



Women in Technology:

Ambition and Advancement

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 **the glasshammer**
smart women in numbers



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We would like to thank our sponsors and the readers of The Glass Hammer for their candid and detailed responses to our Women in Technology survey.

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Advancing Women in Tech

As Founder and CEO of The Glass Hammer and Evolved Employer, I'm pleased to present our first ever white paper – and this one tackles an interesting issue. Where are the women in IT?

What brought this topic to my attention was the report “Women in IT: The Facts” by the National Center for Women & Information Technology. The research showed that the percentage of computer-related jobs held by women has declined over the past two decades, from 36% in 1991, to just above 25% in 2008.

That same report also showed that fewer women are studying computer science than ever (in 1985, women earned 37% of computer and information science degrees, but fast forward to 2008, when women only earned 18% of those degrees). My initial reaction was disbelief.

But, the facts are the facts.

What is it about technology that leads girls away from the field in the first place? What is the impact of workplace culture on the women who are already there? And why are there so few? Is it a skills issue? Or is it something much deeper? Finally, what are successful women in tech doing right?

The Glass Hammer has a unique audience – our readers are professional women excited about advancing their careers. In search of some answers, we polled a sample of our readers who work on tech teams to find out how they felt about issues like advancement, gender, sponsorship, networking, and more.

And we found that this is an ambitious group of

women. In our sample, 80.23% of our respondents agreed or strongly agreed that promotion was a top priority in the next five years.

The study shows that while women understand the need for building a network and finding a sponsor in order to advance their careers, many women aren't approaching career development in a strategic manner. There are many moving parts when it comes to advancement, and it would be prudent for companies who want to best manage female talent in technology to ensure that programs are visible and appropriate to truly serve the purpose of creating opportunities for under-represented groups.

In this pilot study, you'll see statistics based on the answers to our survey, separated into the broad themes that we felt had the most bearing on career advancement. Breaking the data into these groups illuminated the importance of cultivating a culture in which everyone can thrive. I hope the research will be of use to you on your own diversity and inclusion journey.

Sincerely,



Nicki Gilmour
Founder and CEO
The Glass Hammer
Evolved Employer



Women Working in Technology

At a time when some of the world's largest economies are faltering, and when traditional industries are losing steam, many are turning their eyes to technology as a potential saving grace, in the hope that it will provide the jobs, revenue, and innovation that are so sorely needed.

But technology has its own challenges: namely around attracting and retaining top talent within the industry. And, like other male dominated fields, it faces a particular challenge in the retention of women. Not only are fewer women starting out in this field, but as pointed out by the National Center for Women & Information Technology in the report "Women in IT: The Facts," of the few who enter, many will leave.

There have been tremendous recent efforts on behalf of companies and public partnerships to get girls interested in tech at a young age. But what happens when they get there, and find the field unwelcoming and unwilling to bend to meet their needs? What's more, how can IT thrive *now*, when, as revealed by the NCWIT report, so many of the best and brightest women are fleeing (women in computer-related jobs has dropped from a high of 36% in 1991, to just above 25% in 2008)? As the NCWIT study – and many others – pointed out: "diversity fosters innovation." Studies from Catalyst, Deloitte, McKinsey, and academic sources have proven that diverse teams tend to perform better than homogeneous ones.

The Anita Borg Institute for Women and Technology's 2010 study on senior technical women in IT identified a few key qualities for success – including the ability to be innovative, be assertive, and work long hours. The organization also identified, that for some reason, women in tech are ushered out of technical roles and into management roles much more frequently than men, who more often remain on the individual contributor track. And that *should* be alarming to anyone working in technology. Why are women on a different career track than men when they have the same credentials?

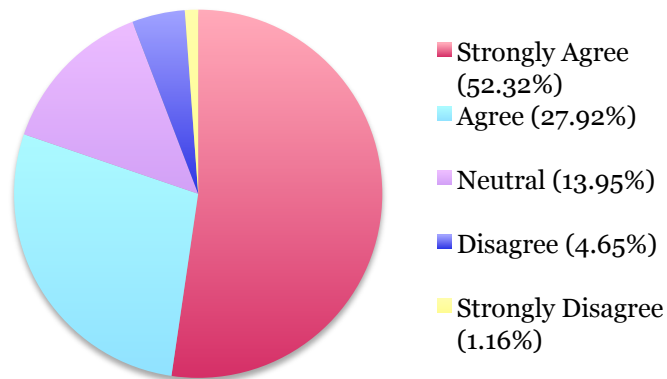
How can the well-documented culture of technology change – not just to make it more enticing to high performing women, but to make the field more innovative, more productive, more valuable to investors, and more beneficial to society at large?

