

URL: <https://stvp.stanford.edu/clips/the-origin-of-girls-who-code>

Reshma Saujani founded Girls Who Code at a low point in her professional life, after leaving an unfulfilling law career and then embarking on an unsuccessful run for Congress. But those setbacks set the stage for her next move. During her Democratic primary campaign, she noticed that all the computer science classes she visited were filled with boys. So she decided to build a movement to prepare girls for lucrative and impactful careers in tech.



Transcript

- I'm like a weird person to have started Girls Who Code 00:00:05,260 because I'm not a coder, right? I didn't major in computer science.. I was a pol-sci and speech communications graduate.. I'd never built anything before.. I mean, I'd started things.. Like I was always like the president of my debate club.. I started campaigns, I organized in politics, but I had never started a nonprofit 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.. 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 rock bottom.. And I remember calling my father and saying, "Dad, I got to quit." And I remember him saying, "Finally, better." (laughs) 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.. 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 to 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 that 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 pissed off everybody in the democratic establishment, but 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 a change." And even though I wasn't elected to make a change, I'm gonna to make a change.. I kind of said to myself, "Well, okay, of all the problems whereas when you saw on the campaign trail, what's the one problem that you can't stop thinking about." And the problem that I couldn't stop thinking about was when I would go into classrooms, 'cause 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 buy a home.. So the fact that women, 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...