How Hiring Women and Moms Propels Economic Recovery



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This week I spent time with a friend I admire highly – Trina Limpert, formerly Global President of Women for eBay. She now heads RizeNext, with a vision of raising up a new generation of diverse technologists, executives, and directors. Since mid-2019, she's been training companies in the creation of diversity and impact initiatives that drive change while also propelling profitability and growth (agendas that are often seen as being at odds).

Limpert and I have much in common, as we both began our technology careers at Provo, Utah based Novell, Inc., which was acquired by The Attachmate Group in 2011. I arrived in

1986 before launching my own business in 1989. Limpert's Novell experience was much longer, beginning in 1998 and ending in 2007 when she transitioned to a role at Oracle.

The 1980s and 90s were a different world for women in technology. I was fortunate to begin my work in public relations under a female Senior Vice President who served as a wonderful mentor. But much of the reason I left Novell to start my own business in 1989 is that I came up against too many requirements that were unfriendly to both women and parents.

As a female programmer, Limpert faced much greater difficulties. On her first day of work, she was handed a box of computer parts and instructed to build her own workstation. She did, but wryly noted the shiny new computers that arrived on a regular basis for her male counterparts.

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Translating lived experience into lasting change

Neither of us was inclined to be angry and we both persevered. But the experiences instilled a desire in Limpert, especially, to make things better for the women and the employees and leaders of every diversity to come.

To that end, Limpert stepped forward as Global President of Women during her tenure at eBay and launched the RizeNext organization last year. In addition to corporate and individual training, Limpert provides free assessments, consultations, and roadmaps on diversity programs and female talent pipelines and has given a number of keynote addresses. In early 2020, RizeNext also became an affiliate partner of MotherCoders.org, a non-profit organization headquartered in

San Francisco that’s provided technical training and career preparation in the Bay area and New York to more than 300 U.S. mothers so far.

Limpert could not have predicted the level of need that now exists for the MotherCoders program in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic and the economic challenges it has spawned.

Limpert notes that 86 percent of U.S. women become mothers by age 44, which means that sidelining women who become mothers is a colossal waste of human capital. Yet women drive 85 percent of business and consumer purchasing, putting an average of 90 percent of their income back into their local economies. Given this, it makes good sense to invest in mothers to ensure the continued development of products and services. The training MotherCoders provides is also beneficial in the respect that it puts a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) role model into the home of each individual it trains, resulting in stronger families and communities for generations to come.

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A bluprint for helping mothers learn to code

For other regions that are intrigued by this kind of program, here’s the way the MotherCoders initiative works in the Salt Lake City pilot:

- The program provides a nine-week/Saturdays only curriculum from 10:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. In Utah, the program will select 10 students each in two locations, beginning Sept. 12 and Sept. 26, 2020, in facilities sponsored by Weber State University and Bottega, in Lehi. Current plans are for the course to run live, with appropriate social distancing, but if necessary, the

program will be remote. In either case, the program offers childcare support on-site, or through a stipend for remote students to ensure participants are able to fully focus on their own development.

- All participants are individuals of at least 21 years old who identify as a woman in a way that's significant to her, including anyone who is trans, cis, or queer or was assigned female gender at birth but does not identify with the binary definition of gender.
- Participants are caring for at least one individual under the age of 17 when admitted to the program and through its duration.
- It is suggested but not required that entrants have at least five hours of coding experience – enough to know that it is something they'd like to do much more.

The program welcomes sponsors to participate with in-kind donations and services as well as funds for tuition and stipends for costs such as childcare not covered by tuition in an effort to creating a scenario that provides as many as possible of the seats on scholarship. For Salt Lake, the program is discounted to $1,450 per seat (a 65 percent discount from standard national cost). Limpert notes that organizations including Facebook, eBay, Album VC, and Lockheed Martin have signed up as Utah sponsors so far, in addition to the two universities providing facility space. The program strives to have each participant cover a minimum of $200 of their costs as a personal investment in the program's completion, but in cases of hardship, even this portion could be potentially waived.

Participants learn technical skills by building and launching a website using HTML, CSS, and JavaScript to showcase the skills acquired for potential employers. They expand understanding of the technology industry including trends, the issues driving growth and innovation, and the potential career paths for technology workers. The program also provides

professional network-building to result in connections to like-minded peers and working professionals.

Advantages for integrating women into the workforce are clear

While Utah has fared better than many states in the process of recovery, the state continues to suffer from a shortage of sufficient technology talent that could not only add revenue to the region’s businesses and economy but could create additional high-paying jobs for a segment of the population that is typically disadvantaged. This is true for many U.S. regions.

The results can be astonishing. A 2018 success survey by MotherCoders showed 62 percent of California and new York participants are now fulfilling technology jobs. Nineteen percent have gotten promotions and four percent have launched their own entrepreneurial ventures. Together, they’ve increased their salaries by an average of 68 percent, increasing their household incomes by an average of $54,360.

For every technology business, the value of developing a pipeline of female employees should be clear. Other regions can reach out to MotherCoders or to Limpert and RizeNext to suggest affiliations or can launch their own programs to accomplish similar goals.

Limpert also offers suggestions for ways to make Impact Initiatives successful in organizations. Her ideas are available from her website or may also be available here in a future column. In all cases, it is clear that providing training and support for female employees bears dividends on multiple levels. Even better, instead of observing and bemoaning the continuing salary discrepancy between genders, companies that participate in programs like MotherCoders and RizeNext are actively closing the gap.

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