THE
MAVEN
REPORT

Owning it

Female tech leaders on today's power and tomorrow's possibilities.

THE MAVEN REPORT

The Maven Report provides pragmatic, actionable advice from industry experts who have led large teams through periods of serious disruption. Our Mavens believe no business problem is insurmountable if you leverage smart people who know how to harness the power of better technologies.

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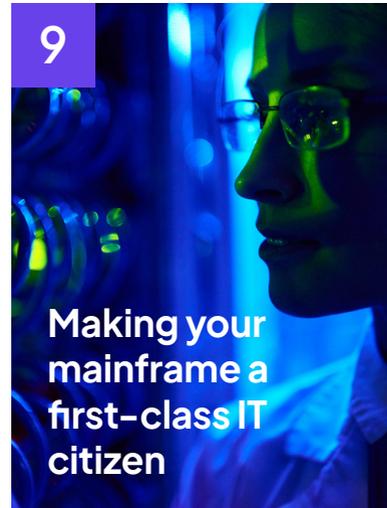
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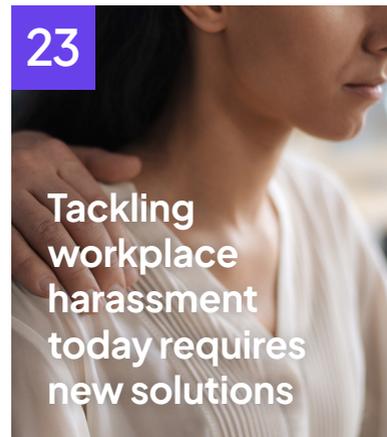
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FOREWORD

Happy International Women's Day!

March 8, 2023 is International Women's Day. To honor the occasion, we've dedicated this issue of *The Maven Report* exclusively to articles by and about women in tech, with relevant insights for *all* leaders looking to drive transformation in both their business and their mindset. And what an incredible lineup of thought leaders and trailblazers we have for you.

In **"The power of owning your career"** (page 4) Dell SVP of Global Alliances and Industries Denise Millard looks at why an ownership mindset is essential for anyone who aspires to career advancement and success. It's especially powerful guidance for women in tech, who face strong headwinds despite recent gains. In **"Imposter syndrome is everywhere… and it's getting in your way"** (page 13), Ensono SVP of Global Implementations and Operations Transformation Jodi Goglin explores a phenomenon that affects people across workplaces at all levels, but has particularly serious implications for women.

Great strides have been made in exposing and combating workplace harassment, but in **"Tackling workplace harassment today requires new solutions"** (page 23) Ensono India VP‑Service Delivery Head Veena Khandke considers ways companies can do more to stamp out this insidious and changing problem. State of Tennessee CIO and NASCIO President Stephanie Dedmon shares her journey to the

C-suite and view from the intersection of state government and tech in **"Creating a state of success"** (page 28). Ensono Senior Mainframe Solutions Architect Claire Connor lays out some key elements to consider as you contemplate the future of your underappreciated IT powerhouse in **"Making your mainframe a first-class IT citizen"** (page 9).

The findings of Ensono's 2022 global Speak Up survey informed several of the topics explored in this issue as well as our **"Speak Up 2022: Reasons to Cheer. Room to Grow."** infographic (page 32). Speak Up has its origins in a 2017 tweet posted by Lin Classon, Ensono's Director of Public Cloud Strategy at the time, with whom we reconnected to revisit the story of **"The tweet heard 'round the conference center"** (page 19). And in **"Ask a Maven"** (page 34), Ensono Director of Digital Transformation Services Angela Spencer fields a question about one of the hottest topics around, ChatGPT, and offers a refreshingly positive take.

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All the best!
Violette Sieczka, Managing Editor

This month and always, here's to strong women everywhere—may we recognize them, be inspired by them, and support their success in every way possible!

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The power of owning your career

When team members take intentional control of their career path, everyone wins.

By Denise Millard

Denise Millard
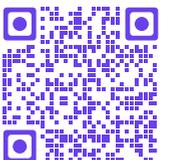SVP Global Alliances
and Industries,
Dell Technologies

Waiting for supportive managers to recognize your value, and meritocratic processes to move your career needle, are formulas for stagnation, frustration and disenchantment. If you know where you want to go, you need to take control of the journey. You need to own it.

Career ownership is more than just having a conscious desire to rise and succeed. It means knowing in specific detail what your goals are, framing a path that will get you there, seeking out and seizing strategic opportunities for learning, growth, connection and advancement along that path, and strongly advocating for yourself every step of the way.

Taking an active, deliberate approach to your career is a must for anyone with serious professional ambitions. Whether you're at the beginning of your career or well into it, you can take the reins and steer it in a more intentional, impactful and fulfilling direction. Here are three ways to get started.

Three keys to owning your career at any stage

#1) Understand the commitments your goals will require—and your willingness to make them

Any role worth striving for requires hard work. You need to be clear-eyed about the demands of the path you want to take, and weigh them against your temperament, energy levels and the other priorities—current and anticipated—in your life.

Reach out to people who are sitting in the type of job you want and ask them for the unvarnished truth about their journey to success. What have they loved? What has been hard? What has it given them? What have they given up? What would they do differently? Then, have an honest conversation with yourself. What are you prepared to commit to and compromise on—and what would make those trade-offs worth it? If you have a partner, is he or she willing to sign up for the same pros and cons, career impacts, and potential relationship burdens?

You may come through this assessment with your career objectives unchanged, or you may reevaluate. Either way, you'll have a more holistic picture of what truly defines success for you. Pursue cultures and environments that will help you achieve success on your terms, instead of chasing titles that may take you somewhere you never wanted to be.

#2) Connect objectives to outcomes

Leaders in positions of influence want to help their team members achieve their goals. But they don't always have the time or mental bandwidth to formulate the steps themselves. Nor should they—it's your career! They're much more likely to use their position to support you if you give them concrete, easily actionable guidance.

People who succeed in achieving their career aspirations don't just ask questions or make declarations about where they want to go. They connect objectives to a specific outcome: "I want to reach 'X' target and need 'Y' knowledge/experience/credential to get there." Then they identify how their leader or sponsor can help them achieve "Y."

Case in point: A member of my team once asked if he could sit in on our upcoming strategic planning sessions. The role he was aspiring to required experience with several aspects of business operations he had no previous visibility into. He believed the exposure would accelerate his path to the next level, and I knew he was right. It was an easy ask of me with a huge upside for him. I was happy to facilitate it.

#3) Invest in relationships

Few things will have a bigger impact on your career success than cultivating and nurturing strong personal relationships. The people you are connected to will support your rise and break your falls. They will be your champions and your refuge. Your network is everything, and you need to be very intentional about how you build and keep it. If you are in a remote role, make sure to create moments of authentic, impactful connection. Set up recurring one-on-ones with people. Establish group text threads. Pop into people's chats to say hello and check in. Open lines of communication with key leaders and colleagues and keep them active and dynamic, so you're top of mind and easily accessible when opportunities cross their radar that you'd be a good fit for.

Additionally, don't discount the value your non-professional networks bring to your professional life. Whether it's a book club, a running group, or the friends you meet for dinner once a month, having an external support system is essential for managing the stress and challenges work throws at you, maintaining perspective, and coming back to your job refreshed and refocused.

How—and why—leaders should foster a culture of career ownership

While the onus is absolutely on the team member to define their path, seek out opportunities and self-advocate, there's a tremendous upside for organizations that provide an apparatus to support their team members in doing so.

People who feel invested in by their employer tend to invest in that employer in return, in the form of dedication and loyalty. Over time, those team members may become leaders in the organization, who are themselves steeped in a development-minded, people-first approach to bring along the next generation of talent.

3keys to owning your career at any stage

Understand the commitments your goals will require—and your willingness to make them

