WORKING MOTHER

MOST POWERFUL MOMS

Most Powerful Moms in STEM

Despite the myth that women aren't interested in a career in science or engineering working mothers are running huge tech companies, building robots and teaching the next generation of women engineers.

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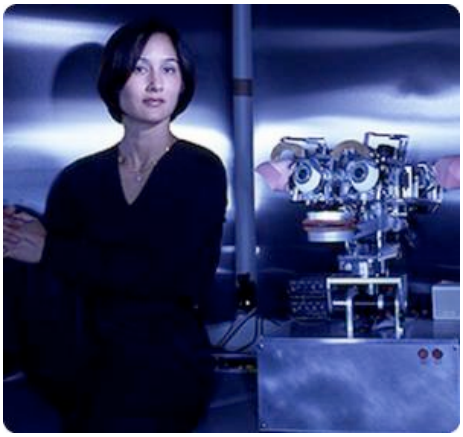

For all of the bunk that women aren't interested in careers in math or science the numbers of women entering STEM [Science, Technology, Engineering and Math] careers has been quietly growing. According to the National Science Foundation, the number of female science and engineering doctorate recipients increased by 36.1% from 2003 to 2008. Women stars in STEM have also been getting recognition as of late, including Elizabeth Blackburn who won the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine in 2009 for her work in molecular biology.

See Most Powerful Moms in STEM in pictures (http://www.workingmother.com/most-powerful-moms/most-powerful-moms-stem-pictures)

Despite gains, women still fall far behind men in STEM. The US Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that although women currently make up more than half of the American workforce, they hold only 14% of engineering positions and 25% of mathematics positions. Catherine Hill, the Research Director of the American Association of University Women suggests that nurturing girls early on in their education will help increase the number of women entering math and science fields. “We’ve found a lot of small things can make a difference, like a course in spatial skills for women going into engineering, or teaching children that math ability is not fixed, but grows with effort,” she says.

Hill also says that talking about the achievements of women in STEM will help to erode the negative stereotypes for the next generation, making the accomplishments of the women on our Most Powerful Moms in STEM list all the more important.

So how did we choose workingmother.com’s Most Powerful Moms in STEM? The women on this list all have at least one child living at home who is 18 years old or younger. We have also tried to include a broad range of women—from corporate women, to academics, to researchers. The women on this list do share one thing in common—they are all shattering the illusion that women can’t succeed in STEM fields.

Most Powerful Moms in STEM in pictures

Several prominent corporate women (all with strong science, tech and engineering backgrounds) have made our list. Ursula Burns is the first African American woman CEO of $22 billion a year Xerox. She often credits her mechanical engineering background for helping her ascend the ranks. Johnson & Johnson’s Sherilyn McCoy runs the company’s pharmaceutical and consumer business segments. She also holds five US patents. Padmasree Warrior joined Cisco in 2007 as its chief technology officer. In 2010, she also took over the company’s commercial and small business development group—a move that many analysts saw as evidence Cisco may be grooming her to be CEO.

"Women bring unique perspectives and valuable insights to STEM careers that help drive the innovation of this ever-evolving field forward," said Cisco's Chief Diversity Officer Marilyn Nagel, adding "organizations able to recognize and harness the value of a diverse workforce often gain competitive advantage that leads to sustainable long-term growth and prosperity.”

Julie Larson-Green is a major mover and shaker at Microsoft, in charge of the Windows Experience, and nearly 1,400 of the company’s employees. She is one of the few women to hold a top post at the tech giant. Marry Barra at the start of 2011 was named Senior Vice President of Global Product Development at troubled US carmaker GM. She too is one of the few women in the company’s executive ranks. It would be a major coup

should Barra succeed in turning around GM.

Women researchers on our list are making major discoveries with the potential to change the world. Pamela J. Bjorkman, the Max Delbruck Professor of Biology at California Institute of Technology has done pioneering work in the field of immune recognition. Cristiana Rastellini has pioneered the pancreatic islet transplantation (lifesaving for diabetes patients) and made strides developing the first artificial intestine. Cynthia Breazeal, Director of the Personal Robots Group at the MIT Media Library has done groundbreaking work in social robotics and human robot interaction.

Several women on our list are myth-shattering academics, who are determined to help women rise through the ranks in STEM fields. Kristi Anseth, a researcher at the Howard Hughes Medical Center in Boulder Colorado designs polymers that imitate living tissues, with the goal of helping the body heal itself. She is also a faculty scientist and wants to see the number of PhDs awarded to women in the sciences rise. Cammy Abernathy is one of the few women engineering deans in the country (she heads the University of Florida's Engineering School). Her goal during her tenure—get more women into the program.

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