

reachHIRE's Aurora Platform Brings a Human Touch to Robot Maker's Diversity Campaign

iRobot Corporation, an American technology company, based in Bedford, MA, was founded in 1990 by three members of MIT's Artificial Intelligence Lab, who designed robots for space exploration and military defense. In 2002 the company branched out to join the consumer market with Roomba, a robotic vacuum cleaner that went on to become the best-selling appliance of its kind, with more than 30 million sold. The company has since expanded into a variety of consumer and industrial markets while growing its annual revenues to over \$1.5 billion.

iRobot has always had a progressive attitude toward diversity. Seventy-five percent of its senior vice presidents are women, but in technical disciplines, the company encountered the same challenges other engineering-centric firms have, of trying to diversify the workplace. At the time of this study, approximately 40% of its research and development management positions were held by women.

Doubling Down on Diversity

Over the last three years, iRobot re-committed to improving the diversity of its technical workforce by requiring that at least one woman be interviewed for all R&D management roles and by becoming a sponsor for more than 100 female employees at events such as the Massachusetts Conference for Women and the Grace Hopper Conference.

“Gender equity, diversity in the workforce, and investing in new talent is critical to iRobot’s global strategy.”

– **RUSSELL CAMPANELLO**, EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT, HR & CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS, iROBOT

Amid COVID-19 lockdowns in 2019, iRobot took it one step further and engaged reachHIRE to bring its proprietary SaaS platform, Aurora into the organization, to create safe and inclusive spaces for women to connect with a community of like-minded professionals and share real-world work experiences. Access to on-the-go and bite-sized content, career tools, and real-time advice from accomplished leaders helped women build the soft skills needed to navigate and advance their careers. Aurora offered a six-month curriculum with a proven formula to help women build confidence and influence through a series of collaborative workshops augmented by individual coaching sessions and self-directed 10-Minute Career Workouts™. Senior iRobot leaders participated as guest speakers on such topics as “Building Resilience,” “Communicating with Confidence” and “Mapping Your Vision.” The outcome exceeded expectations.

Beyond Training

iRobot chose reachHIRE because they wanted more than just another training course. Fostering a sense of community and belonging was a top priority and the Aurora platform delivered on all aspects toward achieving that goal. The women chosen to participate in the first cohort found much needed support through secure meetups and chat sessions. The importance of networks and collaboration became apparent as iRobot rapidly transitioned from being almost entirely office-based to 90% remote during COVID. Company leaders leaned into the flexibility initiative, encouraging senior leaders to incorporate elements of their home life into meetings and sponsoring monthly webinars on meditation, improved sleep, and other topics chosen by employees.

reachHIRE's Aurora platform integrated seamlessly with the shift in culture.

“Regardless of location, we are trying to create new networks of people because we understand that being more remote makes it harder to make connections.”

– HEATHER BENDER, VICE PRESIDENT OF TALENT, IROBOT

The reviews that came back from participants in the initial program were so strong that iRobot expanded in 2021 to include 18 more women in two cohorts. “I am more confident than before and that is really important for me,” summed up one participant. Others reported improvements in self-confidence, a new willingness to seek out allies and mentors, and benefits from having more strong women in their personal networks.



Connected with Confidence

Assessment surveys from 49 participants in the 2021 program further validated Aurora's positive impact. Participants reported significantly improved relationships with their managers, greater confidence in their leadership skills, and a stronger sense of belonging. They also indicated that the program had achieved its objective of helping them build confidence and stronger networks within the organization.

“The program really helped me develop my confidence and gave me the tools to succeed. I am now able to put myself out there more for others to see. Overall, it has positively impacted my career growth.”

– AURORA PARTICIPANT

“The Aurora Program was key in helping me think about my career aspirations and build a network. I really enjoyed the networking component. I also recognized that many of the problems I face are not unique to me.”

“I was lucky to be a part of the Aurora program while I transitioned from being an individual contributor to a manager. It helped me make personal changes based on the frameworks provided.”

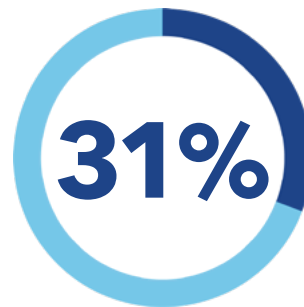
In 2022, the program was tailored even further by separating into two tracks, early- and mid-career. Members of the early-career cohort said the training improved their feeling that the work was having an impact and made them more effective at influencing others.

Results of the mid-career leadership track assessment showed that participants developed a stronger growth mindset, greater resilience, and improved skills at building relationships and exerting influence.

“Being part of this group is keeping me accountable to think differently and act differently. I’m also focusing on what I can

control, and that’s reducing my stress,” said one.

For iRobot’s leadership, reachHIRE’s Aurora program was instrumental in helping the company move closer towards its diversity goals. “By implementing a scalable engagement and retention platform like Aurora, we are making an investment in accelerating the growth of our early-career women and retaining top talent,” Campanello said.



Aurora participants at iRobot who earned promotions in the past year

We have seen proof of this when we look at the graduates from the 2021 and 2022 programs, with 31% of the 2022 class receiving promotions in the past year. This program continues to be an important part of our strategy to retain, grow and develop our future women leaders within iRobot.

About reachHIRE

For almost a decade, reachHIRE has been on a mission to empower women to thrive and rise, partnering with forward-thinking companies to create opportunities for women at all ages and stages of their careers.

From Return-to-Work programs that connect talented women with industry leaders such as T-Mobile, Fidelity, and Wayfair, to the Aurora platform designed to grow your women leaders, reachHIRE is committed to finding and fueling the potential in all professional women and improving the gender talent pipeline for corporations.