URL: https://stvp.stanford.edu/blog/videos/fixing-techs-gender-gap

Reshma Saujani is the founder of Girls Who Code and the Marshall Plan for Moms, and is the author of the forthcoming book Pay Up: The Future of Women and Work (and Why It's Different Than You Think). She has spent more than a decade building movements to fight for women and girls' economic empowerment, working to close the gender gap in the tech sector, and most recently advocating for policies to support moms impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. In this conversation with Stanford adjunct lecturer Ravi Belani, Saujani discusses the root causes of the gender gap in tech and explores what companies and individuals still need to do to make the field more fair and equitable.

Transcript

(bright music) Narrator Who you are defines how you build.. 00:00:08,122 - Welcome YouTube, and Stanford communities 00:00:11,360 to this week's "Entrepreneurial Thought Leader" seminar.. I am Ravi Belani, a lecturer in the Management Science, and Engineering Department at Stanford, and the director of Alchemist Accelerator for enterprise startups.. And the "Entrepreneurial Thought Leader" series is brought to you by STVP, the Entrepreneurship Center, and the School of Engineering at Stanford, and BASES, the Business Association of Stanford Entrepreneurial Students.. Today, I am thrilled to welcome, Reshma Saujani, to "ETL." Reshma is the founder of Girls Who Code, a non-profit, but high-impact, and highly socially profitable organization, which is all about closing the gender gap in tech.. They are building the world's largest pipeline of female engineers, and their programming has reached hundreds of thousands of girls around the country.. Reshma graduated with a degree in political science from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and then went on to earn graduate degrees from Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, and a JD from Yale Law School.. From there, she pursued a legal career, while also becoming active as an organizer in the Democratic party, and, in fact, in 2009, Reshma decided to run in the Democratic primary in New York's 14th congressional district.. And while she ultimately lost the race, and if you haven't seen the TED Talk, you definitely should check her TED Talk out.. That experience also sent her in a new direction..

And three years later, she founded Girls Who Code.. Reshma is also the author of three books, "Brave, Not Perfect," "Girls Who Code: Learn to Code and Change the World," and "Women Who Don't Wait in Line." Her fourth book titled "Pay Up: The Future of Women and Work (and Why It's Different Than You Think)" comes out next March.. And her TED Talk as I was mentioning before, which is "Teach girls bravery, not perfection" has more than five million views, and you should definitely see if you haven't already.. She, also, most recently founded a new project called Marshall Plan for Moms, which we'll also talk about, hopefully, if we have time as well.. All of which is to say, we're very lucky to have the opportunity to learn from somebody who's fused the entrepreneurial spirit with a real passion for social impact.. So please welcome Reshma.. Reshma, welcome to "ETL." - Thank you for having me, it's so great to be here, Ravi.. 00:02:25,730 - It's really an honor to have you, 00:02:29,390 and I'd love to start off just with you as a founder, and your founder journey, and the origin story for Girls Who Code, because correct me if I'm wrong, but your founder journey started in your mid 30s, and everybody's founder journey starts at a different time, and the founder bug can bite them at a different time, but you spent over a decade in politics, and activism, and law.. And then in your mid 30s, you decided to be a founder and start Girls Who Code.. Can you talk to us about why that was the moment in time for you to be a founder, and how you decided to start Girls Who Code? - Yeah, I mean, that's

a great question..

00:03:05,150 I'm, like, a weird person to have started Girls Who Code, 'cause I'm not a coder, right? I didn't major in computer science.. I was a poli sci, and speech communications graduate.. I had never built anything before.. I mean, I'd started things, like, I was always, like, the president of my debate club, you know, I started campaigns.. I organized in politics, but I had never started a non-profit before.. And I came to Girls Who Code because in 2010, I was in this job that I hated, like, in a life I didn't want.. And I'm a pretty religious person, and I've always known what my dharma is, which was to be a leader servant, or servant leader.. And here I was as a corporate lawyer working in finance.. And I kept thinking, like, this is not servant leadership.. Like, this is not what I'm meant to be doing in my life..

And sometimes when you make these huge pivots in your life, it's almost when you're at the bottom.. And I'm certainly that person.. I hit rock bottom, and then I make huge shifts, and I was pretty pretty rock bottom.. And I remember calling my father and saying, "Dad, I got to quit." And I remember him saying, "Finally, beta." My parents were refugees, and so, so many of the professional decisions that I had made up until that point was for them, was to help them, and meet their sacrifice, and their struggle, but that was most of the time in opposition to what I felt, like, my destiny was, and my purpose was.. And so getting that permission allowed me to quit.. And instead of getting another job I was gonna hate, I decided to run for United States Congress, and, Ravi, I was the first South Asian woman to ever run.. I had no idea what I was doing.. I remember we raised, like, $50,000 from Indian aunties who were just so happy an Indian girl was running for office, but we were off to the races, And I thought I could meet every voter, shake every hand, and I'd win, and it didn't happen that way.. I lost spectacularly, I mean, it wasn't even close, like, less than 19% of the vote.. I was broke..

I was humiliated.. I'd pissed off everybody in the Democratic establishment, but, you know, when I woke up the next morning, the big aha for me was, like, wow, this failure didn't break me.. And I know we're gonna talk about that later, but the other thing was, it was like, I'm not going back to that life.. Like, I'm gonna keep making change.. And even though I wasn't elected to make change, I'm gonna make change.. And when I thought about, I kind of said to myself, well, okay, of all the problems, Reshma, you saw on the campaign trail, what's the one problem that really, that you can't stop thinking about? And the problem that I couldn't stop thinking about was when I would go into classrooms, because when you're running for office you meet a lot of kids.. And I would go into computer science classes, and robotics classes.. I would just literally see lines and lines and lines of boys who wanted to be the next Steve Jobs, or Mark Zuckerberg.. And there wasn't a girl in sight.. And because I had never experienced that in college, I was, like, what's going on here? Like, I know Silicon Valley was a boys' club, but like, I didn't know that club started in high school, and it pissed me off..