We set out to peer into the culture of IT through a unique window: our own audience in the technology space. The Glass Hammer's readership is made up of high performing women in traditionally male dominated fields – women who have identified themselves as ambitious, conscientious, and determined – and they can provide a telling description of the situation on the ground. We found some interesting facts about the culture of technology, as well as the strategies women are employing to advance their own careers, that can provide some answers to our questions.

Ambition: Definitely Not a Dirty Word

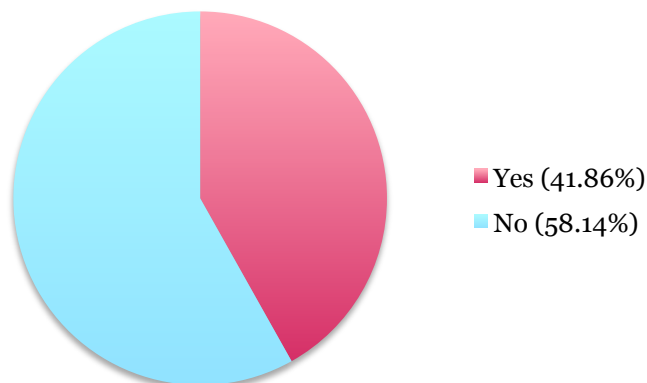
Our survey respondents represented women working on technology teams, mainly within Fortune 500 companies. They hold jobs at every rank. They are a diverse group of women, but one thing was clear about them. They're ambitious. When asked if promotion was a top priority over the next five years, 80.23% agreed or strongly agreed.

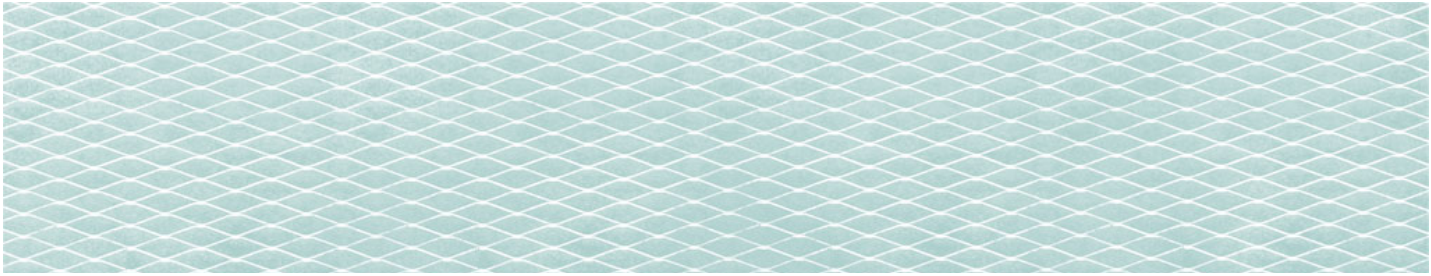
"Promotion is a top priority for me."



Of course, five years is a long time in which to anticipate a promotion. Many of our respondents expected to make a move in a much shorter length of time. According to our survey, almost half (41.86%) said they planned to change jobs in the next year.

"I intend to change jobs in the next year."





A qualitative review of open answers on the subject of career goals also revealed our respondents' attitudes toward ambition and advancement. They were asked, "What would you like to achieve in your career in the next five years?" On average, our respondents discussed ideas like "moving up the ladder" most frequently – more than twice as often as the next most common answer: "becoming a leader." Following leadership, our respondents most frequently expressed desires to hone their job skills and become better managers. Additionally, several women discussed their desire simply to make more money. A few revealing quotes include:

"Become more successful, learn more to acquire an expertise, and move up in the ladder."

"Promotion to Managing Director and drastically increased salary."

"New role that is challenging and provides the opportunity for upward growth - not looking to move up today given balance between personal and professional life."

Most of the woman who responded to our survey are keen to advance their careers and climb the ladder. If these women are representative of other high performing women in the IT field, our data shows that women are not simply "opting out," as some have suggested. Then why are there so few women in the top ranks of technology?

There are a few notable examples of women leading large technology companies – like Meg Whitman at HP, Virginia Rometty at IBM, and Ursula Burns at Xerox. But by and large, there aren't many women at the top in technology and certainly few female Chief Technology Officers to cite, and the same goes for the majority of today's global corporations. Why aren't women breaking through? In the recent report "Women Matter 2010," McKinsey researchers stated that the problem is not at the recruitment level. Most companies are hiring their "fair share" of women – and sometimes even more.

