IBM Pathways Program - Empowering technical talent to grow and succeed

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Laura is a Learning Consultant working on contract for IBM. She is representing the IBM Pathways Program, as well as the Program Owner and Leader, Lisa Gable.

Laura has a long career with IBM, serving in many HR functions including Talent Management, Talent Development, Learning and Leadership Development. She has extensive experience designing, implementing, and scaling learning solutions that drive individual and organizational growth.

Besides IBM, Laura also worked in the Financial Services industry, as the Leadership Development Executive for New York Life Insurance Company, and she is owns and manages a small business that empowers and supports women going through career transitions.

IBM Pathways Program | *Presenter Name*
Empowering technical professionals to grow and succeed | Event Date

Opening Slide:

- Greeting to everyone
- Introduce yourself (Name, role in IBM, where you live, your education background)
- Thrilled to be here today to talk about IBM's distinct program for our diverse technical employees – It's called "Pathways"
- Before we move on, just a few words about IBM.
    - You may already know that IBM is a global technology and innovation company founded in 1911 and headquartered in Armonk, NY.
    - We have over 280,000 employees globally.
    - Throughout IBM's history they have been at the forefront of diversity. Starting in 1911, when founded, the company included Black and Female employees. Hired the first person with disability in 1914. In 1935 was the first to write an equal opportunity policy, and many more historic moments.
    - Our business strategy is focused on helping clients leverage the power of hybrid cloud and Artificial Intelligence (AI). See the IBM 2021 Annual Report.
    - Our purpose is "to be the catalyst that makes the world work better."

In the highly competitive technical market, IBM knows it must attract, grow, advance, and retain the world's best technical professionals. This is where IBM Pathways comes into the picture.
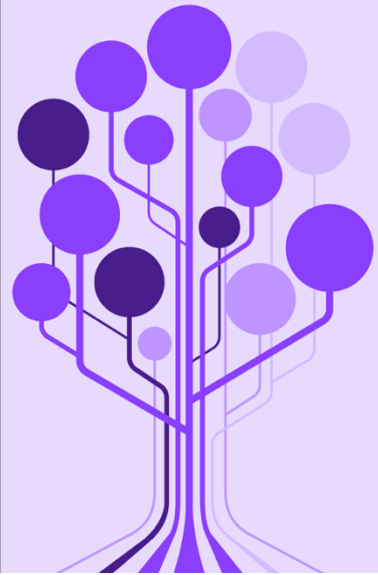
Here's what we'd like to share with you today:
- What exactly is IBM Pathways and its mission? Who is the audience? What are the program components? How does it all work?
- Why and when was Pathways developed? How has it evolved and changed to remain effective?
- What has been the impact of Pathways for the students (we call them participants)?
- And, time permitting, we'd love to engage you in experiencing one of our post-Pandemic activities that has proven to be quite valuable in re-igniting energy, meaning, and direction for our participants and our partners.

And please, ask questions – it's a great program and I'm happy to tell you all about it.

IBM Pathways is an educational program designed to increase the diversity of IBM's technical executive and technical thought leader community.

In 1963, IBM established a Fellowship program to recognize senior IBM scientists, engineers, and other technical professionals for outstanding technical achievements. Only eight were inducted in the program that year. The program continues today and there have been two other distinction programs, 1) Distinguished Engineer and 2) Distinguished Designer, which are appointments that lead to being a Fellow. All 3 positions are at the executive level and are often referred to as IBM's technical executives and thought leaders. They are the company's "most exceptional" technical professionals and visionaries who are recognized inside and outside IBM as experts in their field. They have won five Nobel Prizes, five Turing Awards, and been responsible for nearly 10,000 U.S. patents. This pre-eminent community of technical professionals has since been emulated by other organizations as well.

