**Lady Boss Faiza Yousuf**

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A talk with Faiza Yousuf, a tech influencer in Pakistan. The Co-founder of Code Girls, Faiza gives us an insight into tech training here in Pakistan. Known for her viewpoints on Social Media she has a great fan following. Faiza Yousuf is also the founder of WomenInTech, a non-profit community initiative, a fully funded coding boot camp for girls/women. Apart from her own companies and initiatives, she retains the position as a Senior Product Manager, at Genetech Solutions.

**What does CodeGirls do?**

CodeGirls started with Shamim Rajani, Hasnain Walji and me. We had a basic plan and some money, and we started with training 100 girls on basic web design and development. This was back in 2018 and now, the program has entered its 8th cohort with nearly 600 graduates and over 100 job placements. Currently, we offer two phases, each phase is 6 months long. Phase 1 is all about Web Design and Development and Phase 2 has specialized tracks where a student can pick expertise, like, Software Quality Assurance, WordPress Development, UI and UX, etc. It costs us 180 USD to train a girl and this funding comes from a lot of our sponsor organizations, friends, and family.

**Ecommerce as an Empowerment tool**

Ecommerce has changed the way people shop and mostly, women are the ones making these decisions, they have been the main target audience of the eCommerce industry. Now, with communities and initiatives like Sheops, Femprow, and CaterpillHers, more and more women are opening up home-based eCommerce businesses and are slowly creating a space for themselves. With the inclusion of women in this industry, we see more creative and versatile ideas being executed and it is creating wealth for women and giving them a voice in both their personal and professional lives.

I think empowerment is about choice and autonomy. This is what I want for myself and for all the women of this world

We recently did a workshop with Tech4Girls, teaching girls how to establish their online stores when they don’t know how to code or have money to hire someone.

**On Shattering the Glass ceiling**

I am not sure about the glass ceiling, but I do know that I have broken a lot of barriers that were in my mind. I am a person with a learning disability. I have Dyslexia, and I am an introvert with social anxiety. Computers make my life easy. Even with these limitations, I was able to get two degrees in tech and then do hundreds of workshops and speaking engagements. This industry also considers women as outsiders and I think this is something we have worked on a lot, making sure that we show them the strength in numbers by building WomenInTechPK, working on the tech pipeline problem by teaching coding to more women, and also helping them by placements and lastly, we now have a woman as a senior vice chairperson of Pakistan Software House Association with more representations in their action committees.

**Challenges Posed**

Women technologists and engineers are made to feel less welcomed and alien in their workplaces and labeled as token hires or that they are not technical enough. These problems are enough to drive women out of their careers. I faced the same challenges and I think with time, I understood that I need to find a tribe and mentors to ensure that I don’t let my career go. A support system can be a game-changer, and this is what I did for myself and now doing it for other women.

**Our Work**

CodeGirls is a tech and business education program. Other than that, we do lots of collaborations to bring more tech education to Pakistan. Recently we joined hands with QuickStart to train a handful of our girls in Data Science. Shamim and I also represent CryptoChicks in Pakistan, so we do the AI and Blockchain hackathons here and have run two cohorts of their blockchain education program. I also mentioned our collaboration with Tech4Girls, which was also a tech training project. We also help other tech education nonprofits and initiatives by amplifying their voices, so one of the most recent collaborations is with Global AI Hub to push their free courses in Pakistan.

I think the work we are doing for the Pakistan Software House Association’s diversity and inclusion committee deserves a mention here. We have also created Pakistan’s first digital and public directory of professional women, the project was initiated by the Pakistan Software House Association and the graduates from our coding boot camp volunteered to build the platform, it is called prowomen.pk. WomenInTechPK is also building a digital footprint of our fellow WomenInTechPK by publishing their interviews. We have also collaborated with both local and international events and conferences to increase the representation of women, on and off stage.

**Women’s Empowerment**

I think empowerment is about choice and autonomy. This is what I want for myself and for all the women of this world.

**A list of awards/achievements.**

I have received two awards, one from WomenTechNetwork Awards for 2020 in the category of Women & Diversity in Tech – Ally of the Year and another from Women of Wonders Awards 2020 by Connected Women for my Community Work. Other than that, I have spoken at over 100 events, moderated panels and facilitated workshops and focus groups. I have also been interviewed and featured in a couple of dozen international and local digital publications.

**A Progressive Pakistan**

We need an open mind and the ability to self-reflect. These are the two things that have been my guiding principle and I want to learn more of it. Another virtue is discipline, this is something that I am working on and I hope more of us will understand the value of it. I am an optimist and see amazing things coming out of our country, especially by the younger lot and I am hopeful that they will be able to do better than us.

*The writer is known for her articles on Cultural Impact*