Connect objectives to outcomes

Invest in relationships
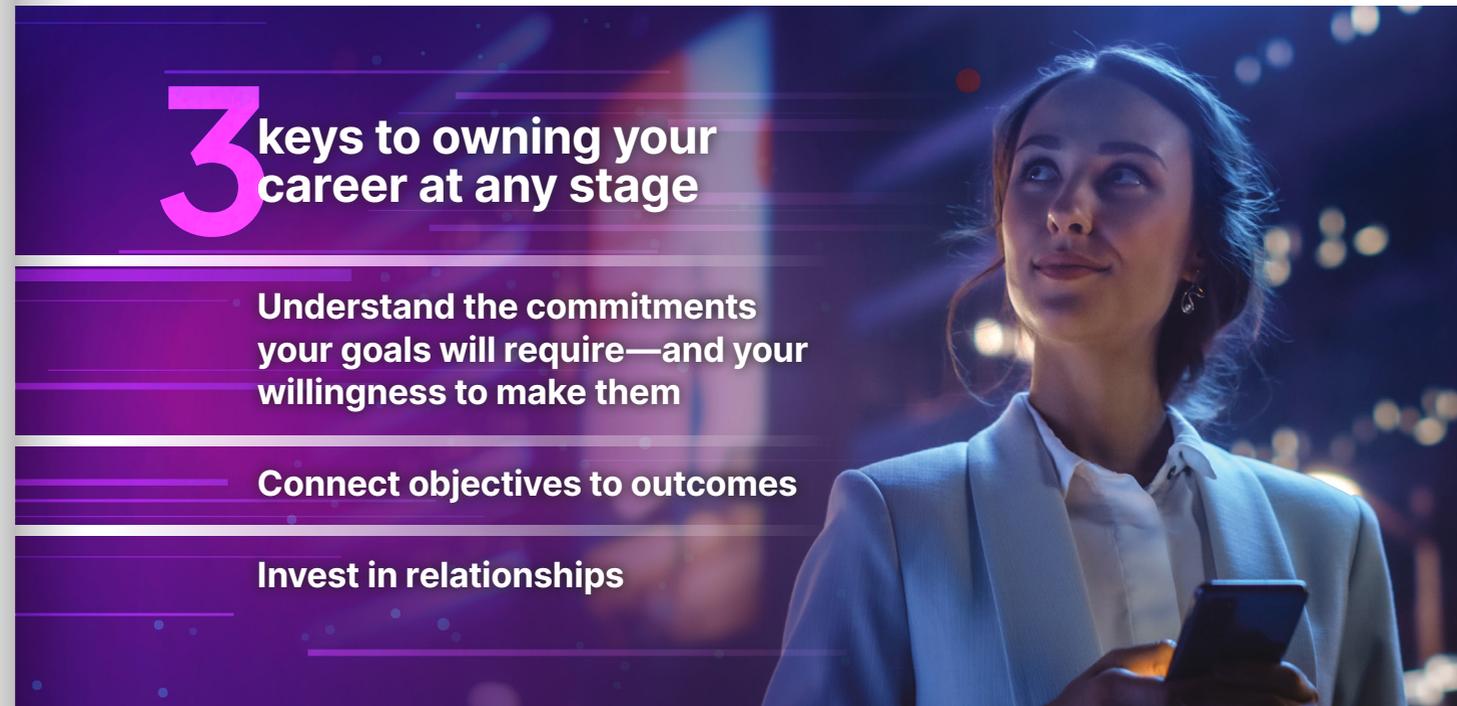
Don't just sponsor team members—prepare them. Always look for opportunities to give high-potential, high-ownership team members on-the-job experience for the roles they aspire to so they can confidently step into their new responsibilities when promoted. Empower team members to lead a new initiative, manage a project or, as in the example earlier, provide exposure to high-level discussions. This lets them broaden their knowledge and test their capabilities in a relatively low-stakes scenario and enables you to provide air cover if they falter, coach them on what went wrong and demonstrate how to course correct moving forward.

People who feel invested in by their employer tend to invest in that employer in return, in the form of dedication and loyalty.

Build long-term goals into ongoing conversations. People often make the mistake of thinking their manager is aware of their goals because they were mentioned in the interview process or an annual review. Create the space in regular touchpoints to discuss their bigger picture objectives alongside KPIs and other immediate concerns. The value here cuts both ways: team members will reap the benefit of your experience

and insight as they map out their path forward, and you will be able to more readily identify the right kinds of training and enrichment opportunities to help them get to the next step on that path.

Create and encourage opportunities for connection. From mentorship programs and employee resource groups (ERGs) to sponsoring volunteer activities and funding networking opportunities, there are countless ways companies of any size can support team members looking to build their professional relationships. Organizations should invest meaningful thought and time in building and internally promoting such programs, and managers should encourage their teams to take advantage of them. You can't force team members to engage, but you can share the ways your own career has benefited from intentional connection.

Begin where you are— but *begin*

There is no match for a person who knows exactly what he or she wants and is actively, intentionally focused on achieving it. The sooner you start fully owning your career, the better, but it's never too late, and the rewards will enrich your life in countless ways. \\
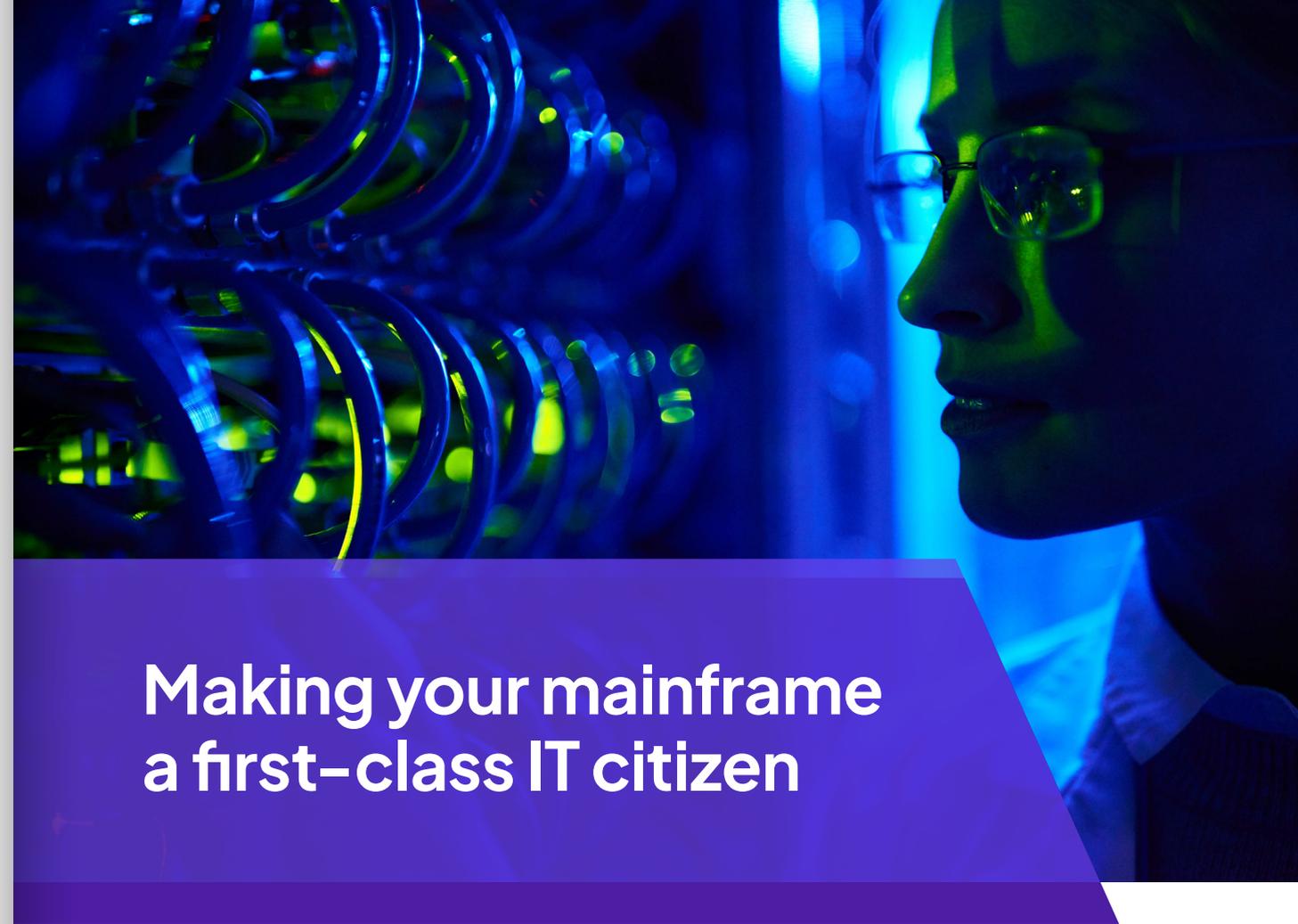
Did you know?

Women continue to be promoted at a lower rate than their male colleagues.

Female leaders are switching jobs in higher numbers than ever before.

Source: "Women in the Workplace 2022," LeanIn.Org and McKinsey.com, 2022.

Making your mainframe a first–class IT citizen

Why the mainframe may be your organization's most underappreciated asset—and what you can do to upgrade its status.

Headlines over the last decade have focused heavily on the cloud and its benefits to businesses. But with their undisputed track record for security and resilience, mainframes continue to be a vital asset for many enterprises.

Despite the growing adoption of cloud alternatives, the mainframe market size is estimated to be worth $5.3 billion (USD) in 2023[1], a very healthy outlook. And IBM's April 2022 launch of its IBM z16 is a sign of strong continued investment in mainframe technology. Because mainframes get on with their work with the bare minimum of fuss,

they can be taken for granted, and not considered central to a digital transformation strategy. But given its proven, highly secure capability to handle the enormous quantity of data demanded by today's business-critical applications, the mainframe warrants serious consideration as a core part of your IT strategy. In fact, with the right

Claire Connor
Senior Mainframe Solution
Architect, Ensono

[1] "Global Mainframe Market Insights and Forecast to 2028," marketgrowthreports.com.

approach this reliable workhorse can become one of the strategic superstars of your IT environment.

