

From Wary to Wonder — My Day with Techbridge Girls

By Michelle Simmons, Techbridge Girls Volunteer

“Teenagers are not my thing!” That was my first thought when there was a call for volunteers to support a Techbridge Girls event for middle school students at Capital One. But I was promised, ‘These girls are great’ so I took a chance.

These girls *were* great! The large group of young women entered with varying degrees of (visible) enthusiasm. Some were extremely shy and quiet, while others were almost jumping up and down. This was bound to be an interesting day. After some introductions and a silly ice-breaker, we settled in for the real ‘work.’

Techbridge Girls was an opportunity for these young women to learn how cool a career in STEM can be. They got to see real women working in a career in tech and even got to tour the office. It also allowed them to see that women are welcome and encouraged to apply. We were told to be prepared to answer personal questions on various topics and these girls did not disappoint.

“What were you like in middle school?”

“What do you do if someone tells you-you can’t do something?”

“What do you do here?”

After getting these questions the first time, it became a challenge to find new ways to explain what I did, since my role (as an agile delivery lead) is not a typical STEM role.



After the ice-breaker, the middle school girls “interviewed” each of the Capital One “role models”, which allowed us to get to know each other better. Then it was time to have some FUN. Our brilliant facilitators designed puzzle activities. First, we broke up into several small groups to solve an escape room-style puzzle. This was a race to get to the grand prize, and I’m proud to say that my group won (with no help from me). The second puzzle was done in pairs as they learned algorithms using maps and puzzle pieces to get from one part of a

board to another with limited moves. Again, these were very smart young women, as only a nudge here or there was needed to help guide their thinking process or encourage them to try a different path.

What I took away from the day was how different all the girls were, and yet they all had a similar passion for learning and solving problems. They worked really well as teams and took feedback and guidance well. Coaching them just took small suggestions — like looking out to make sure that each pair of the team got their turn leading or saying something like, “It looks like you’ve taken that path several times with the same result.”



It made me think back and wonder if I’d had similar opportunities at that age, Where might I be now? But then I wouldn’t be who I am today and I wouldn’t have met this engaging and wonderfully smart, capable and diverse group of young women ready to conquer the next generation’s set of technological problems.

I had an amazing time learning from this future generation of bright young women and showing them that we women are valued and needed for our various skill sets in STEM. I hope my experience leaves you with a desire to have your own and seek out a similar opportunity.

Michelle Simmons, Techbridge Girls Volunteer