

Kate Brodock: ‘Some Silicon Valley firms are leaders in parental leave’

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Women 2.0 is a for-profit company founded in 2006 as a hub where women in the technology field could network and help each other professionally. Today it has expanded into a media company whose goal is “to close the gender gaps in founding, investing, the workplace and leadership.” LSE Business Review managing editor Helena Vieira spoke with CEO Kate Brodock on 3 May during a tech conference in New Orleans.

What exactly does Women 2.0 do?

Women 2 dot 0, I’ll give you the cliff-notes version, started about a decade ago in San Francisco, Silicon Valley area, very much grassroots. Several women got together, started out some small gatherings that grew into what for several years was a very robust events network. We were actually in 35 chapters around the world, in 35 cities. The events were everything from panel discussions, job recruitment, pitch competitions. We actually have some amazing start-ups, well known in food spotting, who ran through our programme.

Then, about three years ago that event structure was dialled down and the content piece, which naturally grew out of this event structure, started to be organised and created into sort of a burgeoning media property. I stepped into the company last August. So this is new leadership and what we’re doing is that we’re taking that media property, ramping it up, adding a whole bunch of sophistication to it. Our main goal is to use that engagement we have from the community to create products and services around it to help women and organisations dig into immediate, tangible products, and so they can create a lot of the change we have been talking about for women in the tech space.

How is Women 2.0 fighting for equality?

We break down our audience into four ‘pipelines’ in the tech space: female technologists, female founders, female and female-friendly investors, and female leaders. You could slice and dice this a hundred different ways. We’ve

chosen these four because of our strengths in the past decade and because of some of the clear areas that we feel we can have an impact on. Our goals cover a lot of different areas of equality: the gender pay gap, diversity in tech teams, the amount of funding that is given every year to women versus men...

Why aren't more women taking up STEM subjects?

It's a very multifaceted issue and there are many different schools of thought on this. For me some of the most difficult issues to look at are the ingrained, long-term, structural issues. A lot of what we talk about is really analysing the structure that is in place. Just to mention one aspect, look at the pre-university phase in education. In the classroom, women are more likely to raise their hands if the classroom is set up in a circle versus straight rows. These are things that a lot of people don't think about. Unconscious biases are some of the most difficult things to change, and that's what I think would be really interesting to focus on. Forward that to the university phase, because if you can tackle some of these issues before women go to university there's such an increased chance that they'll make it through. Their confidence will be higher, they'll have more opportunities, their level of engagement will be increased.

Do you think there has been change in the past few years with the push for gender equality?

What we've seen is that the discussion has gotten really fantastic. We feel that we've been at the forefront of a lot of that discussion, which is happening in the right places, in Silicon Valley, in major tech hubs, inside major tech companies. We feel that the 'walking the walk' part really has yet to be realised. And that is the core piece of our mission. We're trying to help move forward the discussion that we're all having and reading about in the news. It needs to be translated into actual impact at the company level, and we feel that the change is coming.

Women bear children, and we hear a lot about how Silicon Valley is not exactly family friendly.

I could wax poetic about this. This again has a lot of different layers. Everything from national, state level and company policies. The inequalities that are built into the tech industry are all things that we have up against us. We want to have future generations, and it's very obvious that it's women who bear them. And it seems silly that there is still not enough space for that to happen in the workplace, that childbearing isn't supported.

Silicon Valley has both ends of the spectrum. Some companies are doing horribly, others are leaders in terms of parental leave, parental support, the ability to go and have a child and still come back to your employment. 500 Startups is a great example of that. They have a great parental leave policy, which also includes paternity leave, not just maternity. The CEO of YouTube, Susan Wojcicki, actually was in a position in leadership when she had children and she was able to set company policy to allow for six months of maternity leave and paternity leave. There are people who are very conscious of this, but the company's philosophy needs to support that, the leader's philosophy need to support that, and there's still a lot of work to be done.

What's up next for Women 2.0?

We have three goals. One is that we feel pretty strongly that this isn't just a women's issue. Men are 50 per cent of the population, so it's a requirement that they support us in this effort. We'd like to find ways to bring them more comfortably into this whole conversation and into this process.

Two, I think it's really important for us to communicate the actual benefits of equality, diversity and inclusion for a company, as opposed to just "doing the right thing" argument. No, it's not only the right thing, but the company's bottom line, performance and dynamics will be affected. That's also important for men to understand. Yes, it absolutely is the right thing to do and we support that, but we have to understand it's also going to be a really positive benefit for the company.

Lastly, we function as a for-profit, for-good company. We always have and we're going to be going out for a B Corp status at the end of this year. We really want to be a champion for that model, and say that it's ok for us to have a

scalable, revenue-generating, sustainable business model, that is something we all feel passionate about and from our mission standpoint it's really important. That's a structural framework that we really want to support, and we'll be doing that in the next year or so.



- *This Q&A was done during the [Collision](#) conference in New Orleans, 2-4 May 2017.*
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