And the reason why it pissed me off was because I knew that those jobs paid well.. I had a dad who was an engineer who kept telling me to become one, so I could go, you know, buy a home.. So the fact that women and girls, people of color were not going into this field, that was incredibly lucrative, that would allow you to march into the middle-class didn't make sense to me.. And that's why I decided to start Girls Who Code, and try to start solving that problem.. - There's so much to unpack there.. 00:06:43,850 Hopefully, we'll get time to do so, but I love, first of all, that lesson on just knowing there's this conflict between what the external world is telling you, and what your internal voice knows to be true, and when to listen to the internal voice, and push forward.. And so that's a powerful moment when you decide to take the red pill, and listen to what you want to do versus whatever society, however you're defining that is telling you what to do.. Can we talk then about whether that problem that you identified, which was the kernel for Girls Who Code, still do you feel that exists today? Because let me just explain to the students, the full scope of the problem.. There's a fascinating statistic on your website that in 1995, 37% of computer scientists were women.. And by 2017, that number dropped to 24%..

And by next year it might drop to as low as 22%.. That seems to suggest that despite the Me Too movement, all the work that's being done on diversity, equity, and inclusion, and gender equity, that the gap is actually getting worse, is that true? Are those numbers accurate? - I mean, the numbers are accurate, 00:07:58,940 but it's complicated, right? Because, and this is why I'm so fired up about what's happening with women in the workforce today is that to set it up, right? The world's first programmer was a woman.. In the 1980s if you went to any robotics class in the world, it would have been half boys, half girls.. And so we were at parody up until almost, I mean, close to parody up until 1995.. And then we started pushing women out.. So at the lows, it was almost 18, 19%.. And so the workforce is one place to look at the pipeline problem, but, also, college classrooms are another.. Stanford University is at parody, essentially, in their engineering departments, but there was a dip in the '90s, and 2000s.. And so the pipeline work was getting young girls to say, STEM is, computer science is something that I care about, and something that I want to do.. So getting them degrees is one thing, but then getting them jobs, and having them stay in those jobs is an entirely different problem, and we are failing at that..

Silicon Valley, the tech community is absolutely failing at that.. We did a survey with Accenture that said women by the age of 35 in tech will leave.. 50% of them will leave.. So we can't really tell what the full potential of those numbers are because the attrition is so high, right? - Yep, yep, yep, yep.. 00:09:26,010 Is the root of that issue, the thesis that you talked about in your TED Talk on teaching girls bravery, not perfection? - Well, I think it is, I think it is.. 00:09:36,250 It depends on what stage, right? So I think what I talked about in my TED Talk is that girls learn how to be perfect, and not brave.. And so this idea of coding where the semicolon is in the wrong place, you know, I tell the story about how women in the CS major will come to their office hours, and say, I'm broken, I can't figure this out.. And the guys will come in, and be like, the computer is broken.. Not I did something wrong, but the computer is broken, right? So it goes back to this idea of perfectionism, and

iteration, and if you're comfortable failing, and doing something over and over again, you don't think it's personal.. So I think the problem in college is about perfectionism, but it's also about culture, right? You still have a very broey culture..

Many universities have no engineering teachers of color, or women, right? And there's a lot of microaggressions that are still made in the classroom.. Again, I don't think you can point to one thing.. And there's so many different variables that we have to attack, and I hate.. I don't want to blame women, right? It's not our fault, right? And, in fact, like, our whatever you want to call perfectionism is, like, this piece of it, but if we could actually fix culture, if you could fix broken racist, sexist structures, you know, if you could fix that, we would actually make a lot of progress, but there's a reluctance to fix that because we still believe that we live in a meritocracy, and we don't.. - And so is that the first step is acknowledging 00:11:16,230 that it's systematically non-meritocratic? - Yeah, I think the first step is acknowledging 00:11:18,850 that people don't give up power easily.. Like, you know what I do now, Ravi.. So if you go look at the top 10 universities, and you look at their CS degrees, and you look at their engineering degrees, and you look at the gender ratio we're almost at 50%.. Carnegie Mellon, MIT, Stanford, Berkeley, right? You're between 42 to 50%.. Then you look at the engineering departments at Facebook, at Google, at Microsoft.. Why are you still sitting at 19%? Like, it should match the gender ratio of the very universities that you recruit from..

It doesn't make sense.. So, like, when people say to me, oh, I just want to find talented engineers.. I literally carry because I've got the class list, you know what I mean? Of everyone and say really? 'Cause look at her, and her, and her, and her, and her, so something's not adding up.. And I think we just have to now start speaking very honestly about what that is.. And I think what that is is that people don't give up power.. Go ahead.. - Oh, well, let's, I don't want to overstate.. 00:12:26,600 I don't want to gloss over that.. What it is, is that people don't give up power.. - Yeah, I have a list and lists of women 00:12:33,470 who are 4.0 majors at MIT that can't get an internship at Google because they weren't qualified..

