

# Finding My Place in Technology

*Creating a win-win situation through diversity*

As a woman engineer, Latina, and member of the LGBTQ community, I'm often asked about my career path and the challenges I've faced along the way. Working in such a male-dominated field, I feel fortunate to have ended up at an organization whose culture genuinely supports women.

I am currently an applications engineer at Qorvo, a company with 40 locations worldwide that develops radio frequency and power chips for connected devices. Our solutions are found in everything from smart cars, phones, and homes to space rovers and fighter jets to the satellites and cellular base stations that connect our world.

Many things had to happen for me to be at Qorvo today, but the most immediate factor was the COVID-19 pandemic. I was a recent engineering graduate in my first job after college when the pandemic hit, and I was laid off. I saw the Qorvo job listing on LinkedIn, and I immediately applied and sent a message to the hiring manager. I've always had an interest in working in the Wi-Fi customer support industry, and now I had the chance. The role seemed like a great fit because it called for the ability to effectively communicate with peers and customers while

also being able to solve technical issues, and in normal times, it involves a lot of travel, which I love. This position was the perfect opportunity for the career I wanted to build. Plus, the benefits were much better than what I was seeing for recent graduate employees at most companies, so that helped me with my decision.

What I love most about my job is the challenge that each project presents—that's what drives me. We're solving different types of problems every day, which forces us to keep learning new things and be creative. Understanding and meeting customer needs requires not only expertise and field experience but also teamwork, planning, preparation, and trial and error. I enjoy working with all my teammates. Since the very first day, they've all been very helpful, sharing their knowledge and time, and I do the same for them. Another exciting aspect of my job is the opportunity to travel and see the world while working. I haven't been able to enjoy that benefit due to the pandemic, but I'm looking forward to starting as soon as it's safe.

## Advice for the Next Generation

I've been at Qorvo for a year, and I've had managers who've been here for 20

years or so, and we have one thing in common: we're always learning new things. They've shown that your attitude matters more than anything else. Many of the technicalities can be learned on the job. So the advice I always give young engineers is to make the most of every opportunity. Don't let yourself be limited by the school you went to or the experiences you didn't have—just be yourself. Own your story, be proud of who you are, and know that every day you can write a new chapter in your story, even if the challenges seem insurmountable at the time.

We all face challenges, of course. In my case, I've experienced some specific ones related to my background, gender, and sexual orientation, which is why I feel strongly about the importance of creating a work environment in which young engineers and professionals can feel safe and supported.

In previous positions, I didn't always feel comfortable bringing my whole self to work. For example, I didn't feel comfortable talking about my partner, and many times

I held back from speaking my mind because I'm an immigrant and I was afraid of not being taken seriously or even losing my job. I've also faced challenges due to language: I'm trilingual but my native tongue is Portuguese, and I am very conscious of peers judging me when I mispronounce or misunderstand the meaning of a word. This pressure has been a challenge for me, but having supportive teammates has helped me to feel comfortable enough to learn from complicated situations and grow. An inclusive culture makes all the difference.



Larissa De Maria



Larissa De Maria in the Qorvo lab.



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I always make time to reconnect with my roots, and my advice to others in a similar situation is to stay true to yourself. Get to know yourself, love yourself, be kind to yourself and proud of who you are, and if you do your best and you “fail,” at least your conscience will be clear and you can look forward and move on.

### Opening Doors for Others

When I was hired at Qorvo, I was the only woman engineer on my team at the time. I was nervous and a little intimidated but never afraid because I knew the responsibility I had in my hands and the doors that I might help open for other women. I like to think that I inspire other engineers, especially women, immigrants, people of color, and members of the LGBTQ+ community by breaking down barriers and opening doors that weren't opened for us before.

I also support groups within Qorvo, such as Women in Tech and the I:Q forum to promote inclusion and diver-

sity. In Women in Tech, for example, I volunteered to be part of a team working to create better onboarding assistance for new engineers. Outside my job, I also donate to organizations that serve underrepresented communities.

### Making the Industry More Inclusive

In recent times, and especially in the past year, we've heard about a lot of people in the industry acknowledging the lack of diversity in many corporate positions; science, technology, engineering, and mathematics programs; and virtually everywhere else we look. But although everyone is talking about it, very little effort is being made to change things. We've taken the first step of recognizing that there are flaws in the system, but now we need to make—and implement—concrete plans to address them.

In my view, having people from diverse backgrounds working together is a win-win situation as that's where innovation lies. Initiatives I'd like to see

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introduced to drive greater inclusion involve investing in creating more co-op/internship programs at historically black colleges and universities, and collaborating with black, Latinx, and indigenous people; people with disabilities, LGBTQ+, and other underrepresented communities to assist people with starting a profession. In my mind, this begins by helping them to obtain a certificate or four-year degree through partnering with a college or university.

Companies also need to do a better job of tracking progress toward their goal of having more diverse individuals in positions of power. Being able to see people who look like us in these positions contributes to our journey in ways that are immeasurable; it makes us feel more confident, empowered, capable, and seen and heard. I speak from experience. The moment I knew my new manager at Qorvo was also a woman, everything changed in my head. I am no longer the only woman on the team, but even more importantly, that other woman is not just another manager, she is an inspiration and a model for the leadership role I can play within this industry.

—Larissa De Maria