Three ways to unlock the strategic potential of your mainframe

Of course, even the best equipment can be improved. To get the most from the mainframe and maximize its capabilities, modernization is essential. The term "modernization" encompasses several different approaches to enhancing the performance and value of your mainframe. Which one you take should be informed by a clear understanding of your business priorities and goals. What is the business trying to achieve? Does the mainframe currently deliver value against these objectives? If not, why not? What do you need from your business applications, and therefore, where are they best placed to sit? And what are the future opportunities?

Senior business and IT leaders have an opportunity to gain a competitive advantage by applying the following lens when considering whether and how to leverage the mainframe to support their strategy.

#1) Know what mainframe modernization can offer

For some companies, a strategy of optimization is the best path forward: assessing the current environment and upgrading hardware, software and operational processes as needed to improve security, efficiency and performance. This relatively straightforward modernization approach can yield tremendous upside including significant ROI, operational stability, enhanced SLAs, and greater visibility and insight across your entire estate. Other organizations benefit from introducing more significant innovation into their mainframe environment.

While it may not be a word typically associated with the mainframe, innovation on this platform is both possible and hugely impactful. There are several exciting areas of mainframe innovation driving powerful business results today:

Modern capability development – Traditionally, mainframe issues have been addressed with bespoke code written to fix specific problems. This perpetuates the siloed position of the environment, drives up costs and limits access, innovation and productivity. A modernized mainframe presents an opportunity to replace homegrown code with open-source, platform agnostic programming languages like Python. This makes the mainframe far easier to maintain, and ensures your organization stays agile with changing strategic business needs, market trends and customer requirements by:

- Enabling rapid, cross-platform application development
- Automating any repeatable workflow or process
- Reducing time spent on configuration management and software updates

Cross-platform data visibility – There's a common perception that cloud can offer an agile and responsive alternative for enterprises, while mainframes offer reliability for business-critical functions. It's often not that straightforward, and it doesn't have to be an "either/or" decision.

A hybrid approach, where the mainframe has a lighter load but concentrates heavily on business-critical applications alongside cloud services where agility and faster evolution are a greater priority, can be incredibly effective. In a hybrid scenario, data fabric architectures provide a centralized and cost-effective point of data integration, access, management, governance and security between mainframe and cloud locations—delivering holistic visibility and insights across the full breadth of your IT estate.

Ecosystem connectivity and communication – Enabling the mainframe to seamlessly communicate and collaborate with other elements in the ecosystem is critical to maintaining business speed and velocity.

Modern integrations and interfaces such as web-based and mobile applications and APIs allow mainframe and non-mainframe assets to access each other quickly and securely. Here again, these modern applications are easy and intuitive for developers to consume on any platform, as opposed to proprietary coding methods which limit accessibility and increase costs.

Whichever approach you take, a modernized mainframe will deliver growth, increased productivity, decreased costs, improved customer experience, increased strategic agility moving forward, increased accessibility and ultimately, true business differentiation. As your business goals and needs change, your modernization journey can evolve to support them.
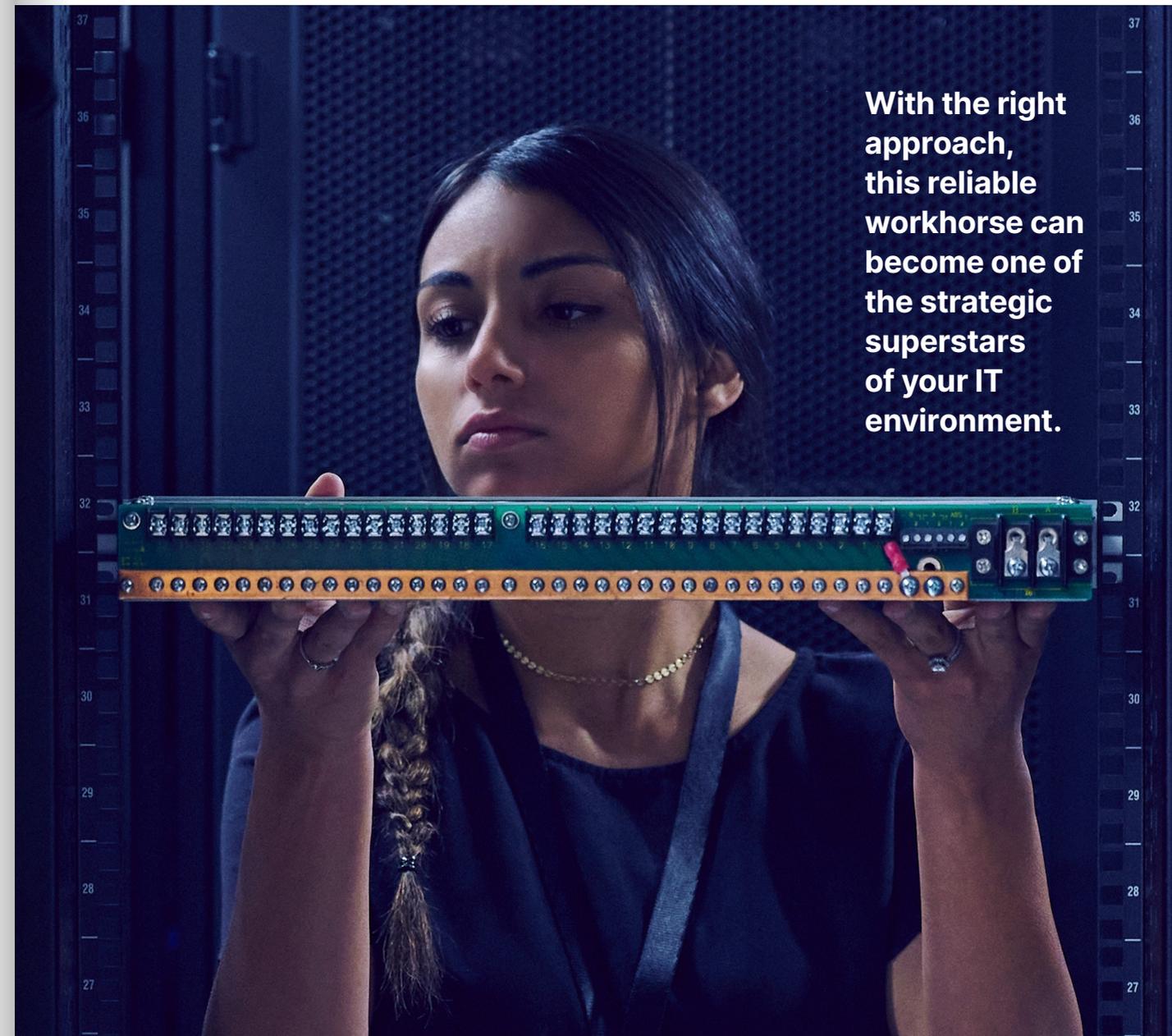
With the right approach, this reliable workhorse can become one of the strategic superstars of your IT environment.

#2) Understand the risks

Risks are an inherent aspect of any business transformation, and mainframe modernization involves its own unique set. While most risks can be managed by setting realistic, achievable project milestones, it's important to know upfront what you may be facing, including:

Staffing availability – The mainframe workforce is aging, and those who cycle out are not being replaced at an equivalent rate. Assess the tenure and capabilities of your current staff and build a plan to address any current or anticipated gaps. This could include supporting internal resources with training to broaden their knowledge and skills, or partnering with a service provider who can augment your workforce with their own mainframe experts.

Operational stability – Any change from X to Y is going to introduce some level of disruption into your steady state operations. This can be a particular point of vulnerability if you are saddled with technical debt due to inconsistent maintenance or frequently changed requirements, or if you've been operating in an environment with limited resources whose expertise and attention have been spread thin.

Culture management – Getting people to adapt to a new and different way of working can be a bumpy road. To help minimize negative impacts of a modernization project, the business should take a holistic approach: everyone from infrastructure or development teams should be brought along to understand the goal of the changes and how they will be affected and be responsive to any questions or concerns they raise.

#3) Don't defer, DECIDE

Once you have a clear picture of the opportunities, requirements, risks and mitigations of transformation, you need to make a decision: Is the mainframe going to be part of the enterprise infrastructure going forward, or not? Given the inevitable unknowns on the other side of a clear "yes" or "no" answer, deferring this decision to an indefinite future point can feel like a safe, do-no-harm path forward. But standing still carries its own risks—excess costs, operational disruptions, security vulnerabilities, lost innovation and more—which can potentially be greater than the risks of decisive action.

To paraphrase Jeff Bezos, some decisions are reversible and some aren't. Being comfortable with both making the decision to either embrace the mainframe as part of your go-forward strategy or leave it behind, and with accepting and responding to any unforeseen consequences of that decision, can free your business to move forward with energy, focus and a reinvigorated sense of purpose.

Start treating your mainframe like a first-class citizen

As the world continues to readjust in the wake of the global pandemic, digital transformation is at the heart of business strategy. Understanding how modernizing your mainframe can deliver more strategic value is essential. No longer "legacy" technology, a modernized mainframe can play a critical role in driving businesses into the next phase of growth, securing vital processes, enabling greater productivity and better business outcomes—in other words, a first-class citizen of your IT environment who more than earns its place alongside the technology stars. \\

> **Standing still carries its own risks, which can potentially be greater than any risks associated with decisive action.**

Imposter syndrome is everywhere... and it's getting in your way

How leaders can identify and eradicate this persistent psychological phenomenon and its impacts on their employees, their colleagues and themselves.

