

Interviewee: Andrea Goodman  
Interviewers: Jonathan Wozney and Gabriella Reynoso  
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**Abstract:** Andrea Goodman lived in Chicago, attended college at the University of Illinois Champaign Havna and moved to Worcester in 1974 after she got married. She has been living there ever since and says it's a great place. She has three children two twin boys and a daughter. Currently she teaches computer science at Assumption College but she talks about many other jobs she had prior to this one pertaining to the business world. In this interview she also talks about the hardships she went through to be able to get a better high paying job as a woman, and all the differences she is seeing throughout Worcester MA, both good and bad. She also talks about a personal business she and her husband founded together and the success she got out of that changing the corporate world. In this interview she talks about the positive and negative things she thinks the current technology has brought to colleges and society overall.

**JW:** If there's anything you don't want to answer that's absolutely fine you know, just say you would just rather not answer if you don't feel like sharing any information.

**AG:** Okay

**JW:** But yeah again, it's about Worcester your connection to Worcester and questions like that. We're just going to start off with your general family so what's your full maiden name if applicable and your married name?

**AG:** Okay, you don't really need my maiden name because I wasn't born in Worcester so I don't have any ties that way to Worcester but my married name is Goodman and . . . so it's Andrea Goodman and moved to Worcester in 1974 when I got married.

**JW:** Do you have children, grandchildren?

**AG:** I have three children thirty-year old twin boys one is married no grandchildren and a twenty-five year old daughter.

**JW:** Very nice, what cultures/ethnicities do you identify with, family background?

**AG:** Well, my parents were both Greek and . . . so clearly ethnicity I'm Greek and I'm also Jewish.

**JW:** What were your primary responsibilities in terms of housework did you share housework with anyone, that sort, how was the home?

**AG:** In the home life, well for many years the housework was primarily mine, now it is shared because times have changed, but in 1974, well actually early in my marriage we both worked hard but my husband worked more than I did. He probably worked 80 or 90 hours a week and I only worked 50 or 60 so I got to do the housework.

**JW:** Tell me about your parents.

**AG:** Tell you about my parents . . . my parents grew up in Chicago, they were both born in Chicago and grew up in Chicago. My father actually spoke Greek as his first language and learned English and my mother grew up bilingual in Greek and English. My father was a veteran from World War II and after he finished in the war he went to college, got a degree in accounting and then he went to law school. He worked most of his life for the Internal Revenue Service. My mother was a homemaker.

**JW:** You said you weren't born in Worcester, where have you lived during your life?

**AG:** I've lived in Chicago, I went to college at the University of Illinois Champaign Havana so I lived there for four years then I moved to Worcester and I have lived here ever since.

**GR:** Okay so I'll continue, you moved here in 1974 right?

**AG:** Mhhhm.

**GR:** So where you here during like any major historical events?

**AG:** Well my husband and I opened the first retail computer store in Worcester in 1979 when all there was to sell were 16k Apple II computers. I was the first woman on Apple computers dealer counsel, which is a group of dealers that met with Steve Jobs and the rest of the Apple crew to tell them what we were seeing in the trenches versus what they were, you know, what they were designing and what we saw as needed in the business world.

**GR:** That's good, do your other family members live around here or are they still like in Chicago?

**AG:** My sister is still in Chicago, my parents are both deceased, my children—both of my sons live in Massachusetts, one in Natick, one in Randolph and my daughter lives in New York City.

**GR:** Have you seen in major changes in Worcester like the environment?

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**AG:** I guess it's (pause) well the place--well in terms of Worcester itself I haven't seen any, you know it's still the place it was thirty-eight years ago when I moved here in terms of you know, transportation, the bus system isn't any better, rail is better. But in terms of the colleges of course it's huge, I taught at Clark University in 1975 and students were still turning in cards at the windows and now I teach computer science at Assumption College and every student has their own lap top and some have lap tops and iPads and that world has changed dramatically.

