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What can be done to increase diversity in STEM fields?

Increasing diversity in STEM fields starts with early — and equal — exposure to these disciplines for all children. As a parent, I get to observe firsthand how my young children take in the world around them, and how they latch on to the particular areas that excite them. STEM is one of those areas, but it can only be embraced by those children who have access to it. By introducing STEM concepts in elementary school, we plant the seeds of curiosity and innovation early on, and pave the way for a more diverse and vibrant STEM community.

But this approach hinges on the principle that equal exposure sparks equal interest, which provides a mandate for us to allocate adequate resources to schools, particularly those serving underrepresented communities, to ensure that every child can explore and engage with STEM from a young age. Early exposure demystifies these fields for young learners and enables them to see themselves as future contributors to STEM, breaking down the barriers that have historically limited diversity in STEM careers.

What can be done to move women forward in STEM?

Women have made great strides forward in STEM, and I've been lucky enough to work alongside many women in positions of leadership who make a concerted effort to provide robust mentorship to the next generation. But there is still significant progress to be made.

First, it is our responsibility to grow the base of women in STEM into a truly representative population. It's not enough to replicate our current advancements for the upcoming generation. Teams must dedicate the time, effort, and resources to honestly assess their composition and structure, and then act on that information to make the changes necessary to promote equity. We don't just want to see women present in STEM; we want to see them equally sharing in the responsibilities of leadership and influence in the field. Such representation doesn't just benefit the women in question, but improves the whole team and their output by bringing diversity of thought, experience, and perspective to the work.

Second, we need to make sure the women in our field have the support they need. I've observed many women in STEM battle doubts about their abilities to thrive and lead. By acknowledging and tackling this issue head-on, organizations can empower women to see themselves as capable and deserving leaders, whether that's achieved through supportive networks, professional development opportunities, or open conversations about self-doubt and how to overcome it.