So who's doing the interviews? What are the things that they're looking for? What are the biases that we have? You know, we did a survey right after COVID last year, and 40% of our Girls Who Code alumni had either faced, or knew someone who faced some form of sexual harassment in the interview, right? - And so if it is systematic, you know, 00:13:06,550 part of the spirit of this class is the spirit of entrepreneurship, the spirit of the change agent who can go in and create change.. And, obviously, I'm not a woman, but if you are in a system that is systematically unjust, is the message that you cannot change that status quo on your own, and you need to change the power structure first before you can? - No, I have a lot of hope in this next generation 00:13:36,748 of young men in particular, and women.. I went to the Rochester Institute of Technology, and RID had actually made tremendous progress in closing the gender gap in their CS majors.. And I went and spoke to the women in computing group.. And when I was speaking to them, there was this group of three guys that were sitting in the back, and after I was done talking I went up to them, and I said, "Who are you?" Like, I thought that maybe they showed up to, like, hackle me, you know what I mean? It was something.. And they looked at me and they said, "Well, Ms.. Saujani, we're the men who support the women in computing group." They had formed a club inside a club, and they said, "You know, we know exactly what it's like, that there's microaggressions made in the classroom, that when we go to interviews that we have a different experience.. So we feel like it is up to us to use our power, to use our status, to use our privilege, to make things better." And to be honest, Ravi, 'cause I speak to a lot of, this is what I'm seeing in the next generation.. That's why I'm hopeful.. You know, even when you've seen things happen at Uber, it was male engineers who called me, and said, "I'm leaving, like, I don't want to work here." So I really do think that that change is coming, and it's happening..

- But then is the takeaway that the fate of women 00:14:56,647 is in the hands of men, or is there a takeaway? Because I think one of the takeaways, also, that I got from the TED Talk is that the problem is not the pipeline problem from female founders.. The problem, or at least what I heard was a bravery deficit of teaching women to take more risk.. Is that actually inaccurate? - Well, no, I think you have to give, 00:15:21,350 so I think you have to change the structures, and that's what we're talking about.. How do you change power structures, right? And so there's numerous things that you can actually do in academia, and in the private sector to help change move faster.. I would have liked to, for example, have seen.. Assume that there is a talent pipeline, that there are female engineers, and engineers of color to hire.. Why are companies not hiring them? That's the first structural problem that needs to be solved.. I don't think that there has been enough pressure put on companies to move faster.. Most of these companies know what I ate for breakfast.. And you're telling me that you can't solve the gender gap in tech, that is one..

The second thing is as we're building, as we're changing that, you have to give women strategies to thrive in the culture as it is.. And that's the bravery deficit, right? So you're in a room.. - Can you explain the bravery deficit for people? 00:16:21,980 - Yeah, so the bravery deficit is like, you know, 00:16:24,220 if perfectionism, because we've been socialized to be perfect, right? And so let's go back to that.. Like, if you look at, I always say, like, go to any playground in America, and you'll see what I'm talking about.. Like, we encourage our boys to climb to the top of the monkey bars, and just jump, but with our girls, it's like, be careful, honey, don't swing too high.. We start when we raise girls by wanting to physically protect them.. I have two sons, and so I live this, like, my husband will just push over my 12-year-old just for fun, and I know what he's doing.. He's trying to toughen him up.. And so that physical, that way of physical coddling for girls extends into emotional coddling.. So around eight or nine if you go to gymnastics, and you can't do a cartwheel, and you come home crying and say, I don't want to go to gymnastics anymore..

If you're a girl, we say, don't worry, honey, let me put you into swimming.. If you're a boy, you'll be like, you're going back

tomorrow.. I don't care.. So then you learn as a young boy, again, the psychological resiliency, how to fail.. Do it again, and again, and again.. We don't learn, or develop that muscle because we're coddled, and we're protected.. And you see the ramifications of that perfectionism on every aspect of our life.. If you look at academia, studies show that when women declare economics as a major, if they get a B in a single class, they drop out, right? Whereas, boys are like, I got a B, I'm running for president.. I got an F I'm running for president.. Different implications..

You see it in mental health.. Young women suffer from anxiety, mental health depression at twice the rate of young men.. You see it in leadership, right? Studies show that men will apply for a job if they meet 60% of the qualifications, but for women we don't even apply unless we can meet 100%.. Literally, we have to check off every single box until we apply, so that is perfectionism, right? And so to me, the antidote to perfectionism is bravery, right? When you teach bravery, you're essentially teaching imperfection.. I don't know how to do this thing, but I'm gonna just try it.. I'm gonna keep repeating my code over and over again until I get the semicolon in the wrong place.. You don't give up before you even try.. And for me, teaching that bravery muscle in the sciences, where often you are the only one, or you have people questioning your ability to be there is really critical.. I'll give you a basic example of this.. Studies show that men talk 80% more in meetings..

And so I see this dynamic happen all the time.. I'll give a speech, it will be Q&A time.. And I'll be talking about women in tech.. First 10 hand raised men, right? Before they even know exactly what they want to say, they're literally, hand, and we're all don't say it, but what are we doing? Women, we're perfecting the question.. We're thinking about it, writing it down, we're asking a friend, hey, should I say that? Again, and by the time we get a chance to raise our hand, I'm in my car home, right? And so now the men in the room think we have nothing to say.. And now we're pissed because Joe said the same thing that I was gonna say, but now he's smart, and I'm quiet.. So, again, like, these dynamics are actually really big because I will say that for me, there are many times where I'll go home and be, like, why didn't I just say what was on my mind? Why didn't I just raise my hand? Why didn't I sign up for that, you know, to start that company, to do that blog, to do thing, even though I wasn't ready yet.. - But what about for the woman who says that's all true, 00:20:06,730 but how do you reconcile that with what we were just talking about, about power that the men have the privilege so they can afford to take the risks, and fail, because they're in this system that supports them, whereas, the women aren't as privileged.. And so it's not necessarily the rational thing to fail because you can't fail as easily.. - Well, and that's absolutely right..

00:20:28,730 This is the hardest thing about my teaching because it is true.. Failure is a privilege for men.. We don't get that failure, but to fail is the only way you could become great.. And when you think about, like, Serena Williams, I am obsessed with Serena Williams.. She literally lives on the edge of her ability, and a coach who's saying, do it again, do it again, do it again.. Like to be great, you have to do it again, and again, and again.. So if you don't get to build that muscle, if you don't get to have that experience, you'll never become great, but we live in a society where when women fail, we see this with entrepreneurship all the time, like, I don't know, she missed Q1.. I don't think we could fund her.. So it's not fair, so this is something, but just because it's not fair, doesn't mean we can't change it.. And so that's why I talk about this all the time, and talk about failure as a privilege..