**GR:** What distinct characteristics make Worcester what it is?

**AG:** Say that again I didn't hear the beginning.

**GR:** What distinct characteristics make Worcester the place that it is?

**AG:** (Pause) I think it's a great town, I think part of what makes it what it is, is all the colleges that are here, it's interesting that you know there are a lot of people that say there is nothing to do in Worcester and that certainly isn't true, especially if you like cultural things. Because there is a ton of things to do at the colleges so you could spend your whole, every night doing out to something that's free, interesting, a lecture or a jazz ensemble, or something to do in that respect. I hear that you know that young people say well there's nothing here, well you know I guess that depends on what you're looking for. If you're in your late 20's early 30's it's not as easy a place to live but once you have a family, it's a wonderful place to live because the neighborhoods are so great and it's got all the advantages of a city but its small.

**GR:** What is your neighborhood like in general?

**AG:** It's pretty quiet and its lovely and I live two miles away from here Assumption college right up Salisbury street so it the same neighborhood you're in (laughs).

**GR:** What do you think women experiences in Worcester have been like generally?

**AG:** Things have changed I think dramatically in that respect, when I first opened my store and my degree is in computer science, people would walk in and I was basically the sales force at the time and they would say to me, I would to talk to somebody about a computer and I would say oh, I can talk to you about a computer, no we want to talk to somebody who can really talk to us about computers. And I'd say well, I can really talk to you about computers and they would say no somebody who really. . and basically they wanted a man to talk to them about computers because women didn't know anything about computers. And so I would say okay, and my partner was my husband so it became the big joke. We also had programmers working for us, so I'd say okay hold on please and I'd bring Dick in and he would you know talk to them for a few minutes and he'd say you know I have to bring the person who really knows about this in and he'd

call me back in, and so then I'd say, "Oh, you been sitting here for a little while would you like a cup of coffee?" And they'd say yes so I'd say, "Oh Jared or Rick," and they'd jump up and I'd say, "Would you get this person a cup of coffee," and they'd say, "What would you like in it" and you know and of course the guys knew that I would never, I would never ask them for my own coffee but it became the joke around the place that you know, they had to jump because I said so and you know it just changed the minds of whoever I was, whoever wanted to talk to somebody who knew about computers. So that was just sort of a fun game and you don't hear that nearly as much anymore (laughs).

**JW:** So talk about you know, you opened up the first computer store in Worcester now you say you see all these kids at Assumption or colleges around with iPads and all this technology is explored how is that kind of make you feel what kind of, what does that mean to you?

**AG:** I think it's tremendous, in some ways I think it's absolutely fabulous you know I mean obviously I've invested in this industry I've studied in this industry, I had my own business in this industry, now I still teach about computers. I've seen it mostly flow but what's interesting is that for a while computers made everything better and now I'm not convinced that they're making everything better anymore, yes things are faster but I feel students don't know how to communicate with each other as well, they're better with their thumbs and texting then they are at actually talking to somebody. You can hide behind texting where you can't face to face and its made a lot of the world much more personal and its made bullying worse because you can do things sort of anonymously unless somebody's techy enough to figure out who it is and, and I'm finding that a lot of the students don't know how to do the calculations or whatever they—they rely on the computers without knowing how to do something for itself first without using the computer to solve the problem. And I see that as a potential issue. I read, you know, I read—I can't remember who wrote the book I think it was Highline, but talked about a civilization that computers have come so far and they have started to break down and nobody knew how to fix them anymore, and I don't think that's gonna happen but (pause) what I'm seeing with the students brings continuously back to mind at this point, you know do you know how to talk to each other anymore and so that's sort of what I've seen in my industry that yes it's speed things up and, but it got it to the point where things aren't as wonderful you know people can. . it's a global economy now because of computers but also when you call customer support you don't necessarily understand who's at the other end of the phone because the accent is so thick you can't understand it but its cheaper to hire that person, so you know there's good and there's bad.

**JW:** Now we're moving into education, where did you attend school and what were the challenges you face while pursuing your education?