Coined over 40 years ago, "imposter syndrome" is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as, "the persistent inability to believe that one's success is deserved or has been legitimately achieved as a result of one's own efforts or skills."

When I first heard about imposter syndrome, something clicked. It was as if all my years of watching highly capable people hide from their accomplishments had been wrapped up into a neat, short phrase. The feelings of inadequacy associated with imposter syndrome have been recognized among both men and women, and in many professional settings.

That said, they are particularly intense among high-achieving women in industries and fields stereotyped by high levels of competence or intelligence, where individuals feel the pressure to represent their entire demographic. Imposter syndrome isn't a recognized psychiatric disorder. Instead, it's attributed to external factors that undermine internal belief systems,

Jodi Goglin
SVP Global Implementations and Operations Transformation, Ensono

and it's common in biased or inequitable cultures—such as male dominated industries.[1] If this sounds very much like the tech world, that's no coincidence.

How imposter syndrome impacts careers and businesses—and why leaders should care

To understand the best ways to deal with imposter syndrome amongst talented women in tech, it is essential to understand the context of their experiences. It's a fact that women are acutely underrepresented in the tech industry, with 32 percent of women in technical and engineering roles reporting that they are often the only woman in the room.[2] This is likely why women in tech face higher levels of inequality. Research from the Women in Technology Survey 2023 revealed that 76 percent of respondents have experienced gender bias or discrimination in the workplace at least once in their tech career.[3]

Women in tech roles are also more likely to have their knowledge and judgment questioned. It's the wider societal issues that lead to a greater number of women in tech experiencing imposter syndrome. Each negative experience chips away at self-worth, and the subsequent internalization of toxic narratives only exacerbates self-doubt. The stress that can plague employees with imposter syndrome can have a profoundly negative effect on mental and physical health. Negative effects include:

Workaholism – Workaholism or "toxic productivity" (overworking at the expense of other areas of your life), is one of the key effects of imposter syndrome cited by a group of women in tech we sat down with to discuss their experiences. The worry of whether or not they are doing a good job often leads to feelings of not doing enough, so they fall into the trap of working unhealthy hours. In the long run this can lead to burnout as well as myriad physical and mental health consequences.

Reinforcing the glass ceiling – Although both men and women can struggle with imposter syndrome, they do deal with it differently. Where men tend to internalize their feelings and "push through" their emotions (often leading to greater physical damage in the long term), women are more likely to mask their imposter feelings by dismissing praise or sharing achievements with the wider team. In one study, over 40 percent of women in senior positions cited imposter syndrome as a reason why they have consciously chosen not to apply for a promotion that they knew they deserved.[4]

Holding back careers – Lack of faith in their professional skills is silencing women's careers. Research from NatWest Group has shown that 28 percent of working women feel like imposter syndrome has stopped them speaking in a meeting.[5] Women we interviewed described several of their own experiences of being spoken over and interrupted, ideas ignored, and achievements underplayed.

76%
of women have experienced workplace gender bias or discrimination, while nearly a third in tech roles report they are often the only woman in the room.

40%
in senior positions cited imposter syndrome as a reason for not applying for a deserved promotion.

28%
feel like imposter syndrome has stopped them from speaking in a meeting.

[1] Pauline Rose Clance & Suzanne Imes, "The Imposter Phenomenon in High-Achieving Women: Dynamics and Therapeutic Intervention," *Psychotherapy Theory, Research and Practice,* Fall 1978.

[2] "Women in the Workplace 2022," LeanIn.Org and McKinsey.com, October 2022.

[3] "Women in Tech Survey 2023," *Women in Tech,* December 2022.

[4] Clare Josa, "How Is Imposter Syndrome Affecting Business? And What Can We Do About It?" 2019.

[5] "60% of women put off starting a business due to imposter syndrome," NatWest Group, 2019.

Recognizing and addressing imposter syndrome

As widely as our personalities, drivers and values differ, so do the ways in which imposter syndrome manifests. Approaches to tackle these feelings of fraud and inadequacy also vary between character type and situation. Dr. Valerie Young, a widely respected authority on imposter syndrome and founder of the Imposter Syndrome Institute (ISI), has simplified this by grouping the manifestations into five distinct subtypes.

Remember, these are a starting point, not hard and fast classifications—a struggling employee may exhibit a combination of traits. The important thing in our increasingly hybrid work environment is knowing the signs of imposter syndrome and starting a dialogue before they cause harm.

The Superhero

This subtype is convinced they are frauds amongst their colleagues and continuously push themselves harder to keep up. They might stay longer at the office, become stressed when they aren't working, or abandon their hobbies to focus on work. These are workaholics who are addicted to the validation that comes from working rather than the work output itself. Superheroes need to realize that no one has more power to make them feel good than they themselves possess. They should be coached to take constructive criticism on face value, and not as a personal attack. Most importantly, they need to objectively audit how much work is reasonable and seek out a healthier work/life balance.

The Genius

The Genius is compelled to make the complex simple, and the challenging easy. They judge their competency not on their efforts or outcomes, but on how quickly they master something.

Unlike Perfectionists, they don't just judge themselves on getting it right but on getting it right quickly and fluently. This subtype has a history of being the smartest one in the room, class or family, and often avoids challenges they don't believe they have a chance of solving. Geniuses need to view themselves as works in progress, allowing themselves the space to build skills over time.

Recognizing and addressing imposter syndrome

The Perfectionist

These individuals set excessively high goals for themselves and feel extreme self doubt when they inevitably fail to meet them. Perfectionists may also present as "control freaks" who struggle to delegate tasks. For this group, success holds little satisfaction because, at best, it is the least that should be expected and, at worst, they could have done better. As a result, Perfectionists need help owning and celebrating their achievements. They also must learn to accept mistakes as a natural part of the process and start on projects or tasks before they feel completely ready, understanding that "perfection is the enemy of progress."

The Soloist

The Soloist refuses to ask for help because that would risk revealing themself as a "fraud." They may frame requests in broad terms such as those of the project, team or business. They work independently, but often at a cost to their own mental health, or the outcome of the task. These folks need to recognize the power in asking for support and be coached on the importance and value of forging collaborative relationships.

The Expert

The Expert obsesses over the idea of what they know, how much they know or even who they know. Because they don't believe they will ever know enough, they fear being exposed. They might avoid applying for roles unless they meet every criterion, often believe their skillset is not enough, or even rankle when someone refers to them as an "expert." These people need to get comfortable learning about skills they need only when they need them, and start practicing on-the-job learning. Mentoring junior colleagues or volunteering can also help, while benefiting team members.

Women in technical roles are already the exception rather than the rule, let alone women in technical leadership positions. Imposter feelings prevent women from reaching for the next level, which means younger women contemplating a future in tech have fewer role models to aspire to.

When employees' voices are stifled, so are their ideas. Fear of failure may be preventing talent, men and women alike, from taking strategic, valuable risks—putting their employers at a competitive disadvantage.

Doubting other areas of their lives – For women in general, particularly working mothers, life is a constant battlefield of high-reaching expectations and judgements from society. A key part of our discussions that really stood out to me was how those expectations for many manifested in early life. We discussed how girls are taught to be the bigger person and not to fail. Fast forward to motherhood, and working mothers are expected to parent like they don't have a job, and work like they don't have a child. Such high expectations instilled from a young age means that trying to juggle various aspects of work and life can lead to the feeling that they are underperforming in both.

How to support employees and team members with imposter syndrome

Previously, imposter syndrome was written off as a personal problem to fix rather than a symptom of deeper root causes. Having doubts and anxieties does not make anyone a failure, nor do these valid feelings stem from simple low confidence.

Leaders and people managers of all levels have a responsibility to not only help identify imposter syndrome within their teams but also create a culture that blocks imposter feelings from developing in the first place. Doing so will be vital to developing and retaining women talent in tech. Here are five good places to start:

1) Provide 360-degree feedback – Mitigate doubt and pessimistic self-assessments by ensuring your organization has a process for collecting feedback up, down and sideways. Coach all employees on how to give valuable feedback (both positive and constructive), in ways that align with objective terms like your company values or core competencies.

2) Encourage specialization – There is always something new to learn (or relearn) in tech, but no one person can be an expert in all aspects of hardware, software, security, etc. To help employees ward off feelings of inadequacy, highlight the power of becoming a specialist in one or two disciplines. Striving to become the go-to expert in a particular subject matter, rather than knowing a little bit about a breadth of topics, can stoke confidence and provide focus.

3) Encourage both mentors and sponsors – Mentorship can help combat imposter feelings, as long as mentors are chosen with care. Pairing individuals with mentors from other teams or departments can take the pressure off the relationship and allow the mentor to provide objective, skills-based guidance. Take this a step further by looking for opportunities to serve as an employee's sponsor. For women in tech, a sponsor who will actively go to bat for their expertise and potential—and not merely dole out advice—can open critical doors.

