

The Salesforce logo, consisting of the word "salesforce" in white lowercase letters inside a blue cloud-like shape.

salesforce

A woman with long dark hair and glasses, wearing a light blue button-down shirt, is smiling and looking at a tablet computer she is holding with both hands. The background is a blurred office setting with green and white geometric shapes.

WOMEN IN TECHNOLOGY

BEST PRACTICES FOR MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR CAREER

Introduction

MEET GERALDINE GRAY

There's been a lot of conversation recently around the number of women working in technology and what can be done to increase their ranks. With this topic in mind, we decided to pick the brain of one woman who has not only thrived in the tech industry, but has been instrumental in paving the way for other women as well.

Geraldine Gray has some 20 years of experience in technology, with much of that time spent as a Salesforce consultant and solutions architect. She is the founder and CEO of Endiem, a Houston-based firm that helps organizations align their strategic goals with Salesforce and other cloud products and services. Gray is a Salesforce Certified Developer, Certified Sales Cloud Consultant, and Certified Administrator.

Gray is more than happy to share her secrets to success along the way. Keep reading for her thoughts on:

- Breaking into the technology industry
- Navigating your technology career
- Building and leveraging a network
- Managing a leadership role

Whether you work in technology or any other industry — and whether you're a woman or just related or married to one — Gray's words of advice are sure to ring true.

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Chapter 1

Getting Started

There is both progress and work to be done when it comes to women's roles in the working population. In 1950, just 33 percent of all U.S. jobs were held by women. By 2013, that number had jumped to 57 percent. That's according to the National Center for Women and Information Technology. However, when taking a look at professional computing jobs in the U.S., the NCWIT found that only 26 percent of those are currently held by women.

Gray is widely regarded as an expert in all things Salesforce CRM, Service Cloud, and cloud computing in general. She is also a Salesforce MVP, a program that recognizes exceptional individuals within the Salesforce community for their leadership, knowledge, and ongoing contributions. But long before these accolades, Gray launched her career by working with an early version of CRM in London.



Here are some of her tips for breaking into technology:

Make them remember you.

“Find the thing that is different about you that will make people remember you,” says Gray. As a U.K. native, Gray credits her English accent for opening doors. She adds that this point is about more than just having a certain way of speaking or a big personality. “You must have an amount of self-confidence that shows that you are OK with yourself,” Gray says.

Don't be afraid to try.

Say yes to new opportunities. “You can trust your gut and tell if a job or project is good or not,” says Gray. She recommends allowing yourself extra time to figure out an unfamiliar role or task — because although there is a “first for everything,” it will probably take you “twice as long to get the work done” the first time around.

Ask questions.

“If you don't know the answer, ask someone who does,” says Gray. “I still do that now. You don't have to be an expert on everything.” She has observed that some women are afraid to speak up because they don't want to look “stupid.” Gray says there are many easy, innocuous questions that can get the ball rolling, including: “What has or hasn't worked in the past?” or “Can you give me an example?”



Chia Hwu
CEO & Co-Founder
Qubop.com

“My advice for women who want to break into technology is to remember that it's about doing. If you have an idea for software or hardware that will make your life better, go make it happen. If you don't have an idea, find someone else who does and team up to ship the product. In the process you'll learn a lot about how to start and finish a project. At the end of the process, you'll be able to point to the finished technology as a thing that you've created and that's a really powerful statement.”

Chapter 2

Career Navigation

The number of women seeking careers in tech has followed a strange trajectory. A study by the National Center for Women and Information Technology found that in the mid-1980s — around the same time the home computing market started to take off — 37 percent of computer science graduates were women. Yet by 2012, that number had decreased to just 12 percent. And the past two decades have seen the biggest change. Between 2000 and 2012, the number of women interested in pursuing a degree in computer science tumbled a whopping 64 percent.

Gray's career path has taken her from the United Kingdom to the United States, from working in the office of a CEO to becoming a CEO herself, and on many other work-related adventures. All along the way, she has known that technology was the industry for her.

And that's not all. Gray has also picked up these guiding principles:





**Jeremy
Stoppelman**
Co-Founder & CEO
Yelp Inc.

“I think any innovative company is missing out if it doesn’t have diversity, both male and female, as well as a lot of different nationalities, because everybody is bringing in different perspectives. There’s going to be things that you miss if you don’t have the world represented in your company. I think, fundamentally, to address the problem, we have to look at how do we get these folks engaged at the university level, and further back, how do we get them engaged in high school?”

Get help and be helpful.

“Don’t worry about being perfect,” says Gray. Be sure to ask for help when you need it and be willing to extend a helping hand to others. “You can’t expect people to do you a favor if you’re not supporting them as well.” Gray also says it’s wise to be careful whom you ask, to be sure they also have your best interests in mind.

It’s OK to walk away.

As things go, Gray says there may be a time when you end up in a job that is not a good fit in the end. She says to ask yourself: “Can I change my situation to make it better, or is it something company-deep that won’t be solved by my staying?” Gray says you can decrease the odds of landing in the wrong job by keeping a scorecard that ranks what is most important to you in any work situation.

Leave the door open.

Gray says some of the best advice she has ever received from a female boss is: “Always leave the door open.” When the time comes to move on from a project or role, don’t burn your bridges. “Leave with grace and make it so you can always come back,” says Gray. “Be grateful to the person who gave you the opportunity, even if it didn’t work out.”

