



TMT Bold Moves

How Four Women Became Top Names
in Tech and Media

Just how far can confidence and taking chances get you in your career? According to this candid conversation with top leadership from Google, Barstool Sports, Discord, and Etsy... pretty far. Find out how making “bold moves” allowed these women to reach the top of their game, and how you can get there too.

MEET THE LEADERS



Blair Morgan
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Maureen Ford Sitterson
Global Head of
Product Marketing
Etsy

Laura Mae Martin
Executive Productivity
Advisor Google

Prachi Gupta
Head of Engineering
Discord

Erika Ayers
CEO
Barstool Sports

How Four Women Became Top Names in Tech and Media

What does it take to become a leading name in your industry? Intelligence and work ethic, but what about the guts to go against the grain, resilience, and ruthless prioritization?

At Deloitte, we have the incredible privilege of meeting and working alongside inspiring leaders every day. We are also passionate about supporting women with career and leadership development, and we invest heavily in career development programs for women managers.

As a leader within the Tech, Media & Telecommunications industry, I have been particularly blown away by the courageous women spearheading change in the fast-moving and increasingly ubiquitous fields of Technology and Media. These women prove that key drivers of success today include being bold and taking chances.

Our fascination with such “bold moves” became the seedling for an interview series with:

Laura Mae Martin, Executive Productivity Advisor at Google

Erika Ayers, CEO of Barstool Sports

Prachi Gupta, Head of Engineering at Discord

Maureen Ford Sitterson, Global Head of Product Marketing at Etsy

Their paths are rich and varied, but their messages help demystify what it takes and can provide inspiration for all.

We hope their words resonate and encourage women in our industry to have confidence in themselves, to not hold back, and to take chances.

I don't know about you, but I'm listening.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Blair Morgan'.

Blair

Blair: What were the important inflection points in your career path that were crucial in helping to bring you to where you are today?

Laura: One of the big turning points was when I started at Google, and I started realizing why I didn't like sales. I did a StrengthsFinder course, and my number one strength was harmony... It literally said, "do not pursue a career in sales." One of the big things is it's ok to not like parts of what you're currently doing. It doesn't mean that you have to learn to love it. It means figuring out what you do like doing. For me, it was organizing client dinners and the logistics, which led me to my next role.

Erika: I was on a fast track to go to law school, and I gave it up. HR people at the company where I was working at the time said, "this is a bad idea...you're making a grave mistake." Usually when someone tells me I'm making a mistake, I know I'm doing it right. I was forced go out on my own. All I could do was prove myself, and that's what really fueled me.

Prachi: The first critical inflection point in my career was working part time for a startup while getting a Master's degree (and paying my own way through the Master's program). By the time I graduated, I already owned significant projects at the startup in a leadership role, so I decided to continue working there instead of joining a large global consulting firm, the traditional path — which was a bet I took on both the startup and myself.

Maureen: My second job at a financial services corporation started shortly after they ended their partnership with a wholesaler, and we had to determine how to make up for the lost revenue from those card members. We shifted as an organization from focusing on acquiring new customers to driving organic growth with our existing customers. I was reporting to the Head of Consumer on our progress, identifying how to measure success and where we had untapped opportunity. That was really the job that 1) was my favorite job I've had and 2) was such a unique lane in the organization and enabled me to get promoted. I think that was the biggest unlock in my career.

Blair: When making bold moves, what challenges have you overcome and how have they impacted you?

Laura: I think something people don't realize is for a good five years, my organizational work was still a side project, and that was challenging. I think I was a little ahead of my time with the content. It fit, but nobody had a place for it yet. Now at Google, there are so many places where it fits. So at first, it was kind of discouraging knowing it was good content and I had data backing it, but it wasn't catching fire.

Erika: When I joined Barstool, I was fired from every board I was on and lost a lot of friends. I ended up creating a company that I'm incredibly proud of, and I believe we're quite revolutionary in what we do.

Prachi: I was asked to take on a new leadership role right when I was about to return from maternity leave after having my first baby. What helped me make the leap was a very supportive manager who convinced me to try out the role, and if I found that I needed help, we would figure out what that help looked like... Instead of turning down an opportunity upfront for reasons we think it might not work, it's better to be transparent about the stretch areas with your stakeholders and give it a shot. More often than not, you will surprise yourself and experience exponential growth.