**AG:** I went to an okay grammar school in a very blue collar neighborhood and I say it that way only because the parents all cared and . . but the work ethic was okay and but I had in grammar school . . in grammar school I had no peers because there wasn't

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anybody who was as smart as I was which made it tough. In high school I went to a much bigger high school I went from a graduating class in eighth grade of twenty something to my graduating class in high school and my graduating class had 773 students and that was the graduating class, that wasn't everybody in the school so consequently I had, I did have peers in high school and one of the important things to me was that there was an accelerated track, I ended up taking so many AP classes in my major, in math and some in chemistry that I managed to graduate college in three years because the AP credits went to you know, what I needed to study. And I look at the schools now and, here in Worcester and I want to tear my hair out. They don't group kids by ability anymore in reading or in math and I would have been so bored out of my skull most of my time in grammar school I anyway but because it was important for me to be perfect I didn't disrupt the class but I was bored and its fortunate that I had enough in my home life to keep me interested but when students aren't kept interested where do they put that energy? And I'm seeing you know that grouping kids at ability now is elitist and that's absolutely ridiculous because what we're doing, we're taking our good minds and making them mediocre or giving them you know mediocrity as opposed to the highest level that they can do so in terms of education in that way I was very lucky my high school had you know all these college level classes which I got to take advantage of and then I went to the University of Illinois which was in Champaign Havana which was one of the best schools in the world. I don't remember where it ranks in computer science but its right up there, it's one of the oldest departments. It was one of the original schools on the operant in 1969 and they have continued to do world-class research there so I, you know I couldn't have been in a better place for what I chose to major in, in the University of Illinois. I met my husband in a theory class that is the mathematics behind computing and, so he was from Worcester so that how I ended up here I got my Bachelor's in mathematics in University of Illinois, went on to get my Master's in computer science I did, from the University of Illinois I did everything but my thesis and then I got married and moved here, and it took me another four years to get my thesis done when you're out of the school environment it makes it much tougher. You're not in an environment that encourages that type of stuff I was in the working world, yes I was teaching computer science at Clark University which was—I was here a year or two before I started doing that which was what put me on to what my master's thesis ended up being, designing an intro to computer science class for liberal art students which were, who were in Clark University at the time. And back then computer science was teaching programming so I designed four classes for liberal art students and they were my guinea pigs they did what I asked, it worked very well. In fact some of my students, I just heard from a couple of them recently so we're talking about more than thirty years ago when I get an e-mail saying thank you very much I worked on the x-box I designed the graphical interface for Windows user NT, and you know I've written this book and that book and thank you very much. And so that's kinda cool to hear from somebody thirty years later and I thanked him and he e-mails me back and says thank you for not making me feel like a geek or a jerk for writing that letter and I say are you kidding me it took you thirty years how often do you think professors hear these kind of thing, all you hear are the ones who are mad at you not the ones who think you are fabulous (laughs). So, and so I taught at

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Clark University back then and the mid 70's and it wasn't—I enjoyed what I did and I enjoyed the students but it wasn't a fun place because the computer science department was a necessary evil it wasn't held as an esteemed, you know we were held down in the basement, and this was a liberal art school of course now you know computer science is held in high esteem there but at the time it was like ugh we got to deal with it, we know we got to deal with it, but and so that when I left Clark and went to work for Digital Equipment Corporation which was where all the geeks in Massachusetts either worked for Digital or Data General, they had a big ad in the paper that the kind of people we are looking for probably aren't looking for jobs. And my husband saw that in one of the tech newspapers and he gave it so me and I said, “Oh let me see what they want,” and of course not being an academic I got much higher pay than I did at academia and back then computer people were very hard to come by. You know there weren't that many of us I was one of seven women in the graduate school at the University of Illinois and there were fifty something in the department you know fifty graduate students and there were only seven women so it was you know basically a male dominated field at the time and so I went to work for Digital and I never fit in the corporate world very well so I started as a technical writer writing manuals and what they did was they mostly hired English majors because English majors could write, tech people couldn't write and I was the oddball technical person who could write. And they started me at the lowest level and I found very rapidly people at the highest level of senior technical writers were coming to me for help. And because they were English majors you know! They understood only to a certain degree and they did their best to write about it but when somebody says when you press this key this may happen—may happen, so when won't it happen? I mean that's the way a technical person thinks. You know what do you do that doesn't let that happen and so I started questioning these things and so people started coming to me, so when it came up for my review, oh and we were supposed to you know take classes to improve ourselves in digital taught classes and I asked to take a senior programming class or something like that I can't remember I mean we're talking a lot of years ago now and so they said you know, “Oh no that doesn't apply to what you're doing.” I said okay so when it came to my review I said I should get a double promotion at least and this much more money and they said, “Why should we give you a double promotion you didn't even take a class!” I said what should I have taken and they said basic programming I said I've taught it. Well then Fortran programming, I've taught it. PDP11 assembler! I've taught it. I asked to take this, you wouldn't let me. And so they looked at me and I, I said so what should I have taken and it really . . . I threw them for a loop because they have never had a technical person in that department but everyone and you know I said clearly you need a technical person here because everyone's coming to me for help and they said well you can't compare yourself to anyone else and I said well so how is it fair when a senior technical writer gets you know 10,000 dollars more a year than I do and I'm helping that person. And so then they gave me a raise but in six months, which was way earlier maybe four months, they gave me another one and another promotion. But at that point my husband had started his own software company and he said okay I need your help it's time for you to leave Digital and come to work for me which is what I did and I never looked back and I always worked for myself ever since. And so we had a

