IWD - Jagoda Sulikowska

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Mar 2023

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As part of International Women's Day 2023, we're sharing insights from our team about their experiences, their role models and their goals for inspiring others as, or about, women in tech and business.

How did you become a woman in tech/a workplace?

After graduating from university with a degree in modern languages (German and Japanese), I really didn't know what I wanted to do, but my language skills somehow led me into a project analyst role within financial operations.

I enjoyed the variety of different projects, but after a little bit of exposure to JavaScript and SAP scripting, I knew I wanted something more 'techy'; that's when I decided to jump ship and do a software development apprenticeship. I haven't looked back since!

How do you feel empowered as a woman in tech/a workplace?

By working together with clients and colleagues to resolve complex issues.

Sometimes empowerment comes from beating my inner imposter syndrome; anyone in the tech space, regardless of their sex or gender, can fall victim to it, but working collaboratively and having open conversations with peers is a great remedy for me.

What advice would you give to the next generation of women starting their careers?

The best piece of advice I ever got is to apply for roles even if I do not completely meet all the criteria. Most male friends I asked say they apply even if they barely meet 50% of the criteria – but I felt I had to check every box. If I didn't listen to this advice, I wouldn't be here!

Don't get me wrong, as a woman, you will have a lot of bad interviews. Some where you will instantly feel dismissed, belittled, and not listened to. Even so, stick it out. There are amazing people out there that you will connect with, learn from, and maybe even teach.

If there is a woman who has inspired you throughout your career, who was it and how?

In the workplace I did my apprenticeship, the head of delivery is a woman who is highly respected, and for good reason. She is very in tune with other people, knows how to handle pressure, how to push back, is very candid, and ultimately always has the developer's best interest in mind. A lot to aspire to!

What have you learned from the women you have worked with in your career so far?

More than anything, it's how to be heard. There have been times where I didn't feel heard, and I found that a male colleague conveying the same message was received positively. In my experience, the women who are heard and understood are a little more assertive, clear, and concise, especially when they realise their audience will only respond to that.

What did you never expect about being a woman in tech?

The biggest thing I never expected, is that the tech industry requires a lot of creativity. I always thought I'll be terrible at coding because maths was never one of my strengths in school. However, finding solutions to complex problems, finding the root of an issue, visualising information, or data, all these things require creativity.

What else about your journey do you think would inspire others?

My family emigrated twice; the first time from Poland to Germany when I was 9, then Germany to the UK when I was 13. I always gravitated towards creative arts and writing, rather than science.

Sadly, the inability to speak the language when we first moved really hindered my science education by creating gaps. This is why I hadn't taken a step towards the tech industry until I was 25, even though I was always intrigued by it. Regardless of what someone wants to do, they should just try it! Anyone would be surprised at how many places out there need a different outlook.

During an interview, a former boss asked: "If I gave you a rock and a blanket, what would you do with it?" He told me the other four developers in my team (coincidentally all men) answered that they would throw it, but they had different ways of throwing it.

I had more questions about the size of the blanket and the rock, then the first thing that came to mind was to use the rock to prevent the blanket from blowing away. None of these answers are better than others, but they show that even simple questions can have vastly different answers, based on our experiences.

[Find out more about Jagoda here](#).

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