How do we change that? How do we teach managers when you're going through performance reviews, we should not treat men and women differently for, like, the exact same mistake, right? And same thing when we're investing, you know, I laugh about, you know, I'll just say it.. You know, I laugh about Andrew Yang who ran for mayor.. And, you know, he ran twice, lost twice miserably, but when you read about his race, it's almost like he didn't lose.. For me, 10 years later after I've built one of the largest women and girls' organizations in the world, if someone is writing about me, they always talk about my losses that I did 10 years ago.. Again, he gets to benefit from that failure, and it not be a slight on his resume.. Women don't get that benefit.. - And so what is your takeaway then from that experience? 00:22:19,290 Is it if society is disproportionately penalizing you do you take the takeaway from that failure then to dig your heels in deeper? - Yeah, my takeaway is, like, screw them.. 00:22:29,528 - Right.. 00:22:31,140 - I don't care what you read about me 00:22:34,290 because if I never lost my congressional race, I never would have started Girls Who Code.. If I never started Girls Who Code, I would never have started, every failure has given me so much..

I look for it now where I'm, like, what can I try? And, like, I know it's not gonna happen because it teaches me so much.. I don't even know how I could, like, I just, I couldn't even live life, I mean, and I sound crazy, right? But I'm that into failure, like, I'm that into putting myself out there, and learning from the mistakes.. And if everything is working out for you, it's like, you just don't grow, and I want to grow.. - I think that is the shift is if you can get off on, 00:23:14,766 and you actually realize the thrill that actually exists on the other side of that fear.. Can I actually give you, though, a real life situation? Because this actually was a question that was posed to me by a Stanford student in my other class 178, and I didn't know how to respond.. And I'm curious what your reactions would be.. This is a Stanford undergrad, female computer science major, who is an intern.. And I think many of our students right now, they're experiencing this power dynamic as interns.. And she had this relatively simple, but profound crisis where she was with a bunch of other male CS engineers.. And they said that they felt physically nervous when she came to them physically to discuss issues..

And so they asked if she could just present all of her issues over the message board, digitally over the text.. And she was asking me, what should she do? Because the other males would talk to each other, but they asked her to send something digitally.. She wants the job, so she doesn't want to disrupt the situation, but it's obviously something that's also gendered.. What would you do in that situation? - I would disrupt the situation.. 00:24:22,390 I would say, okay, I appreciate your

honesty, but you're gonna have to get comfortable with my physical presence.. Like, I think we just too many times bend ourselves, and you may not get the job.. You may not get the job, but I think we cannot keep bending to the will of what men need to, quote, feel comfortable.. And, you know, somebody said this to me once, even in my Girls Who Code program, we've taught 450,000 girls to code, 10,000 clubs.. And a lot of male engineers would say, thank you.. This is the first time I actually got to work with women..

And I was like, okay, but then I was, like, okay, like, you didn't have that experience, now you're building it.. And so we have to figure out how we work with one another, and how we all feel comfortable doing that.. And I generally think that, like, we as women, because we're taught to be people-pleasers, and to want to be liked, we're always apologizing.. We're always saying sorry.. We're always shrinking ourselves.. We're always accommodating.. And that's why the world knows how to operate without us.. And we got to stop.. - Ooh, yes, yes, that's good.. 00:25:34,930 So how do you 'cause we don't teach that..

And I think in the moments when these things happen, your limbic system sort of takes over.. It's something where you sort of freeze in these moments when you're seeing sort of these injustices occur.. Can you speak to how, I mean, it's one thing to tell people to recognize the injustice.. It's another to actually act.. How do you build that muscle if you feel like you're not there yet to build that bravery muscle? - Yeah, I think you build it, right? 00:26:04,980 So what often normally happens is you're in a situation right? Where somebody may say something to you and you're, like, and you may laugh it off, which I've done, and still probably have done last week, and then I'll go home, and I'll be, like, I cannot believe, you know what I mean? They said that, and I will just simmer about it, and why didn't I respond? Why didn't I respond? And then I'll just keep saying to my husband, we talk to a friend about it, and I'll move on, but now what I make myself do is go back.. Even if it's a week later and respond, and then say something.. And so you just gotta practice that, like, because I think it's, like, if it doesn't come to you in the moment, and it comes to you later that's okay.. You could still go back and say something, and say it in a way that you feel comfortable.. I now try, honestly, I try to say something all the time to everything, even if it's, like, I'm in, like, a line at spin class, and people all, I mean, I feel like this happens to me as a brown person, like, people don't see me.. And so they'll just get in line in front of me..

And normally I'll just be, like, you know, but now I'm, like, excuse me, I'm here.. Like, I'm here, see me, right? And so I just make myself, I don't want to say, maybe it is confrontational.. I make myself confront all situations.. - I think that is the best, also, 00:27:27,200 is if you can actually just create these goals for yourself, and almost make it, like, not a game, but make it into something that you sort of need to do.. Can we talk about identity beyond just gender? So you, you know, you talked about your brownness, and you're obviously an Indian American.. You're sort of an icon, I think, amongst Indian Americans who are Gujarati, which is for people who don't know, that's a region from Northern India.. Can you talk about your relationship to other aspects of your identity beyond gender, and how has that shaped the lens through which you look at the world? - I mean, it's shaped everything about who I am.. 00:27:58,397 My parents came here as refugees in the 1970s.. They were one of the few brown families in our Midwestern neighborhood, and they did everything to kind of assimilate.. My dad changed his name from Mukund to Mike..