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software house and we were doing software for a number of the big businesses in town at the time which I don't think any of them are around here GE Stinson was one of the large office product places and AMI automotive management Inc. was on Gold Star Boulevard was another huge business that we did their software for them and they sold out to Ford they were part of Hartford it was all owned by the same people and then they sold out to Ford. But in the meantime we, we had been selling computers to go along with our software and the people we sold computers for said, "Oh we're going to open a retail computer store in Worcester and we want you to open our store." And so we looked at their numbers and we said this is nuts we can do better by ourselves. So we decided to open our own store. So we started our own business and we thought well gee, you know, if we have a store it will get people in the door and that might help our software business. Well it turned out to be the tail wagging the dog and that business took off and we, you know, with a lot of hard work from us. And we had three basic—we had a basic philosophy: we were good to work employees, we were good to our vendors, and we were good to our customers and if we did that and we made sure we stayed in the business we wanted to be in we would, we would do well, which we did. We grew and we grew and we grew from nothing to a four million dollar a year business in four years and then we sold the store. We started basically at the end of 1979 and we sold, I guess it was five years, and we sold our store in 1984 to someone else who we had been talking to him for a long time. We had become friends with him and some of the big chains could buy computers, could sell computers cheaper than we could buy them because they were big and buying in bulk and we were small so the thought was we will start a big chain and so that's when we sold our store and we grew from nothing to 4 million dollars a year and 28 employees and our employees pretty much stayed with us the whole time which was unusual for the computer industry back then, people hopped from job to job in that industry. We changed the way businesses in Worcester did business. Norton company which is now Saint Gobain was bought by Saint Gobain but at the time it was a Fortune 500 company that was you know based in Worcester—it was owned in Worcester. It was a Worcester company and their data processing unit had big computers they didn't want to deal with these little computers and the management came to me and said we'd like little computers but we can't get it through. So I did something my husband was ready to kill me for, I loaned them the computers and I showed them how to use them and my husband said you just took perfectly good equipment and made it used. And I said trust me and once they knew what they could do with them and they had a program which was BIZZY HELP which was the first spread sheet, that was way before Excel, and Norton company ended up being our biggest client and then we sold into some of the other big companies here in town too. I was dealing with the president of Norton Company, I was dealing with the president of American Optical Corporation and a lot of these people were my customers and I started an employee purchase with Norton too because they learned that if their employees bought computers then they would be better at work so we worked out a plan so that their employees could buy Apple computers at the time. So our store had a lot to do with personal computers ending up in Worcester and we had a national name for ourselves, we had other dealers from around the country calling. I had vendors calling, people, companies would create printers and not know how to hook it up

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to a certain computer and I would figure out how to wire it so an Apple II or an Apple IIc or whatever was around at the time would talk to their printer. So we had created a name for ourselves both in Worcester and nationally and then like I said we sold the store which was again where I say I got my MBA selling it and watching venture capital take that business down. Fortunately I didn't own it anymore so it didn't matter. They just didn't get it. It should have been a Harvard Business School case study watching what was going on in the computer industry at the time because making money back then wasn't any easier than it is now. You still have to have your wits about you. You have to have a good business. So that's what I did. So that's how I affected business in Worcester. At the time, right at the beginning of opening our store, I joined the Worcester Chamber of Commerce and got on the Business Education Committee so that any seminar they put on about computers was run by me so that I basically implicitly got the stamp of approval from the Chamber of Commerce. So my name got out there as well. And so let's see, where did this start? What was the question?

