

Women in NYC Tech: Tanyella Evans of Library For All. (2017). AlleyWatch. Retrieved 3 November 2017, from <http://www.alleywatch.com/2017/07/women-in-nyc-tech-tanyella-evans-of-library-for-all/>



Women in NYC Tech: Tanyella Evans of Library For All

BY ALLEYWATCH

Much has been said and written about the lack of women in the tech sector, be it as investors (or associates), founders, or in management positions at major companies. Is the problem the old boys network – or that success in technology is seen as a young man’s game? In this series, we speak with some of the top women in tech in New York as they discuss the challenges they face, the perceptions that need to be changed and the work that’s being done – or not – to help to promote women.

Today we speak with Tanyella Evans, cofounder and CEO at [Library For All](#), a nonprofit building a cloud-based digital library and platform for communities in the developing world. Tanyella has worked in social entrepreneurship and international development, focusing specifically on education and culture. Using her experience as an educator in some of the poorest communities, Tanyella has established a much needed school in Haiti and continues to provide necessary educational tools and resources to the world’s indigent communities. Tanyella is active in the NYC tech ecosystem and is doing her part to strengthen communities in a booming tech city to the poorest regions.



Tanyella Evans

What's your background and how did you develop your career as a female entrepreneur in the NYC tech ecosystem?

I have always been captivated by books, even as a young girl. My love for books and curiosity for learning led me to receive a scholarship to the United World College (UWC) at age 16, an experience that allowed me to discover my passion for international development. During my time at UWC, I spent a year in Uganda volunteering as a teacher in a classroom, where I had a single textbook to teach from. Despite the lack of resources available, the kids in my class were so eager to learn, they would come to school even when they didn't have food in their bellies. They were so hungry for knowledge that they would beg me for homework. This experience opened my eyes to the broader issue – individuals around the world lack access to the books they need to learn, dream, and aspire to lift themselves out of poverty. In fact, 250 million children are not even learning the basics of how to read, even after attending four years of school.

Years later, I met my now Australian co-founder Rebecca in New York City, who witnessed classroom after classroom without books in Haiti. We knew we could spend our lives making an impact by building physical libraries around the world, but it wouldn't be a cost-effective, scalable solution to the widespread problem. Though neither of us

had a background in technology, we quickly recognized the need for a digital library platform – one that would leverage mobile technology to provide the world’s poorest with access to books and a brighter future. We started Library For All to build a digital library, suitable for online and offline environments, that delivers locally relevant books to devices that already exist in the developing communities, such as low-cost phones and tablets. I understood from my time in Uganda that even people living on \$1.25 a day had access to mobile technologies, and today, 6 of the 7 billion mobile phone subscribers live in developing countries.

We started a tech nonprofit in NYC in part because of the vast number of technology companies and experts in the area, particularly those interested in using “technology for good.” Our strategy has been influenced by tech leaders in NYC, primarily because we have been transparent about some of the roadblocks and challenges we’ve faced since inception. An openness to learning and improving is an invitation for male and female leaders alike to support your organization, especially as an early-stage entrepreneur.

What are the advantages of being a woman in tech?

A diverse team is a competitive advantage to any company, and that’s even more important in the social impact space where women are often on the frontlines of social change at the community level. We embrace being a woman-led tech non profit, and plan to keep building a team that reflects diversity.

What do you think can be done to further promote female entrepreneurs and women in tech in New York?

New York is phasing in paid family leave for men and women starting last year so that is a good start. Doing more to support men and women as they balance raising families will mean that more women will be able to stay in tech and other demanding fields.

What is diversity to you and do you see it evolving in tech?

Diversity to me doesn’t just mean having women or minorities on the team, it means that they are the founders, product owners, or CEOs of tech companies designing the products of the future. We need to teach girls not just to code, but also create business plans for tech products and bring their ideas to the market.

Why do you think it's important that women retain, grow, and develop into senior roles within their organizations?

Our corporations, our communities, our social and political systems, are profoundly shaped by our leaders. Women need to be at the helm of tech companies or the products they create will not fully embody or reflect 50% of our population.

How do you see the future of teams and interactions in a diverse environment and what implications will this have?

If 50% of teams were female at all levels in a company, the implications would be world changing! Teams are most creative when there is diversity of perspectives and strengths.

How can women rise in the ecosystem and what are the unseen barriers?

The unseen barriers include the unrealistic ideal of female beauty that women must aspire to that pervades our culture. It's everywhere. Did you know men are more likely to trust a woman in a business meeting if she is wearing lipstick? Men and women can counter this uneven playing field by acknowledging these biases exist, and working to examine biases in ourselves and others and actively addressing them in our everyday lives.

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Tanyella Evans
Library for All

Please tell us about a few organizations that you are involved with or respect that are promoting women in tech.

One organizations I really respect in our field is the Akilah Institute for Women, a nonprofit that empowers women in developing countries through educational programs that offer many technology courses and development programs. Outside of our field, we recently partnered with a new job posting platform for women only called Werk, which promotes flexible, leadership roles for women in the workplace. Many of these jobs have a tech focus.

What can men do to participate in this discussion?

Men, use your male privilege. Refuse to speak on panels if there is less than 50% of women. Offer to coach and support female leaders in your organization. Teach your daughters to be brave and creative in the face of adversity.