Imposter syndrome should not be dismissed as a fad or distraction. It can have a deep-seated impact on your employees' wellbeing and mental health and, subsequently, a negative effect on company performance.

4) Make yourself vulnerable – According to nearly half of women executives in a KPMG study, having a supportive manager was a key factor toward minimizing feelings of imposter syndrome.[6] As uncomfortable as it may seem, executives and managers can normalize imposter feelings by opening up about their own challenges. Sharing your own wins and failures, or not-so-linear paths to success, demonstrates empathy and dispels the idea that an employee is the lone fraud hiding in a pack of achievers.

5) Foster peer connection – In addition to regular candor from leaders, outlets for peers to decompress and share experiences can help employees work through challenging points throughout their career. These might be internal company programs such as employee resource groups, or cohorts based on department or start date. They can also be external communities such as trade associations or industry Slack channels.

Creating opportunities for employees to "find their people" ensures they always have a neutral sounding board, and a place to hear perspectives from folks who have walked similar paths.

Imposter syndrome should not be dismissed as a fad or a distraction. It is likely to affect talent across your C-suite, your engineering teams, your client managers and everywhere in between. It can have a deep-seated impact on your employees' wellbeing and mental health and, subsequently, a negative effect on company performance. But with the right care and attention, we can learn to identify imposter behaviors and feelings in ourselves and our teams. More importantly, we can create environments where our people—women in tech in particular—see their value, embrace new opportunities and forge a path for the next generation. \\\\

[6] "Advancing the Future of Women in Business: The 2020 KPMG Women's Leadership Summit Report," KPMG.

The tweet heard 'round the conference center

How a single mobile phone snap got people in the twitterverse and across the IT world asking, "Where are all the women at tech events?"... and refusing to take silence for an answer.

In 2017, tech-industry veteran and then-Director of Public Cloud Strategy at Ensono Lin Classon tweeted a picture of an empty women's restroom at the AWS re:Invent conference. She wanted to make a simple but meaningful statement to her followers, mostly friends and fellow IT pros, about the lack of female attendees at such events.

The tweet quickly traveled far beyond its original audience. It grabbed the attention of women across the tech world as well as the media, sparking long-overdue conversations about female representation and inclusion in technology—and ultimately leading to the launch of Ensono's first-ever Speak Up survey, now in its third year.

Today, as SVP of Platform Strategy at Kognitiv, Lin is still advocating for more female faces, voices and points of view in the tech space. *The Maven Report* editor Sheila Lothian recently caught up with Lin to look back on the tweet that started it all and hear about what's giving her pause—and hope—for women in technology today.

Sheila Lothian: Lin, give us a quick recap of what prompted you to post the tweet from the restroom of AWS re:Invent back in 2017 and what happened after.

Lin Classon: Even at that time, AWS re:Invent was a massive conference with tons of attendees. In between sessions, the lines for the men's restrooms were huge. But I was able to just walk right into a beautiful, clean, empty women's restroom every time. Typically, whether you're at a concert or the airport or even just a store, it's the women's restrooms that have the lines streaming out. The difference was just so striking. So, I took a picture and tweeted it out. As cliché as it sounds, a picture is worth a thousand words. And if you were a woman who had been to a lot of tech conferences, you knew the story that picture told.

> ## "If you were a woman who had been to a lot of tech conferences, you knew the story that picture told. I think the tweet showed up at the right time to get some attention."
>
> **– Lin Classon, SVP of Platform Strategy, Kognitiv**

I think the tweet showed up at the right time to get some attention. The #MeToo movement was happening, people were starting to look at some of the unaddressed biases and inequities out there and say, "Hey, this isn't right. We should talk about it." Obviously, we need to find solutions. But the first thing you have to do is start talking about the problems. So there was really a groundswell of those conversations happening then, which the tweet became

a part of. I had women reaching out to me saying, "This is exactly what I was thinking." Media outlets picked up on it.

But to me the best outcome was that my company's Marketing leader at the time, who was a woman, said, "You know what? Let's *do* something about this. Let's see if we can find some data to support this hypothesis and figure out how to make this better." That turned into the Speak Up survey which really quantified the issues around lack of female representation at tech conferences and brought a lot of visibility and discussion to the issue. And it also got the entire team excited because we all felt the company was really walking the walk. Not just saying, "Hmm, that's terrible... yes, that really resonates," but taking action.

SL: In a 2019 interview with Tech.co[1] about your tweet, you said, "The under-representation of women at major tech events is largely a pipeline problem, and it's something I experience at every IT event I attend." Have you seen that problem improve since then?

LC: To build a pipeline, there has to be a pathway. We have to get girls interested in STEM, studying STEM, recruited by STEM companies. But that pathway can't just start. It needs to go on. It needs to take women all the way to positions of power and influence where they can actually create change.

One person I think is doing this in a powerful way is Melinda French Gates. She started an investment fund, Pivotal Ventures, and she has been very intentional about focusing on startups founded and owned by women. Culture is hard to change. We must do it, but it's hard. She wants to do something a little more drastic. Because if these startups grow and succeed, it will fundamentally

change the landscape of the tech world. The female perspective will be built in from the very beginning, built into the vision, built into the culture, built into the products, built into the design. And what she's proving is that investing in women isn't charity. It's good business. It's a profitable model. So, it's twofold: she's demonstrating through her own example the impact women in power can make, and she's also creating the pathways for other women to get all the way there. Of course, everyone cannot be a billionaire philanthropist. And that is not the only way to create change in the world. But seeing her lead from the top gives me hope.

SL: What impact do you think the post-pandemic shift to remote work has had on women's representation and advancement in tech?

LC: One good thing that came out of the pandemic was that it leveled the playing field. When tech conferences went all virtual, I noticed female attendance shot up. The interest in the content was always there, but suddenly the barriers that kept many women from attending in person were gone. Reduced or no attendance cost. No travel cost. It was easier for people who have others in the household to care for.

The same thing happened in the workplace. When everyone was working remotely, the playing field was more level. Now that things are opening up, I'm not too concerned about a negative impact on women in companies that are all-remote, or companies that have a fixed hybridity policy for everyone—two days a week in the office, three days remote, whatever it may be. That's great for women who are caretakers and if companies are careful not to let things slip back to the status quo, it's still a level playing field.

But I am very concerned about the impact in companies that offer very flexible policies where you have some people always working in the office and some people always working remotely. And I'm not the only one. I think someone has coined the term "Zoom ceiling." Instead of a glass ceiling women have this new barrier, this new form of bias in favor of people who are working in person. Because inevitably, women are going to lean toward that remote option.

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[6] Adam Rowe, "What Women's Restrooms Can Tell Us About Tech Conference Sexism," Tech.co, 2019.

SL: Can you share some advice for successfully navigating this new remote landscape?

LC: From the top on down, companies need to be aware of the potential for bias that may unintentionally exist towards employees who are in-office and provide managers with more training and tools to help them combat it. Maybe that means more planned engagement or more frequent goal setting. Maybe it's mandating the use of participation tools on communication platforms so remote workers can have a stronger presence in meetings. Really just being very conscientious about ensuring equal treatment for people who are working from home and people who are back in the office.

Managers of mixed in-person/remote teams need to be highly focused on deliverables and outcomes. But the outcomes only matter if you're able to provide your team with very clear expectations. And I think it's okay to be very specific. Managers don't want to seem like micromanagers—and people don't want to be micromanaged. But in this environment, that kind of clarity is critical. And remote employees who are part of mixed teams have to be much more proactive about "showing their work". Your manager isn't going to walk by your desk and see your three monitors and multiple spreadsheets up or see you strategizing in a conference room like they will with your in-person colleagues. If your work is kind of invisible, you need to make it visible. Again, it's not about being micromanaged, it's about giving your manager a view into your day-to-day, so they know you're performing at an equally high level.

We also need to engineer more humanity into our work interactions when we're remote. Give someone a "thumbs up" reaction on a call. Send them an email and say, "Great job in that presentation today!" Schedule a 15-minute chat just to catch up. It can be hard, especially if you're an introvert. It can feel a little artificial. But it makes a difference. And managers can help here too. Maybe it becomes part of a goal: "Hey, I want to make sure you continue to be part of the group, let's plan for you to schedule five coffee chats across the org this quarter."

And for women especially who find it hard to make their voices heard working remotely, I really recommend joining online communities. There are a lot of women out there in a role just like yours, in a situation like yours. And once you start participating in those conversations and feeling that support, you will find the confidence to raise your hand in the next virtual meeting and make yourself heard. Because you'll feel like you have a thousand angels at your back supporting you.

SL: Before we let you go... any upcoming tech conferences planned?

LC: I'm definitely looking at which conferences line up with my schedule now that we're back in person—and I will be keeping my fingers crossed for some nice long lines at the women's restrooms. But I'll have my camera ready, just in case!

