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How Capital One Supports Diversity From Top To Bottom



Three years ago a group of 19 women at Capital One's technology group put together a courageous and unflinching presentation that documented the challenges faced by women at the firm, ranging from low representation on key teams, to isolation and micro-aggressions. The presentation was so compelling that it spurred the company's leadership to explore a variety of initiatives to support diversity. Among them, the firm's CIO funded an initiative that has become the [Women In Tech Demo Days \(WITDD\) in New York](#). A few weeks ago we had the opportunity to attend WITDD, and saw for ourselves some of the ways in which Capital One supports diversity top-to-bottom, with initiatives that include a hackathon to identify embryonic ideas, hiring diverse talent in senior roles and an expanding commitment to supporting external initiatives. "WITDD, now in its second year, is a terrific platform for women to use their tech skills to do what they do best: solve problems. In this case, the challenges were directly related to issues that women in tech face" said Julie Elberfeld, SVP, Shared Technology and Executive Sponsor of Diversity and Inclusion for Technology at Capital One. This year's event asked hackathon participants to create technology-driven tools, in 24 hours, that would

address one of these challenges: • Help identify, understand and improve the influence of unconscious bias in the workplace. • Help male allies learn ways to support women in the workplace and the tech community. • Enable women in tech to find resources, events, and networking opportunities to connect with other women in tech in their region. • Celebrate role models by highlighting senior women leaders in tech and telling their stories, with the goal of inspiring girls and younger women to pursue tech careers. And without a doubt, this year's group of more than 100 female technologists and a number of their male allies rose to the occasion by creating innovative solutions using apps, virtual reality, gamification and browser extensions. After 24 hours of hacking, 18 teams pitched their ideas to Ms. Elberfeld and a panel of judges including Ellen McGirt of [Fortune](#), Elizabeth Ferrao of [Women Who Code](#), Rushaine McBean of [Agrilyst](#) and Janki Gause of [Source3](#). These judges had the challenging task of selecting a grand prize winner to receive a \$10,000 scholarship to [General Assembly](#) and an invitation and funds to participate in Capital One's *Women in Tech Experience* that will take place in Virginia in November 2017. The winning idea, Link With Women, was developed by Ruth Naebeck, Rachel Cohen and Christine Leverett, who had noticed that the software engineer connections recommended by LinkedIn skew heavily toward men, reflecting the current lack of gender diversity in the industry. In order to make it easier for female engineers to network with other women, the team leveraged some existing APIs to estimate the likely gender of LinkedIn profiles, and developed a Chrome extension that elevates women's profile for LinkedIn pages showing multiple profiles, such as the "People you may know" page. The team even [made their solution available on GitHub](#). Honorable mentions went to Wonder Girls, an online network for women in tech to find partners to do passion projects together; WomanCard, digital cards that showcase current and past women leaders and pioneers in technology; and "Slack Bias Whaaat?!" a Slack bot that alerts users when they use biased language in their Slack conversations as they occur. The team presentations were followed by a powerful, touching keynote by [Asmau Ahmed](#), who recently joined Capital One as Digital Product Leader. Ms. Ahmed is also known as one of fewer than 20 [Black women who have raised at least \\$1 million](#)

[for their startups](#). She recounted some of the obstacles she faced when she was creating [Plum Perfect](#), a visual advertising targeting platform. As a poignant example, after struggling to get first meetings with investors, she removed her picture from her LinkedIn profile and suddenly started getting more appointments. However, frustration grew each time she went to a meeting and saw the visible surprise when investors realized that “Asmau Ahmed” was a Black woman. Eventually she decided that it was best to replace her profile picture, which would at least assure that those investors meeting with her would be genuinely interested. In her words, “why do I want to waste my time meeting with people who don’t want to meet with me?” Ms. Ahmed eventually got her first investment from [Kapor Capital](#), and that led to more investments. In an earlier conversation, Ms. Ahmed had mentioned her enthusiasm for joining Capital One, because she saw a genuine commitment to diversity through all levels of the organization. The event drew a substantial crowd, including a large number of aspiring entrepreneurs and members of the media. One of the attendees, Sherrell Dorsey, is an entrepreneur, tech journalist, and founder of [ThePLUG](#), a fantastic daily newsletter that features five news stories related to Blacks in tech, as well as insights and observations. A few weeks after the event, ThePLUG announced that Capital One had become its latest sponsor – a further example of Capital One’s top-to-bottom approach to supporting diversity.

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