

## Abbott STEM Podcast: Episode 2

Shaping the Future of STEM series

### How to Find Support When You're Studying STEM

**Abbott intern Diya Iyer talks with Betsy Wille about how to find support when you're studying STEM subjects.**

In this edition of Shaping the Future of STEM, college intern Diya Iyer – who is majoring in computer engineering at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign - speaks with Betsy Wille, Abbott's Chief Information Security Officer. Listen as Betsy and Diya talk about what it's like to be one of the only girls in their STEM classes and the tools they used to find support.

Diya, who also was an Abbott high school intern, is the latest host on Shaping the Future of STEM. Every episode features different female Abbott high school and college interns as they interview female Abbott STEM professionals from across the company. As a global health technology company committed to providing opportunities for students in science, technology, engineering and math, we offer opportunities around the world including our award-winning high school and college internship programs.

#### **READ THE TRANSCRIPT:**

**Diya:** Hello, everyone, and welcome to the Shaping the Future of STEM podcast. I'm this episode's host, Diya Iyer. I'm a student at the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign, and I'm studying computer engineering. I was a high school intern for three summers at Abbott and I just completed my first summer as a college intern. I'm so happy to be here today talking with Abbott's Chief Information Security Officer, Betsy Wille. So Betsy, can you tell me a little bit about what you're responsible for at Abbott?

**Betsy:** I absolutely can. Thank you, Diya. And it's just so great to join you today and in this conversation and get to be part of this experience. At Abbott I am the chief information security officer. I have responsibility for protecting Abbott's systems and

data from cyber-attack and ensuring that we protect and live up to what our customers expect from us as an organization, to protect their information and their well-being.

**Diya:** That is really cool. As I had mentioned, STEM is something that I'm very involved in and I'm very interested in. So it's really cool to hear your STEM journey as well. So one of the questions that I did want to ask you was, what has been your biggest motivation in pursuing a career in STEM?

**Betsy:** I would say that I like big challenges and big problems to solve. And in technology, we face that every day.

**Diya:** Absolutely, I could totally relate to that. And that's the interesting part of technology that it's always changing. Has this always been the case for you? Have you always had this type of motivation?

**Betsy:** It's interesting because I think it has changed throughout my career. When I entered into the technology field – and I've really been in cybersecurity specifically for most of my career – it was because I loved the idea of a new space and a new challenge and how technology was being used by companies. And certainly when I entered the field in really different ways to bring their services and products and so forth to consumers. And so I thought, 'Well, this is a really new and interesting place to be at.' What has kept me in the STEM field is the fact really that actually continues with, if you think about how much technology has changed over the last 20 years. And no one year looks the same as any other year of what we're up against. And I love a good challenge.

**Diya:** So, I noticed that you graduated from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, I-L-L, with a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration. As a student, were there any events or situations in which you felt like STEM maybe wasn't for you?

**Betsy:** I knew that STEM and technology was for me because I found it so interesting. And I just had a kind of a natural skill in the space. It just came pretty easily to me. But I certainly found that there were times where it felt lonely. And I wondered if that was something that I wanted to have as a career. And when I say lonely, we know that – particularly in the STEM fields and in technology – it is not as highly represented by

women in the field. And I remember sitting in my computer science lab for my entry level computer science class and I was one of two women in that class. And it felt like everybody else in the classroom knew somebody that was in computer science and could help mentor them through the class and give them help and, and I, I just didn't, I didn't know anybody that was in that, that degree program. And so it felt, you know, a little lonely to me. And I thought like, is this what it's going to be like throughout my career? And so I probably had some questions. But from that experience, there was, I was one of two and so the other woman in that class, became a good friend. We navigated our computer science classes together. And I found that ally and I think that's a thing that has stuck with me throughout my career as well. That is finding those allies and finding those people that I really connect with throughout the field. That has reinforced that this is where I want to be. And it's what I want to do. And, and certainly as I've gone through my career, those dynamics in the workplace have changed.

