

# Harassment in Tech: It's Time for Men to Speak Out

by  
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It's still a tough time for women in the tech industry. A recent survey of women working in Silicon Valley and the Bay Area found that 60% reported unwanted sexual advances. 87% reported hearing demeaning comments about women. 88% had clients or colleagues address questions to male peers that should have been addressed to them. 84% have been told they were too aggressive. And who were these women? 77% were over 40 years old, one in four had C-level positions, one in ten was a company founder—these were not women in their first jobs who had little in the way of experience or clout.

Many men will respond with concern and alarm. But, sadly, others will react with denial. And some will throw out excuses along the lines of “What do you expect? It's an alpha-male world. If you can't take the heat, get out of the Valley.”

Few women I've worked with over the years would be surprised by either the levels of harassment and discrimination or by the denial and excuses that some men toss their way.

The tech industry is far from alone. A few years ago I was brought in by several United Nations agencies to give advice on developing responses and training tools to end sexual harassment and workplace discrimination. One woman, right near the top of her agency, asked to speak to me at the end of the work day. When I arrived at her office, she poked her head out, looked up and down the hallway to make sure no one had seen my arrival, and then invited me in. She proceeded to tell me about the harassment she'd experienced.

The problems might be widespread, but when it comes to the tech world it's all too easy to point a finger to the engineering/computer-nerd-in-the-basement backdrop. You know, not the type of men to worry about minor things such as washing or who show Mensa abilities when it comes to relationship skills. That's excuse number one for an environment unfriendly to women. The problem is this doesn't give credit or agency to men-in-tech to do the right thing.

It's also too easy to point to the dogged devotion to work that it takes to get ahead. Or the homogeneity some startups strive for to create the cohesion supposedly

necessary to succeed against long odds. Or the beer-on-Friday-afternoon and pool-table work environments.

These might be explanations. But, as men, we need to face two things. First, too many of our brothers are responsible for unwanted workplace behavior. And second, too many of us are responsible for staying silent. The majority of men do *not* and never will harass women, or make disparaging and demeaning comments, or discriminate in hiring or promotions (although we might bring in unconscious biases.) But unfortunately, a significant minority of men do such things. If the majority doesn't speak out, this minority will continue to define the work culture of a whole industry.

That's why it is critical for men in tech to start taking real leadership, working alongside women, to create work environments that are gender equitable and welcoming to all women and men. After all, men who still dominate tech companies and have defined the work environments have the power to bring about change.

This isn't the only reason why we need men to speak out. Men look to other men to define their values and behaviors as men. Young men, fresh out of college, tend to model their behaviors on the men who have beaten the path before them.

The good news is that more men are embracing equitable environments. My son, who runs a life sciences tech startup developing a digital assessment to detect and monitor Alzheimer's, notes that half his team are women and he tells me it's not unusual to see large numbers of women in life science tech companies.

The other good news for men is that this will strengthen our own work experiences. It means firms can more effectively tap into a wider range of talent and ensure that women hired will be women who stick around. It means more women in positions of leadership who will bring unique insights to products and the market. It will mean that the many men who don't feel comfortable with a locker-room atmosphere will have healthier workplaces. And it will support a push for more family friendly work workplaces. After all, we now have a whole generation of young men who, like women, don't want to sacrifice their family for their job and who value workplaces that support them as parents.

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