

Mind the Gap – Women in Technology Leadership, Kim Chapman

The technology industry has historically been a difficult industry for women aspiring to executive positions. For those of us who started our careers in the '80's, we have certainly seen a shift in the direction of more inclusiveness and a growing diversity in upper management. But there is still a long way to go. When we joined the workforce it was the era of lifelong service to "The Company" - a time of pensions and shared desktop computers, where the World Wide Web and Internet were still mostly dark and telecommunications was your lifeline to communicate with your customers. Cell phones were just emerging and if you were important enough – you wore a beeper. The men were many and the women were few – and pay was anything but equal.

[A 2017 survey](#) of 53 million LinkedIn professional profiles found that *only 25% of the hardware and Telecom business profiles were women – and only 16% are leadership – the lowest of the all industries surveyed.* While

Telecommunications may not seem like "sexy" technology – it is the engineering that enables all technology to function – the roads and highways over which all data flows. Additionally, only [26% of technology Industry](#) employees overall were women, globally.

An early pioneer for women's leadership in telecom and networking is Kim Chapman, now Founder and President of Network Services, Inc. A former NC Tech Board Chairperson and the first female executive of BTI (now part of Windstream), she became the President of FiberSouth – the company at BTI that laid the fiber foundation of many networks that exist today in the Triangle. *"When I became an executive – I was the only woman in the room – it was a very unbalanced environment."*

Kim feels she was lucky. She was the first employee at BTI here in Raleigh and got to help build the company from the ground up. *"I was lucky that my boss was gender-blind – he cared more about what you could do than what you looked like"*. Because of this she rose to be the Executive VP of Marketing and Customer Relations.

When Kim left BTI – she struggled for a bit about what she wanted to do. After doing some consulting, she decided to start her own company as a BTI Agent, but

also a competitor. To women who are thinking of becoming business owners in the tech space Kim has a few words of advice.

- **Don't be afraid to jump right in.** *"have faith in yourself that the money will come. Make the decision and take that leap of faith"*
- **Make the customer the focus of everything.** *"In the tech industry, customer service is NOT done very well at many companies. Make sure you surround your clients with the support they will need to be successful."*
- **Surround yourself with good people.** *"having a great team that feels included and responsible for the business is key."*
- **Be prepared for the battle.** *"when you are the owner of the company – all the battles are yours. As they say – If it was easy, everyone would be doing it!"*

Many of us struggle as working Mom's trying to juggle our business time with kid time. According to a [study](#) out from the University of British Columbia published in the journal *Work and Occupations* it was found that without flexible work hours, working moms made 7 percent less than childless women, but with flexible work hours, they earned 12 percent *more* than childless women with flexible hours. Kim credits business ownership with being able to be more available for her daughter. *"Having a competent staff at the office and flexible work hours allowed me to be present for all of my daughter's games and events"*. Kim continues to provide a flexible workplace for her employee today.

While we still have a long way to go towards female equality in technology leadership jobs – the needle is moving in the right direction, albeit slowly. Kim is still as passionate about technology today as ever – and her ability to lead has allowed her to be successful for over 30 years in the Industry. She says, *"While I may still be one of a few women in the room at meetings, at least I am not always the only one anymore!"*