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# Inspiration From A Rising Female Leader On Solving The STEM Gender Gap



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Research [suggests](#) that companies with both men and women in leadership roles [outperform](#) those with male-dominated corporate hierarchies. Although women have made [modest gains](#) in C-suite representation in recent years, one of the largest obstacles remains the critical first promotion from entry-level to management.

Everyone stands to benefit from helping women over this “[broken rung](#)” on the corporate ladder. Forward-thinking companies [view](#) the advancement of women as a business imperative. But some of the largest barriers to gender equity in leadership exist long before women enter the workforce.

This is particularly evident in the STEM fields—poised to be one of the fastest-growing segments of the American workforce over the next decade, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. While women now [earn 58%](#) of all college degrees, they earn just 22% of all engineering degrees, 19% of all computer science degrees, and altogether make up just over [one-quarter](#) of the broader STEM workforce.

Numerous factors contribute to this gender gap. One of the most significant may be a lack of exposure to STEM role models at a young age. Representation matters, and numerous studies [suggest](#) that examples of female leaders excelling in these fields can counter stereotypes and give girls the confidence in math and science they so often lack compared to male students.

One young author is doing something about that. A high school student in Washington State, Maya Sharma provides a timely reminder to women of all ages that their duties in support of equality are two-fold: providing role models and support for the next generation of female leaders, and championing diversity and opportunity in traditionally male-dominated educational fields.

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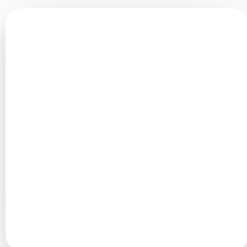


Although she is just a teenager, Maya is already receiving critical acclaim on the publishing circuit. Her new book, “[Paving](#),” has been featured in [Axios](#) and “The Great Indoors” [podcast](#) and has received praise from luminaries at *The Wall Street Journal* and Harvard Business School.

Over the course of 25 interviews, Maya provides candid insights into the experiences that shaped the lives of several of the world’s most prominent female leaders. The young author remarkably gained access to New Zealand prime minister Jacinda Ardern, treasury secretary Janet Yellen, U.S. representative Pramila Jayapal, Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter Ashley Parker and author and entrepreneur Arianna Huffington, among many others.

“Female leader role models fuel the next generation of girls to give them someone to look up to so that they can see what they are capable of,” Maya says. “By encouraging more girls to take a programming or engineering class, they will pursue STEM disciplines and we will end up seeing the ratio of women to men leaders increase.”

*Listen to the interview:*



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I had the opportunity to chat with Maya about her inspiration for the book and some of her biggest takeaways from the project. In the view below, Maya describes how she was exposed to the importance of representation, from being the only girl in her programming class to the formative experience of attending the 2017 Women's March. She shares her views on the role of activism among young people, and some of her favorite moments and best pieces of advice from conversations with a veritable who's who of powerful women around the globe.

"I definitely saw some overlapping themes with the advice that they shared," Maya adds. "The confidence that these women have is one of the things that brought them to where they are today, and I think that is important for anyone."

Maya's book—and our interview—serves as a vital reinforcement of the idea that a culture of support, encouragement and inspiration can help alleviate gender disparities on the most uneven of playing fields. It also reminds us that sometimes the road to equal opportunity isn't just paved from the top of the ladder down, but from the bottom up.

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