

# NEVER GIVE UP:

## The Future of Tech Leadership is in Our Hands

The phrase “Women in Tech” used to mean simply that—women finding meaningful and challenging careers in the technology industry. But, an extraordinary series of articles about what it’s like to be a woman in the technology industry published this year may serve to discourage smart, capable young women from one of the most important careers in any industry—and women already in the sector may wonder if sticking it out is worth the misery and high emotional toll. I urge you: Please don’t stop believing!

Such articles are wounding for all women in technology and those planning for careers in the industry. *The Atlantic’s* “Why is Silicon Valley So Awful to Women?” revealed the blunt differences in how senior management in technology firms treats men and women employees. Like secretaries in the *Mad Men* era, women were expected to fetch coffee and take notes in meetings, during which men regularly interrupted them.

Several brave female tech entrepreneurs spoke out about the predatory behaviors of male venture capital investors and executives, in *The New York Times’* “Women in Tech Speak Frankly on Culture of Harassment.” The women brought their concerns to the attention of the investors’ firms and were advised to play them down. **This “massive imbalance of power,” the newspaper stated, makes it difficult for women “to push back against inappropriate behavior.”**

Then, the notorious memo by a male Google engineer went viral, asserting the reason there were few women in technical positions in the tech industry was because of their biological differences—not discrimination. Called “Google’s Ideological Echo Chamber,” the anti-diversity memo asserted that women were less interested in high-stress jobs because they were prone to anxiety and lacked the biological drive to hold high-status positions.

Has the time come for us to call it a day? Sadly, this has been the decision of far too many women in tech. **An astonishing 56 percent of technical women have quit their jobs in mid-career, according to the Anita Borg Institute.** This startling statistic suggests that a job in the industry may be exciting and promising at the outset, but after several years the truth sets in. Women are supposedly second-class to men, so why bother?

Here’s why. Because women’s intellectual vigor, empathy and ability to listen with both sides of the brain are needed to lead today’s diverse, inclusive tech workforce. Let the men have their boys’ clubs and insensitive jokes. **Women in tech have all the requisite abilities and biology to be truly human and modern leaders.** There is a clear and growing need today for women to lead a unified workforce of people increasingly interested in self-directing their career arcs, work-life balance, and work assignments, not to mention self-identifying their sexual preference and gender. No one is more prepared than women to take on the responsibility.



So put aside the downbeat articles (but don't ignore them). Focus instead on the positives—because there are many. Gallup, for instance, reported that **both male and female employees are more engaged in their work when women manage and lead them.** Their higher levels of engagement fuel such crucial performance metrics as lower absenteeism and turnover rates, and higher productivity and profits. "Engagement is the most important factor for empowering individuals, teams, and organizations to perform with excellence," the respected polling organization stated. And women are better at achieving it.

Women are indistinguishable from men in regard to key leadership traits such as intelligence and innovativeness, yet surpass men when it comes to skills of compassion and organization, according to a survey by the [Pew Research Center](#). **At Ultimate, where 43% of managers are women, we are positioned as a leader in all major industry vendor evaluations. Coincidence? I think not!** Women's inimitable characteristics lift employee engagement to enhance operational efficiency and business growth. In other words, women have what it takes to lead in any industry sector, tech included.

**Bold companies that want to level the playing field must lead the change.** For one thing, make sure the people developing your products mirror the population they're developing them for! Promote women, create women's networks so women can elevate one another, and invest in them as leaders. Provide equal parental leave to parents of all genders. Offer on-site facilities for women and men to help care for babies and young children. Don't adversely judge women for working at home more than male counterparts. As a recent Yale-sponsored study underscored, time at the office is not a major contributor to productivity. In fact, it's a "cheap proxy" by which to evaluate people, "costly not only to women, but also to men who may prefer a better career-family or work-life balance," the study states.

**No one would dispute that women in tech confront bias and worse. The key is not to give up or let it get the best of you.**



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Cecile Alper-Leroux is the Vice President of human capital management (HCM) innovation at Ultimate Software. **She frequently speaks and writes about people and technology in a work context.**

An economic anthropologist and committed advocate for women in technology, Cecile understands the importance of having a truly representative workforce within organizations and helping leaders and HR professionals effectively respond to evolving workplace dynamics, trends, and opportunities.

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- The Forrester Wave™: SaaS Human Resource Management Systems, Q3 2017
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