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Becoming a Woman

I felt their eyes fall on me as I raised my hand to ask a question during a technological business presentation at the luxurious Hershey Hotel on a frigid February morning. As a junior in high school surrounded by a sea of adults, I was a little out of place. I rigorously took notes, intently listening to every word of the presenter. At the end of the session, the speaker approached me with a question. "I'm guessing you're not a teacher or administrator, if you don't mind me asking, why are you here?"

I was at the Pennsylvania Education Technology Expo and Conference with a small group of students to present our brand new Student Technology Assistance Program, or STAP. STAP is a one to one iPad initiative that is completely handled by students for the management and technical work throughout the school district.

The date we were set to present was two days away, so in the mean time, we were allowed to attend any sessions we wanted to throughout the day and debrief over dinner. I was nervous the first day, dressing up in my best blouse and blazer. I wanted to be taken seriously, because I was serious about our program and bringing new ideas back to our school in order to better our program. It was time to prove I was a woman, capable of more than just high school.

As I proceeded to the meetings, I learned not only about technology in the classroom, but how to use my tools as an advantage. Curiously, teachers and administrators from all over

Pennsylvania would approach me with unending questions and comments. "Who are you? What are you doing here? What's your idea? How does it work? You let students run your program! I can't even imagine middle schoolers with their own iPads! I need to know more!" There was a lot of pressure to demonstrate my capabilities to belong amongst the professionals. Many were skeptical of us and our program.

There was much talk about our program filling the halls of the Hershey Lodge. How we were the chatter of the conference, I did not understand. However, our presentation was first thing in the morning and I needed to prepare to present myself and the program I worked so hard for to the best of my ability. I knew my part well, but I was still nervous as I watched people enter one by one, filling up the room. The odds were against me with not much experience with public speaking and I was no expert on technology. However, this was my opportunity to be the adult I wanted to be. I took a breath as I was introduced, "And now I'd like to introduce you to our senior office manger, Kennedy Young, to explain about App Purchasing and iTunes U." I cleared my mind of my nerves and concentrated on my audience. I smiled as I went through my job; a job I love so much. I flowed from one point to the next as they followed my every move and vigorously took notes. Just as I had listened to a few of them speak the day before, they were now the students and I was the teacher. They hung on every word, fully invested in my presentation. Although it seemed like forever, only ten minutes had passed, and it was time to introduce the techs. I triumphantly ended my portion of the presentation and stepped aside, almost sad to end the short time I had in the spotlight. However, it was not really the end.

After we concluded our presentation, we got a standing ovation. We were still answering questions as the next presenters came to kick us out. I didn't make it far out of the room without

being approached by a woman from Philadelphia. "I just wanted to tell you how impressed I am with you and your program. You all are by far the most amazing group of teenagers I have seen and you all should be very proud," she exclaimed. Another gentleman stopped us later that night asking to visit our school to watch us in action. "If you were all eighteen, I'd give you job offers right now!" he joked. Never before have I been treated with such interest and respect.

The conference was an experience I will never forget. I arrived, expecting to be lost and looked down upon in a flood of adults, incompetent to make an influence. I never believed I could be seen as an equal among adults at such a young age. It was at that conference that I found something new, my identity. I want to be a woman who can make a change and be an influence even in an ever-changing world, such as technology. I can be confident in who I am and my ideas; I'm more than my age. I'm now ready to dive into the business world, undaunted to be the woman that I know I can be.