

WOMEN IN TECHNOLOGY: KNOCKING DOWN BARRIERS

Collective Notes

LINK: https://s2019.siggraph.org/presentation/?id=bof_185&sess=sess579
DATE/TIME: Tuesday, July 30 2019, 10:30am-12pm
LOCATION: Diamond Ballroom 1-2 at JW Marriott
DESCRIPTION: Join female CG professionals to discuss how to create a positive work environment by eliminating obstacles. Hear what holds us back and how they have navigated similar problems.

PANEL NOTES

Moderator:

Megha Davalath, Character Technology Lead at DreamWorks Animation

Panelists:

Michelle Robinson, Look Development Supervisor at Disney Animation

Gracie Arenas Strittmatter, Technical Art Director at BioWare

Mariana Galindo, Technical Director Pixar

Sandy Kao, Character Rigging Supervisor at DreamWorks Animation

- Dealing with Different Leadership Styles
 - Taking a moment to understand the management, will help you deal with the management style.
 - Don't underestimate the importance of one on ones.
 - It's fine to say I need to think about it and I will get back to you. Don't fill empty space in meetings.
 - Easy to mirror the negative attitudes, stay positive and surround yourself with like people.
 - Finding strengths & weaknesses with Supervisors and direct reports
 - Set expectations early!
 - Nip bad behavior in the bud - correct through feedback
 - Team culture - find how to fit
 - Don't underestimate the importance of one-one meetings
 - Let others know what style you have (i.e. "processor" - need time to think before responding)
- Dealing with Bullies at Work
 - Don't be fearful of approaching someone that can influence the bully.
 - Be solutions oriented, when working with them.
 - Keep a record.
 - Finding sponsorship, find people to elevate your ideas.
 - Address aggressive behavior early/often
 - Tough conversation, but it's worth it!
 - Keep a record (written documentation)
 - Build network/allies ahead of time (support each other in meetings)

- Sponsorship - help elevate each other's ideas/support (sponsorship different than mentorship)
- Thing in your life to help your day to day.
 - Carve out an hour of your day to care for yourself.
 - A partner needs to be actual that, a partner.
 - You need to reserve time for yourself - find ways to "partner with your partner"
 - Always spread knowledge, so you can be away if you need to be.
 - The importance of saying no and to delegate.
 - Ask for help, people are very generous.
 - Delegate/hire out work you don't like to do (i.e. hire a housekeeper)
 - Prioritize exercise/self care
 - Work/life balance - find balance at home w/ partner/spouse/family (prioritize family as you are able)
 - School/continuous education is important
- Work/Life Balance:
 - Setup team to be ready to support you (if need to leave early/travel)
 - Designate a "2nd in Command" so the team is supported if you are out
 - Importance of being able to say "no"
 - Delegation (@ home & work) of tasks/duties as able
 - No FOMO!
 - Pregnancy - delegate to team/be transparent so team can support you
- How to Thrive:
 - Be yourself!
 - Don't focus so much on "male vs. female" - how can we get more women into this meeting?
 - Help build/uplift each other
 - Build a community
 - Find mentors - people want to help you!
- Importance of saying "No"
 - Reserve time for yourself
 - Not a failure - should be a positive thing
 - Delegation is key
 - Get over "Fear of missing out"
- "Tell your younger self"
 - Find your allies
 - Focus less on the Male/Female distinctions
 - Build a community - hold on to relationships and realize people are interested in helping you
- There is a difference in mentorship and sponsorship
 - Mentorship is offering guidance and advice where as sponsorship is being a cheerleader and advocate for career success.
 - it is important to know what you are asking for or what you are helping to provide

IMPORTANCE OF NETWORKING & MENTORSHIP

Table Captain: Irene Geller

- Mentorship
 - Don't look for 1 mentor
 - Look for mentors in specific areas
 - Find specialists in a topic
 - Rotate mentors
 - Find Enrichment
 - People are willing to talk
 - Feedback with work is straightforward
 - Leadership/soft skills are hard
 - Personal style match
 - Being a good match
 - Finding common ground
 - Encourage people to connect
 - Leading questions
- Networking
 - The job part is easy
 - Soft skills are hard to navigate
 - Find good communicators
 - What is taken for granted?
 - Build trust
 - Learn soft skills for when you are wrong
 - Trust your mentees (creates feeling safe)
 - Caring about them sometimes when out of work
 - Promoting failure is fine
 - Not knowing is fine
 - Being a coach where do they find development
 - Finding where the challenges are
 - How do they want to be supportive
 - Empowering mentees to build their agendas
 - Asking them leading questions to help work through things
 - Colocate with the mentor
 - Formal process vs informal
- Giving Feedback
 - Feeling comfortable giving feedback
 - Be constructive
 - Actionable items
 - Give Observations
 - This is what you need to do
 - This is what's getting in the way
 - Our professional obligation
 - Timeliness - don't let things fester
 - Impact is lost when you wait

