

Changing Company Culture Bottom-Up: How You Can Make a Difference as an Intern

Rebecca Krieger

Cal Poly, Slo
rebecca.c.krieger@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Although kicking off cultural change can seem daunting, its entirely doable as an intern! In this session mentees will learn strategies I used during my internships to create company-wide change at Apple, GoDaddy, and Microsoft.

AUDIENCE

The primary audience of this talk is Students, With the secondary audience being Early Career (less than 5< years) individuals. This talk is perfect for anyone who wants to bring a cultural change at their company but does not know where to begin. This topic is not covered in schools.

INTRODUCTION

This session will be formatted as the presenter covering one topic at a time, then having a small discussion, then going to the next topic.

Topics to cover:

Identifying problems worth changing –

A good rule of thumb is if you find at least a half dozen people at a company who say they have an issue with a certain aspect of a company's culture, chances are it affects a sizable part of the company even if they don't want to speak up about it. For example, when I championed an accessibility engineering team at GoDaddy I learned other managers in different teams had taken it upon themselves to implement accessibility standards, but because they were worried that they missed some and the company had no accessibility standards they were not confident how to go about it.

They responded supported me when I talked to the CEO about formally starting an accessibility team.

Overcoming a fear of speaking up – Often if you ask a manager why something is done that way, they'll say its because it is how it has always been done. As a new person to the company you can see issues older employees have gone blind to. You have to remember your experience holds value. Also, managers and leaders will often under estimate early career-stage women, but we can use this to our advantage to successfully effect change in a non-threatening way.

Networking with higher-ups – the easiest way to push corporate change is to have connections with higher-ups. Remember they are people too. Over the summer at Microsoft I befriended the CEO's Chief of Staff by treating him like a normal person (we joked about the raffles for executive lunches and I admitted I picked his because it was least competitive – warning though don't use humor until you get a sense of how the person will respond to it). Humor has helped me, but if it is not your thing at least be genuine. I will bring in statistics about how humor can advance your social status in the workplace. I will also suggest booking coffee 1:1s with VPs, if you ask their admins nicely they will typically find 30 minutes to chat with you about their career paths,

Modulating directness – at both Apple and Microsoft I campaigned for female-cut NEO shirts. Female-cut shirts are symbolic of saying "women are welcome here, we

accept you as you are". Unisex only shirts are symbolic of being forced to change to fit male-normative standards of what an employee looks like. At Apple the direct route was appropriate. HR people had blown off both Women at Apple's and my requests for female-cut company shirts in the past, so when the interns had the chance to meet the executive in charge of onboarding and NEO, I asked him "given Apple's push to recruit more women, why are all the NEO still unisex". He froze on stage and started repeating "No one's ever brought that to me before". The next summer at Microsoft there was the same problem with intern shirts. I wrote a petition that was shared so widely in the company that the head of university recruiting called me hours later saying they are working on female-cut intern NEO shirts for next year, as well as female-cut shirts for full time NEO. He asked that in the future when I have ideas for change like these that I go to him directly.

Accepting failure/limited successes – At Apple the next year after my campaign they switched to water bottles. Instead of shirts. Not every company is as receptive to change. I also tried to start a disability employee resource group (ID group) at Apple. HR canceled their meeting with me 3 times. Not every change you try to push will be successfully merged with the existing company culture (git it?), but at least you have the satisfaction of knowing you tried.

Accepting sometimes you are not the one to see a change through – At the end of the day all that matters is that the company is improving, regardless of who gets credit. Before I started at Microsoft I noticed Microsoft grossly overrepresented men in its marketing materials, I started reaching out to people at the company through the Facebook Group Ladies Storm Hackathons. Eventually someone in Visual Studio saw my research on gender representation in their marketing, shared it with the marketing team, and then the marketing team totally redid their website.

Using projects as a proof of concept for technical company culture changes– If you think your suggestion might be

seen as out of scope, show its feasibility through a mini project. I used this strategy at Microsoft's hackathon to show how simple it would be to make changes to LinkedIn to show how we could improve the job application processes for people with disabilities.

OUTCOMES/CONCLUSION

Attendees will leave with an increased confidence in their ability to enact change at a company as interns. They will have learned the factors and strategies to implement change more effectively.

PARTICIPATION STATEMENT

Rebecca Krieger Will attend GHC 2019 if her proposal is accepted.

REFERENCES/BIBLIOGRAPHY

Honestly, I'm writing this the hour before it is due, but I would present more supported findings if accepted.
<https://www.linkedin.com/in/rckrieger/>

BIO

Rebecca Krieger is a senior double majoring in software engineering and psychology at Cal Poly, SLO. Like the Little Mermaid, she "want(s) to be where the people are". She loves the intersection of people and technology, and specializes in the psychology side of HCI as well as accessibility engineering. As her Uber drivers like to joke, she's a "super intern", with experience at Ancestry, Apple, GoDaddy, and Microsoft. Most of her original leadership experience came from being the oldest of four kids (which she still puts on her resume). She did theatre through high school, and was not exposed to computer science until college. She accepts that she's rarely the top programmer in the room, but has learned to compensate by being the most passionate person in the room. Her projects have helped women in tech and employees with disabilities. Want to hear more? Come to her mentoring session!