We ate Taco Bell, and Pizza Hut at home.. We didn't barely speak Gujarati.. It was really all about the '80s assimilation, and we saw the consequences if you didn't assimilate.. If my mom wore a sari to the Kmart people would make fun of her, and say, "Were you born with that dot on your head?" You know, my house was often teepeed, or spray-painted, go back to your own country.. And I remember one morning after our house was spray-painted, I came outside and my dad was sitting there, and he was just quietly Cloroxing, like, the side of the house.. And I remember, I think he was, like, humming, and not one shred of anger.. Like, in his mind it was the tax that you paid to come to this country.. And I remember thinking to myself, I will never be like him.. I will never just lay down, I will fight.. And so watching, again, how much they went through, and the humiliations, and the sacrifices, and the discrimination, and the jobs they did, all of it, he barely talked, I feel like I'll know so much, I mean, he just wouldn't even talk about it because there's so much love and reverence, right? I'm everything I am because of that experience, and because of the way that I was raised, and the fact that I did grow up hiding my identity, wishing my mom named me Rachel instead of Reshma, being in church with friends and being a Hindu, and being, like, oh my God, I hope nobody asks me about the Bible..

I mean, just having so much shame, and then I got beat up as a kid, and then everything shifted.. And then I was like, oh, I'm owning this identity.. And I'm gonna tell everybody about it.. It's everything about who I am.. And I think it was because I suffered, like, real, everything from physical violence, to, like, everything, you know? Because of the color of my skin.. - Well, and, you know, there's a strong correlation, 00:30:27,650 actually, between being successful as a founder, and coming from an immigrant family.. And I think there are just these lessons that you can't help but learn that make you power through adversity that's also very powerful as a founder, but, Reshma, we do have right now, an audience of about 450 Stanford students in this class.. Many of them are engineers, and all of them are interested in entrepreneurship, and innovation.. Any advice that you would want to give them to think about their own roles in terms of advancing gender equity during their time in school, or their careers? For many of them they're doing internships.. And I think most people feel like when your internships are at the bottom of the totem pole, you don't have that much power, or clout..

Can you speak to anything that you want to address to them? - I mean, I think we're in a profound shift right now 00:31:13,770 with the Great Resignation, and the labor shortage, there's a lot happening.. And so we're reinventing workplaces.. I actually think that we're gonna see a trend towards a lot of power with employees, and demand because there's

a demand for talent.. So I think you can actually push companies to make the change on diversity in the numbers, you know what I mean? And the movement that we've been wanting to see for the first time if you just ask for it.. Even in the advocacy that I'm doing for moms, so much of what we want is what dads want, and what childless parents want, what young people want.. Flexibility, the ability to work remotely.. And it's almost like those who actually have the most amount of power are the ones who don't actually really need it.. So, quite frankly, if you're a white guy, like, I would love for you to be, like, hey, what's your progress on diversity? Like, where are you trying to go in the next five years? How important is this? Like, I would encourage white nation men to actually make, ask those questions, and to push for that change.. - And can you talk about this Marshall Plan for Moms? 00:32:21,800 And can you talk about just, also, just in your personal life, how do you straddle being a founder, and a mom of two sons? And I ask that just because that is something that is a mission of yours.. - No, no, ask me, I think it's important to talk about..

00:32:34,437 Look, I mean, on the first thing, the next move that I am building, or I'm in the process, and I'm building right now, or built, is to basically fight for the economic participation of women in the labor market.. So because of COVID-19 about three million women, mostly mothers have exited the workforce, and mostly mothers of color.. And it's because we don't have affordable childcare.. We don't have paid leave.. We don't have a support structure.. We very much see motherhood, and parenting as your personal problem, right? The government, the private sector, they don't play a role, right? It is your personal problem to solve.. And the thing is, is most Americans spend about 40% of their income on childcare.. The United States has one of the most expensive, un-subsidized forms of childcare than any other developed nation.. We're the only nation that doesn't offer paid leave, right? And so we have this declining birth rate.. It's the lowest it's been in 50 years because people just don't want to have kids..

They can't afford to have kids, but that's deeply problematic for any innovative society.. And so before COVID-19 women were 51% labor force, and now we're back where we were in 1989.. And as we discussed at the beginning of our conversation, it is very hard when you lose that much progress to come back.. It's not an on and off switch.. You can have hundreds of billions of dollars of innovation, but it's hard.. It's hard to lose that many jobs, and bring them right back.. So the Marshall Plan for Moms is really a movement to help change that.. One, culturally, how do we basically reimagine what motherhood looks like, you know? And that we create a society where women can actually move in and out of the workforce without penalty.. Now, if you take more than six months off after you have a child you lose 40% of your income, but for fathers there's a premium for that.. So that's just not right, and it's not good for our society..

Secondly, workplaces were really never built for women, or for mothers, and so how do you change that? Like, how do you really build a workplace that, like, has flexibility? And so if I want to go to a soccer game, or pick up my kids from swimming, or my kid is sick, I can do that, and not be seen as an unproductive, unambitious worker if I do that.. 70% of American men take less than 10 days off when they have a baby, right? And so how do we tie parental leave to performance reviews? I mean, men also, like, you know that if you do bedtime, or you feed your children you live longer, you don't have heart attacks, you don't have diabetes.. Again, it is good for dads to be involved in that child rearing.. So how do we think about gender equality at home, and tie the two? And then, finally, the political change that we're trying to make.. We are banging our heads in Washington right now.. I'm working on finishing my book.. I have 10 more days to finish it.. And going through, again, the history, of second wave feminism and women in the workplace, and about how for so much of this, it's like the same fights we've been fighting for so long, since the 1970s, and how do we finish these fights once and for all so we can get to equality? - That's fantastic.. 00:35:49,940 I know we won't have enough time to go through everything that I want to discuss, but I'm gonna open it up to the questions now from the students.. So the first question is I love that you pursued a startup that you saw a need for, even though you didn't have strong expertise in this space..