- Avoiding building of feedback
 - Training communication for intergenerational
 - Frequent feedback
 - Don't get attached to work
 - Create a level of separation
- Join organizations
 - VFX Society
 - WIA
- Encourage networking
 - How do introverts network
 - Introduce people
 - Self elevator pitch
 - Avoid yes or no questions
 - Organizations should be responsible to help with ice breakers
 - Career Coaches
 - Linked in
 - Email Out
 - Go with a chatty buddy
 - Feel comfortable showing failures
- Networking
 - Follow up after conferences SOON (LinkedIn/Email) - impact is lost when you wait
 - Networks don't grow organically, put in the effort and branch out
 - Make time for different people
 - Connecting with adults is hard
 - Know you won't connect with everyone

LEADERSHIP STYLES

Table Captain: Christina Lee Storm

- Interested in discussing leadership personalities, how to work with conflict resolution and how to protect team. What techniques can we use?
- Discussed needing to be assertive but feeling guilty with this style.
- How best to supervise when Supervising mostly males?
- Does your home environment impact how you view leadership styles?
 - Reinforced at work with "You're so collaborative."
 - I should have just gotten angry. There are times to get angry.
- Finding the line between assertive and aggressive is a good place to be.
- Has anyone experienced, 'there is a need for more emotion?'
- How to be Assertiveness and Professional
- How to be Emotional & Professional
- Write an email and hold it - or not send it. Sending an email is not necessarily good.
- Be thoughtful about being constructive.
- Work on interpersonal relationships
- Post-Mortem process - structural leaders

- Natural Community Leaders / Leadership Hubs
- What's working and what's not?
- What is it as me, helping and inspiring growth?
- LEAD INCLUSIVELY
- What leadership styles do you find effective?
- Delegate Too Much VS. Micro Managing
 - How do you find the right balance between the two?
- It's good to ask What Is the Intention? For the most part, it's good.
 - Is there a conversation on better leadership style?
- Take time to get to know your team. A middle ground is:
 - They get direction from us VS. I got this
 - Be sincere
 - Open communication
- "You're doing it wrong" - not a leader
- I'm going to show you how to get there.
 - Laying the path or clearing a path.
- Ask team members: What is the level of communication do you need?
 - It's a service you provide to your team
- Different types of LEADS:
 - A) Coding Skills - Technical Program Manager
 - B) Career Path/Growth - People Manager
 - Unicorns - have both A & B or are good at both
 - It falls apart when it's not their strength in A or B. So address it and figure out how to provide the area that is not your strength.
- There can be a disconnect because Managers do not know what the person is doing everyday.
- @Netflix, all managers are People Managers and they lean on their engineers.
- You need to ask the right questions.
 - What is it that you're busy doing?

MAINTAINING RELEVANCE IN TECHNOLOGY

Table Captain: Bill Ballew

Started each round with a quote: "Once a new technology rolls over you, if you are not part of the steamroller, you're part of the road"

Round #1

- Advice from the "steamroller" quote
 - Don't be afraid to make a change
 - Example came up about moving into Houdini development...it may be scary at first, but you need to just jump in and embrace the change.
- If your company uses a formal review process
 - Take advantage of the opportunity to focus one-on-ones around career advancement and learning new tech

- Speak up and say what you are looking for - don't get pigeon-holed
- Spend time thinking about what you want and say it.
- At periodic check-ins throughout the year
 - Be proactive about your development plan - what do you want to learn
 - Let your manager help guide you - make sure you understand and can align with the company direction/needs
- Attend conferences
 - Take notes - write down terms you didn't understand and research them later
 - Write a trip report
 - Show that you are "maintaining relevance"
- Actively look for new technology to stretch into
 - Rely on your foundations of what you have learned
 - Don't be afraid or intimidated
 - Find those that know more about the subject than you do - leverage their expertise
 - Remember that "to every 3rd grader a 4th grader is a god" - you may be more of an expert than you think - make yourself a resource to others
- Semi-formal training
 - Identify experts in a topic and encourage them to share with others
 - "Brown bag lunches" can be a forum for doing this where the topic rotates
 - Book Clubs
 - Find a book at a conference that is on new technology
 - Pick a book on a topic that you are an expert on to help others grow in that area.

