

Why skill-based mentorship is the need of the hour to advance women in tech

Mentorship has traditionally been defined as a formal, reciprocal relationship between an advance-career and an early-career professional in a work setting. Many Fortune 500 companies offer mentoring programs (Boeing, Caterpillar and Bain and Company are just a few, according to Together); many medium and smaller-sized companies still do not have access to any such initiatives, even today.

Per the [U.S. Department of Labor](#), in the 1920s, women made up about 20% of the labor force in the U.S. Today, women make up about 47% of the workforce. We have seen signs of progress in women's representation — but even today, sadly, the tech sector lags. According to a [2020 report](#) from Statista, women make up between 28% (Microsoft) and 42% (Amazon) of the total workforce at America's largest tech companies, otherwise known as the GAFAM (Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon and Microsoft) group. Having inaccessible and fewer mentorship opportunities for women in tech could mean fewer opportunities to

advance into leadership roles, which could widen the gap and contribute to pay disparities and noninclusive innovation.

Sadly, problems like these may only be exacerbated by the pandemic. As the whole world faces unprecedented challenges, women in particular are bearing many of the economic impacts of COVID-19. Per the 2020 McKinsey & Company Women in the Workplace report, more than one in four women are considering “downshifting” their careers or leaving the workforce due to the pandemic. One way of reengaging women and bringing them back into the workforce is to make mentorship available and accessible. Many tech communities, like Girls Who Code, Barclays RISE and my company, Products by Women, offer such accessible programs. Listed below are a few benefits of mentorship:

Mentee

- Gain advice and support from experts.
- Build a strong professional network.
- Learn from the experiences of others.
- Gain insight into the next stage of your life or career.
- Become more empowered to make decisions.
- Identify goals and establish a sense of direction.

Mentor

- Gain social recognition for your skills and experience.
- Advance and practice your leadership and management skills.
- Enhance your profile and CV.
- Benefit from a sense of fulfilment.
- Increase your confidence and motivation.
- Grow a circle of friends and network.

So, what is skill-based mentorship?

Skill-based mentorship is often measurable and outcomes-based. This type of mentorship's sole objective is to help, coach and support mentees in developing a skill that can help them advance in their career or life. Skill-based mentorship could involve a one-hour session or a long-term commitment and could range from learning how to code to practicing public speaking skills. It depends on the goals that the mentor and mentee set. [Per LinkedIn](#), below are some of the latest in-demand hard and soft skills: *Soft Skills* 1. Creativity 2. Persuasion 3. Collaboration 4. Adaptability 5. Emotional intelligence

Hard Skills 1. Blockchain 2. Cloud computing 3. Analytical reasoning 4. Artificial intelligence 5. UX design

If there is one thing that will be true after the pandemic, I think it will be the fact that women will make up a large portion of the population that holds remote jobs. Possessing technical skills can help women to have flexible jobs, earn higher wages, and reduce the gender gap that still exists today. [Per Dice's 2020 tech salary report](#) (download required), in 2019, the average U.S. annual salary in the technology industry was \$94,000, but women are still behind in making comparable wages to men. According to a [2019 Hired report](#), women are typically offered 3% less than men for the same job at the same company.

There is a larger problem here that we need to address — the gender inequality in tech at the leadership level can have a domino effect. Furthermore, while we are moving in the right direction, many say that Silicon Valley possesses the “bro culture” even today. IDC research ([via CIO](#)) suggests that women may often be the “only ones” at the decision-making table. The question we need to ask each other is, “Can a female analyst joining a business unit today see a fellow woman rising in the ranks and leading the business?” There is still an enormous gap, and the fact is that young girls and women in their early careers are likely going to see very few role models they can model their careers after. Perhaps this will deter them from going after what could be a fulfilling and lucrative career path.

How can you be an effective mentor?

First and foremost, focus on establishing a deep trust-based relationship with your mentee — sometimes this happens instantaneously, sometimes it takes longer and sometimes there is no connection, and that's okay. Defining the nature of your relationship upfront is very important. For example, understand if they are seeking guidance, looking to learn a new skill, or perhaps something else. It's important to discuss and confirm goals and objectives and then elaborate on the outcomes, action items and other details in the initial few

meetings. Additionally, your role as a mentor is to offer constructive feedback and help mentees achieve their goals. In other words, their success is your success. Please stay away from decision-making and instead build an environment that leads them in the right direction. As a good mentor, you must perfect the art of listening and empathising to unleash the mentee's full potential. Yes, this could sometimes mean asking the mentee difficult questions you may not know the answer to. Perhaps you can work on solutions and find answers together.

This article was originally published on [ParlayMe](#).

[Naimeesha Murthy](#), Founder @ Products by Women | Early-stage Start-up Advisor & Mentor - Product & Marketing.

Naimeesha is the Founder at [ProductsbyWomen.com](#) - a skill-based platform that helps women identify gaps in their skills and recommends suitable training opportunities, mentorship, and best-fit jobs to accelerate their career in innovation and tech. Naimeesha also serves as an advisor and an early-stage start-up mentor and investor.

Article by NAIMEESHA MURTHY