How did you tackle this learning gap to make sure you were helping these girls become successful in software? - Such a great question.. 00:36:11,470 I think that we think that to start a company, we have to be an expert, and I really think you just got to have a passion for solving the problem.. So when I learned that there's this gender gap in computer science, I was just passionate about it.. And so I almost wrote a business plan, and, like, a memo, and it really detailed when did this happen? Why did it happen? What are the interventions for closing the gender gap? And every day for two years at breakfast, lunch, and dinner, I would meet with somebody and I would learn.. I would meet with educators to understand why there was a gender gap in K through 12.. I would meet with those who would basically do their PhD in computer science.. I met with founders to say, why aren't you hiring? What's going on? So I basically just learned and became a nerd on everything about women in tech, and then figured out what the right intervention was.. And so when I started Girls Who Code it was a pilot.. I handpicked 20 girls.. I put them in a conference room..

I found this amazing woman to, like, develop the curriculum, and we just experimented.. I remember with those first 20 girls, I paid them $50 because I thought that they would never, like, spend the entire summer.. I bought them pizza every day, but not only did they learn how to code, they, like, blossomed and they learned, and then they told their friends, and then it built, and then it built, and then it built, but I think the thing is is it's follow your passion for solving a problem.. And then second to get really nerdy and smart, and learning about it, because sometimes the best founders are ones that actually don't know much about the problem.. So they're not attached to outcomes.. They can actually come at it from a fresh perspective.. And so people say this all the time, the reason why I was able to successfully build Girls Who Code, and actually make a dent in this problem was because I wasn't a coder, and I didn't come at it with any bias, or previous experience, but I also was honest that I didn't know what I didn't know.. And I found the experts to come in and fill in those gaps.. - And to your point,

there have been many people 00:38:23,430 that have been trying to solve this problem that have failed.. When was the moment that you knew that Girls Who Code was gonna be successful and having impact? - Well, I think my first program I knew that, like, 00:38:37,490 the aha for me was that you have to connect coding to changemaking..

And that was how you were gonna ignite millions of girls to want to learn how to code.. And that came to me in my first program, when I invited my friends from the New York Immigration Coalition to come in, and the problem was how do you use code to help undocumented students? And I just saw, like, the different innovations, and the different apps, and the different ways with the girls in the classroom that were actually going about solving this problem.. And I was like, holy cat smokes, right? Like we can actually do this with climate, and mental health, and dyslexia, like, you know what I mean? And, like, that is the connection because girls want to actually change the world.. And so if you connect technology to changemaking, you can get them hooked.. So that was a big aha moment for me.. The thing is, Ravi, I'm never satisfied.. I still don't feel like Girls Who Code made it.. Like, I'm, like, you still look at those numbers, like, I'm not done yet, we're not done yet.. The one thing I do feel, like, check is we've built the pipeline.. Like, no one can say, like, we've built the pipeline from K through 12 into college..

You know what I mean? That we have done and are doing it, and we're on the right trend.. Now the next fight is about getting them hired, and creating cultures that allow them to stay and flourish.. - Terrific, next question.. 00:40:06,400 How do you prevent comparing yourself to others when you fail at something someone is doing better? - I think it's like reminding yourself 00:40:15,920 the only person you're competing with yourself is you.. And that doesn't mean that we don't feel envy, but I almost think that envy is a superpower.. And that you kind of, like, you look to where your envy is as to where that you're supposed to go.. Does that make sense? - Yeah, yeah, yeah, it's your compass, I think.. 00:40:38,810 It's a gentle way of telling you where to go.. Yeah, makes sense to me.. Next question..

How has your experience with law and politics influenced the initial foundation, Girls Who Code, and its current mission? How do you encourage and educate others to advocate for closing the gender disparity gap? - I mean, I think for law and politics, 00:40:54,540 I was never trying to build an organization.. I was trying to build a movement, and I saw a non-profit as just a structural way to basically go about doing that.. And because I've been an organizer since I was 13.. I led my first March when I was 13.. That allowed me to figure out how do you build a movement? And by building a movement, what I mean is, like, I think to be a founder, you have to be able to tell a good story.. You gotta be able to stand up, and, like, basically tell a story about what you're doing, and what the world is gonna look like.. And you gotta inspire other people to move along with you.. And so with Girls Who Code with everything, the colors we picked, the T-shirts that we had, the logos that we had, the story was always about the girls, and what would happen if girls learned how to code? That they would be healers, that they would be teachers, that they would be presidents, that they would be everything and anything.. And once you told that story, people were, like, signing up.. Where do I write the check? Where do they mentor? Where do I volunteer? And so my experience in law and politics, and just quite frankly, public speaking, helped me become a really good storyteller..

And that's my superpower.. And that's why even in the second movement that I've built, Girls Who Code has about 80% global name recognition, which is insane after 10 years.. Marshall Plan for Moms has 15% global name recognition after nine months, right? Which is really hard to do, but I knew how to do it because I did it before.. And so that I think is, like, really, like, and I wouldn't have been able to know how to be a good storyteller, how to be a big movement builder, how to bring people along, how to inspire them into action, had I not had a career in law and politics.. - And if you inspire people now, 00:42:42,516 and they wanted to start movements is the structure of what you choose a non-profit versus, like, a B Corporation, or a for-profit entity? Does that matter in making that decision in terms of your efficacy? - Yeah, I think if you do it with integrity.. 00:42:58,953 Did we talk about this? I was thinking about you and I talked about this, or I was thinking about this.. I mean, I think a big problem that big tech did is they said that they were building movements when really they were trying to make money.. And then the hypocrisy, right? Is what pissed people off.. I think you should really be honest about what you wanted to do.. Like, in this problem of solving the economic recovery for women, I could have built a company..