Today, this community acts as the "technical conscience" of the company, responsible for maintaining IBM's technical edge. They also represent the pinnacle of a technical career at IBM.
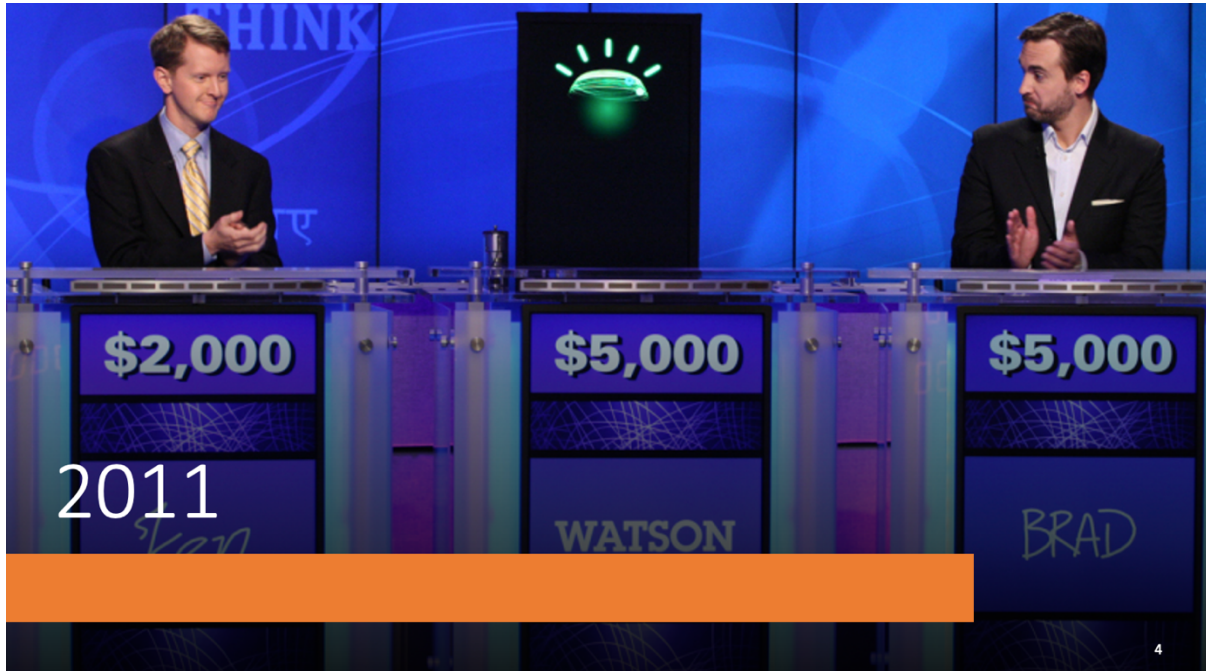
In 2011, IBM's 100th year anniversary, the company introduced Watson technology, and had Watson as a game show contestant on Jeopardy. It was an exciting year!

In that same year, Pathways was created. This came from the top technical leaders who made the decision to develop the program based on the company's culture for always being at the forefront on diversity, the importance of diversity of thought needed for innovation, and based on the data. See statistics below:

- o *According to [McKinsey](), "companies in the top-quartile for gender diversity on executive teams were 21% more likely to outperform on profitability," while ethnically diverse executive teams were 33% more likely to outperform in profitability.*

- o *A [2018 study published in the Harvard Business Review]() revealed that companies with above-average diversity had "19% points higher innovation revenues and 9% points higher [EBIT]() margins, on average."*

- o *US technology companies employ strikingly __few__ **Black and Hispanic workers.***

- o *In the US, __84%__ of working professionals currently in science and engineering jobs in the U.S are white or Asian males.*

- o *__77%__ of women and minorities feel that formal **mentorship is beneficial** and impactful to their careers.*

o *Women with sponsors feel they are [70%](#) more likely to have their ideas endorsed, 119% more likely to see their ideas developed, and 200% more likely to see their ideas implemented.*

The program offerings were determined by the Pathways program team (3 employees). They conducted interviews with business and technical stakeholders, leadership experts, both internally and externally.

They determined that the main key factors for success for infusing diversity into the technical executive population that were needed are **empowerment** and **advocacy**.

Pathways Purpose: "To empower technical professionals to grow and succeed."