Round #2

- Even if you don't have a clear opportunity to be trained on new tech in your job there are things you can do:
 - Attend conferences
 - Dedicate your own time for deeper dives into something new (even if that just means you scratch the surface on new concepts)
 - Volunteer for new projects at work - show no fear
 - Jump on code reviews to learn a new area
 - Volunteer for things like open source projects - learn by doing
- How to deal with the intimidation that comes with new tech
 - Google for answers and use stack overflow (build on the backs of others)
 - Organically grow from a foundation of knowledge you already have - context you have gained from personal projects
- Challenges when you are at a company or non-profit that does not have the resources to invest in new tech - how can you keep up given how fast the industry moves?
 - Use learning sites such as pluralsight
 - Contribute to open source projects
 - Public libraries provide Lynda or other training materials
 - Podcasts
 - Some great podcasts on software engineering
 - Use them to at least understand where to start and what resources you should check out

CONTRACT/SALARY NEGOTIATIONS

Table Captain: Michelle Martinez

- The majority of women participants openly admitted to having accepted their first job offer right out of college without any negotiation. Where as the men at the table felt it didn't make a difference and still negotiated. As women gained more experience they felt more confident with negotiating salary.
- Negotiating salary with a current employer seems harder than negotiating externally. The women/men at the table felt that they were more successful at negotiating higher salaries with external employers and it was only when they got an external offer they felt that their current employer was making an effort to work with them. How can we change this?
- Negotiating an offer doesn't always involve an increase in salary. The majority of the women at the table said they would take a lower salary over a better work life balance.
- Negotiations can include extra time off, flexibility with work schedules, educational benefits, additional company perks etc.
- Participants felt they were more successful in the negotiation process when they put greater focus on their experience and what they can bring to the organization and how much their experience is worth to the employer and not about their persons personal financial needs.

WOMEN BEING EACH OTHER'S WORST ENEMY

Table Captain: Sandy Kao & Munira Tayabji

- "Pay Your Dues" mentality
 - Does that cause women mentors to be worse to women than men? One cited case
 - If I had to go through it, you should too
 - Makes you tougher
- One seat at the table
 - Women are brought up to think that there are not too many seats for women at the top so they compete with each other
 - One cited case that their company is more 50/50 and are witnessing less of that. Is it changing for the better?
- Appropriate Dress Code
 - One cited case of a woman having to change the way she dressed because she was not dressed professionally. Even though not all the women thought so
- Men and Women seem to have different group dynamics, people need to be able to identify with the group
- How do we make the correction of women leadership not being more abusive than men?
- Be more aware of raising people up. sponsorship and promote more.
- Women are often reduced to as organizers.
- Women being each other's worst enemy:
- Some women are defensive because they have been forced to advocate for themselves their entire careers.

- The short Pearl resonated with a lot of women. You realize how much you have to be conditioned and then w/o realizing it you are not supportive of other women.
- Stereotypes
 - Girls don't get along.
 - The movie "Mean Girls".
 - After hearing and growing up with these stereotypes, girls start to behave that way and believe it. They are trained to be ruthless to each other.
- Mentorship - 90% of people mentored become mentors. Many of the existing female leaders did not have mentors and fought their way to the top.
 - Siggraph - great example of a program that created mentorship matches for you. Mentees had to submit essays to get accepted. When there are programs that negotiate the mentorship match for you, it is really nice and much easier to pair up with people that would otherwise be intimidating.
- One manager talked about how he noticed that when he hired a few women into entry level positions, they started competing with each other instead of being supportive of each other. Maybe it's a generational perspective. Younger females do not want to be nurturing. As managers, it is the responsibility to build that nurturing atmosphere and reassure everyone of their confidence so that there isn't a competitive environment.
- If you are technical, how can you navigate communicating up to managers or leadership that is less technical without sounding condescending?
 - Ask for feedback if you get the sense that your manager is getting upset or doesn't react well to your way of communicating.
 - Look for ways of adjusting your communication style without compromising your confidence.
 - Ask questions instead of coming across as a know it all.
 - Don't come on too strong. Approach in a way knowing that you also have something to learn.