**Betsy:** How does that – Diya can I turn the question on you? How does that relate to your experience? Because you're there now. You're in those computer engineering, computer science classes. Have you questioned at all the path and journey you're on?

**Diya:** Yeah, actually, it's funny because I kind of experienced something a little similar in high school. So my first engineering class ever, my freshman year of high school, I walked into class, and I didn't know anyone. I was waiting for a girl to walk in the door, waiting for like five minutes, and no girls showed up. And I actually ended up being the only girl in my very first freshman year engineering class. So that was a moment to me where I kind of understood that it's not something that girls just do. And it's not something that is going to be comfortable for me necessarily. So it's really funny that you mention that you had a similar experience, because I never realized that many women have experienced the same thing. But what's really, really cool is that when I joined the Abbott family, the Abbott internship, my sophomore year actually of high school, they had just started this mentorship program. So, they had college interns pair up with a high school intern buddy. And they mentored them. And our, us high school interns, we were able to go to them to ask questions, or if we needed advice, or, honestly, if we needed anything. So I think that also is really cool to me because it

shows growth within the STEM field as well as growth within, a sense, that women in STEM are getting that mentorship as well, which maybe some were not able to see beforehand. So I think it's really cool that we've experienced similar things, and it's something that women can kind of join together and look at.

**Betsy:** Oh, that's, yeah, that's excellent. And congratulations to you for recognizing that so early in your career journey of reaching back and providing that mentorship. I have in my office, I have often looked to, you know, a quote, attributed to Mahatma Gandhi, that says, 'Be the change you want to see in the world.' And I think that's really what we're talking about here, which is, you know, embrace that. And, you know, what, what would you like to have changed in your experience. OK, go be that change for the next, the next young woman that's coming behind you. So congratulations to you for embracing that so early in your career.

**Diya:** Thank you. Thank you. Yeah. So throughout your career, as a woman, what are some challenges that you faced in a largely male dominant career?

**Betsy:** I wouldn't have gotten to where I am today, if I hadn't, you know, been at times the only woman at the table or the female manager of a team of male technologists. And I wouldn't have, you know, gone through that and developed the same kind of resiliency and persistence if I hadn't been a woman in STEM. And so I find that to be one of my biggest strengths, and the benefit of this is it has built me into somebody that really knows my stuff, and can do this job well. Even though sometimes, again, it can feel a little bit lonely along that path. The other thing that it has developed in me, I believe, is a real capability in building connections. And what I mean by that is, even if, on the surface, there are differences, you know, between the people that I'm working with, there are always things to connect on. They're always places to find common ground.

**Diya:** So as we had mentioned, technology's always changing and especially being a woman in STEM, there are a lot of things that I know that you may have seen that have changed. So, I wanted to know have you noticed any major changes in the STEM field since you started your career, especially as a woman?

**Betsy:** The biggest one that I have, the biggest change and evolution that I've seen in technology is really the change from technology being somewhat in the back office, in the back room, behind the scenes, keeping systems running, keeping you know, things up, and, and people kind of continue to do their job, to it really shifting into a business driver. What company today doesn't rely on technology to really differentiate them in the industry? And you know, all of us use technology in our every day. And we're, you know, seeing things like at Abbott, where we have devices, technology devices, that allow people to have more freedom of movement and enjoy their lives. And so that is now putting us in front and being part of the business, versus necessarily those in the background. And in that then, it means that, what skills are required in the technology field have also evolved. So, it's not just that subject matter expertise, and being, you know, the best at a certain area of technology, but the fact of being able to tie that into the business or into the purpose of what that technology is serving, and then being able to communicate that to a wide audience of people. That has really drastically changed, you know, over the years that I've been in the field.

**Diya:** So, in your career, if there was one thing that you could change, or even during your education, what, what would that be? And if there isn't anything, definitely, by all means. But if there was something, what would that be?