Pathways is deliberate about supporting diversity and inclusion in everything. Not only for the reasons IBM created the program, but also to ensure there is a wide range of experiences and perspectives that foster innovation at all levels to achieve the business outcomes. Pathways has a "diversity first mindset" meaning we ensure all qualified employees can be nominated to participate in the program, and get the individual, specialized support.

The students (we call them participants) are high performing employees at mid-career levels (including engineers, architects, designers, data scientists, consultants, researchers, scientists, tech specialists) who have potential, are motivated and committed to pursue a technical leadership career in IBM. Pathways has multiple offerings (which are traditionally termed courses, workshops, classes), that keep our students motivated, challenged, and excited about their career development, technology, our customers (we call them clients), and IBM.

Mid-career levels were selected based on the data that shows that the proportion of women in technical careers drops significantly (20%) in between the manager and leadership stages of a career.

Pathways focuses on three areas for our program participants:
- **Career Development**: Ensuring participants know the technical career paths and opportunities within IBM and enabling them to acquire the leading-edge skills and experiences they will need for new assignments, and to build professional networks and relationships with key technical leaders.
- **Career Advancement**: This starts with career readiness— gaining the experience, exposure, and evidence needed to advance. Pathways empowers participants to get what they need to prepare and enable them to move forward, take new assignments and promotional opportunities.
- **Retention (Keeping our people at IBM)**: Ensuring participants have on-going executive sponsorship and recognition for their technical contributions to the technical community, the IBM business and for our clients. Participants who achieve their goals often become champions, future coaches and sponsors for the program, and up-and-coming technical talent.

Pathways Program Team created two signature programs: 1) Technical Women's Pipeline Program (women only) and 2) Technical Pipeline Program (men only).

Included in the two programs:
- Actual engagement with people.
    - A 2-day face-to-face instructional class to be held at the corporate headquarters in Armonk, NY (45 minutes outside of New York City)
    - Networking events (with executives, peers, across internal business units)
- A "Career Advancement Support Team" Concept (for advocacy). This team included a dedicated Coach, Sponsor, and the employee's manager, who would work together to help the participant succeed.
- Multi-year journey
- Facilitated activities that empower through coaching and self-discovery

The program was a great success with many nominees and participants, so the 2 tracks continued – and we made small improvements along the way.

2016 was another breakthrough year for technology at IBM.

In 2016, some significant enhancements were made to the two programs based on observations and feedback.

- We found career development and technical conversations were more realistic and beneficial when everyone was together, so we made the decision merge men and women into one track. Enabling more discussion with different perspectives.
- With that, we recreated the two tracks and instead of focusing on gender, we focused the different levels within the technical career tracks. The first track is for mid-level technical employees – called Advanced Technical Eminence. The second was for technical employees who were more senior in their role on the precipice of becoming an executive (1-2 years away). This program was called Breakthrough Technical Eminence.
    - The idea to merge the genders into one group, further supported IBM's pioneering thoughts and actions on diversity. While the program is focused on diverse talent, anyone is open to apply.
- Each program started with a 2-day workshop which includes pre-work and is focused on the learner.
- The Career Advancement Team Concept was expanded with a new role called the TVDM (Technical Vitality Development Manager). The role of the TVDM is to be a trusted advisor across IBM to influence diversity representation, and advocate for growth and success of technical talent. They are assigned to support each of the IBM business areas

(we call them business units) so that every business unit would be fairly and equitably represented).

- Additional classes were added to help nurture the pipeline of technical talent across IBM and throughout the multi-year journey. We specifically created a class for newly hired diverse technical professionals and a negotiations class that examined the barriers women have faced in getting their voices heard. Both were extremely well received.

