



You can't be what you can't see: Empowering women in the utilities industry

By Sara Patnaude

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Women in utilities face unique challenges in gaining equal recognition, advancement opportunities, and leadership roles. Ahead of the upcoming CS Week [Women in Utilities](#) Sunrise Event, of which E Source is a sponsor, I sat down with [Cheryl Stookes](#), chief revenue officer at E Source, to explore some of the specific challenges women face in the industry and how organizations can address them.

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With 20 years of B2B sales and marketing experience, mainly as a leader in large technology companies, Stookes has had a ringside view of how equal opportunity (or a lack thereof) can affect ambitious female talent. She's been a passionate advocate for inclusivity and diversity in organizations, using her position and personal brand to highlight the challenges women in the workplace often face. Her book, [The Token Woman: A Guide to Thriving as a Female in Sales](#), draws on her firsthand experience of becoming a leader in a male-dominated industry.

How it feels to be the only woman in the room

“For years, I was the only woman in the room, the only female sales leader on a team of 17 male peers. And to add to it, the only Canadian, so I often felt out of place,” said Stookes. “Now, I’ve worked with and learned from some great male leaders. There’s no doubt about that. That said, we cannot escape the biases and norms that a culture geared toward any gender creates. And that lack of diversity stifles constructive conflict and fresh thinking.”

Stookes has found parallels between her experience in technology sales and the utilities industry, noting how this presents challenges for women in the workplace. “The sectors have their differences, of course, but historically, the utilities industry has been very male dominated with a significant gender imbalance, which makes it difficult for women to be recognized, advance their careers, and earn leadership roles.”

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Thankfully, we no longer have a *what* question on our hands. Gender parity is good for business and great for decency; the numbers show it. According to the McKinsey & Co. article, [Diversity matters even more: The case for holistic impact](#), organizations with gender-diverse and culturally diverse leadership teams outperform their homogeneous peers by over 30%, highlighting the business imperative of diversity and inclusion.

“It leads one to wonder, *how*? How do we encourage more women to join the industry? And how do we encourage them to stay in the industry?” Stookes inquired.

We must consider diversity because the mindset cascades into culture and business practices. Diverse leadership teams reflect the communities they serve. They encourage differences of opinion, and they challenge antiquated thinking. As Stookes so aptly put it, “You can’t be what you can’t see, right?”

15 questions with Cheryl Stookes

Can Cheryl pass our high-stakes pop quiz as she prepares for sponsoring the CS Week Women in Utilities Sunrise Event?



A mentor shines the light on the door, but a sponsor kicks it in for you

When it comes to addressing these challenges, Stookes explained that “women tend to be overmentored and undersponsored.” Companies can do a lot with mentorship, but sponsorship is more impactful. Mentorship is more of a relationship between someone serving as a guide and adviser to someone less experienced, but sponsorship goes even further.

“The role of men and allies in positions of power and influence in promoting, advancing, and developing women within the organization is so critically important.” —Cheryl Stookes, E Source

A sponsor is someone in a position of power and influence who can use that power and influence to actively advocate for individuals. A sponsor will focus on amplifying peoples’ voices, finding opportunities to showcase their experiences and helping others see how wonderful they are. “Sponsorship is essential for advocating for an individual’s career advancement,” said Stookes. “While a mentor shines the light on the door, a sponsor kicks it in for you.”

“It also can’t just be women sponsoring women,” she clarified. “The role of men and allies in positions of power and influence in promoting, advancing, and developing women within the organization is so critically important.”

E Source is a proud sponsor of CS Week’s Women in Utilities event

As part of our presence at CS Week, E Source sponsored the Women in Utilities Sunrise Event and hosted an ancillary event for attendees. Stookes explained, “This is our first year sponsoring the event, and I love that we’re supporting a topic that we’re committed to as an organization—one that I care about both professionally and personally.”

It’s exciting to be part of the event to facilitate the necessary conversations more broadly in the industry. “We want to see more women in positions of leadership and are thrilled to be a part of the solution,” Stookes said.

E Source was proud to be in support of the growth, success, and inclusiveness of women in the industry. “It’s important to us that it’s not just women that attend. We would like to see male allies at the event because we need those voices in the room to support the women around them,” Stookes explained.

All were welcome at the CS Week Women in Utilities events to learn more about what we can all do everyday to make a difference for those around us. The event was about showing support to the community so that we can be part of the solution.

Walking the talk at E Source

The CS Week Women in Utilities' mission is to support and empower women in the utilities industry personally and professionally so they can transform challenges, adversities, and nontraditional roles into opportunities. This mission resonates with E Source's commitment to diversity and inclusion: "We're dedicated to fostering diversity and inclusion within our organization," Stookes said. "We also believe that diverse and inclusive teams allow us to improve innovation. I'm proud that 40% of our executive leadership team is female, which has been a large focus for us to have more inclusivity and a more diverse leadership team at all levels of the organization."

"I'm proud that 40% of our executive leadership team is female." —Cheryl Stookes, E Source

Since 2020, E Source has grown from only 2% of employees identifying as BIPOC to 25%. "Simultaneously, the company has had record growth and profitability," Stookes added, "I believe those two things are strongly connected."

E Source was honored to support the CS Week Women in Utilities events and to continue to be a champion in the industry. Stookes noted, "We're on this journey right alongside our utility counterparts, and we're excited to be participating in the events at CS Week to keep up the meaningful work."