In fact, the study shows, *institutional culture* will have to change for companies to really reach gender balance in the top ranks. The report says, "The projection of historic trends demonstrates that unless prevailing corporate norms and rules for promotion are changed, the growth in female graduate numbers will have a marginal impact on women's representation in executive committees."

A report by the Level Playing Field Institute entitled "The Tilted Playing Field: Hidden Bias in Information Technology Workplaces" concurs. It says, "While gender and racial disparities within the K-16 pipeline are a major issue, the practices, policies, and culture within the sector must not be overlooked, and the underrepresentation in STEM will not be solved without the analyses of subtle or hidden biases in the workplace."

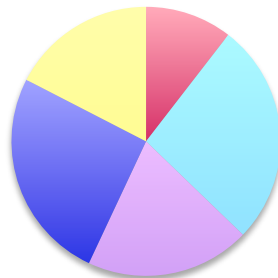
There are plenty of ambitious women in IT striving to reach the top. What is it about the culture of IT that is keeping them from getting there, and how can we change it?

The Impact of Gender on Advancement

Our survey showed the majority of our respondents at every level eager to advance in their careers. Yet the statistics show that women aren't making it through to the top in large numbers in the IT workforce. The Anita Borg Institute identified that women are being pushed or heavily encouraged to go into management – and ushered away from the technical side. Even when they had the same credentials as men, the women in the study reported being treated differently in the workplace – some doors are closed to them, while others are opened more readily. Why is this? How do women in IT feel about gender and advancement?

We asked our respondents whether they have the same chances as men for advancement. The responses were divided. The largest segment (43.02%) either disagreed or strongly disagreed that they had the same opportunities as men. Yet, almost as many respondents (37.21%) agreed or strongly agreed that they had the same chances for advancement. About one-fifth wasn't sure.

“I feel that I have the same chances for advancement as my male counterparts in my firm.”



- Strongly Agree (10.47%)
- Agree (26.74%)
- Neutral / Unsure (19.77%)
- Disagree (25.58%)
- Strongly Disagree (17.44%)

Qualitatively, our respondents reported issues regarding gender and promotion – communication issues, bias against “assertive women,” and the idea of having to prove themselves over and over again while statements made by male colleagues were accepted without question or their qualifications were simply assumed. These are the same issues brought to light in McKinsey’s study, “Women Matter 2010.” A few telling statements from our study include:

“When looking for the move up to VP or Director, a lot of that depends on who you know and are friendly with. Well, all are male on top and generally have their own cliques.”

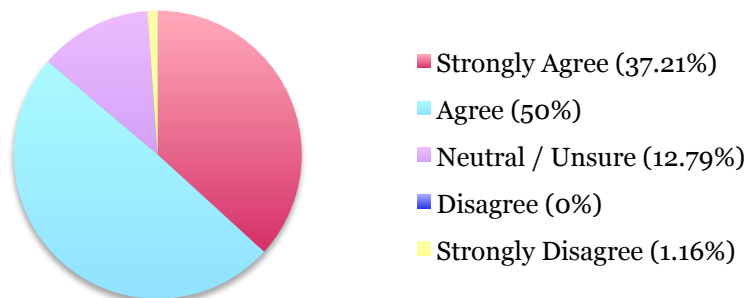
“During negotiations, women are often expected to have dealings with a softer approach, rather than more directly. We are often asked to ‘stand down’ and let the men handle things.”

“Sometimes your work gets evaluated based on the amount of time you can put in. In that case being a new Mom, I do feel that people make predefined notions.”

Building a Network

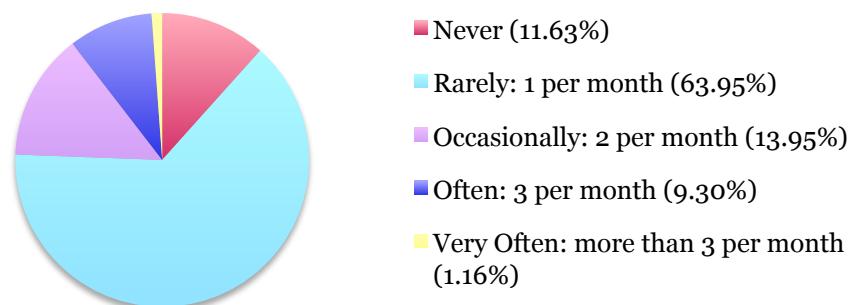
In Catalyst's recent study, "The Myth of the Ideal Worker: Does Doing All the Right Things Really Get Women Ahead," the organization showed that networking with key people is a critical component of career success for both men and women. And our respondents agreed. According to our survey, women in technology believe networking is absolutely essential for advancement – 87.21% agreed or strongly agreed.

