

A Blueprint for Inspiring and Mentoring the
Next Generation of Technology Innovators

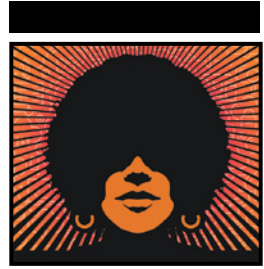
WOMEN OF COLOR IN TECH



Susanne Tedrick

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Women of Color in Tech



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A Blueprint for Inspiring and
Mentoring the Next Generation of
Technology Innovators

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To my mother, Susan, who was my first true role model in strength and perseverance.

To my father, Ken, who lit the spark in me that would ultimately lead me to tech.

To my husband, Paul, who has always been my #1 fan.

Thank you all for your support, your sacrifices, and your unyielding and unconditional love. I love you more than words can express.



About the Author



Susanne Tedrick is a technical specialist for a leading Fortune 50 technology company. In her work, Susanne helps organizations understand the benefits of creating cloud-native software applications and modernizing their existing IT infrastructure through cloud computing and tackling the complexities that come with the process. Prior to her transition into the tech field, Susanne worked in many administrative and operational roles with various companies in the financial services industry.

Fiercely committed to community service and increasing participation of women and people of color in STEM educational and professional opportunities, she performs volunteer work for P-TECH and Black Girls Code.

Susanne was the winner of CompTIA Association of Information Technology Professional's 2018 Rising Star of the Year Award and a 2019 nominee for CompTIA Advancing Women in Technology Mentorship Guide Spotlight Award for her dedication in advancing her tech career and that of future technologists. Susanne graduated with a degree in communication systems from Northwestern University and currently resides in New York City with her husband, Paul.



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One of the themes of this book is that no one becomes successful on their own. While I had to put in the work and effort to get here, my successes—and frankly, still having my limbs and sanity—are largely a result of having people who cared enough to help me along the way.

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Foreword

It all starts with a decision.

The willful choice to prioritize your interests in the face of the unknown, the uncharted, and what could be a long road of isolation.

It is met with an affirmation.

A belief that you belong here. That your ideas are worthwhile, your thoughts serve a purpose, and your perspective is a value add.

And accompanied by a notion.

A declaration that science, technology, engineering, and math don't have a color. They don't have a face. They belong to no one and everyone, for the whole and the betterment of all.

Your presence in STEM is an act of courage.

As if your choice to pursue your passions wasn't radical enough, here you are, prepared to beat the odds, defy the disparaging stats, and stare down adversity while carving a path, exploring new territory and laying our future.

Thank you for being a catalyst for innovation and the personification of endless possibility.

The work that you have done, and will do, is admirable, relevant, and necessary. You are just the right person to perform it.

Amanda Spann
Innovation Consultant & App Entrepreneur
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Introduction

One of the important duties in my job is helping customers figure out “why”: with all of the options that are available to them for their needs, and their limited time and resources, why is my product the one that they should choose?

Considering a career in tech prompts the same question. Of the career fields and options available, why should you, as a woman of color, pursue a career in technology? More specifically, why should you pursue this career field considering the well-known, heavily researched, and persistent challenges we continue to face in the field?

To be honest, I struggled with how to effectively answer that question every day while I wrote this book. I deal with many of the issues raised in this book, and more, such as the following:

- Keeping up with dynamic and complex technology areas, while balancing what’s demanded of me daily at work and home.
- Dealing with the occasional insensitive comment made by the ignorant and the unpleasant, rooted in misconceptions about my race and gender, and then wrestling with whether to respond and be dubbed as “sensitive” or let the comment stand but let it slowly eat away at my spirit.
- Seeing many people willing to give easy praise and “advice,” but few willing to publicly advocate on my behalf professionally. There are people who say they are allies but whose words, actions, and motivations reveal anything but.

- Being the only one like me in the room and sometimes feeling tokenized.
- For the women of color peers I do have, sadly watching them leave for other industries because they've simply had enough.
- Feeling like I had to work 10 times harder to be taken seriously, let alone advance in my career, and feeling pressure to always exude perfection rather than vulnerability.

Some days, it was tough to get excited about what I do, and I kept thinking, *if I can't excited about why I'm in tech and why I stay, then how can I inspire someone else to take this path?*

My "why"—what inspired me to come to tech and to stay—is that it is one of the few career fields that fully utilized my interests, skills, and passions. While I face challenges, and not always of the good, constructive kind, I am fully engaged. I love getting lost in my work, learning new things, and never having two days that are the same. I love what I do, and that love and the benefits I've received far outweigh any challenges that have come my way.

Tech is a field full of creativity, research, and discovery, where innovations can be used to solve the world's most pressing problems. Essential and purposeful work is being done all throughout the tech sector, and I love being part of the solution.

More importantly to me, I want to make the path easier for the future generations of female tech leaders. When they see other women of color out there and making it happen, despite the difficulties, then they know that there are not limited to opportunities that there have been historically. They know that these opportunities are out there, and they know that they truly are not alone, because we will always be there and have their backs.

It is not an easy path, but it can be a richly rewarding one—for your mind, your heart, and, hopefully, your wallet! I hope that you'll bring your talents and energies to the field, because you belong here, and you are very much needed.

Switching gears a bit . . . studying architecture is one of my favorite pastimes. What I love about architecture is that it can transform a building from being functional but ordinary into one that is memorable and iconic. It's what separates the Empire State Building or the Willis Tower from other tall office buildings. It can help a building become the standard that all other future buildings will measure themselves against.

Good architects require a strong understanding of what makes a building safe for people to enter and use on a regular basis and how to

make it follow safety rules put in place by local agencies. Good architects also need to know how to take a client's requirements and translate them into a design that meets those basic needs *and* is pleasing to the mind and eyes. Considering that the average worker spends about a third of their life in an office, being in an office or building that is safe and pleasant is always ideal.

All great buildings start (and require) a blueprint before any major work is done. At a high level, a blueprint is a detailed technical drawing. Given the costs, resources, and time it takes to get a building from concept to reality, architects can't just approach the process haphazardly or without a solid plan. A blueprint details exactly what tasks or work needs to be done, what materials are to be used, and an estimate of the time and costs (tangible and intangible) that the project will take. Additionally, blueprints are constantly reviewed and revised, as needs (and challenges) arise.

To me, becoming a good tech professional is not much different. Tech professionals, at minimum, need to have solid technical skills. Depending on where you land in tech, this may mean knowing how and when to use various programming languages, knowing how to analyze massive amounts of data, or knowing how to keep computers and computer networks secure. In my job, I need to be able to effectively demonstrate complex technical concepts about cloud-native software development. If I'm unable to do that, I can end up losing credibility with clients and people within my organization.

Being an in-demand and respected tech professional, however, takes much more than technical skill. Tech professionals need to be able to communicate effectively in both oral and written forms. They need to be adept problem-solvers who treat challenges as opportunities and who know how to move forward even when things get tough. They need to have a continuous growth mind-set, understanding that skill and knowledge attainment is a lifelong process instead of having an "I went to school, so I'm done" attitude. To be successful, they need to be "renaissance women"—talented and knowledgeable in many different areas.

Great tech professionals also know that a huge attributor to success is a plan. They know that a great career will not materialize on its own and requires a plan. When there are changes along the way, they know that they should consult their "blueprint" as a guide and revise it as necessary.

This book will help you design your own personal blueprint for starting your tech career. Whether you are mapping out your first career or you're someone who is figuring out what your next career will look