

URL: <https://ecorner-prod.tcg.stanford.edu/in-brief/confronting-sexism-over-coffee/>

Fintech entrepreneur Catherine Berman recounts an experience earlier in her career when businessmen at a meeting assumed she was there to serve them coffee. Instead of becoming offended or flustered, Berman says she stayed focused on her desired-outcome for the meeting and diffused the awkwardness by bluntly correcting the men and swiftly moving on to the matter at hand.



Transcript

- Unlike many of my friends, who had gone for careers in cosmetics, and fashion, I always loved technology.. Thought it was so much more interesting than toothpaste, or make-up.. And so I ended up getting a job at this great marketing firm, and joining their tech team.. And not shocking to most of you in the room, only woman.. CEO was a man, all my team members were guys, and all my clients were gentlemen.. Well, I shouldn't say gentlemen - guys.. It's a good segue into this story.. And so one of my first experiences working in New York and working in this firm was the CEO flew me down to San Antonio, where we were pitching a robotics company.. Really cool robotics company, folks from NASA, amazing guys, we're gonna get in front of them, this is the last conversation to close the deal, represent them.. And so it's just me and the CEO of this firm..

And I remember walking in, to a table with four white gentlemen, many of them at that point probably 30 years my senior.. And I walk in, and I've got my suit, and I look very young but I'm trying to look very professional, and I walk in, and a gentleman says to me, "Great, so you're here to take our coffee order, right?" The CEO had not come in yet, so he didn't know.. And so, without hesitation, I looked at him and said, "No, I'm actually here to save your company.. I'm part of the marketing firm and man, you guys need help." I can't believe he didn't run me out of that room, but he didn't.. All of them laughed, we sat down, and I had a seat at the table.. The CEO was incredibly supportive.. I had a lot to say, I gave a lot of feedback, and by the end that robotics firm didn't hire them, they hired us, me and the CEO.. And so it was a really important moment for me, of again, recognizing how I was being perceived being facing up to that challenge, and then responding a way that, to me, celebrated who I was, for better or for worse..