

Diversity & inclusion, Life at Nuance, Women in tech

Forward, Stronger, Together: Harnessing the Power of our Communities and Human Connection

[Life at Nuance](#)

December 7, 2021



We learn from hearing the stories and experiences of others, and we use that inspiration in our daily work and personal lives. After attending this year’s Massachusetts Conference for Women, Melissa’s understanding about the value of communities and human connection was renewed. Read this blog to hear what she learned from the conference that she’ll surely carry into her everyday life, and how the theme of “Forward, Strong, Together” rings true.

Melissa Ill is the Senior Director of Global Facilities and Real Estate and joined Nuance in 2019. Prior to working for Nuance, Melissa managed procurement and real estate functions within the telecommunications industry. She played principal roles in women-centered employee resource groups at her prior company and is part of the planning committee for Nuance's WIN ERG.

For the 17th annual [Massachusetts Conference for Women](#), close to 60 members of Team Nuance gathered from our home offices to experience the virtual conference, converse on Microsoft Teams together, and learn from inspiring speakers such as Jay Shetty (who we got to meet during a recent annual Sales Kickoff), Selma Blair, Stacey Abrams, Regina King, and Chloe Zhao – to name a few. We were joined by small group facilitators from various industries who have shown leadership, built trust, and navigated unimaginable hurdles.

With the theme of “Forward, Stronger, Together,” each speaker shared stories and advice on a myriad of topics. But the message I walked away with was **the power of our communities and human connection** – whether as mentors, peers, friends, family, or virtual connections – sharing their lives.

Selma Blair, in sharing her journey with multiple sclerosis, reiterated repeatedly the power of her friendships in helping her through her lowest points. Stacey Abrams, a self-described introvert, talked through finding alternative channels for connections that worked for her versus the ways others might have approached campaigning. Each of these stories shared in the breakout and networking sessions, whether the theme was career growth or the hybrid office, reiterated the power of our connectedness.

I moved to Massachusetts in November 2019 knowing very few people in the state but with so much excitement about new places, people, and opportunities. Only months later, COVID sent everyone home and changed how we all connect with each other. Despite initial frustrations I felt about making new friends or getting to know new colleagues, what I quickly saw were people adapting out of a need to connect:

- A group of Colorado friends turned their weekly trivia night at a local bar into a virtual trivia night using Twitch and Zoom – which I could join from Boston
- Speaker series typically hosted in bookstores or museums moved virtual and became available globally
- Attendees of the Massachusetts Conference for Women could attend from anywhere in the world!

During a breakout session called “The Lost Art of Connection: Reclaim the Power of Human Contact,” the presenter, Susan McPherson, shared some of her practical tips for staying in touch with her network. She sends three to four texts per day to folks in her network just to maintain the connection. And weekly she puts thirty minutes in her calendar to call someone she knows but she might not otherwise chat with. I loved how intentional this was for her – like scheduling time for lunch, a haircut, or meeting with your boss – scheduling time to stay in touch with folks she may not more naturally have been in contact with became a part of her routine.

When I think about the moments that have meant the most to me in my personal life and in my career, they have come from the intentional as well as highly unexpected connections I've made. My friends in industries completely different from mine will tell me if they think I'm not focusing in the right areas for my career. My colleagues and professional connections support me when my personal life is approaching a curve. And the people who fit into both and can see all sides.

This year's theme “**Forward, Stronger, Together**” struck me as Nuance approaches the acquisition by Microsoft. Dr. Maya Shankar, a cognitive scientist and podcast host, in her breakout session titled “Enabling Trust in Times of Transition,” described the power of sharing change experiences in bonding individuals and creating trust.

During our Teams chat, Rosy, the Chair of the Women in Nuance Network (WIN) which sponsored our attendance, commented:

“Selma Blair's session highlighted some great points. Our networks and tribes of women are key. The energy we bring to the table in our groups has such a great impact on our own professional and personal lives, the groups, and respective communities. I keep in mind (or be reminded) that despite not wanting to engage all of the time or attend every event, the time and energy spent is truly an investment.”

As the conference wrapped up, Debjani, a member of WIN's planning committee, shared:

“I must tell you that although I very much enjoy the privilege of attending this conference from the comfort of home and the bonus of recorded sessions, this experience is more cherished because of all of you! The joy of sharing the thoughts and excitements with all of you and learning about yours certainly made the difference for me. Thank you ALL! Thank you WIN!”

All of us at Nuance are on an amazing journey together and I could not be more impressed with how we have moved through the last 20+ months to be who we are together today. Let's carry the theme from the Massachusetts Women's Conference into 2022, with all the unknowns, but the joy of the journey, stronger, together.

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