This conversation has been condensed and lightly edited for clarity. See results from the Ensono 2022 Speak Up survey on page 32. \\

> **"There has to be a pathway to take women all the way to positions of power and influence where they can actually create change."**

Tackling workplace harassment today requires new solutions

Over the last three years, we've witnessed nothing short of a work revolution. But, amid intense hype around the often-invoked "new normal," it's easy to forget that, regrettably, some aspects of work remain the same.

Despite improvements in so many facets of how we work, toxic cultures and harassment are ongoing, even growing issues, and women in technology organizations know this all too well.

Ensono's most recent Speak Up survey (see infographic on page 32) found that over 20 percent of women in technology across the U.S., U.K. and India report experiencing verbal and sexual harassment on the job.[1] Workplace toxicity and harassment are not simply people problems, they're a threat to the health and success of businesses everywhere. In 2023, employers need to evolve their approach to acknowledging, understanding and mitigating these issues (or risk losing talent and damaging their reputations).

Veena Khandke
VP – Service Delivery Head, Ensono India

[1] "Speak Up 2022: Women's voices in the tech workplace," Ensono, 2022.

59%

of women have experienced harassment and/or microaggressions at work over the past year, up from 52% in 2021.

54%

of those who experienced violence and harassment in the last five years disclosed it to another person.

43%

of employees who haven't reported a harassment instance say it was because of unclear company procedures.

The numbers don't lie: Harassment persists across industries and geographies

Ensono's own Speak Up study reflects one segment of a broader trend in harassment at work. First-of-its-kind research from the International Labour Organization and Gallup found that more than 22 percent of employed people around the world have experienced at least one form of violence and harassment at work.[2]

And while the reality is that employees of any gender can be workplace aggressors, women are often at the receiving end of these interactions. 59 percent of women have experienced harassment and/or microaggressions at work over the past year, according to Deloitte's Women at Work 2022 report, up from 52 percent in 2021.[3]

These statistics aren't surprising, but they are disappointing. Even with employers' efforts to make meaningful progress toward inclusivity and greater diversity, there is more work to be done. Some may question how these numbers are rising as more employees work remotely. In fact, hybrid arrangements introduce new challenges to identifying and mitigating bad behaviors. In a video meeting or chat conversation, a microaggression (or worse) is often only seen by the two people involved. Today, unless the harassed employee opens up to a coworker or manager, these aggressions may remain invisible. As we move faster into a world of flexible, decentralized work, the checks and balances we rely on to promote positive cultures need to catch up.

Silence and subpar policies impede needed change

Despite the prevalence of workplace harassment, so many of these interactions go unreported. The ILO/Gallup study found that worldwide, only 54 percent of those who experienced violence and harassment in the last five years disclosed it to another person. Of this group, just 55 percent told their employer or supervisor; most were likely to tell a friend or family member instead. Almost all women surveyed in Deloitte's Women at Work research reported feeling that their employer will not take action when non-inclusive behaviors are reported.[3]

In India, where I'm based, part of this stems from a culture where women aren't always empowered to vocalize their own wants and needs (let alone concerns). Universally, this inclination to stay silent indicates another root problem: vague organizational policies. Of employees who haven't reported a harassment instance, 43 percent say it was because of unclear procedures within their companies. This is another issue that can be exacerbated by hybrid work. Inconsistent communication across distributed teams and channels can dilute the power of processes meant to safeguard employees in the first place.

When it comes to practices meant to stop toxic behavior before it occurs, there's also room for improvement. Recent McKinsey research found that though most HR professionals expect managers to promote inclusion on their teams, only around half of managers actually take action to encourage respectful team behavior.[4]

Misconduct and workplace harassment don't simply happen—they're the product of a culture that enables (or turns a blind eye to) them. Left unchecked, they can wreak havoc on your entire organization.

What happens when we let toxic behavior slide

Many of us have dealt with stressful jobs, or roles that brought us so little fulfillment that it was hard to look forward to the work week ahead. But a truly toxic work culture does much more than incentivize employees to hit the snooze button.

Toxic behavior erodes morale across your team. Working for a company, or a leadership team, that fails to protect us from microaggressions or harassment can quickly foster distrust, burnout and disengagement. This not only damages relationships and collaboration across your business, but also impacts employee productivity and mental health.

As we move faster into a world of flexible, decentralized work, the checks and balances we rely on to promote positive cultures need to catch up.

[2] "Experience of violence and harassment at work: A global first survey," International Labour Organization, 2022.

[3] "Women @ Work 2022: A global outlook," Deloitte, 2022.

[4] "Women in the Workplace 2022," McKinsey & Company, 2022.

If those on the receiving end of harmful interactions are still hesitant to speak up, and if the perpetrators don't understand the gravity of their behavior, there is more work to do.

The ultimate consequence is losing your most important asset — your people. Toxic corporate cultures were found to be the leading indicator of attrition across industries.[5]

Toxic behavior places more pressure on managers. As the saying goes, "There are three sides to every story: yours, mine and the truth." In environments that lack clear protocols, managers shoulder a greater responsibility to decipher the truth when instances of harassment are brought forward. Knowing that plenty of managers struggle to foster an inclusive team atmosphere, we can't realistically expect them to navigate and arbitrate incidents on their own.

Toxic behavior undermines our investments to improve diversity. We already know that, despite some strides, women are underrepresented in technology companies and technical roles.[6] Slow progress is still progress, but perpetuating environments that aren't conducive to helping women grow will reverse this forward momentum. In India, more than 30 percent of the IT workforce is female, but we often see women leave the workforce in their late 20s and early 30s as they get married and have children.[7] With these cultural gender dynamics already at play, employers must work even harder to create safe spaces where women can thrive and innovate. In today's competitive economic climate, employers can't afford to suffer these consequences. But what does real change look like?

Four ways to purge and prevent toxicity at work

As a Gen Xer, I've witnessed a clear shift throughout my own career in how employers handle toxicity. Policies and programs exist today that did not exist years ago. Mandatory corporate anti-bias and harassment trainings have increased overall awareness of these issues and their impacts. But, if those on the receiving end of harmful interactions are still hesitant to speak up, and if the perpetrators still don't understand the gravity of their behavior, there is more work to do. Here are four ways employers can do better at combating harassment and other aggressions:

#1) Zero in on flawed practices – Hours of education and reinforcement will not always undo a personality problem (i.e., someone's own deep-seated biases). Instead, employers need to take an objective look at their operations, reflecting on how gaps in certain policies or communication standards may contribute to a toxic environment. If parts of your corporate infrastructure enable the wrong actions from employees, it's time to knock down that load-bearing wall.

#2) Model diversity and inclusion at the highest level – For female employees especially, the best support is other women. When women don't hold roles with decision-making power, it's impossible to change the experiences of those on the ground floor. When more women inhabit leadership teams, C-suites and boards, there are more voices advocating for them throughout your ranks. Many female leaders, myself included, take it upon themselves to proactively ask their employees, "How are you?" and "What do you need?" These simple gestures generate trust, making employees comfortable and willing to raise important concerns when necessary.

#3) Create space – Clear incident protocols are only part of the solution. Leaders must also create safe forums for reporting issues, channels that allow people to candidly share their experiences without fear. People managers must also be equipped with the resources to play different roles depending on the situation. This likely means going beyond boilerplate, self-guided corporate training. Consider how more interactive, participant-led education can better prepare your teams for a variety of potential issues. This may mean role playing ways to effectively listen to an employee's account. It could also mean discussing what specific avenues are available for escalating an incident. A one-size-fits-all approach cannot accommodate the nuance of individual scenarios.

#4) Nail the follow-through – The International Labour Organization survey found the top reason employees didn't disclose harassment was that it, "felt like a waste of time." Leaders at all levels should be communicating the consequences for violating workplace codes of conduct, whether that means termination, temporary suspension or being put on a performance improvement plan.

A one-size-fits-all approach cannot accommodate the nuance of individual scenarios.

When incidents are raised, employers need to demonstrate that they will be dealt with swiftly and investigated thoroughly and the rights and reputations of all parties protected until the investigation runs its course, or else risk more employees suffering in silence. Make your company's response and investigation protocol public on an intranet or internal wiki so that everyone understands the process and can be confident their feedback won't disappear into a void.

We're entering a new era in how we work. Organizations can no longer rely on the same decades-old playbook for mitigating misconduct and expect positive results. In 2023, no company should be new to a documented harassment and discrimination policy. Now is the time for leaders to revisit the status quo and ask, "Are we doing enough?" And if the data has taught us anything, the answer is probably, "No."

To effect significant change, employers will need to commit to redlining existing policies, patching the holes and testing creative solutions. Not all will choose to make this investment, but those that do will be more resilient and productive for it. \\

[5] Donald Sull, Charles Sull and Ben Zweig, "Toxic Culture Is Driving the Great Resignation," MIT Sloan Management Review, 2022.

[6] "Women in the tech industry: Gaining ground, but facing new headwinds," Deloitte, 2021.

[7] Dr. Katy Ring, "Women in Tech: India Leads the Way," 451 Research.

Stephanie Dedmon: Creating a state of success

The State of Tennessee CIO and newly minted NASCIO president on unconventional tech career paths, the power of visionary mentorship, and how government agencies can bring more women to the IT table.