Pathways continued to see great success, having many of our students move into technical executive roles in IBM.
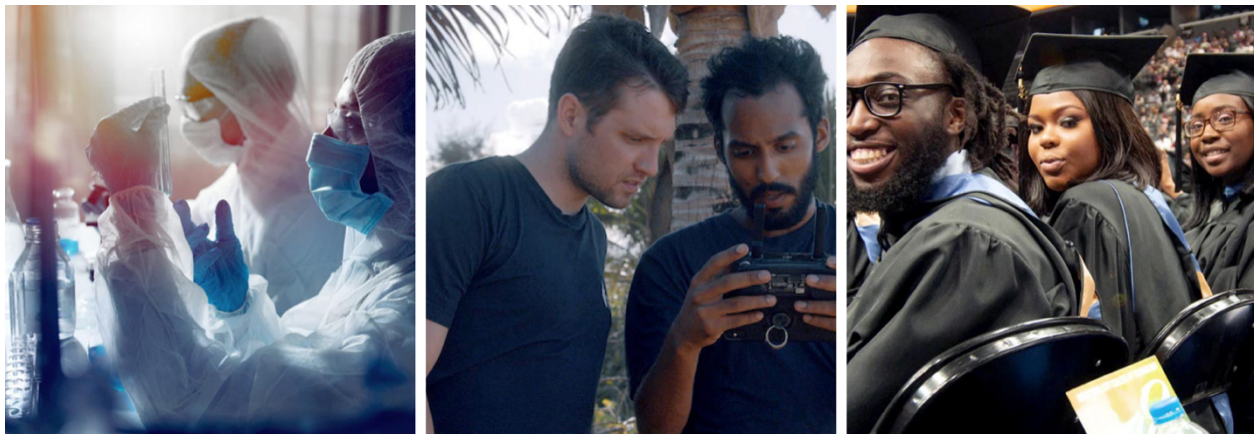
IBM 2020

Then, the pandemic hit. It didn't slow us down at all.

In fact, in 2020, IBM contributed in many ways with their technology to help the world. Supercomputers added muscle to the vaccine search; AI, analytics and data power gave a boost to medical research; introduced the Embrace Pledge to stand for racial justice; helped to support the world's pressing issues with Call for Code, and more.

The Pandemic gave us an opportunity to restructure our program and reach more people. We:

In 2020, we:
- Transitioned all workshops to virtual (spanning several days)
- Shifted the career development responsibility to the Participant giving them a chance to own their career, enable more empowerment
- Created Playbooks for self-paced learning, and to equip the Career Advancement Support Teams with program operations and support guidance
- Hosted virtual speed networking events to create the structure for people in the program to build their networks
- Created a webcast series titled Talk-the-Walk which gives participants a forum to share their work and demonstrate their technical abilities
- Created Pathways-specific communication channels using Slack to ensure everyone stayed connected and up to date on program changes

After 2 years of being virtual, Pathways lead the way being the first IBM class to return to face-to-face at the corporate headquarters in 2022!

Let's create ↵
something that
changes everything.

IBM 2023

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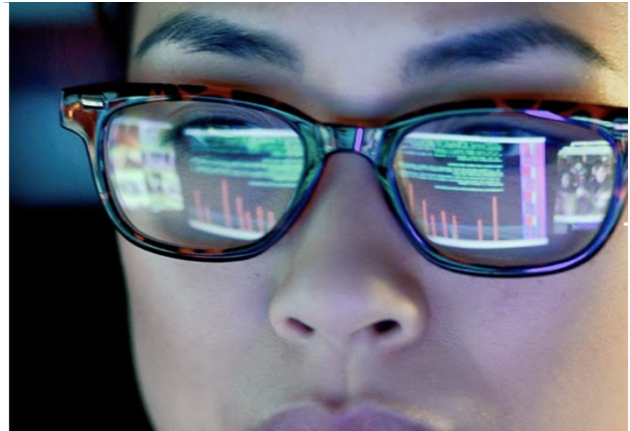
2023

Let's create is IBM's new business strategy for working with clients.
- Pathway is taking this strategy and focusing internally on how to continue to evolve the program. The team is working to redesign experiences for 2023 to further enhance the ability for participants to be empowered in their career journeys and have strong advocacy along the way.

- As a result of the pandemic, all workshops are now offered using a hybrid approach, both virtual and face-to-face, allowing us to reach people all over the world.

