

# LOUISVILLE BUSINESS FIRST

## Papa John's leader talks about the importance of women in technology

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Sarika Attal says that the U.S. will never fill a gap in the technology workforce without tapping into an oft-forgotten demographic: women.

"There is a gender split of 50 percent in the U.S. workforce today, so if we don't tap into the other 50 percent of the female talent pool, it's impossible to fill this supply demand gap," she said.

Attal is a tech professional herself as director of enterprise architecture at Louisville-based Papa John's International Inc., and she said that she wants other women to know they can make it their career, too.

Attal leads a team that contributes to the overall technology strategy of the company – including tech infrastructure and process improvements.

"My advice to women out there is to take the time to explore and don't be afraid to take risks. Make the time for networking and seek out mentors," she said. "We have to continue to break the myth that technology is hard and only for men."

Attal will present at the second annual Women in Technology Conference on Dec. 4 at the C2 Event Venue on East Breckinridge Street. She will talk about how to bring more women into the technological creator roles, such as engineering, architecture, business analytics and information technology.

One place to start is in middle and high school. Attal said she grew up in India, and science was her favorite subject.

"I loved conducting experiments in our science lab and solving long math problems always excited me," she said.

Unfortunately, research shows that many girls lose interest in STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) fields during that time. But by not capturing the demographic and bringing women into STEM jobs, Attal thinks technology in the U.S. is suffering.



"Technology is shaping almost every aspect of our lives, whether it's how we communicate to our families, the security of our homes to how we order groceries – or for that matter, pizzas," Attal said. "The people creating this technology should not belong to a single demographic."

"There is a need for diversity. The more viewpoints and perspectives you bring to the table, the better the technology outcomes you see."

Plus, Attal said, the technology industry (and other STEM careers) are suffering from a supply issue. There simply aren't enough tech professionals to keep up with the increasing demands of the sector.

And technology jobs often provide a lot of space for upward growth. Attal started as an engineer at Papa John's, but has worked her way into several leadership positions, learning more each step of the way.

"I actually believe that it's easier to grow as a female leader in the tech industry than in some other traditional sectors," she said. "It's nature is very dynamic, it's pace is very fast and there is a constant need for innovation."

She said all of these reasons are why it's so vital to have conversations about bringing more women into the sector, so she's happy to be part of the Women in Technology Conference.

"It's important to bring diversity into these technology roles," she said. "This conference is a great platform for bringing thought leaders together. It is an opportunity for women to feel connected to the community of women technologists and get inspired to enter or build a career in tech."

The event coordinator, Shannon Fehr of Fehr Event Group, said that's the exact reason she created the conference last year. This year's nearly sold-out conference, with more than 300 people attending, shows her that she and Attal aren't the only ones thinking about the problem.

Fehr said the conference also gives women in tech a unique environment in which they can air grievances and learn in a way that's specifically tailored to women.

"The event is geared around them, instead of like every other day when it's not. There aren't as many women in IT, so when you go to a typical IT event, there's like 50 men to every two women," she said. "Women get sick of being the only woman in the room. But for the most part, 90 percent of these people will be women attending."

There is also networking time built in, so women in technology can meet each other.

"I just did this event because there was such a need for it, with the times we're in and the environment in society," she said.

Fehr, along with event sponsors Papa John's and SkuVault, has put together a group of women in high level positions in the sector who will present during the day-long conference, including keynote speaker Catherine Harris, the chief information officer at USAA Bank.

Each presenter will have a different topic, discussing issues ranging from bringing more women into C-suite positions, to getting young women interested in STEM to reaching out to male allies to step up.