Alyana Versolatto

How did it feel to be recognized as a top executive leader through the WX100 awards and what did the award mean to you?

Susan Uthayakumar

First of all, I was humbled by the recognition and what it meant to me is that, I see, obviously, representation of women in the Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics (STEM) field, [but] not as much as we’d like to see. So, what it really represents to me is for others to see me. There’s a saying that says, “If you see it, you can do it”, and really what I would like it to be is to showcase to other young women and others in our field to really take the opportunity to take the leadership position, because we all need to pave the way for the future. And also, it is just super nice to be recognized for the contribution that you hope to make.

Alyana Versolatto

Great, this kind of leads into the next question. Why is women representation so important in the STEM field? Did you experience mentorship from a woman leader that helped to give you confidence to become a strong leader yourself?

Susan Uthayakumar

Absolutely. One of the biggest challenges that we will face as we look at the future is just talent. Technology is becoming more and more a part of the core of what we do, everywhere. For example, at Schneider we say, “We see the future as digital and electric”. All electric and a digital world, is what we see ahead of us. So, when you see the future and digitization that’s happening all around you, obviously we’re 50% men 50% women - just some statistic, just a little bit different than 50/50 maybe – but it is important to engage all the people that we have in what we do because that’s the talent for the future. The second thing that I would say is in order to attract talent into that field is they have to be able to see the representation, because people are hesitant to enter an area where they don’t see diversity. So, for all accounts, its very important to have women representation. As to your second question of did I have great women mentors, absolutely, I had so many along my career. I would like to share some of them with you. In my previous role of the country’s president of Schneider Electric, my boss’s name was Annette Clayton, she is the executive vice president for Schneider, she also ran all of the global supply chain for Schneider. An incredible leader, I would say, and an incredible champion and a sponsor of women and she has had a tremendous impact on how my career has evolved. Another person I would like to single out is Pearl Sullivan, I had mentioned earlier, that I had stayed in touch with the former dean of Engineering at Waterloo. Again, I remember something she said, which is that she is developing students, not only students that are great students, but are also leaders and great people. So, I think when you have women and men that are actively engaged in mentoring and bringing up the future talent, its super important.

Alyana Versolatto

Awesome, so what are your hopes for the next generation of women leaders?

Susan Uthayakumar

First of all, my hope is that everyone feels that they are uniquely valued, meaning that no one makes the decision not to enter a field because they don’t think they can add value. As you see the enrollment in universities in engineering and other technical fields, you know that we are seeing more and more representation, so I would like to see that in the work force as well. What I’ve personally seen is that we do a very good job when it comes to recruiting talent at the entry level from STEM fields. I’ll speak to Schneider, and I’ve spoken to many other technology leaders. The challenge that we see is to have those women come up to the ranks and into the leadership positions. So, in Schneider, we have an initiative called 50-40-30. So, in order to make sure that we have the right diversity and the right representation, 50% of our new hires we aim to have them as female, 40% of our hires in front facing or client facing roles we aim to have as women, and 30% of the top 1000 leaders at Schneider we aim to have as women. So, they are broad goals, and bold goals I would say, and we do that because we really see the importance of diversity for the success of business and for the success of the society.