- To help mitigate any challenges with hybrid, we have added new ways to connect with the Pathways community. For example, we are piloting a series of local (in person) and virtual sessions for informal Meet & Greets, added Slack channels for community conversations, and inviting people to participate in other offerings i.e., guest on a podcast-like series.
    - Overall, we have seen limited challenges operating in a hybrid mode.
    - It's fair to say we have seen attrition of our technical talent, as well. It's common for people to change career paths. However, the Pathways community is strong with over 3,000 employees and advocates, and new talent is always joining the company.
- All the onboarding for the programs is, and will continued to be conducted virtually.
- Introduced the topics of Passion and Purpose with a class activity that helps participants re-discover themselves after the pandemic. This information enables the Career Advancement Support team to know what really energizes the participant as they help

to identify career development opportunities, and helps the participants connect their purpose to IBM's purpose. If we have time, we'll take you through the activity.

- Transitioning Playbooks (word documents) to IBM's Digital Learning Platform (which for us are self-paced, interactive, learning activities consisting of short videos, articles, and resources).
- Transitioning all workshops to discussion-based learning to enable less "instructions from slides and defined learning" and more about real-world conversations and peer learning.
- Starting to host a series of end-of-year summits, both in person and virtually, to give participants and their Career Advancement Support Teams the opportunity to continue to come together.

What makes Pathways distinct is the individual, customized "high touch" attention provided to each one of our participants… especially in a company as big as IBM (over 280,000 employees). We recognize, advocacy and empowerment are the two differentiators for employees in general, and especially for diverse talent. The participants are supported by the Pathways team 6 people), the Career Advancement Support Team, and the Pathways community at large.

In addition to the support team, Pathways provides instructional modules that are available to the participants, coaches, and sponsors. Example topics include:
- Articulating complex technical points of view and solutions
- Technical leadership branding
- Building social technical eminence (internal and external)
- Building "soft" skills such as (leadership, negotiations, communications
- Networking across the enterprise and externally
- Career advancement planning
- Identifying and correcting derailing behaviors that could delay career progression
- Discovering passions and purpose for both personal and professional
- Understanding dimensions of diversity, equity, and inclusion, unconscious bias
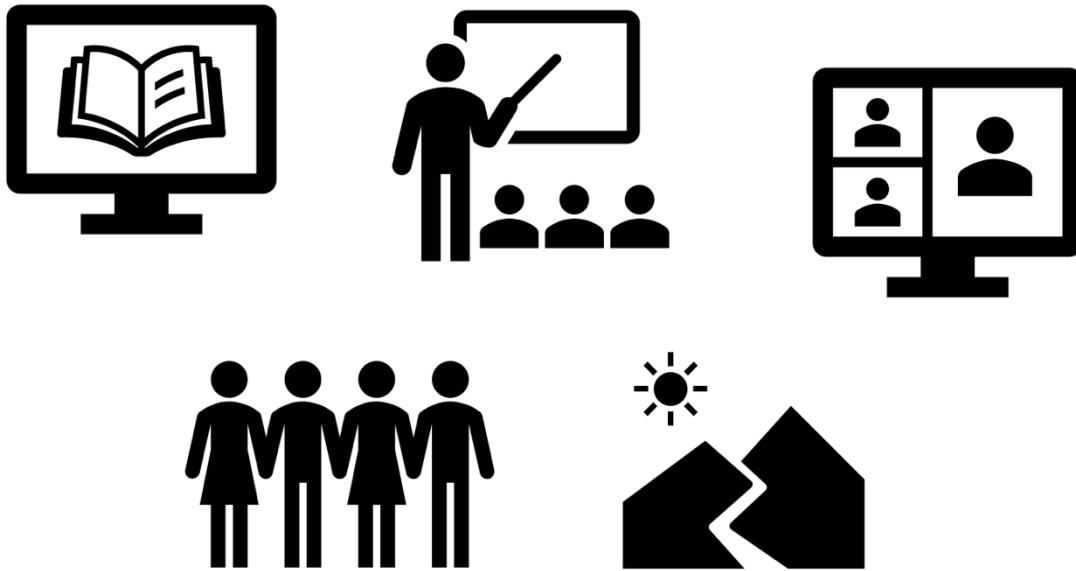
Pathways using multiple ways for delivering the learning experience, to accommodate all learning styles and disabilities, including:

Self-paced, on-line learning:
- Recorded presentation series with examples of career stories
- A blog series
- Monthly newsletter
- Technical Leader digital learning

Face-to-Face or Virtual Workshops:
- Kickoff for the Advanced Technical Eminence program
- Kickoff for the Breakthrough Technical Eminence program
- Professional Hire Workshop
- Pathways networking sessions

Virtual Workshops:
- Taking Charge of Your Social Technical Eminence (new this year)
- Make Your Mark: Impact, Influence, Gravitas (new this year)

Long-term one-on-one coaching and mentoring from a dedicated technical leader and business executive.