**JW:** It was perfect; it was where did you attend school?

**AG:** .. And where did it change, right. So I was in business for a lot of years, I still have my own consulting business. I am adjunct at Assumption, and after I sold my business I turned into "Andrea Goodman Swamp Drainer." It comes from the old saying "when you're up to your ass in alligator shit, it's hard to remember that your mission was to drain the swamp." I am basically a CFO for hire at this point. Having had my store I found out I was very good at growing a business. The business end to me was even more fun than the computer end. So I started helping other businesses grow and get their finances in order. So I helped them with their finances and their operations and I have been doing that since the mid 90's. I did stay home for a little while to have kids. I had my boys when I had my store. So I stayed home for a little while and then had a third child. It was very interesting at the time and I think it is probably the same way that if I went to a party and said that I was an at home mom people stopped talking to me—I had to be a boring person. If I told them that I was a consultant that made me interesting and all of a sudden they would talk to me. So you know, and I don't think the attitude has changed too much. You know I am the same person with the same degree whether I chose to stay home with my kids for a while and I think that that's important. I think you end up with better children. Yes I worked as soon as my daughter went to grammar school but there is no one more invested in your kids then you are. I didn't feel like at least in the very beginning that I should give that job to somebody else who got paid less than I was, wasn't as smart as I was, and didn't care as much about my kids as I did. Now, the nice thing about consulting is that I could end my day at 2:30 so that I could be home when they got home from school. As much as people tell you take time off you know maternity leave, they need you at home when they are in high school and it's interesting because my kids all had friends that parents both worked or were divorced and nobody was home. They didn't go hang out there they came and hung out at my house, the house with the mom home. So that was interesting and my kids are out of the house at this point and I started, while I was consulting, I saw an ad in the paper to teach at

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Assumption. And again Intro to Computer Science so I've come full circle. That's what I wrote my master's thesis on. Now computers had changed dramatically in those 25 years since I had taught at Clark and started teaching here. When I first started teaching here there weren't smart classrooms, I was lucky I had to go borrow a projector to attach to my own personal computer. I could borrow a computer too but I couldn't count on the fact that it would be in the closet to take out so I bought my own computer to teach class here, my own laptop. When I first started teaching almost nobody had their own computer. They had to do their homework assignments in the lab and I came up with my own design to Intro to Computer Science. I made the kids buy the book at the time but I stopped doing that. Having been out in the business world I knew what students needed to know and I designed my class that way. I kind of became the heretic of the department because part of the philosophy at the department was "This is Computer Science, it should be theoretical." My feeling is, you can teach a lot of theory behind practical things. So I decided my class was going to run around these software packages that I saw the students needed to use. And believe it or not I've been teaching it fourteen years now. The basic outline of my class hasn't changed at all or not much because basics are the basics but the actual facts have changed dramatically I mean it changes all the time and keeping on top of teaching computer science at this point is a lot of work but its good. I like teaching, keeps me young. Working with the students keeps me young, working with my clients keeps me interested as well. So basically I am working two jobs and yes it has changed dramatically at this point because everybody now—nobody having their own personal computer and a good portion of the students never having done email, that was only fourteen years ago. And now of course they all laugh when I ask is there anyone who doesn't own their own computer. So it's changed a lot but I've also seen communication skills, writing skills, spelling skills go downhill. I think some of that is because of the computers.

**JW:** So as far as being a passionate mother and a woman in Worcester and being so successful, what other issues, if any, did you come across or what support systems, or how did you prioritize this time you had being so successful and a mother and business owner?

**AG:** Well when I had my store I had to hire somebody that came into my house. When I went back to work after I had my kids I only worked three days a week and part of it is that I could get done in three days a week what most people got done in five days. I just made sure I worked three full days and I was home four full days. I was still home more than I was working and I was always available by phone that wasn't an issue and then when I sold my store and I started consulting I didn't go back to work until my kids were in school. I just made sure I worked during school hours... Did we stop recording?

**GR:** No it's fine.

**AG:** I just made sure I worked during school hours and very rarely did I have a meeting or something that I had to go to when they were home. That's hard to do, I was very

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fortunate that I had made my reputation for my store when I could work full time and manage to get away with that. I think it's still hard, that would be a hard thing for people to do and it's hard in these economic times. You have to do whatever your employer wants you to do. I think the people that are going to be the most successful here are the ones that are going to be entrepreneurial and manage to make their own way.

