

Profile of a successful woman in the STEM field

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You are a software engineer. How is that you become interested in the engineering and technologies' world?

“When I went to school I liked science subjects very much and I was quite good in these classes. But the main reason that fostered my interest in science was that I always wanted (and still want) to know how things work. My parents supported me and gave me the opportunity to try everything out. I used to be in kitchen as often as I used to be in the model making garage of my father.”

How did you become a software engineer? (Biography)

“My father worked at Siemens as an electrician and suggested that I could do an apprenticeship as “Associate Engineer” at Siemens. After I graduated from school I did not dare to choose to study informatics because I did not know if I would hit the spot. Therefore, I chose to do an apprenticeship which only took two years and which was more practically oriented. After the apprenticeship at Siemens I worked as associate engineer. I had a very interesting job and did not want to miss the monthly salary anymore, so I decided not to study.

After working for seven years I got the first of three children and went on parental leave. I stopped working because I wanted to care for my children at home and my husband earned a salary which was high enough. After this break I had the wish to work as associate engineer again. Therefore, I applied for a new job in the software development department of a furniture company. I immediately got the job and did not have to do a lot of job hunting. Since then I am working at this company as a software engineer.”

Why do you think there are fewer women in STEM? Do you think there are still stereotypes about these studies?

“I think women are underrepresented in STEM jobs because of stereotypical understandings of what a girl should be able to do. It starts in the early childhood when some parents (or in particular mothers) have rather stereotypical expectations towards their children' skills: boys

should be able to build a tower with Lego bricks but it does not matter whether girls are good at such things.

These stereotypical attitudes regarding expected skills from boys and girls range from Kindergarten to school. Concerning the study or career choice gender-specific prejudices and expectations hinder girls and women to choose a technical profession (“Sitting the whole day in front of the computer without talking to anyone”).

How could these stereotypes be changed?

The curriculum of the STEM subjects should be changed in my opinion. I think girls and young women need other questions and learning approaches. A gendered curriculum could make girls more interested in STEM subjects. Further, it should be made absolutely clear how important communication and teamwork skills are in those subjects and professions.”

What does it mean to you to be a woman in science, technology and engineering?

“I could utilize both of my interests: communication and logical reasoning. However, I have to be quite self-confident. I prepare myself very well before I will make statements about a topic and advance my position very factually.”

Are you fulfilled and happy with your career?

“When I restarted working as a software engineer after the parental leave I realized that this field is the one for me.”