

Keeping Women In STEM Careers: Looking to Data For Answers

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BRIDGEWATER, N.J., Oct. 9, 2018 /PRNewswire/ -- Companies across industries from IT to biopharma have long emphasized the importance of recruiting and maintaining women in jobs in the so-called STEM fields – Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math. They spend billions every year to create all kinds of programs to encourage gender equality in these important occupations where men have tended to dominate, in order to benefit from the talents and ideas of empowered women in the workforce.

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"We know from our own experience, and demonstrated by research, that gender diversity creates greater value, and that an inclusive culture is far more likely to be innovative and agile," says Cristina Santos, Sanofi's Head of Inclusion & Diversity and EEO North America. "If we don't intentionally invite everyone to the conversation, Sanofi won't be able to deliver on our ambition to be a top three human healthcare company and meet the needs of the patients that count on us."

Often, however, programs launched with good intentions fall short of their objectives, frustrating the very people they are aimed to support. More than half of the highly qualified women in STEM jobs will eventually quit because of factors like lack of opportunity, bias, or isolation by male peers. That leaves companies struggling to figure out what to do next.

Study provides insight into what works

A new study promises to help answer that question the way that STEM professionals look for answers: With data.

The study, conducted by the Center for Talent Innovation (CTI), reports on the experience of more than 3,000 women employed in the field. Sponsored by a dozen major corporations, including Sanofi US, the study ranked ten common initiatives according to how effective they are in retaining and advancing women in STEM – as well as the most effective strategies women in STEM use to be successful.

At the top of the list of effective initiatives: A commitment to pay equity, followed by an opportunity to connect with female and minority consumers.

"Having this kind of data is of immense value in providing guidance to Sanofi and others when developing programs aimed at fostering growth and development for women in STEM," said Dr. Holly Schachner, the US Medical Chair at Sanofi. "It also helps those of us who serve as mentors to these women understand how we can better help to support the next generation of female STEM leaders."

While one item near the top of the list is being given time outside of core job functions to do innovative side projects – an area of specific interest to employees in STEM fields – the remainder of the list are programs that generally promote gender equality in the workplace. So companies that want STEM diversity should ensure that they are not only committed to diversity, but that they actively work toward inclusion.

"Many of the real causes of lack of progression come back to a culture of non-inclusion and a lack of accountability for managers who do not have diverse teams," said Anne C. Beal, MD, Sanofi's Global Head of Patient Solutions. "We need to create an environment where talented, diverse candidates can thrive. Given that more women attend college and are better academically prepared than ever before, we cannot accept that the problem with lack of diversity is a pipeline issue."

Sponsorship Aligns with Company's Commitment

A major reason that Sanofi sponsored the study is its strong commitment to diversity across the company, including in the STEM fields. The company's efforts in Diversity & Inclusion ensures that women from all over the world have the opportunity to achieve their full potential and contribute to research and innovation at Sanofi.

"I am very excited with the increased innovation that we are already seeing around the world as a result of the increased presence of women, and diversity in general, on the marketplace and that in a variety of domains," said Anne Villeneuve, Global Head of Vaccines Industrial Risk Management, Toronto.

In addition to the best steps that companies can take, the study also examined how the most successful women surveyed approached their jobs and the strategies they used to build strong careers. Most important was to be confident in their abilities – just ahead of confronting colleagues and situations when their contributions are ignored.

The study's data-driven approach is another tool that every company can use to bring talented women on board in STEM fields and ensure they make long-term contributions to improving our world.

"We gradually evolved from a society where the woman's role was being in the home and taking care of the family and farm, to a society where women are given the opportunity to add more value to the society," said Ildiko Bodor, Sanofi's Manager of Regulatory Affairs in Toronto. "We should take time for reflection, celebration and remembering of all the girls and women that shaped our world."

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