



Stanford eCorner

Women in Tech Entrepreneurship

Cindy Padnos, *Illuminate Ventures*

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Video URL: <http://ecorner.stanford.edu/videos/3088/Women-in-Tech-Entrepreneurship>

Entrepreneur and investor Cindy Padnos reveals the unique advantages and disadvantages of being female in the world of Silicon Valley. Padnos also articulates the need to develop larger groups of women connected through an affinity for technology entrepreneurship.



Transcript

What are my experiences as a woman in two fields, both being an entrepreneur, a founder and CEO of a tech company and a VC in a world that's primarily dominated by men? Is that fair? Yes. You know it's had some huge advantages to be honest, especially when I was working in more the operating kind of a role because I was unique walking into a room. In virtually any room I was in, I was almost always the only woman. And that included when I went out to raise venture capital and would walk in - I will say there were some downsides as well, there were times when people weren't quite sure what role I played in the company and a couple of meetings where in particular with investors they - the male VCs on the other side of the table were clearly a little bit uncomfortable asking me some of the more CEO oriented questions, but I had a team that was very aware of that and so in fact in a funny way if they turned to my VP of Engineering or my VP of Marketing who were both men and asked them a question they should have asked me, they would just turn to me and say that's probably a better question for Cindy to address. And we got over those pretty quickly, you learned how to do that. There are without a doubt some challenges if you will in terms of the building relationships, it's not - I didn't play basketball with all of these guys, but I will tell you it's equally challenging that instead of going to Stanford or Harvard I went to Carnegie Mellon, and being here in Silicon Valley. If I look around, first of all my graduating class was 110 students, not 600 or 800 as many of the major programs are. And we had about 12% women in my graduating class so my natural affinity group was pretty small and if I counted today what percentage of those are still working and for gosh sake which ones are in tech or in venture, the numbers get down to probably two. Literally two people, not 2%, right. So the numbers get to be pretty small.

So, the challenge I think is that we have to build and expand that natural affinity group and it's really important to have that. I have been fortunate here to do what I do in Silicon Valley. When I was a founder CEO there was a great group called Forum for Women Entrepreneurs and Executives that had a separate CEO group that was just women CEOs. And you might have been surprised because this is 15 or a dozen years ago anyway but that group had 30 or 40 people at every meeting which meant we had about 200 people in the group and they were all women and they were all CEOs. So they do exist, the myth that they don't exist is kind of a little overblown. The numbers are still small and I'd love to see them expand.