With women accounting for less than one-quarter of CIOs across government agencies—and an even smaller percentage at the state level—Stephanie Dedmon operates in rarefied air, having risen to the position of Chief Information Officer for the State of Tennessee.

Add to that her recent election as President of NASCIO (The National Association of State Chief Information Officers), and she is a particularly exceptional role model for women looking to forge a successful career in the male-dominated tech world. Her team even coined a new word— "Stephanitely"—to capture the can-do attitude she embodies and inspires. Her stellar IT credentials are even more impressive given that a technology-centered role was anything but a foregone conclusion at the start of Stephanie's career. She wasn't steeped in STEM as a young student and graduated from college with a degree in Marketing. But after receiving her MBA she joined Accenture, where her work with tech clients introduced her to the world that would eventually become her professional home.

A deliberate journey to an unexpected destination

After 15 years with Accenture, Stephanie left to pursue an opportunity to lead the State of Tennessee's Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) implementation. While she was well-versed in project management and large software implementation at the time, she didn't know much about ERP. But she benefited from a hiring manager who saw beyond the so-called gaps in her experience to the value her proven skills would bring to the task and was willing to take a risk on her.

"I remember saying to him, 'Here's how I think we should structure the governance, here's how I think we should procure it. But we need to run it by a steering committee.' And he said, 'We hired you because you know what you're doing. So just do what you think we need to do.'" His faith reinforced hers, and she embraced the job fully confident in her ability to make it successful.

The role was an excellent introduction to the inner workings of state government, from payroll, financials and procurement to HR, benefits and other critical administrative functions.

It also gave Stephanie an opportunity to forge strong relationships with process owners and SMEs across the organization to build out new teams and capabilities—all of which proved the ideal training ground for her eventual move to the CIO office. Her pivotal step in that direction came in 2014, when her then-CIO, boss and mentor tapped her as his successor.

At the time, Stephanie says, it wasn't a role she saw herself in. "Networking, servers and infrastructure were not things I was familiar with. Customer service and building teams and implementing things and solving problems—those were my strengths. But the trends and research for state CIOs are fairly consistent: the key skills are more about problem solving, customer service and building relationships." It was another powerful experience of a mentor who saw beyond the seeming limits of her resume. "I thank him every day for seeing that potential in me."

Stephanie's team coined a new word to capture the can-do attitude she embodies and inspires...

"Stephanitely!"

The next year, he made Stephanie his deputy CIO, working with her to learn and master the technical areas of the job. She thrived in the new role. Upon his retirement in 2018, she was appointed CIO and has been leading the agency's operational areas ever since.

Powering tech leadership with a people-first approach

For Stephanie, the care and support women tend to bring to the workplace is something to be recognized and celebrated: A positive force in and of itself, and a critical balance to a "just-get-it-done" mentality that is necessary to move business forward but often discounts the negative residual effects on people.

Her belief in centering positive human experience manifested itself early on in Stephanie's tenure as CIO. One of her first orders of business in the role was to rally her team and leaders around a renewed focus on the agency's identity and culture.

For Stephanie, the care and support that women tend to bring to the workplace is something to be recognized and celebrated: A positive force in and of itself.

That meant doubling down on the "service" aspect of their customer service, and building an inclusive, supportive, family-oriented workplace—two distinct objectives driving toward the same outcome. "When you're doing both well, they're reciprocal. You need to feel a connection at work that is positive, where you feel like you're supported and have a path forward. And the culture that you foster internally is going to be what your customers see and experience."

Investment in culture also serves as a powerful retention tool. "The competition for talent is so steep these days. You must figure out other ways to make a job and a career with the state more attractive."

Inviting more women into tech by setting a bigger table

While her own tech career isn't rooted in a science or technology background, Stephanie considers the focus on STEM for girls and young women as a hugely positive force for expanding female representation in tech companies and roles.

At the same time, she sees opportunity in reframing the idea of what a career in technology looks like. "It does not have to be a geeky proposition. You don't have to be a strong technologist to have a tech career. There are so many areas that are equally as important to the success of the technology organization." Stephanie attributes the passion for project management that was her own entrée into tech to the influence of her mother, whose legendary to-do lists kept the household running like clockwork.

She is also a strong advocate for acknowledging and supporting the unique needs of women who choose to pursue parallel paths of career and motherhood. "We've come a long way as a society. But you have to manage young mothers—and for that matter, young fathers—differently."

Even with a string of supportive bosses, Stephanie experienced the self-imposed guilt of balancing work and motherhood as she moved up the professional ladder. As a leader, she is adamant about giving her team members with young children the flexibility they need and empowering them to ditch the guilt. "I constantly tell them, 'Do not worry. Do what you need to do.' I know that when they feel supported, they're going to give me that support back in spades."

Bringing the outside in

Stephanie instinctively attaches herself to organizations and opportunities that support the visibility and advancement of women in technology. And she strives to extend those opportunities into the workplace.

An active member of the Tennessee chapter of Women in Technology, she encourages both the women and men on her team to attend local networking events and leverage the organization's workshops and speakers to inform their own conversations and initiatives.

NASCIO's monthly forum for women in state IT also gives members great exposure to female leaders across a variety of industries; recent speakers have included the CEO of the Federal Office of Management and Budget. And her team's DEI committee plays an active role in expanding inclusion and educational opportunities across all areas of her organization.

Advice for the next generation

Given her position and path to success, it's no surprise that Stephanie's career advice is highly sought after. Her answer comes down to two key elements: Ownership and mentorship. "You have to take responsibility for your own career development. Ask for what you need. The worst someone can say is no. But if you're good at what you do and you're a problem solver and you're dedicated and committed, supervisors and managers are most likely going to do what they can do to make sure you're supported."

Her own career is a testament to the importance of building and nurturing the right professional relationships. "Seek out those people who demonstrate not just the professional qualities but also the personal qualities you admire."

"You need to feel a connection at work that is positive, where you feel like you're supported and have a path forward. And the culture that you foster internally is going to be what your customers see and experience."

– Stephanie Dedmon, State of Tennessee CIO

More than likely, she says, they'll jump at the opportunity. "One of the most flattering things that has ever happened to me is someone coming to me and saying, 'I don't know you very well, but I think you're awesome. Would you be my mentor?'"

For Stephanie, the lifelong learner, relationship builder, and champion of women in technology—and beyond it—the benefits of mentorship flow both ways. "I think I get as much out of those conversations as she does. I always learn something." \\

Reasons to cheer. Room to grow.

Expert technology advisor and managed service provider Ensono recently surveyed 1,500 female full-time tech workers in the U.S., U.K. and India about day-to-day challenges, the impact of remote work and gaps in support and training.

Here's what they had to say...
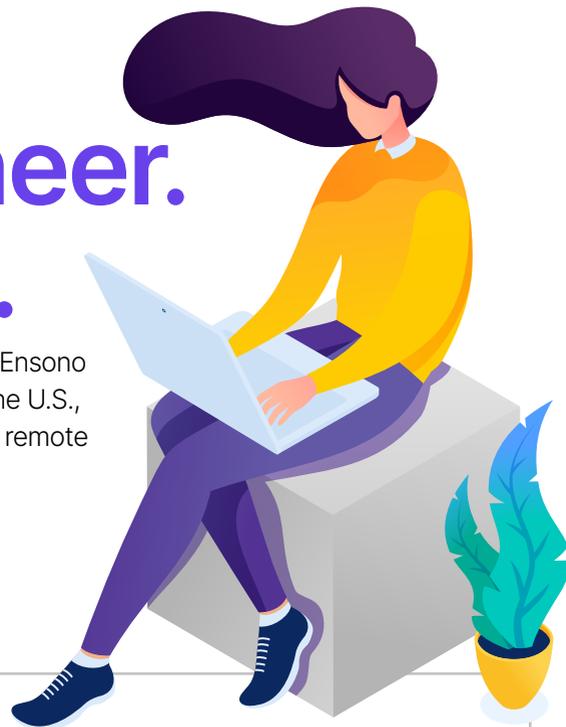
Men are stepping up...

