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"Tech must be integrated into all school subjects"

Joanna Pamphilis is Global Head of Investments and Securities Digital Products at the major Italian bank UniCredit. She would like to see more women in the FinTech sector and believes that this is also an issue that should be addressed in education and training. She calls for coding, data analysis and web design to be included in the curriculum.

Ms. Pamphilis, what does it take for more women to venture into the tech industry?
First of all, we need to dispel the preconception that the tech industry is a purely male domain. Women can also play a key role here. Unfortunately, they are still subject to prejudice: they are said to be less technically adept, less qualified and/or less committed than men and better suited to non-technical positions that involve soft skills. It only goes hand in hand - and more visible, female role models are needed for other aspiring women - true to the motto "You can't be what you can't see".

Certainly not easy in the male-dominated tech industry...
Yes, there is also a "bro culture" in some places, where women are excluded from strategic decisions and promotion opportunities. The dynamics of the work culture in a male-dominated industry are also perceived as toxic. The sad fact is that women are still ignored, ignored, interrupted and their ideas rejected.

What can companies do?
Companies need to focus on gender diversity when it comes to recruiting staff and live up to value propositions so that women perceive the company as attractive. This means emphasizing inclusion and belonging, which translates into creating opportunities. Countless academic studies show that companies that put gender diversity front and center have tangible benefits that can be measured in terms of revenue, return on investment (ROI) and customer loyalty. The most important advice goes to the women themselves: You have to have the guts to go for it. If you're thinking about a career in tech, you'll never know if tech is right for you - until you try it.

How can we encourage young women to take up careers in the tech sector?
The basic requirement is that we educate them. Technology is an integral part of life and the future of work. Not encouraging girls in technology and not giving them an education means denying them opportunities for the future. We should encourage girls to participate in STEM-related activities, give them access to female role models and teach coding and tech skills as early as possible so that they are fun and girls recognize how technology contributes to society and our lives. We should start at school.

This subject area is not yet part of the curriculum...
Exactly! That's why I advocate school subjects such as coding, data analysis and web design. But that alone is not enough. School subjects should not be considered separately, they must complement each other.

Can you give a specific example?
On the one hand, there are subjects that focus on technology and, on the other, subjects that are not traditionally technical - such as art, architecture and biology. It is important to find overlaps here. Technology must be integrated into all school subjects.

Do teachers need further and advanced training?

Definitely! Online learning platforms, educational software, virtual reality and augmented reality technologies (VR and AR) are changing the way we teach and learn. Conversely, this means that teachers and professors need basic technical knowledge to be able to implement digital tools in a classroom. Unfortunately, they are insufficiently trained in this respect.

Which countries can we learn from?
The countries with the highest percentage of women in STEM roles are Lithuania (49%) and Iceland (45 Prozent). In Lithuania, there are more than 30 higher education institutions and the cost of living is low, which facilitates access to higher education. As women have access to free or low-cost higher education, Lithuania has the highest number of female scientists and engineers in Europe. Access to higher education also drives the number of technology start-ups emerging from academia, confirming that an educated population is a powerful accelerator. There are more female founders and entrepreneurs receiving venture capital funding in Lithuania than in any other country in Europe. Lithuania also has subsidized childcare, which benefits women during their careers.

What could programs look like to get girls and women interested in technology?
Hands-on and fun projects are needed in schools to show career opportunities and how technology is integrated into different career fields. Another approach is to make computer skills an integral part of the curriculum from a young age to get girls interested in technology at an early age. Companies can also take action by partnering with schools and offering volunteer and mentoring programs. Practical experiences such as work shadowing and internships can further motivate girls to enter the world of technology.

About the person:
Successful through transformation - this is what Joanna Pamphilis stands for and she can look back on over 20 years of experience: State Street, KCG, UBS, Northern Trust and today UniCredit - Joanna Pamphilis lives and loves her role as a woman in Tech and is one of the Global CIO 100 as well as one of the FinTech Top 100 Women 2023 and 2024. With her American roots and European family background, she brings a multicultural perspective to her work. For UniCredit, she leads a team of more than 100 digital experts as Global Head, Investments and Securities Digital Products.