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# Therese Tucker

**BlackLine**

Making Accountants' Lives Easier

by *Therese Tucker*

**O**kay, a declaration: I detest rote, repetitive tasks. I know I am far from alone in feeling this, but I am fortunate as a software programmer that I can do something about it. I'd rather take time to build a piece of software—even if it takes 10 hours—than do something four times in a row.

Maybe I'm inherently lazy, I've often thought. But the likelier truth is that I hate wasting time that can be more creatively and productively invested elsewhere. A computer is an incredible tool that helps do just that, performing the grunge work, no questions asked.

As a working mother whose grown children have flown the roost, I am no newcomer to efficiency. Like many women, I am a juggler extraordinaire. Every second must be accounted for or bills don't get paid and kids eat toast for dinner. I have a friend whose young son

once heard the microwave ring. When his pal asked what that sound was, he said, 'Mommy is cooking.'

Computers help us be the parents we want to be, the people we want to be and the workers we want to be. They're my passion and I've dedicated my life to operating them on behalf of others, most recently to help improve the professional lives of accountants.

As founder and CEO of BlackLine, my colleagues and I have helped make the tasks of thousands of accountants more efficient, humane and productive. We've lowered the stress levels of internal auditors and given CFOs unfettered visibility into their organization's performance, informing smarter decisions to enhance the competitive standing of the business.

Being a woman has never been a disadvantage, although I do see a glass ceiling affixed firmly in place. When

I was younger, I had to cope with preconceptions of the jobs suitable to my gender. My parents owned a farm in Illinois and wanted me to get a “respectable job” as a secretary or a stenographer. And then get married to dodge “Old Maid”-ism. I had other plans.

I went off to Illinois Wesleyan University in the late-1970s and became a business and French major. I thought about switching to an art major, as I loved paintings. Then, sophomore year, I took a course in one of the first computer programming classes available to understand Apple Basic. I loved that I could instruct a machine to do something. The first computer program I wrote was a Christmas tree with blinking asterisks as lights. How cool was that? I then transferred to the University of Illinois, which had one of the country's top computer science programs at the time.

I'd love to say I excelled academically, but other than my major I honestly just got by. Blame it on all that rote memorization for tests, which seemed so silly—another big-time time-waster. I graduated by the skin of my teeth and took a job working on fault detection firmware for surface

ship sonar systems at Hughes Aircraft in Southern California. I looked up, saw that glass ceiling, quit, and started doing software programming on an independent basis for anyone who would hire me. I met the man who would become my husband, in a laundromat. He was a Marine working on the *USS Missouri*. I was scraping by and his extra income helped feed and house us both.

I had no practical knowledge of running a business, learning on the fly. Several years elapsed. I took (and left) different posts at several companies. I gradually migrated from the “back room” of programming into the front office to manage people and relationships. I climbed the proverbial rungs to become chief technology officer at Sungard Treasury Systems. I was content. Or so I thought.

Then, one morning my daughter was getting ready to go to school and was

having a tough time. “I’m so stressed, Mom!” she sighed (she was in first grade). I felt miserable for her. Actually no, I felt miserable for me that I hadn’t been of much help. So I turned in my resignation, did a lot of yoga, and gave a lot more attention to the kids.

One year later, I noticed that my wealth manager’s tax software was extremely clunky. She kept entering the same data over and over again. I felt I could code a much better product and did just that in 2001. That software morphed into the first of BlackLine’s cloud-based Finance and Accounting solutions. I transformed quickly into a CEO, running a small company with a handful of employees that, 15 years later, has become a publicly traded entity with more than 600 employees in offices all over the world.

So what’s it all about? My message to all the entrepreneurial women reading

these ruminations is this: You were born with the ability to communicate, think outside the box, multi-task and manage commotion. The nurturer inside you will make you naturally gravitate toward helping others. Software programming is my means of doing that. Yours may be different, but it’s there, simply waiting for you to find it.

What else? Oh gosh, you’re going to hate this, but it’s true—when a door closes, a window opens. You just don’t know when. Jobs come, jobs go. Love withers, love blooms. Trust your capacity to do it on your own. It’s the best way to shatter the glass ceiling. ☺

THERESE TUCKER is founder and CEO of accounting automation software provider BlackLine. She is a member of the Enterprising Women Advisory Board and is a mentor and strong supporter of the Enterprising Women Foundation.

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