Each participant (student) is assigned a career advancement support team – 4 members in total, plus the Pathways Program Team. Below is a brief description of each member of the team.

The following provides a brief description of the role for each of the members of the Career Advancement Support Team:

- **The Coach:** Develops long-term relationship with participant to help develop and execute upon a tactical and strategic career action plan leading toward the next step in their career, and ultimately and technical executive position. The specifically work on developing technical and leadership skills, finding ways to demonstrate technical competence, challenging assumptions, helping with career advancement options and preparations. They meet at least once per month.
- **The Sponsor:** The sponsor is mainly an advocate who looks for opportunities for the participant to increase their technical eminence and visibility within the organization. The sponsor helps to remove barriers which may impede advancement for a participant. This could be by helping to get an opportunity to close a skill gap or advocating for an advancement, including them in their network, and communicating their impact. They meet periodically with participant and coach (recommend once per quarter).
- **The Manager**: Helps to identify opportunities for visibility, enables them with time to participate in other activities for their development, and to ensure they are making progress in their career development plans. They communicate regularly with the Career Advancement Support team. Managers must be prepared to release the participant when they are ready to advance to a new opportunity or position.
- **The Technical Vitality Development Manager**: Acts as a general resource for the participant, identifying opportunities and enhancing visibility, and ensuring career

advancement readiness. These managers are assigned to cover each of IBM's businesses and work together as a team which promotes cross-business area opportunities. They share with the participants, knowledge on business-specific development and advancement processes. They also identify opportunities to execute upon the participants' action plans. They meet occasionally with Career Advancement Support team to check in on progress, and then report overall progress to the Senior Technical Leadership Team.

Everyone on the Career Advancement Support team will act as a coach and mentor to the participant, depending on the situation or topic i.e., career decisions, technical point of view, speaking engagements, patents or scientific papers and publications.

