

**Press Release
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**March 8 Special Report:
Hong Kong Computer Society FACE Club Outstanding ICT Women Awards
Shines the spotlight on female professionals in a male-dominated industry**

7 March 2016, Hong Kong – “I was asked to deliver a system administration training more than 20 years ago and had to set up my own teaching equipment and workstation, which were very heavy. It’s too bad that no one came forth to help and I had to do it all by myself.”

“One of the challenges is family responsibilities, which could cause interruptions during the career development stage.”

“We need to be more aware of our capabilities, and proactively seek for help from colleagues and supervisors when needed.”

“I will be more concerned about whether there exists any discrimination in terms of pay and benefits, career prospect etc. between male and female employees who have the same job/role/position in the same company within the industry. If gender discrimination exists, then we must not keep quiet.”

These are just a few of the challenges faced by women in the male-dominated ICT industry, according to the executive committee members of the Hong Kong Computer Society’s (HKCS) FACE Club.

To bring women more to the fore in this significant and rapidly growing industry, HKCS launched its first Outstanding ICT Women Awards (OICTWA) in 2015 to recognize the achievements of successful women in the ICT industry, and groom them into role models to encourage other females to join the profession. This Award captures the unique spirit of International Women’s Day, where appreciation and respect towards women and their achievements are being celebrated around the world.

The Award is organized by HKCS’ FACE Club, an acronym that stands for “Female”, “Attract”, “Connect” and “Engage”. Established by HKCS in 2015, FACE Club aims to provide a platform to facilitate mutual exchange among HKCS’ 2,000 or so female members, give them more opportunities to engage with ICT and encourage more young women to choose ICT as their career.

Indeed, the number of women who have chosen ICT as a career in Hong Kong is still significantly less than expected. According to Michael Leung, President of the Hong Kong Computer Society, “The number of women who have adopted ICT as a career is disproportional to our demographics and the number of women graduates from our tertiary institutions.”

“If we are to grow Hong Kong’s ICT industry, it is important to achieve similar demographics as our customers,” Cally Chan, Chairlady of FACE Club and Managing Director of Hewlett

Packard Enterprise Hong Kong & Macau points out. “While women make up about 50% of the population, women represent only 20% of the ICT workforce in Hong Kong, so there remains a huge gap to be filled.”

The executive committee members of FACE Club, all outstanding women in the ICT sector, agree that the male-dominated ICT profession could pose quite a challenge for women, but encourage female ICT professionals to persevere and carve a niche for themselves.

“Family support is critical for women to be successful in ICT,” says Cally Chan. Cally remembers being asked to perform a system upgrade at midnight many years ago and asking her boyfriend to accompany her to ensure her safety. “Because of this, our customer joked that we were ‘buy one, get two’.”

Although the ICT industry is heavily skewed towards men because men are generally regarded as being more technology-savvy, analytic and decisive, these female ICT veterans believe that women actually have some inherent advantages over men.

“As women, we have our unique strengths such as being more people-oriented, mindful, attentive and considerate, which can make it easier for us to succeed down the career path,” says Cally Chan.

“Female are particularly good at team building, presentation and communications. These are important skills for team work and software development.” Observes Dr. Ong Lay Lian, the winner of OICTWA, “I have noticed that in the final year projects, male students tend to choose female students when forming their project teams as they see the strengths and advantages of having a female in the team.”

“Women are generally more meticulous, can think broadly and work with details,” adds Edith Mok, MH, FACE Club Executive Committee Member and Former Director of Information Systems and Communication Services, Pacific Area of Dow Chemical Pacific Limited. “We are also more tactful and tend to read body language better than men. Women can be more flexible, and we can accept and learn from our failures more so than men.”

Even more importantly, Barbara Chiu, FACE Club Executive Committee Member and Managing Director, Hong Kong and Macau of Cisco Systems (HK) Limited, points out that the ICT profession is made up of much more than just technicians. There are many different roles, such as sales and customer service which are just as suitable for women as for men. In the multinational technology company where she works, for instance, there is an equal ratio of both genders and they take up different roles within the team to complement each another.

With all of these advantages on their side, Edith Mok doesn’t see why women engaged in ICT startups cannot become exceedingly successful. “Some women are innovative and creative. With enough guts and curiosity, they can certainly create very successful ICT startups,” she observes. “Startups require business sense, customer experience and product vision... such competencies have to be developed at an early stage through education, experiment, trial and error and persistence.”

“Women are naturally better communicators and collaborators than men. One who demonstrates a high level of enthusiasm to learn, who genuinely cares and treasures people and talent will gain trust and support within and across teams. This lays the foundation of being a good leader.” Irene Leung, one of the winners of “ICT Woman Professional” OICTWA 2015 and Chief Executive Officer, Senior Citizen Home Safety Association added.

OICTWA is divided into two award categories, namely the outstanding “ICT Woman Professional” and “ICT Super Girl” awards. Its eleven winners come from a broad spectrum of professional and educational backgrounds including educational institutions, NGOs and public utility companies.

In spite of working in a male dominant industry, many women professionals have made significant contribution to ICT sector over the years, they work diligently in various categories, and play an essential role quietly. In fact, majority of the winners of Outstanding ICT Achievers (OICTAA) in the past are women professionals. In recent years, an encouraging upward trend has been seen among young ladies who choose to join this challenging sector, and decided to devote their energies to ICT industry.

Through the introduction of the OICTWA, HKCS hopes to show that the ICT sector recognizes and rewards excellence irrespective of gender, while encouraging more women to join the profession by providing them female role models – the award winners – that they can identify with.

“We believe that introducing the OICTWA is a great way of promoting the ICT profession to young and talented women who aspire to a challenging and rewarding career,” says Mrs Agnes Mak, MH, JP, Chairperson of the Organizing Committee of OICTWA 2015 and Executive Director of the Hong Kong Productivity Council. “We look forward to seeing more women demonstrate their capabilities in ICT to the society, and receiving equally high recognition as their male counterparts.”

In giving advice on how women can fit in more easily in a male-dominated industry like ICT, Barbara Chiu sums it up nicely. “Women need to show more confidence in a male-dominated working environment,” she says. “At the same time, male colleagues also need to respect and support their female counterparts, and provide a comfortable, open working environment in which women can freely share their views and demonstrate their abilities”.

About HKCS

The Hong Kong Computer Society (HKCS) was established in 1970 as a non-profit making professional body with the primary objective to promote the uses of information technology (IT) in Hong Kong by providing a medium for disseminating knowledge and promoting the appreciation of IT and related tools.

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