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How Men Can Help Women in CS; Winning 'Computing's Nobel Prize'

Valerie Barr suggests how men can better promote women in computing, while Michael Stonebraker shares how it feels to receive the top honor in the computer science field.

Valerie Barr
"Things That Men Can Do To Be Real Allies For Women In Computing"

<http://bit.ly/1lffBfE>

August 3, 2015

With thanks to the authors who contributed to "11 things white people can do to be real anti-racist allies" (<http://bit.ly/1IKk2Bf>).

1. Talk to other men in computing in order to create more allies. Talk to other men who are not in computing. Talk to women who are not in computing. Women in computing need lots of allies.

2. As supportive as you are, it is not enough to sit back and watch from the sidelines. Help build a movement to make computing a fair and equitable place for everyone.

3. Because you are a man, you get a seat at lots of tables. Do not be embar-

rassed about that, do not try to pretend it is not the case. Use that to help change who else gets a seat at the table with you.

4. Think about how you use language, both in speech and all forms of writing (both formal and informal writing). Are you using terminology and phrasing that reinforces stereotypes about who belongs in computing?

5. Read what women in computing are writing about their experiences. Listen to their TED talks and conference presentations. Just as importantly, read about the technical work being done by women in computing and refer to it in your own work.

6. Every time a man you know in tech announces he is about to become a father, ask him when he is taking paternity leave, and for how long, and whether he will be the primary parent at home during that time, and whether he will shut down his work email while he is on leave.

7. Be prepared with a response when you hear someone say the company

should not hire women because they will leave to have babies (yes, it may be the 21st century, but people still think and say that). There are lots of ways to counter that. Be creative. And see #6, it might give you inspiration.

8. Speaking of kids—visit toy stores. Study how toys are packaged and marketed. Begin to understand the gendering of the toy aisle. Buy cool puzzles and building games for all the children you know, ones that are designed to encourage kids to use their imagination. Plan in advance and shop online in the "education" store of companies instead of buying the pre-packaged imagination-dulling products that the same companies sell in stores.

9. Talk to girls about math and science and computing. Ask them what is going on in school. Do not sit by idly when you hear the teacher is not calling on the girls or is letting the boys dominate the techie activities.

10. Find out what is going on in your area, and then get your company to support those activities financially *and* by letting staff take time to contribute to the activities. Is there a Girls Who Code or a Black Girls Code group? Is there an ACM-W Celebration of Women in Computing being planned? Is there an ACM-W student chapter at a nearby school? Is there a Girls Inc. or Girl Scouts tech program? Is there an all-girls FIRST Robotics team? An investment of your time will help the girls in the program (short-term impact) and help change the culture in your workplace (longer-term impact).

11. Finally, do not expect a lot of pats on the back and thank you calls

and messages. There will not be an overwhelming wave of acclaim because you finally decided to act on the belief that women belong in tech. We will be happy to have larger numbers of people making the case, but we expect everyone to wage this fight. You will be welcome, but you will not be exceptional. Thanks in advance.

Michael Stonebraker
**"What It's Like to Win
 the Turing Award"**

<http://bit.ly/1MrKPcK>
 July 24, 2015

For about the last 15 years, I have had a fantasy concerning the paper I would write if I actually won the Turing Award. After all, it is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to write a paper that is not subject to the whims of external reviewers. My fantasy was to write something personal and "outside the box," and it had several components. The first was to try to explain why system software is so hard to build, and why good teams screw it up on a regular basis. Second, it takes real perseverance to "stick it out" and make something actually work. The third was to talk about the start-up experience, and why venture capitalists usually deserve their reputation as "land sharks." Lastly, it is clear that luck plays a significant role in successful startups, and I wanted to explain that. The overarching theme was to use a significant physical challenge as a metaphor for system software development. Over the years, the physical challenge has varied between our cross-country bike ride in 1988, and my climbing all 48 4,000-foot mountains in New Hampshire.

So when Barbara Liskov asked to see me on March 6th, I was immediately apprehensive. It was unlikely to be a technical meeting, since I was not collaborating with her on any project at the moment. I also knew she was the head of the Turing committee, so I was expecting either good news (I won) or bad news (somebody else in system software had won and I would not realistically be a candidate for a few years). When she said it was the former, I teared up. The recognition and validation for my lifetime work was incredibly gratifying. On a

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more basic level, I actually got to realize my fantasy!

She said I could share the news with my wife, but nobody else until the press release came out some two weeks hence. Also, she mentioned I would be asked to sign a letter committing to write a Turing paper in a timely fashion, give the Turing Lecture at FCRC on June 14th, attend the awards ceremony on June 20th, and make speaking appearances internationally. She also said there would be a ton of other speaking invitations. It was very sweet that she gave me the news in person, rather than via a phone call out of the blue. My wife and I had a private celebration that night.

Over the next two weeks, the hardest part was remembering who knew and who did not, and acting accordingly. Obviously Barbara knew, as well as the faculty who nominated me; however, I had a couple of conversations of the form, "By the way, I know about it, and there is something we want to plan to do ..."

On the morning of the announcement, I got about 400 email messages, mostly from system software researchers and former students saying how delighted they were. It was a very touching show of support. It was especially touching to talk to my friend and colleague Dave Dewitt. He said it was truly ironic that the two events he had been eagerly awaiting (his daughter Lizzy getting married and me winning the Turing Award) were both going to happen on the same day 2,000 miles apart, and he could only attend one. I am sure you can guess which event won.

Now, I had to actually write the fantasy paper I mentioned. It turned out

to be very uncomfortable. I am accustomed to writing and presenting dry technical material; however, my fantasy was a real emotional stretch for me. Presenting it was even harder. I tried it out on my wife, and then on Dave Dewitt and a few other senior DBMS researchers. I then presented it to the MIT DBMS community, and to audiences at two of the companies I started. Trying out the talk on these friendly audiences gave me the confidence to actually go through with the plan.

It was exceedingly draining to give the talk at FCRC, since there were no DBMS people there to offer moral support. Also, the room was completely dark, so I could not judge how it was being received. I still do not have a good idea whether the audience liked it or not.

The next week was the actual awards ceremony in San Francisco. About 30 friends and colleagues showed up, and it was a very touching event. Again, I felt like it validated the relevance of database management to ACM. I hauled my tuxedo out of mothballs for the event (I hope it can go back into mothballs for the rest of my life).

I am in a bit of a quandary about "what next." After all, there is no possible recognition to strive for off into the future. It is like being at the top of Mt. Everest; there is no "up" in sight. Some thoughts that occur to me: try to help/mentor assistant professors. After all, my experience (many moons ago) as an assistant professor was miserable, and stressful beyond belief. Helping out budding entrepreneurs is also on my radar. I am also concerned that U.S. enterprises are not very good at information technology. It is widely reported that two-thirds of all IT projects fail. Ultimately, successful companies will have to get good at IT, since that is obviously going to be a major differentiator off into the future. But how to make a difference?

I have a year ahead of me with quite a bit of travel, where I will get to talk to lots of people to try to figure this stuff out. □

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