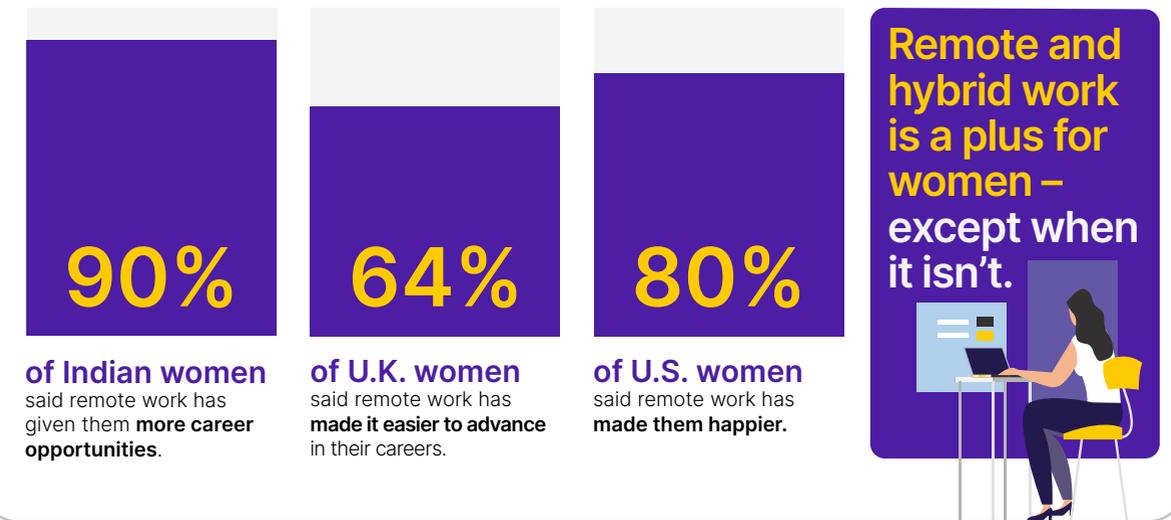**50% of respondents agree** male allies in the workplace have increased in the past 5 years.

U.S.	U.K.	India
51%	**42%**	**57%**
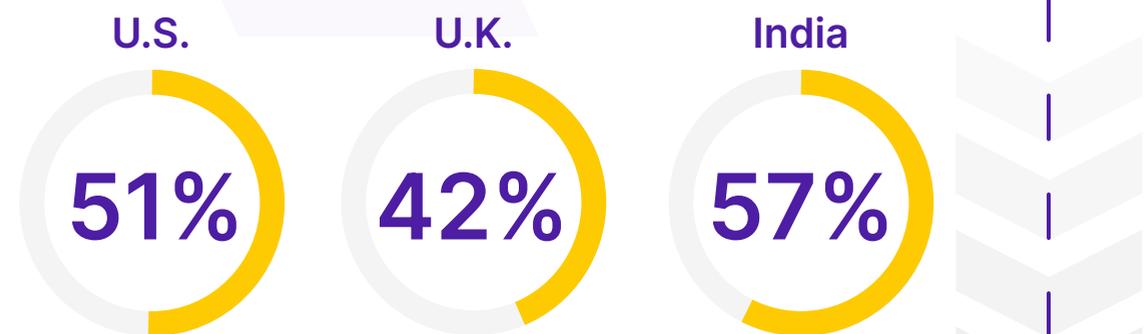
...but toxic behavior persists.

1 in 5 U.S. women report experiencing verbal AND sexual harassment while on the job.

A global problem:

29%
of Indian women have experienced **ideas being dismissed** in a group setting.

22%
of U.K. women have experienced **intimidation** in the work place.

20%
of U.S. women have experienced **microaggressions*** in the work place.

Remote work is (mostly) working.

In India, a near-universal boon. In the U.K., a more complicated story.

90%
of Indian women said remote work has given them **more career opportunities**.

64%
of U.K. women said remote work has **made it easier to advance** in their careers.

80%
of U.S. women said remote work has **made them happier**.

Remote and hybrid work is a plus for women – except when it isn't.

Learning and development lags.

Global insights:

76% of Indian women have been told that a **lack of training or skill development** is keeping them from career advancement.

Less than 50% of respondents' employers offer internal training programs or academies.

Less than 25% of organizations have an official mentorship program.

58%
of U.S. organizations offer fully paid education/coursework outside the company.

26%
of U.K. companies offer employee interest groups or clubs for learning/professional development.

20%
of women across geographies are planning to move on to a new job in the next year.

"More learning and development opportunities"
The **top feature** women are looking for in a new job in the U.S. and India.

* A comment or action that subtly and often unconsciously or unintentionally expresses a prejudiced attitude toward a member of a marginalized group.

Making sense (and dollars) of ChatGPT

Dear Mavens,

Talk of ChatGPT is everywhere right now. As a CEO, how should I be thinking about deploying this technology to drive value across my organization?

F.L. in Austin, Texas

Hi F.L.,

I'm so glad you're approaching the advent of OpenAI's ChatGPT from a positive, "How can this help?" angle, especially given the abundance of fear—and fearmongering—surrounding AI technology right now (i.e. "Is this thing going to replace my job?"). The fear is understandable, but to see why it's misplaced—at least for the time being—it's helpful to take a step back and consider ChatGPT in a broader context. In the tech community, we tend to overestimate how quickly technology is moving. While the current pace of

innovation in AI feels shockingly fast, the reality is that there has been a developed body of research around AI for 70+ years. What we're experiencing could be summed up as "a 70-year overnight leap" in capability!

ChatGPT is unquestionably a meaningful milestone on the road to the Singularity—the theoretical "point of no return" when AI overtakes human intelligence—but we're not there yet. And despite some of the more clickbait-y headlines floating around, we probably won't be for a while.

As it stands today, ChatGPT's greatest power lies not in the existential threat it poses to knowledge workers' jobs, but in its potential to make those jobs dramatically easier, more impactful, and ultimately more valuable. Applied thoughtfully, ChatGPT can be a productivity tool on a level previously unimagined, empowering people to:

- Make better decisions faster (with a caveat—see #2),
- Dramatically increase the volume and quality of content produced, and
- Spend more time on high value tasks that require true expertise.

Google and its predecessors (Yahoo!, Lycos, Alta Vista, etc.) gave us the ability to type a few words into a search engine and instantaneously receive a list of resources to peruse—incalculably transforming the act of research and information processing. ChatGPT takes that acceleration a giant leap further. Beyond giving you links to resources, it gives you what you might create after consuming all that content. And ChatGPT goes beyond even that, creating fiction, marketing copy, programming code and more with just a prompt.

The strategic applications and practical implications of this are massive. Any area of your business that requires written content in some form can immediately use and benefit from this technology. Consider the graphic on the right for how ChatGPT could be cross-functionally deployed to help people and teams accomplish far more in less time. To maximize the effectiveness of ChatGPT in your business, those tasked with using it need to do two critical things:

#1) Ask the right question – The quality of ChatGPT's output rises or falls in direct correlation to the quality of the prompt submitted to it. If you want to get the biggest bang for your AI buck, specificity and precision, as reflected in the examples, are key.

This may mean investing 15–20 minutes developing, submitting and fine-tuning your wording until you receive a response you can work with. Compare that with the 15–20 hours a person might spend getting that result via manual internet research, writing and editing (assuming the human has the authoring skill and context to create such content) and you can start to see the productivity-accelerating potential here.

How ChatGPT can assist your team

HR could use it to develop up-to-the-minute manuals and training:

> Write a sexual harassment policy for a manufacturing company that reflects 2023 best practices.

Customer service could use it to craft situation-specific scripts:

> Write an emotionally sensitive 200-word email response to an angry customer who has sent a complaint about their product to my retail company's support line.

PR could use it to generate customized material for media opportunities:

> Write a list of 20 interview questions to ask a female CTO of a healthcare company on the topic of women in tech leadership.

Marketing could use it to build targeted content at scale:

> Write 750 words on the benefits of near-shore and offshore cloud services in the style of a landing page.

IT could use it to develop industry-relevant protocols:

> Write a five-point password management policy that considers the domestic and global regulations surrounding the financial services industry.

#2) Edit in truth and humanity – Once you've got a solid ChatGPT-produced starting point, the actual work begins. There are some things only a real, live person can bring to any piece of content, the most important being an eye for falsehoods, inaccuracy and bias—all of which have demonstrably shown up in content generated by the tool[1], making proper review and editing by a subject matter expert an absolute imperative.

Brand voice, personality, lived experience and perspective, the unique needs and interests of a specific audience also require human insight and understanding. These are also the very elements that will make that content authentic, resonant and successful in achieving its aims. This marketing use case illustrates just how much more effective that real, live person can become with ChatGPT. Using the tool to draft the foundational content, a marketer could conceivably build ten highly-nuanced landing pages, drawing on their deep knowledge of the specific vertical and customer audience each one is targeting, in the same amount of time it would normally take them to draft a single page from start to finish. More and better content, launched faster, translates directly into increased bottom-line revenue. Imagine that effect replicated across the various contexts and activities of your organization. The numbers start to add up... fast.

More and better content, launched faster, translates directly into increased bottom-line revenue.

Test the waters before you dive all the way in

The active application of ChatGPT in everyday business operations is a "when," not "if," question, so it's great that you're getting out ahead of it. But before implementing any official policies around the use of ChatGPT, I would encourage you and your team members to open an account with OpenAI (openai.com) and just start playing around with it.

The likely response, especially of someone fearful of having their talents rendered obsolete by ChatGPT, will be a combination of awe and relief. It is truly amazing to see what this platform has the potential to do, but its limitations also become quickly apparent. And aside from dispelling fears, asking your team to explore the tool through the lens of productivity and quality-of-work enhancement can generate ideas for applications at the department or role level—and outcomes at the business level—that you may not have considered. \\

Answered by Angela Spencer
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[1] Olivia Solon, "Is ChatGPT an Eloquent Robot or a Misinformation Machine?", The Washington Post, January 2023.

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