There are a couple of companies that are doing it in Femtech.. I hope some of you actually build, you know what I mean? Companies then, but I wanted to build a movement, you know what I mean? And so I think, again, is being very thoughtful about what you want to build, not because of what you want to market, and what's gonna help you market your product, but what you actually want to build, and put into the world.. - And can you talk about other trade-offs, 00:43:50,601 though, with a non-profit? Because I don't know if we put enough attention on.. Yeah, and can you speak to that a little bit about what are the pros and cons with a non-profit that might not be intuitive upfront for a student? - I mean, like, it's funny, like, so, 00:44:06,660 for me there's nothing charitable about teaching girls to code.. And every year, you know, I raised $100 million in 10 years, which is insane, but every year I have to raise another 20, $25 million from scratch again.. And so you have all the stress, and building the budget, and raising the money, and begging people, and not sure what they're gonna do.. And then you do it all over again, and again, and again.. And so that is, even though you have a product that is where I've taught 450,000 kids.. I've taught more kids to code than school districts, right? But I still have to beg for money to allow me to keep doing what I'm doing better than what the government is doing.. So that doesn't make sense..

And so if I were to do it again, I don't know if I would do it this way, but the problem is I would say five years ago, I said, you know what? Forget it, I'm tired of begging for money.. I'm gonna build a fee-for-service product, because Girls Who Code

is offered to kids who could afford it, and kids who can't afford it, right? Because we want as many, anybody who wants to learn how to code, we want them to code.. So we thought, you know what? Why don't we build a fee-for-service product that then we can actually charge families that can afford it.. So then we could subsidize our kids who can't afford it.. Well, guess what? That failed, because we had priced ourselves out of the market because we had flooded the market with so many free products that you actually could, like, there will probably never be a coding for girls business that is bigger than Girls Who Code because we messed up the market, you know? And no one explained that to me 10 years ago.. - Well, you disrupted them.. 00:45:51,720 That's like a classic disruption, but knowing what you know now then for your next venture, are you still doing it as a non-profit? - Yes, I am, and I just said that 00:46:03,470 because the mission is a non-profit mission, right? So unlike Girls Who Code in many ways, you could argue that the mission could have been a for-profit mission too, right? And you would have subsidized because 50% of the girls we teach are under the poverty line, so for me, I always wanted to teach poor girls.. And that is why I created a non-profit, but I just think that you have to also think about what your revenue stream is.. And the good thing is, is I did know 10 years ago that I was fulfilling, I was essentially fulfilling a need for HR departments, and companies because that was the model.. We were building classrooms inside technology companies, and we were gonna recruit, and then you were gonna benefit from that..

So I raised $100 million, which is really hard to do over 10 years.. Very few organizations have done it without any government money from corporations, because we basically were fulfilling a need for them.. And we were almost, like, a subcontractor, right? In that.. - We're gonna move on, the next question is, I'll read it.. 00:47:11,980 It's a little bit long, so I'll read the whole thing.. You discussed how failures are often more consequential for women than they are for men.. Do you believe that women should learn to fail in small ways, like, their code being slightly off so that they don't tarnish their reputations? Or do you believe that they should go after whatever dreams they have despite the possible consequences? - Whatever dreams you have, hands down, hands down, 00:47:37,910 because we have to start changing.. Like, you can change culture, and the cultural narrative is that women can't fail, or when they fail, the consequences of the price for failure are bigger, but there's something magnetic, actually, romantic, iconic about male failures, or we love to talk about how many shots Michael Jordan missed.. We love to talk about Bill Gates, and how many failures he had, but what's the female version of that? We don't have one.. And so we have change that, and I just think it takes time..

And I don't think that we should let our dreams die on the vine until we wait for society to move along with us.. - That's great, okay, next question.. 00:48:21,080 How do you pitch to big tech that the gender gap must end? Are they mostly willing to work with you and your mission? As a woman in STEM, I can sometimes feel reluctant to enter a field where I am unwanted, and sometimes set up to fail.. What is your advice? - I mean, it's always hard for people to come first, 00:48:40,050 and we're all coming first.. Look, I go back and forth I'm gonna be honest.. When I started Girls Who Code, I started with, like, let's work together and change this.. And then 10 years in, I was, like, you're not changing fast enough, so I'm gonna throw bombs at you.. And to be honest that's hard, right? And it's one of the reasons why I also decided to kind of step down from Girls Who Code was because I could throw bombs on the outside, but maybe the person who's running Girls Who Code needs to still employ that strategy of, like, how do we figure out how we work together? But we still tell the truth.. And we were able to do that.. I mean, we would joke, but every year we would count the millions of dollars we lost from funding because I told the truth..

And I could not stop telling the truth.. I never will be able to do that, and look the other way.. So I just think that we have to continue to keep on trying to make them change.. And I think the two ways we have to focus on is infiltration.. I want to teach so many girls, and there's such a need for technical talent, that all they hire are women and woke men, because I do think we all need to activate the men that are on our side to make these companies change.. I think the second thing is that we have to, and you're seeing this happen at Apple, you're seeing it happen at Google, people are starting to fight back, you know, and we're starting to build that muscle in technology companies because so many people came there because they thought that they were working for good.. And they've realized that they maybe aren't, but that it's not a lost cause yet.. So I still think that you have to, you can't take yourself out of the gate, you know, but we gotta walk into the fight.. - Next question.. 00:50:36,530 Could you talk about what you think of affirmative action, particularly how it relates to college admissions? What would you say to people who say it's unmeritocratic? - I deeply support affirmative action, 100%, 100,000% 00:50:48,690 because I don't think that we live in a meritocracy..