**Betsy:** Probably as for help more often. I think sometimes, and particularly, you know, when you are underrepresented in the field that you're in – so as a woman – sometimes asking for help, or asking questions can feel like you're revealing some kind of flaw or you're not being prepared for something. And the reality is, there's a, certainly a way to ask questions and the way to present it, but that nobody has all the answers. You know, no matter how confident somebody comes across, they don't have all the answers either. And it is only through, you know, asking questions, inquiring, and, you know being vulnerable to that, that you actually get the kind of knowledge and education to be better at the job you do. And so I kind of think of it as, you can be confident, but humble. Humble being I don't have all the answers. I'm not expected to have all the answers, but I am expected to go out and you know, find those answers. And, and, and ask the questions. And so I probably came about that maybe a little later in my career than I,

you know, would have liked to, or probably should have. But so that would be the one thing that I would change. And here's the thing that I have found is that, people love to talk about what they do. So asking somebody a question about how something works, or, 'You know what? Could you dive into that a little bit deeper? Tell me a little bit more about how you came to that conclusion.' People love to talk about that. So it's not actually revealing any kind of insecurity or lack of knowledge. It's an it's an inquisitiveness, that then leads to your own education and growth. So I probably would do that a little bit more in my career, if I could.

**Diya:** Yeah. And I think, it's hard sometimes too. I know, one of the things that I've learned recently also, is there's a difference between asking for help and being independent. And I think that's one of the things that I struggle with a little bit. I find that sometimes if I feel like I need to ask questions, I feel like I'm not as independent as I could be. Which there's a huge difference. And I think that's something that I'm learning. So, I think everyone kind of goes through that in their lives. And it's interesting to hear a different perspective on it as well. So for future women, going into STEM, what is kind of the biggest piece of advice that you have?

**Betsy:** Be really, really curious and get really excited about what you do. And I think if you're going into the STEM field, that's probably what drew you there to start with. And so tap into that. Don't forget that. And find the people that give you energy in, in that. Who else is excited about what they do and excited about the challenges – and find those people because those people will be the ones that just, that feed into it, and get you through some of the harder times and the times that you may question yourself. But if you have that excitement if you have that wonder, then, that's what, that's what keeps you going. And I say this even at my level. I joined Abbott almost two years ago, and I had come from the financial services industry, primarily. So this was my first step into life sciences and healthcare space. And I even to this day have so much wonder and like excitement. You know, my team sometimes laughs at me because, I'll come by and be like, 'Do you know what we do? Do you know? I just learned about this and what that means to people, like did know that? It's so cool.' And they'll kind of laugh at me and be like, 'Yes, we've been here for, you know, 15 years. I know exactly— I know what you're

talking about.' But for me, that has brought you know, the energy and excitement to continue to do what we do. And, and I think don't lose sight of that.

**Diya:** So Betsy, I have one final question for you. We'll be asking this at the end of all of our Shaping the Future of STEM podcasts. Would you rather build snow forts or sandcastles?

**Betsy:** I mean, it's going to be snow forts all day long. I'm born and raised in the Chicago area. So Midwest, winter, you know, it can be a long, several months of winter and gray skies. And so the one thing to look forward to is getting out in that snow and building snow forts and having some fun. And this year I'm really looking forward to it because I have a 2-year-old and so she will, this is kind of the first time she'll really understand snow and we've gotten her boots and her snow pants and so we're ready to get out there and build some snow forts with her. So all day long, snow forts.

**Diya:** Oh yeah, me too. Me too. 100% snow forts. I'm also born and raised in Illinois, northern Illinois. I look forward to snow every year.

**Betsy:** Awesome. Well see, this is, I knew we were on the same page here.

**Diya:** For sure. Well, Betsy, thank you so much for being here today. It was wonderful to talk to you.

**Betsy:** Yeah. Thank you, Diya. This has just been such a pleasure to get to talk to you. I am excited to track your career and where you go from here and I can tell already that it's going to be a very long and successful career. So thank you and, and all the best.

*For more stories and advice from Abbott's female STEM interns and experts, check out our Shaping the Future of STEM episodes wherever you get your podcasts or on [Infobase.com](http://Infobase.com).*



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