

TALENT TALKS WITH WXN & BOYDEN

An interview with Microsoft Canada's President Janet Kennedy



MICROSOFT CANADA'S PRESIDENT, Janet Kennedy, has led the remarkable transformation of the organization from a PC-centric business to a cloud solutions and innovation leader. Declaring diversity in technology as a personal passion and fostering a learning, ever-evolving culture, Microsoft Canada has become a diversity champion and innovation hub under Janet's stewardship. Boyden's Ian Collyer and Joanna Goncalves sat down with Janet to talk leadership, diversity, talent, and how she works to ensure women in tech are on the rise.

BOYDEN: Technology and innovation are clearly passions of yours. How much has that led you throughout your career?

JANET: You're lucky when you find a job that you actually have passion for. I've been in the industry 30 years now and I lived through what I consider the three biggest eras – from when Bill Gates declared everyone would have a PC at every desk and in every home, then the Internet exploded, and now mobile apps and the transformation of the Cloud. It's been a lot fun and I've learned it's not just about the company – it's about the culture.

BOYDEN: With that in consideration, what factors would you say have contributed to your leadership style?

JANET: My parents, both teachers, believed education was everything. That was part of my culture and shaped me to always continue to learn. That is especially true in this industry. Since coming to Microsoft Canada and moving to Toronto, I think I have grown as a leader for so many reasons – especially because of the way Canada really embraces diversity.

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BOYDEN: Microsoft is involved with a range of new disruptive technologies in what is a fast- changing market with many new competitors. How do you ensure your organization is ready and nimble enough to tackle these new opportunities?

JANET: Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella has been widely quoted saying “we don’t want to be the *know it all* culture, we want to be the *learn it all* culture”. That actually is what it is like to work here. Not only do you always have to be learning new things, you also need to show that you can handle the pace of change. Part of it is to recruit and hire people who love to learn and are very open to change. Another part of it is our culture of learning.

BOYDEN: Microsoft Canada’s leadership team is an outstanding example of gender diversity – 75% are women! How does diversity fit into the organization’s vision and strategy?

JANET: I’m very proud to lead such a diverse leadership team. I believe that when you see it top-down, that is when we really live it. Everyone here is truly passionate about diversity internally but also for Canada and that is why we lead the way with programs such as *Ladies Learning Code*, *Hour of Code*, *YouthSpark Programs*, and *DigiGirly Camp*. I’m so very proud to say Microsoft was honoured by Women in Communications and Technology (WCT) with the Company of the Year Award, which recognizes organizations for being a leader in diversity and women’s advancement.

BOYDEN: As a tech leader with 30 years’ experience across North America, what have you observed in Canadian tech talent and, more specifically, for women in technology?

JANET: As a sector we are still nowhere near where we should be – 52% of women graduate from Canadian universities yet we are at 28% of women in technology.

We have made some progress but the pace of our progress is not acceptable. By 2019, 172,000 jobs of will go unfilled because we have a gap in tech skills. Research shows girls are just as enthusiastic about tech as boys until about middle school. That’s why we put so much effort into these programs to involve young women, encourage technology as a career, and demonstrate that in today’s world, everything is tech.

BOYDEN: What can leaders do today to move towards greater diversity and inclusion?

JANET: Making sure you always have a diverse team doing the recruiting, which will help contribute to more diverse hiring. As for inclusion, once you hire women, you need to keep them and encourage their best work. One way of doing that is a flexible workplace. Overall, you have to figure out a way that works for a woman and her family.

BOYDEN: What launched your career in technology?

JANET: I was good at math and was planning to be an accountant until someone at my university encouraged me to go for it and take engineering. So because someone took the time in my 20’s to tell me that that would be a good opportunity, I’m here today. Along the way I’ve had some pretty amazing sponsors that helped me understand what is possible. That’s what you need when you’re young.

BOYDEN: What advice would you give someone striving to lead?


JANET: You get noticed when you do good work but from there you need to raise your hand, tell people what it is that you want, and what you are willing to do. And then go for it!

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About the series:


Talent Talks with WXN & Boyden is a feature series highlighting leadership, talent, and diversity discussions with top leaders of today. The series focuses on topics and themes with a purpose to inspire women and our diverse community to lead. Talent Talks also appears on WXN website.

Women's Executive Network (WXN) is a leading organization dedicated to advancement and recognition of women in management, executive, professional, and board roles.

For more information about WXN, please visit their website: www.wxnetwork.com
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