

# Edtech Cypher paves the way for working mothers and coding kids

The demand to employ those who excel at coding continues to rise. While most of us didn't get even a taste for coding at school, Elizabeth Tweeddale, CEO and founder of Cypher, wants to change that for future generations.

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## What is Cypher?

Throughout my life, I've always been interested in technology. At university, I was the only woman in the computer science society and captain of cheerleading, which made me question why other women don't have the same interests as me.

This is one of the main reasons I started Cypher. To encourage more girls into technology, our approach is simple: we want coding to be accessible to all children, regardless of what hobbies are. We engage children through creative themes and real world examples to spark their imaginations and get them excited about learning to code.

Pre-COVID, we hosted our coding camps in person across the holidays and as after school clubs. However, due to the pandemic, we had to commit to 100% online teaching and now run live online classes. These have been incredibly

successful, with camps selling out in under 48 hours of release. Going online has allowed us to expand both nationally and internationally, faster than we could have done so only in person.

A high percentage of our customers are based on recommendations, something that I am very proud of. Apart from this, we work with a number of schools to reach new students, and have an incredible marketing team who have implemented crucial e-commerce strategies to increase awareness of Cypher across all communications channels.

## Why do you think it is important that children learn to code?

Before I started Cypher, I used to work in the architecture field. My team specialized in using computer coding to design buildings, and many of my colleagues had to teach themselves how to code with little base understanding of how computer science actually works. They often ran into problems because they didn't have the basic understanding of computational thinking or key foundations for coding.

If my colleagues had a base foundation in computer science, they would have been able to have a much more open minded and productive approach to the challenges in architecture.

*This made me question, why don't children get taught coding early on?*

Cypher was born through my idea to inspire kids as young as five to learn to code, so that the skills learnt in computer science would be second nature to them.

I believe coding is a crucial part of each child's educational journey, equipping them for success and inspiring them to do great things. In addition, with so many fields now harnessed technology like AI and coding, and in order for children to succeed in the working world, they need to learn the fundamentals of computer science early on.

# Why did you decide to actively seek to recruit working mothers?

In the first instance, I began by hiring my friends who were mothers themselves; those who were looking to get back into work and back onto the career ladder. Yet, as time passed, it became clear that recruiting mothers into the business was advantageous; we were able to reach a wide pool of talent from different mother networks through recommendations.

It is down to the recommendations from different mother networks that makes the recruitment process so successful. Recruiting working mothers using the standard recruitment processes is much more of a difficult process.

# What benefits do working mothers bring to Cypher?

Ultimately, working mothers bring a wealth of knowledge of children and a passion for education, all stemming from their experiences and investment of their own children's lives. With them, they bring different views to the table and a host of experience from different fields.

From a business perspective, they can contribute a wealth of knowledge that is more affordable at a part-time rate as opposed to full-time. Above all, it is the relatability that they bring from their own children's lives and is thus reflected in the work that they do at Cypher.

# What are your personal experiences of working as a mother?

Frankly, being a working mum is tough and juggling work and home life over the course of the pandemic hasn't been easy. Now homeschooling is over and the kids are back at school, the pressure has been relieved a bit and for that I am grateful. 'Mum guilt' is a real thing and I often feel like I have to do it all. I'm lucky that I have a very supportive husband: he is always there to help me make a plan or pick up the kids when I've got too much on my plate.

For me, my biggest achievement has been developing a career alongside raising a family. I completed my Masters when I had my first child, and had my third whilst scaling Cypher in 2018. When I look at my peers, most of them had their kids after their careers, so I feel blessed that I've been able to do both at the same time. My kids have grown up with me alongside, as I've had to

navigate the business world and be an entrepreneur.

Throughout the entirety of my career, my children have been extremely involved. I took part in interviews when my child was just five days old, I completed my Masters degree and presented my dissertation with my two-week old child, and my child accompanied me in the office every day until she was seven months old.

*Now, my 12 year old son runs our TikTok channel and has created our Minecraft Club.*

Including my children has brought me some degree of equilibrium to my professional life and I believe that my career is stronger having built it around them.

## What provisions can companies make to facilitate working mothers to confidently be part of their workforce?

There are a number of ways that companies can ensure working mothers feel confidently part of the workforce. The overarching theme is understanding, and all other provisions fall under this bracket.

A mutual understanding of people's dedicated hours, whether that be part time or full time is crucial within the team, and knowing and understanding colleagues' schedules can ensure that teammates effectively plan collaboration time and produce effective work when teams do come together.

In our case, working mothers' children attend Cypher courses so the provision of childcare would also be helpful and flexibility is key. Finally, providing the opportunity for socialising with others in the workplace is essential in making coming to work an enjoyable experience, as well as providing socialising time that may not be accessed outside of work due to busy schedules. In turn, this will build up morale and motivation of working mothers to succeed within the company.

# What are your aspirations for Cypher in 2021 and beyond?

We experienced exponential growth following our pivot to 100% online as a result of the pandemic. As a result of our success, we expanded into the US market last year, where we launched our offering on the East Coast. As we continue to grow this year, I'd love to reach more children across the globe as we continue with our expansion further across the US and Middle East.

Whilst expanding our online global reach, we will also be creating more relevant content to children in different regions and education systems. Whilst continuing with our expansion, we have started a new round of investment to support our ambitious growth plans. In addition to this, we are currently in discussions with various corporate partners to help scale our offering and support their CSR plans.

*Elizabeth Tweedale is CEO and founder of Cypher.*

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