HERLEAD

WHAT I LEARNED FROM THE LEADERSHIP IN TECHNOLOGY AMBASSADOR WORKSHOP

WRITTEN BY:
Teresa Leatherow, 2014 HERlead Fellow

Some of the most profound advice I have ever received is that in life, change is the only constant. Change is what drives innovation, diversifies thought and challenges habits. The pace of change in today's world - enabled by technology - has created an immediate need to embrace, not fear, the disruptions that will revolutionize the world we all share. As a Leadership in Technology Ambassador, a recent college graduate, and a new full-time employee at a technology start-up, the Leadership in Technology Ambassador Workshop offered me invaluable perspectives on the various intersections of women, technology, career growth and social good.

Consistent with the HERlead and Vital Voices model, Ambassadors were provided the unique opportunity to participate in interactive activities and dynamic discussions on working for a large technology corporation or lean start-up, leveraging technology as a tool for social good (sometimes referred to as "civic tech"), and even launching and operating a new technology or business. Here are some of my takeaways:

TRIPLE THREAT SKILLSET 1

Agility, flexibility and self-awareness are among the skills needed for any person entering, or currently working within the technology space. In this context, agility and flexibility mean quickly adapting and changing course to achieve goals. Self-awareness is critical to identify our own "weaknesses," but more importantly, it allows us to identify our strengths, which can be leveraged to achieve goals. Whether you are working at a large company, start-up, or for yourself, technology is evolving and developing quickly. Agility, flexibility and self-awareness drive performance, and generate a transferable perspective that is always relevant.

2 CONFIDENCE THAT EXCITES OTHERS: D + I

Diversity and Inclusion initiatives are now at the forefront of hiring efforts and culture strategies. Studies on the benefits of a diverse team prove not only "business value," but also opportunity for personal growth. Designing a team that is diverse in thought, experience, race, gender and more is a means to consider multiple dimensions of the increasingly diverse issues that technology promises to address. Working to gain credibility in your organization, start-up or student group permits you to redirect resources toward issues that matter, and allows team members to lead with their professional and personal identities.

3 BE COMFORTABLE BEING UNCOMFORTABLE

This is likely not the first time (nor the last!) that you come across this statement. The innovation and disruptions that are celebrated from a technical perspective come from asking big questions, understanding technical approaches, and even working with unexpected collaborators. To be a driver of change means encountering or creating, and understanding, both complex technical solutions and processes that are by design inclusive to create measurable, scalable change. Seeking out new opportunities, learning an unfamiliar skill, forming relationships with those who can mentor you, and creating and leveraging a network for support, guidance and education, can all be uncomfortable. If you are serious about accomplishing big goals, do it anyway.

4 THE "RIGHT" GOAL

It is an immense challenge to define a solution that is "right". Especially within the context of technology, the feasibility of a proposed idea is dependent on several factors - such as level of familiarity or education, accessibility, cost, or degree of technicality - that make identifying such criteria both a technical and ethical determination. A proven approach to choosing the "right" goal is to ask what would eliminate or lessen the harm or cost to the most people. In a world that promotes the rapid development and expansion of technical solutions, consideration of social impacts is critical for sustainable solutions.

No one will, or should, care more about your own growth more than you. Growth captures both professional and personal advancements

YOUR CAREER IS YOUR RESPONSIBILITY 5

and you should ultimately strive to keep these in balance, and relative to your capacity or needs. Although there are varying levels of what is workplace-appropriate, networking within your organization, seeking learning and development opportunities, and going to lunch with members of your team or different teams are all immediate ways to grow. Bring your authentic self to work and allow yourself to weave connections among your work and non-work interests. Possess a willingness to step up and out of your comfort zone; after all, it is the only way to grow!

The HERlead Women in Technology Ambassador Workshop bolstered one other constant besides change: the women working within, managing, and leading in technology will be one of the ultimate forces of disruption.