into my office to talk about the declining representation

of women in technology, they put forth challenges and opportunities that we could address in the short term. That one meeting, though, turned into a working group, which developed into an enterprise-wide committee, an allies program, and then local chapters at Capital One offices across the country and internationally. Now, we have a movement of women technologists and allies throughout the company.



I consider myself lucky that diversity and inclusion initiatives make up half of my full-time job as a senior vice president, and I believe it is critical for technology executives to have an intense focus on D&I efforts — in partnership with and supported by, but not exclusively driven by, the Human Resources department. At Capital One, inclusive practices embedded in the company culture provide a strong foundation for our tech teams to solve for higher level and longer term challenges. I'm committed to creating sustainable programs that ensure diverse perspectives shape the future of the technology industry.

As a woman technologist, being who you are and doing what you're doing at this time in history is critical to ensure a more robust, skilled, and representative workforce for the future. Whether you realize it or not, you are a positive role model for women and men to show them what the face of technology looks like.

[Learn more about Capital One's commitment to women in technology.](#)

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