**GR:** Now were going to move into politics and community involvement. Do you consider yourself active politically?

**AG:** I am not active politically at all.

**GR:** Have you ever been involved in volunteer or community work?

**AG:** Yes, I have done a lot of community work. I did a ton of community work, well when I did my store I did a lot of education in the community at no charge of course on computers. I started the first Night Life course on computers. I'd hire young guys, they actually had to get work permits, the school department would call and ask, "Is working with computers dangerous?" Then I did a lot in the Jewish community working on the Solomon Schechter Day School. I was on the board of directors there and did that for a lot of years. I did a lot of fundraising for the Worcester Jewish Federation. I figured it kept my sales skills up if I could talk people into giving away their money, I could probably sell them anything, but it also did them a lot of good. But that's the way I looked at it, I said good I can do things that can add to my skills. I did a lot of fundraising and things like that while my kids were young. I don't do as much now, even recently when Assumption did the book for Habitat for Humanity, I put it together for them and laid it out, and did all the technical stuff to get it printed. I still occasionally do things like that.

**GR:** So you kind of already talked about this but what role has religion, because you're Jewish right?

**AG: Right.**

**GR:** What role has religion played in your life?

**AG:** It has played a huge role in my life, a good portion of it spent. A lot of my charitable time was spent in the Jewish community and raising funds there. So, yes it's played a huge role in my life.

**GR:** Okay, so now we are going to talk about health, one of the questions is how has health issues impacted your life or those in your family if it has been?

**AG:** I have been very blessed to be very healthy and I work at it. I do a lot of exercise. I keep my body up. My immediate family, both my father ended up dying of cancer but by

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the time they realized it he was dead in six weeks. So it didn't really impact his life or our lives that much. So I have been extremely fortunate. My parents lived into their eighties. My husband's parents were both killed in a plane crash that was a big deal in Worcester. I have no idea how their health would be, but he and I have both been healthy, my kids have been healthy, my parents and my siblings have been healthy. So if you have your health you have everything. So that's something I have been very blessed. If you're not well that makes life very difficult.

**GR:** What are your experiences in accessing quality, affordable health care?

**AG:** Being in business for myself all these years I have had to pay for all of my own health care, all of my own health insurance and a very mediocre plan right now has cost us \$12,000 a year. Some people don't earn that much. The fee for service, you know, I think health care in this country is just abominable in terms of what it costs for what get. I don't know what else to say about it. I have a friend who has started a new medical practice she's a concierge medical practice where you pay her to join her practice and she takes care of everything for you, which I think, is kind of cool. Yes if you need extra care or hospitalization or something then you can pay but I just think health care has gone nuts in this country.

**GR:** Whose health are you responsible for besides your own?

**AG:** Not really anybody's at this point. You know my parents have died and my children are all adults. So basically me.

**GR:** When you're not at home where do you usually spend your time?

**AG:** At a clients. At Assumption. At my synagogue and I sing in a chorus. That's about it.

**GR:** Do you have any other interests, hobbies, or anything?

**AG:** Well, singing is a big thing. I sing in a quartette and a capella. Of course music has always been a big part of my life. I used to play the piano but when it's your avocation, there are only so many hours in a day that you can spend on your avocation. So I found that I couldn't practice the piano and work on my singing at the same time so now the music in my life has become singing. That's where I spend my extra time. Plus I also have a video business that I spend a little time on.

**GR:** And one last question based on your experience what advice would you give to women of today and future generations?

**AG:** Well, based on my life experience, first of all don't let anybody tell you, you can't do something because you're a woman. I've done everything I've wanted to do and I've

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just made the expectations that I could do it. Now part of the reason my life went as well as it did was because I created my own business. At the time I worked at Digital I'm sure I would of have hit a glass ceiling if I had stayed in the corporate environment. I only didn't because it was my own business and it's still my own business. But I would say to women, you know, what's made me successful is always doing what I was passionate about and finding a way to work at something that I enjoyed and I think that can be true for anybody, not just women. I also think that if you don't want to get outsourced to India become a plumber. But other than that, to get as much education as you feel you want and to just go for whatever you want. Just assume you're going to be able to do well at it.