The Experience

- **Inclusive**

- **Global**

- **Collaborative**

- **Dynamic**

In IBM, and especially for Pathways, we pride ourselves on:
- Inclusivity – Celebrating the unique diversity of every employee
- Global central control - although Pathways started out as a United States focused, it is now open to all technical professional across the globe
- Collaborative – the heart of Pathways is the commitment we have to the advancement of talented diverse technical professionals
- Dynamic – we are ever changing to meet the needs and wants of our current and future technical professionals
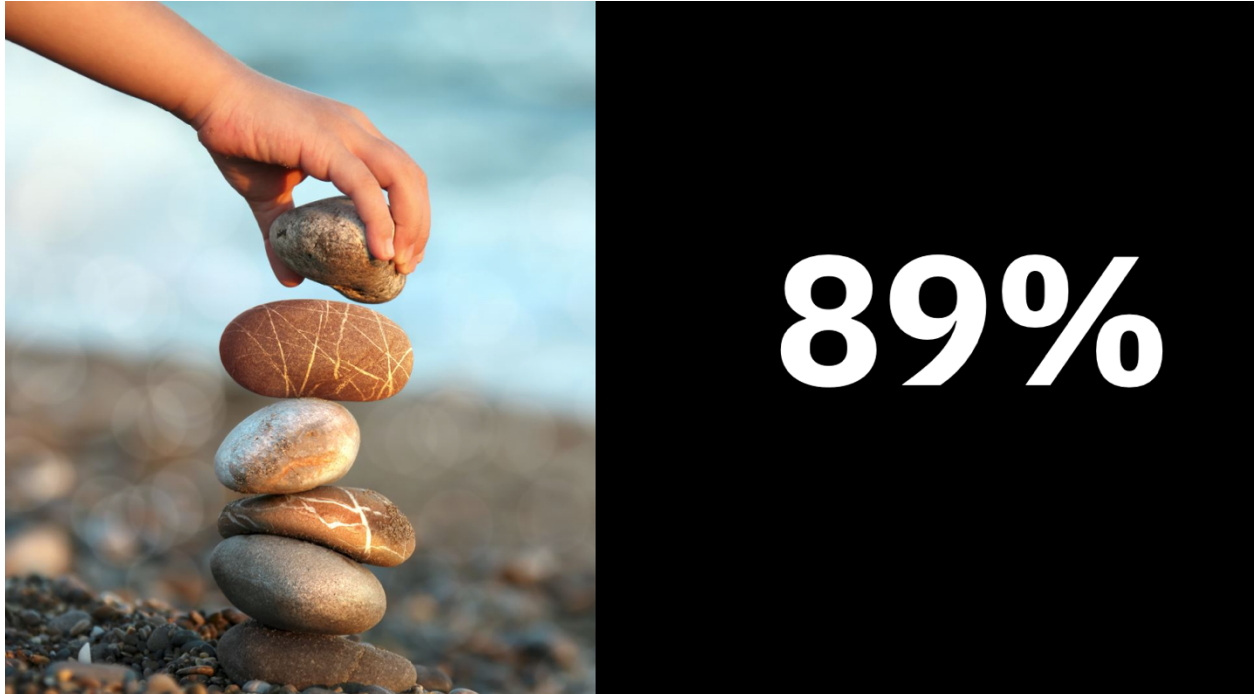
Being promoted (we say appointed) to a technical executive in IBM is a VERY big deal.
Out of 280,000 employees, less than 700 are technical executives.

Since it began in 2011, Pathways continues to enable success: 89% of the 2022 technical executive appointments were Pathways graduates. Proof that our program drives results in increasing the diversity of our senior technical leadership community.

So, here's where we started. IBM Pathways is an educational program designed to increase the diversity of IBM's technical executive and technical thought leader community. Pathways mission (our purpose) is to empower technical professionals to grow and succeed. And that's what we do because it's the right thing to do. However, …

… we must acknowledge that IBM is a business, and we must experience business growth and profit to succeed. By holding true to our purpose, "Empowering technical professionals to grow and succeed," there's no doubt that we are fostering business growth for IBM. These talented technical professionals bring breakthrough ideas, innovations, and solutions essential to exceed and delight our customers!

We have been approached by other organizations who inquired about our program. They have asked us to deliver the program for them as well. We have published and broadcast externally on the program and all that we do, but to this day are not aware of others implementing anything similar. The program has not been replicated internally, because this program covers technical employees across the enterprise.

We continue to see the program and the investment growing. More learning is added every year to address changes in business and external conditions. Overall, we still believe and see that empowerment and advocacy are the key differentiators. If an organization does not have the resources to create a similar program, they just need to focus the empowerment and advocacy.

Questions from anyone at this point?

Note: If there's time – move on to the activity.

Audience activity

This is a real activity from one of Pathways workshops that was new as of 2022 and has been received extremely well from our participants. It takes a few minutes and is quite revealing about who we are and what is uniquely important to us.

It's called "Passion and Purpose."

Speaker to facilitate conversation with the audience:

First, what is meant by Passion?
What is one of your passions?
Wouldn't it be awesome to feel passion in the work you do?
The first step is seeing how your passion can lead into your "purpose."

We then take 5 minutes to guide audience through a fun activity to create their own individual purpose statement.

How does your purpose align to IBM's purpose?

IBM's purpose is to be the catalyst that makes the world work better.

Pathway's purpose is to empower technical professionals to grow and succeed.

IBM

And lastly, we want to share the IBM and Pathways purpose statements and convey the importance of making connection through purpose for personal careers and business.

Our IBM purpose is "the why" for the company. It's the impact we aim to make on our clients, the world and each other. It's what we aspire to every day.

Our Pathways purpose supports the IBM purpose in making sure we have the best people to deliver on the organization's purpose.

Thank you!