Chapter 3

Technology Networking

Networking can go a long way for advancing a career, whether a worker is male or female. When it comes to women breaking into technology specifically, a number of groups have sprung up in recent years — including the high-profile Lean In network, created in concert with Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg’s best-selling book, *Lean In*. Other groups include, but are certainly not limited to: Women in Technology International, Girls in Tech, The Anita Borg Institute for Women and Technology, Lesbians Who Tech, Girls Who Code, and Black Girls Code.

Gray founded the Girly Geeks in 2010 because of a desire to meet and connect with other women in technology. Since then, the group has grown to encompass dozens of chapters around the world, including in Australia, Ireland, and Spain. “I didn’t realize it was going to become such a big deal. I would have chosen a more serious name,” she says.



Below are Gray's tips for successful networking:

Get out there.

The first step of successful networking is to start. Gray says when she first founded her company, she made a commitment to go to a networking event once a week, for a year. She organized the original Girly Geeks gathering at Dreamforce, in spite of worrying that no one would show up.

Give to give.

"You have to give to give," says Gray. "If you give to get, it's not going to work out and you're going to be disappointed." Her company makes it a practice to first see if a potential customer's need or problem can be solved at no cost. "We do 'get' something out of that--a lot of goodwill," Gray says.

Leverage your network.

Once you've established a network, use it. Gray says the Girly Geeks and other networking she has done has resulted in amazing benefits, including job opportunities and the chance to grow her own brand. In addition, Gray relishes being able to reach out to people who are smarter than she is. "These women are so clever. When I get stuck, I have people I can go to," she says.



Max Levchin

CEO
Affirm

"I have a very young daughter, and I neither want her to become a software executive, nor do I want her to stay out of software because it's an unfriendly industry. What I want is for her to have complete control of every decision, career and education, for her entire life, and to never feel that her gender defined any role or any turn she had to take. For that to happen, I think she needs to hear that every day. She's three years old now, and I try to make sure she knows that if she wants to be an astronaut or a stay-at-home mom, either one is a perfectly acceptable reality. And the same goes for my son. He can be a stay-at-home dad. But it starts very early. To fix today, we have to go back in time. When I was in school, there weren't that many women in computer science. When I was in middle school, there weren't that many women in the math club. The only way to fix it is to teach both boys and girls today that things have changed and that they need to behave differently."

Chapter 4

Leadership Roles

Although women hold just 9% of IT management positions and only 14% of senior management positions at Silicon Valley startups, there has been some inroads overall. The Center for American Progress found that in 1980, no women were listed in Fortune 100 top executive ranks, yet by 2001, 11% of those leaders were women. In addition, from 1997 to 2008, the share of companies led by female CEOs increased more than six-fold.

As Endiem's CEO and Principal Consultant, Gray leads a team of nine. She strives to give her employees autonomy, while clearly communicating any non-negotiable expectations. Gray admits that the first year after founding the company, she frequently wondered if she was "insane" for doing so.





Lori Williams

General Manager
EMEA Appirio

“My career in technology started over 25 years ago, and I was fortunate that in my first technology role, I worked for one of the few companies, Lotus Development, that had very visible women on the senior leadership team. So one of the first hurdles, seeing other women succeed and having those role models, wasn’t an issue. I knew it was possible. While there are more women in senior, visible roles today, we still have work to do. To continue making progress, we need to embrace the opportunity in being different and to drive home the fact that some of the more innate characteristics women have lend themselves to building better businesses and teams. The key is to capitalize on the fact that you have a unique point of view, don’t take pushback personally, and don’t forget that it is your job to give other women, and minorities, a voice at the table.”

The following are her secrets for successfully leading:

Hire people you can trust.

Gray says it’s paramount to have employees that will represent your company as you want it to be represented. You must be able to trust them with your business. “This takes a whole level of worry away from you.” She adds that it is better not to hire anyone at all, than to make a bad hire.

Hire people who are better than you.

Your employees don’t need to best you at everything, but they should fill in the gaps and raise the skillset average, not lower it. If you have a weakness in data architecture, for example, hire someone who is an expert. In addition, give your staff a chance to work beyond their comfort zone and coach them through the process.

Know when to say no.

“You have to be able to say you can’t do it all,” says Gray. Cultivate a reputation for saying no. But don’t stop there. Another reason to hire a great team is that when you are overcommitted, you can make an introduction to another qualified person and give them a turn in the spotlight.



Conclusion

THINGS TO REMEMBER

Gray says any career, whether in technology or another industry, requires an element of bravery. Women especially should not be afraid to ask for their opportunities. “The guaranteed answer is no if you don’t ask. You can’t put yourself in the running if you don’t put yourself in the race,” says Gray.

That tip and these chapter takeaways are great to keep in mind going forward:

Getting Started - Find something unique about yourself that will make people remember you. Don’t be afraid to try new opportunities or to ask questions when you don’t know the answer.

Career Navigation - Get help in your role when you need it, and extend the same to others. Know when it is time to walk away from a job, but leave the door open for a return.

Technology Networking - Make the effort to network without expecting anything in return. Once your network is established, use it as a resource for advice, growing your brand, and more.

Leadership Roles - Hire people you can trust and who have skills that you may lack. When you are overcommitted, delegate tasks that give your employees a chance to grow and shine.



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