"Networking is important for my career advancement."



But are they following through? Our study showed that while many women in technology understand how it important it is to network and build relationships with other people in their field, how much they are actually doing it is another matter. Most of our respondents (63.95%) said they "rarely" attended networking events – about once per month – and a relevant percentage (11.63%) said they "never" attend networking events.

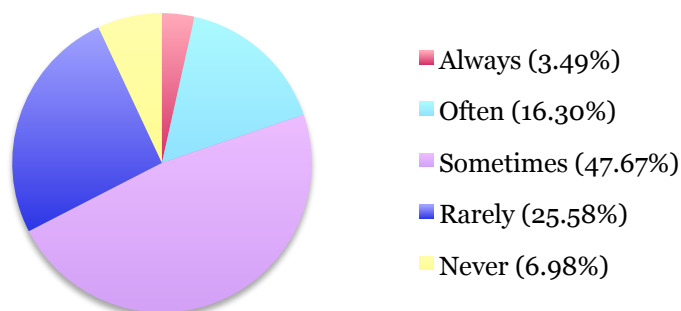
How often do you attend networking events for your career field each month?



While the majority of our respondents recognized the importance of networking, three-quarters aren't really doing it.

We also wanted to find out how women in tech are taking advantage of the connections they have made by networking. After all, the point of meeting new contacts is developing the ability to leverage those relationships over time. But despite our respondents' understanding that networking is important, it was clear that they don't necessarily follow through to reap those benefits. When asked whether they "keep in touch" with contacts they made at networking events, most of our respondents said they "sometimes" keep in touch with contacts they had made – and in fact, less than a fifth said they "always" or "often" keep in touch with people they meet at networking events.

**Do you keep in touch with the contacts
that you made at networking events in your career field?**

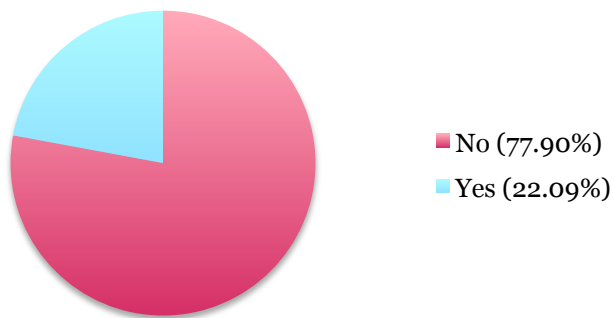


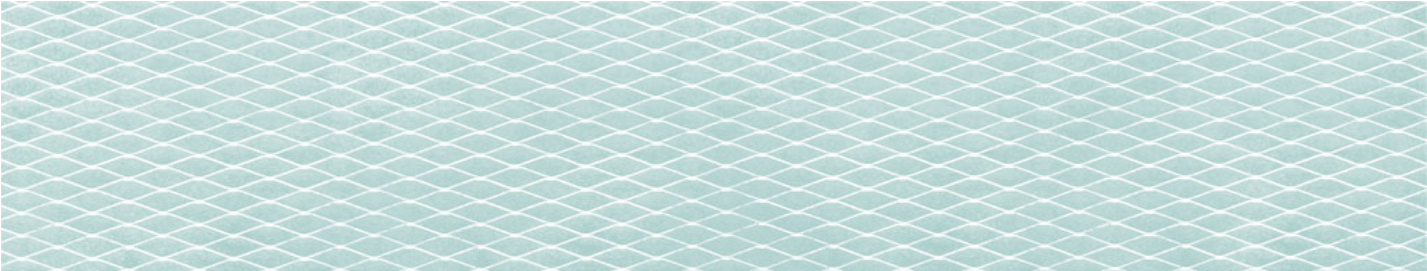
Gaining a Sponsor

At the end of 2010, Catalyst published the report "Mentoring: Necessary, but Insufficient for Advancement," which explained that while mentoring can help women advance in their careers, the really critical relationship for advancement is sponsorship – professional relationships with powerful individuals within your company, who are willing to spend their political capital on your behalf. The Center for Work-Life Policy's 2011 report, "The Sponsor Effect: Breaking Through the Last Glass Ceiling," further defined the sponsor-protégé relationship, as a reciprocal alliance based on trust. This relationship is critical for getting the jobs or assignments you might not even know are available.