I think even as a South Asian woman, I have proximity to privilege because I have proximity to whiteness.. And there's a certain amount of credibility.. There's a certain amount of passing that I get not based on merit, but based on the color of my skin.. And so we just cannot pretend that we're operating in a meritocracy, period.. - And when will we know that we are, it is meritocratic? 00:51:16,330 - I mean, when you start looking at the poverty rates, 00:51:18,360 or the education rates, or the segregation rates, or the housing, I mean, we don't live in an equal society, but, listen, I feel the same thing about, you know, I mean, I think, like, there's other classes of people that are let into universities that are not people of color that get a leg up to, you know what I mean? And so it's not just about, like, we focus on, you know, race-based omissions as what we're trying to actually, quote, attack.. But I think that, like, we have to just acknowledge that there isn't a meritocracy at all in the entire university system, but why are we so focused on that? Why is that one? See, that one upsets, like, that one, even though I am not as a South Asian woman, necessarily the beneficiary, you know what I mean? Of those practices, I support them deeply because I think that you cannot deny that if you are black, or Latina in this country that it is not the same for you.. Like, it's just not, it's not.. Like, even through this pandemic, how many of my students were sitting in Burger King parking lots trying to get the Wi-Fi, had one device between a family of four, or having to quit college because they had to take care of a sibling

'cause their mother was an essential worker.. I mean, it's just, it's not the same.. And I think we just have to be honest about that, and actually be proud that we're trying to build institutions to make them more just and more fair..

   - Thank you.. 00:53:02,230 Next question is when making decisions, how do you balance equity versus equality? And to what extent do you feel it is appropriate to have preferential treatment based on protected attributes in pursuit of your goals? - I mean, I think that, again, 00:53:20,910 it's kind of similar to the same answer that I don't, for example, believe that every male, or white male, or Asian male is there 'cause he's the best one.. Like, I think that we have a lot of, I think white, the conversation that we need to have in our society is about unearned privilege.. And whether you're white, whether you're Asian, whether you are one of the favored class, you basically benefit from unearned privilege, and we have never wanted to have that conversation.. The conversation that we always want to have is about affirmative action as if somebody is getting something that they don't earn.. I've always felt that we've always as people of color, as women had to be twice as good, twice as great, nobody has ever given us anything, but it's a fact those that benefit from unearned privilege that have been given things.. - But if you have, if you are just to push on that, 00:54:27,680 if some of our students are in positions of power, and they have to make a decision between driving a meritocratic process that said that the candidate that they should hire, or the vendor that they should use was matching a demographic of power versus choosing another candidate that did not, how should they make that decision? Should they always be, it sounds like thinking about if it's systematic, should it just be a categorical rule that your hiring should be demographically matching society, or is there another? - Yeah, or whatever, like, for example, 00:55:04,630 I'll give you an example.. At Girls Who Code, I decided year one that I was gonna have every classroom be 25% Asian, 25% white, 25% black, and 25% Latina every year.. That was it, that was, like, that was Reshma's rule, right? Of equality, and to me, and because of that, and we would literally move around classrooms all the time.. And we had tons of kids, you know what I mean? That wanted to be in our program..

   And so I actually do believe in quotas, and I would say, I do believe in goals, you know? And you have to be very intentional about this, but I just think this idea that we live in a meritocracy, that everyone is starting from the same place is just not true, so how do you rectify it? How do you go back to equality? So, for me, again, in our program, we would have tons of white and Asian girls apply because their mother knew about it from "The New York Times," or from reading this article, or blah, blah, blah.. So many of our black and brown girls didn't even hear about the program, so our recruitment efforts were targeted there, so they actually even had a shot to apply.. And I will tell you, after doing this for 10 years, that I didn't give anybody anything, like, all of them, whether they were black coming from a homeless shelter, an Asian coming from a private school, when they got to our classrooms, they were equally competitive to go get a job at Facebook.. So my point is is that, but I gave them a shot.. And I think we need to do that more.. I just don't believe it when they say, well, I'm letting this woman in, and she's just not as good as this guy.. And so it's just not true because we never question the meritocracy of the men.. We just don't, we assume, right? That they are qualified, that they are worthy, right? Of being in this spot.. And I just think we have got to have a conversation about unearned privilege, whoever has it, right? In this case, it's white, and Asian men.. In some cases it might be an Indian woman, right? But we have got to talk about unearned privilege, and stop feeling like we're giving somebody something, and they're not prepared because not that builds imposter syndrome..

   I tell the story, I'm just gonna tell you, like, you know, I was a girl that went to, sorry, go ahead.. We're almost done.. - I want to hear it, but we're out of time, 00:57:42,110 but I want to hear it, so please say it, but I just want to focus that we're out of time.. - No, I'm just saying that I, as someone who went to state, 00:57:48,060 it was University of Illinois that grew up in public schools in a working class family, I finally got into Yale Law School three years, I mean, years and years and years after applying.. And I remember I could not speak in my constitutional law class 'cause I just didn't think I was smart enough.. You know, I just didn't think that I belonged.. 10 years later I was giving a speech between Warren Buffett, and Bill Gates at the Microsoft Summit.. And I remember them saying to me like, you know, you are the only person that we gave this thought to because it's pretty intimidating to sit, and give a speech in front of Bill Gates, and Warren Buffett.. And I remember thinking to myself, wow, I wish they gave me 15 minutes instead of 12.. And I was, like, how did I become that woman to that woman? And that happened because I've been in a lot of rooms, and I've met a lot of people, a lot of powerful people..

   And I sometimes think him, what? He's got that job.. Me and my ladies we could run circles, so my point is is that when you are actually surrounded by power, and prestige, and privilege, it actually allows you to squash your imposter syndrome, and to recognize it, wow, I've always been prepared.. I've always been ready.. I've always been qualified to be here.. And that's all I want to say.. (bright music)..