

High-profile Silicon Valley board improves communication to ignite success of girls in tech

A geographically dispersed, time-strapped board of directors needs to improve communication to help their global non-profit succeed in their mission to support women and girls in tech. How can trust and team dynamics improve with time-strapped executives?

"These people are definitely overachievers," started Ruth Chisum, a consultant for The Myers-Briggs Company, while describing her experience coaching the board members of the global non-profit Girls in Tech.

All well-versed in the fast-paced tech industry, the board members' combined accomplishments easily included founder, executive and influencer titles. They'd each joined because of a passion for furthering female talent in the tech space.

While the power and influence of the board was impressive, the tradeoff came at the availability and geographic separation of each of the members. And with many board meetings attended virtually, the group and the organization itself was primed to benefit from an exercise in communication and trust.

There was also the preconceived idea of competing strengths that lead to different communication styles.

Business Challenges

- Extremely busy schedules of board members
- Geographically dispersed group with many virtual meetings
- Differences in communication styles

Company Profile

Founded in 2007, Girls in Tech is a global non-profit working to put an end to gender inequality in the tech fields by educating and empowering women who are passionate about the industry. They offer everything from coding courses and bootcamps to hackathons and startup competitions no matter age or profession. As of 2020, they have 54 global chapters with an impact of more than 62,000 members in 33 countries.

Girls in Tech

"Because all the members had the common background of tech, start-ups and executive positions, they didn't understand each other's strengths as well as they could. Without knowing each person's strengths, it was harder to know which organizational challenges could be best addressed by which ideas," said the consultant.

Solution

Given the scheduling difficulties and geographic distribution of the board, The Myers-Briggs Company decided the most efficient use of limited time would be a virtual workshop that focused on communication, team building and trust.

The workshop included an introduction to Myers-Briggs personality type to aid in each member's self-awareness as well as a team type table that plotted each of the member's personality types against a grid of all possible types.

"The team type table was an incredibly powerful way to engage and identify the different strengths and blind spots of a group of people," said Sherrie Haynie, Director of US Professional Services. "By seeing where people are based on grouped personality preferences, what becomes clear is where certain perspectives might be missing or how communication patterns will play out because of personality type clusters. It's an incredibly powerful tool for helping members understand their team dynamics and how to turn the knowledge into action. Those actions then become that team's advantage moving forward. It's like a visual representation of the team's chemistry."

In addition to the workshop, members of the board received follow-up questions and activities to keep the insights coming after the virtual workshop had ended. They also decided as a team what developmental areas they wanted to focus on to improve the way they worked together in the future. The action plan accompanying the workshop allowed the team to build even more trust with each other as they worked through roadblocks with new tools for problem-solving.

Solution

- Deliver a low-time-investment, high impact workshop
- Offer workshop virtually to accommodate executive's travel and schedules
- Use Myers-Briggs tool to improve communication, reveal unique strengths and foster trust among board members

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Adriana Gascoigne,
founder, CEO and
board member of Girls in Tech

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Results

The board members had a keen interest in how they could work together. After the virtual workshop, they were eager and excited to leverage each other's communication style, especially in how they could pass on information in the best way for the recipient.

"Understanding how different personality types prefer to consume information allowed us to restructure how we share information within our group," said Darrell Mockus, CTO of Innovation Labs. "We communicate more efficiently now."

One topic in particular that stood out during the workshop was the discussion around gender, personality type and stereotypes in the tech industry.

A female member of the board asked about a specific pain point that resonated with every person present. Often when females are in a male-dominated field like technology, they face certain stereotypes. One of the board members said that when she was conducting business, the people reporting to her often expected her to be nurturing, cut them extra slack, and overall be softer than her male counterparts.

"Essentially, they expected her to be more maternal in her personality. She shared that this was a big challenge for her because that's not how she managed people, nor how she'd gained her success."

The board members, led by The Myers-Briggs Company consultant, explored the Thinking and Feeling preferences, why these gender biases may have run counter to that board member's personality and the implications that had for females in tech leadership positions.

"That was a really powerful moment in the session because it was a direct situational application of personality type. Most of the female board members in the group had a preference for Thinking and many had experienced the same biases. In addition, I shared my preference for

Results

- Improved communication among board members
- Increased trust and understanding of strengths and blind spots of individuals and the team
- Engaged board members in an interactive, virtual workshop

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Thinking as well and the personal things that I'd faced. That lesson definitely stood out as one of the many "ah-ha!" moments of the workshop," said the consultant.

"The Myers-Briggs type-based workshop done with our board was tremendously beneficial to us collectively and as individuals. The session armed us with an invaluable tool to be more effective in achieving our organizational goals. We're better able to move forward as a team thanks to the insights we gained. In fact, we found it so helpful we're looking at doing a similar workshop with employees soon." said Adriana Gascoigne, Founder, CEO and board member of Girls in Tech.

Another takeaway from the workshop stemmed from the discussion around communication preferences of introverted and extraverted individuals. When those with a preference for Extraversion are speaking with someone who has a preference for Introversion, the person with the Introversion preference usually listens and processes that information internally. Those with preferences for Introversion understood that it would be helpful to extraverted colleagues if they gave some sort of verbal cue or feedback of what they're hearing and how the message was being received.

In addition, those preferring Extraversion practiced flexing their communication style when interacting with someone preferring Introversion. This included communicating in writing instead of over the phone, and waiting longer than they felt comfortable after a question had been posed.

"As we walked through our personality types, we also reflected on past projects that didn't meet expectations. Afterwards, it was clear how we could improve the way we dispersed information to address the different preferences in our group. Being mostly a remote working group that only meets in person 2-4 times a year, these communication tips proved to be extremely valuable," said Darrell.

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"This workshop included a lot about applying personality type content to communication specifically. Aside from board members' own self-awareness, by the end of the workshop they were helping each other to communicate better. They offered specific, actionable advice like 'when communicating with me, do this and don't do this'. It also gave people an opportunity to share any pet peeves in a constructive, non-judgmental environment," said Sherrie.

While the workshop was fast-paced, and needed to be because of time limitations, it was also highly interactive. That experiential, interactive learning is what cemented the insights for better communication and board interaction.

"There's something rich that evolves from an interactive workshop that's different than going through a webinar where someone is just delivering slides. That difference is the social learning aspect, that insights are gained live when going through the workshop with a facilitator," said the consultant.



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