In fact, while 22.09% (almost a quarter) of our survey respondents reported that they had a sponsor, 77.9% said they did not.

**Do you currently have a sponsor within the company at
which you are employed?**





A qualitative analysis revealed that while women in tech have heard the buzz about sponsorship, their general understanding of what a sponsor is and what he or she does is somewhat mixed. When asked how best to secure a sponsor within their company, 8.9% of the time, women flat out said they didn't know. The most common answer (25.41% of the time) revolved around building relationships with high ranking individuals. Following that, the idea of working hard or delivering on commitments was represented in about 23.77% of responses, and 18.03% of answers indicated the importance of networking.

These are all relevant to the sponsor-protégé relationship, but leave out important aspects. For instance, very few women indicated the reciprocal nature of the sponsorship relationship (2.5% of answers). Even fewer mentioned the importance of speaking up about accomplishments (1.64%). Less than one in ten responses (8.9%) suggested “asking” as a way to get a sponsor.

What do you think are the best strategies for cultivating a relationship with a potential sponsor?

“This has always been a difficult idea for me to grasp ... I don't know and that's part of the reason why I don't have one!”

“Ensure the person depends on you and see you as reliable, always deliver, always positive and objective.”

“Understand the sponsors' interest and priorities. Be genuinely interested in getting to know your sponsors well, understand their career goals and their aspirations.”

“Networking, luck”

“I do not know. I would guess the first step would be to ask.”

The confusion around sponsorship reveals that many women in technology are still struggling to navigate office politics effectively. So many women named “hard work” as key to gaining a sponsor, yet so few mentioned “asking.” Many women are still waiting to be recognized for their contributions, rather than promoting their own achievements.

And it's no wonder that women are confused. Even when they do all of the right things, they still rarely advance as far as men – as Catalyst's report “The Myth of the Ideal Worker: Does Doing All the Right Things Really Get Women Ahead?” revealed. It showed that even when women do all of the “right” things (negotiating, speaking up about accomplishments, networking with powerful individuals, etc.), they hit road blocks that men just don't have to contend with.

Women are hearing one thing about how to advance, but experiencing another – and this could be a big reason why our respondents expressed confusion about how to navigate networks of power.



Conclusion

The results of our pilot study show that “women in technology” as a group face challenges around advancement in the workplace. We set out to study how *ambitious* women in IT feel about career advancement, and our respondents had their eyes set firmly on the next rung of the ladder – or even a few rungs beyond. In general they perceive some challenges due to gender, and view networking and sponsorship as an important factors for achieving success.

Our research revealed that many women viewed working hard as the key to advancement. Of course, hard work is a prerequisite for success. But it is not the only ingredient.

Ambition, the right networks, delivering on key assignments, powerful allies, and yes – a little luck – all come into play when it comes to climbing the career ladder.

But our study also revealed much richer data around the importance of following through on advancement strategies. While our respondents said they understand issues like networking and gaining sponsorship, it seems that there could be obstacles keeping women from gaining full traction in these areas. It’s hard to ascertain, from this report, which institutional factors, such as managerial or institutional support, are preventing women from taking part in these activities. It is interesting that some respondents answered qualitatively that they would attend more networking events if they were mandatory – so their managers wouldn’t hold that time away from work against them.

Companies must not ignore their significant role in advancing and retaining women. In fact, one of the main take-aways from this study is that women may not be getting practical instructions on how to use the programs or tools that companies are offering. They know what they need to do (for example, secure sponsorship), but they don’t know how to do it.

Every company is at a different place on the gender inclusion journey – and each one must make sure to align various gender diversity initiatives, and measure their outcomes, to ensure that women are making the most of development, promotion, and retention strategies.

By employing thoughtful, culturally-significant solutions, we can begin the work of creating inclusive workplaces where everyone can bring their full selves, their passions, and their unique insights to the table. Not only is gender inclusion the right thing to do for individuals, it’s also the smart thing to do for companies looking to meet the demands of an increasingly diverse and complex global marketplace.



Methodology

Our survey was opened to women in The Glass Hammer newsletter subscriber database who self-selected as employees within the technology industry. They were given 2 months to reply. In total, we had 86 respondents from over 20 companies globally, but largely in and surrounding New York City.

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