Maureen: My biggest challenges have been those requiring a new strategy in an un-touched space, but that is also what has made me successful: finding undefined opportunities and jumping right in.

Blair: How did you leverage advice from mentors or other advisors to chart the vision for your career?

Laura: It helps to have consistent mentors; they already have the context and you don't need to always catch them up on everything. I also think having a female mentor is really helpful. She can say, I've felt like that before. She also has kids, and that's a really good perspective to have. I like getting perspective from mentors because when it comes to advice, it's less about the advice and more about how you feel about the advice.

Erika: I think mentorship is really organic and you don't know where it's going to come from. It surprises you. I think it can come in really bite-sized packages.

Prachi: Maybe the biggest game-changer at every stage of life, career or otherwise, has come from who I could count on for support, who was in my "village." The best advice I can give is to spend the time cultivating and nurturing your relationships and building your village. It's your source for belonging, courage, support, opportunities...everything.

Maureen: Mentorship has always been a critical part of my role... You need to have people in your corner that can champion your personal growth. Now, I always try to pay it forward by helping others who reach out and also by having regular development check-ins with my team at Etsy.

Blair: How have you managed stakeholder alignment throughout your career?

Erika: Everybody has stakeholders. You need to understand what your stakeholders are looking for. What are their motivations, weaknesses, goals? And figure out how you manage what's right for you and how you feel, with what your stakeholders need.

Laura: If I need to get a stakeholder on board for something, I ask for their quarterly goals. Then I dive through them, and I see how what I'm asking for helps them hit their quarterly goals. That helps them realize we're here to accomplish something together.

Prachi: I often see people seek advice from mentors (and stakeholders) without first coming up with a frame of reference, either for themselves or for their mentors. They just present open-ended questions. In my experience, what works better is knowing what aspects of the decision you're sure about, what you need help with, and where you might have blind spots.

Maureen: I became very intentional about who I surrounded myself with... I always try to determine what [stakeholders'] currency is. What is their currency and what matters most to them?

Blair: We would love to know a little bit more about who each of you are as a leader. What is your leadership approach? How do lead when it comes to strategy, decision making, and planning?

Laura: The key for me is finding what people care about. To be an effective leader, I must speak their language – Who am I talking to? What is their day like? What are they thinking about?

Erika: I'm pretty hands on. I have a very clear vision of where we want to go. I'm very decisive. I'm also very open to being educated and being wrong. I have a high standard and I keep moving it, which I think can be frustrating for people that work for me.

Prachi: My general approach to leadership is to: (1) Find the right set of people to focus on what's most important for the organization to succeed, (2) Ensure alignment of the goals and principles for our team, (3) Share a strategic vision with them , (4) ...and then leave them alone to do their best work.

Maureen: Leadership is the best part of my job. I try to be empathetic to the needs of my individual team members, and I also try to be as transparent as possible; constant communication and over-communication is my style, especially when expecting a high-quality work product.

Blair: What fuels/energizes you the most in your professional and personal endeavors?

Laura: If I wasn't getting paid, I would still consider doing all the work that I do because of the things that people tell me they get out of it. Busy does not equal important. I'm trying to evangelize that by doing the right work, saying no to the right things, and doing your best work when you set time aside to do work, you can be both effective and balanced. That's why I started figuring out how to be super effective. When I help transfer that to someone else and give them that sense of balance, that's my joy and motivation.

Erika: I am very challenged at work. I am very interested. I work with very young people. It is so great to be around people in their twenties and thirties. It's such a privilege. I'm very interested in the people that work here. I'm really fulfilled by helping them and building things together with them.

Prachi: Growth of women in tech: I think things are improving slowly but surely for women and other underrepresented minorities in tech. The challenge in front of us now is to start expanding the talent pie as a whole and not just shifting the size of pie slices around.

Maureen: I run almost every day and get up at 6:00 AM before my kids wake up to ensure I have “me time.” I am a firm believer in laughing each day; I always try to make someone on my team laugh. It goes a long way.



TMT Bold Moves Team

Interested in being part of the next installments of the TMT Bold Moves series?
Contact the team below!



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