ENTRY LEVEL JOBS & INTERNSHIPS

Table Captain: Megha Juneja

How do I know I am qualified for a job description?

- Talked about study which shows how women hesitate with 90% matching job description v/s men who go for it when they match 30% job description.
- Also, mentioned to fear from rejection. If the role sounds similar to what you have in mind, go for it. Recruiters might be able to redirect if there is a mismatch.

What do I need to apply?

- TD : CG knowledge , python experience and good problem solving skills
- Artists : Reel which highlights how many different things have you implemented. Don't focus too much on quality of final render, it would be different from the final movie product anyway. It's more important to show the different methods you know and showing your knowledge of the department workflow.

People give different job requirements sometimes. How do I confirm the correct requirements and what do I need to apply correctly?

- Refer to recruiter's definition. Some people might have different kind of experience working in the same department depending on what project they are on, etc.

Have you faced stereotyping in the job? How do you handle it?

- Megha shared her story about being introduced as "young lady" when she went for a presentation because the person who introduced her thought she was too young to give a talk. She smiled in her head and went ahead with the talk like she would. He came to her later and said "He never thought he could attend the same talk multiple times with this much interest and he absolutely enjoyed it".
- Valerie shared her story about working with a group of men who excluded her from lunches under the assumption that she wouldn't know about gaming. She spoke to some people from the group individually by initiating this exact conversation and told them how much of a gamer she was. She got invited to lunch after that.

How is it working in a leadership position as a woman? What are some of the challenges you face?

- It is great. However, there are some days which are harder to get with. It's important to believe in yourself and having empathy for others (where they are coming from) helps to get through in such times.
- If there are less women in the team, sometimes it needs you to re-emphasize it to your team how important is it to get more women in the team and make it a point to source more women through recruiting.
- Support other women in your team by sponsorship is important.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR CAREER ADVANCEMENT

Table Captain: Sarah Counnas

Career Path:

- Understanding what your options are - get clarity on the levels/career path
- Vocalize what you want to do - constantly be networking
- Keep logs of skills/responsibilities you are doing - how do they align w/ future positions?
- Informational interviews - learn from others who are in your desired position

Maintain Relevance:

- Be realistic about lifestyle/location
- Continue learning (in person/online courses)
- Find remote work, if able

How to Bridge Gap Between Mid-level/Senior Engineers:

- How to get promoted? Lots of senior people coming from outside
- Find a mentor/sponsor - get support at ground level
- Be your own advocate
- Network!

How to Get Promoted:

- Take time to network
- Can't just do good work - need to take initiative => Go ask for it!
- Change jobs when it seems like your options are limited

- Teach yourself to be an advocate for yourself
- Have the confidence to know you deserve a seat at the table
 - Ask for it when you are ready
 - Make your supervisor aware of your goals
- Don't wait until you can tick all the boxes for the new job
 - Find ways to translate your skills
- No one cares more about your career than you do!
 - Don't minimize your skills/experience
 - Make sure it's in your resume - provide case study so it's easy for the hiring manager to see how your skills/experience apply
- Branding is so important
 - Keep track of your accomplishments and advocate for yourself
- Find sponsors/mentors to help you
 - Everyone needs an understudy who can take over your job

How To Find a Better Job Somewhere Else:

- Have to take a chance before you have all the boxes ticked
 - Constantly be learning from experiences
 - Challenge yourself with things you haven't done before - get more experience
- "3 Legs of the Stool"
 - Might have 2 of the 3 main things they are looking for in a candidate
 - Need something to challenge yourself (if you had all 3, you wouldn't need this job - would have already done it and will be bored!)
- Cover Letters are really important
 - Opportunity to tell your story - who are you? Why are you a good fit?
- Add description of the company to your resume - not everyone knows what those companies do (set context)

FAMILY LIFE/MATERNITY LIFE

Table Captain: Kristine Middlemiss

- Make a point to leave at 5:00, communicate in advance.
- Talk to your team honestly about what type of person they are to be the most successful, are you a morning person, afternoon person, etc, attempt to work with that when scheduling meetings.
- All show should be adaptable, if you are management you should strive for that to be flexible for your team, happy worker = successful worker.
- Be open to job shares, and work from home.
- For quick workouts you can bring Physio bands.
- Get your car ready the night before so mornings are easier.
- Keep no work stuff on your phone.
- Leave phone in a different location.
- Standing times on Wednesdays for ALL dr's appointments, etc.
- Make sure you take your maternity and paternity leaves, it helps the system and the cause.