

# Serena Williams takes Silicon Valley position to advocate for diversity

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Serena Williams holds up her trophy after defeating her sister, Venus, in the women's singles final at the Australian Open tennis championships on January 28, 2017, in Melbourne, Australia. Williams wants to help diversify the tech industry now that she is joining a Silicon Valley boardroom. Online poll-taking service SurveyMonkey announced Williams' appointment to its board on May 24, 2017, along with Intuit CEO Brad Smith. AP Photo

**SAN FRANCISCO, California** — Tennis star Serena Williams has 39 Grand Slam titles, four Olympic medals and her own line of clothing. Now she is embarking on a new mission: helping tech companies bring more minorities and women into their workforces.

Williams, 35, is joining a Silicon Valley boardroom for the first time. Silicon Valley is a nickname for the southern part of the San Francisco Bay Area, which has long been the center of the high-tech industry.

On Wednesday, the online poll-taking service SurveyMonkey announced Williams' appointment to its board of directors. The company hopes Williams will help it figure out how to bring greater diversity — a broader range of different types of people — to its workforce.

"I feel like diversity is something I speak to," Williams said, referring to her own experience as an African-American in the largely white sport of tennis. "Change is always happening, change is always building. What is important to me is to be at the forefront of the change and to make it easier for the next person that comes behind me."

## **Silicon Valley Has A Diversity Problem**

Williams didn't offer specifics about her goals as a corporate director. However, her very presence on the board may help push the company in a more diverse direction. That also might help bring more diversity to the entire tech industry.

Silicon Valley's lack of diversity has been a problem for years. Despite the efforts of high-tech companies such as Google, Apple and Facebook to fix the problem, not much progress has been made.

Lately, Williams has been hanging around Silicon Valley more often because of her fiancé Alexis Ohanian. Ohanian is a high-tech entrepreneur and the co-founder of the online forum Reddit.

Williams says she is disappointed that the vast majority of high-paying technology jobs are filled by white and Asian men.

## **More Women Needed At SurveyMonkey**

At SurveyMonkey, which employs about 650 workers, only 27 percent of technology jobs are filled by women. Just 14 percent of its total workforce consists of African-Americans or Latinos.

Williams' appointment is part of the solution, according to Zander Lurie, SurveyMonkey's chief executive officer. "My focus is to bring in change agents around the table who can open our eyes," Lurie said.

Racism is something Williams confronted and overcame at an early age when she began playing a predominantly white sport. She overcame the racism and grew up to become the top-ranked female tennis player in the world.

## **Williams Has Been Eyeing Silicon Valley For Years**

Diversifying Silicon Valley isn't the only item on Williams' agenda. Like a lot of rich athletes, she is interested in becoming more involved in the business opportunities that have sprung up during Silicon Valley's high-tech boom. She says she is already exploring other opportunities in the area but isn't ready to provide further details yet.

Her connection to SurveyMonkey came through her friendship with Sheryl Sandberg. She is Facebook's chief operating officer and another member of SurveyMonkey's board. Sandberg's late husband, Dave Goldberg, was SurveyMonkey's chief executive officer before his death in 2015.

"I have been really interested in getting involved in Silicon Valley for years, so I have been kind of in the wading waters," Williams said. "Now, I am jumping into the deep end of the pool. When I do something, I go all out."

**Quiz**

- 1 Which option includes two MAIN ideas of the article?
- (A) Serena Williams, an African-American, has been a tennis superstar for a long time.  
Williams has recently become interested in business opportunities in Silicon Valley.
- (B) Serena Williams, an African-American, has joined the board of SurveyMonkey.  
Williams learned about SurveyMonkey from her friend Sheryl Sandberg.
- (C) Tennis superstar Serena Williams has joined the board of SurveyMonkey.  
As an African-American, she might be able to help the company increase their diversity.
- (D) Serena Williams is an accomplished tennis player with her own line of clothing.  
As an African-American playing a largely white sport, she has had to personally confront racism.
- 2 Which statement would be MOST important to include in a summary of the article?
- (A) This is the first time Serena Williams has joined a Silicon Valley boardroom.
- (B) Serena Williams, 35, has yet to offer specifics about her position on the board of directors.
- (C) The fiancé of Serena Williams is a high-tech entrepreneur who co-founded Reddit.
- (D) Only 27 percent of the technology jobs at SurveyMonkey are filled by women.
- 3 Based on the article, what is the MOST important reason why Serena Williams joined the SurveyMonkey board?
- (A) She has a friend who is already on the SurveyMonkey board.
- (B) She enjoys being in the center of the high-tech industry.
- (C) She hopes the experience will lead to new business opportunities.
- (D) She wants to effect change in the workforce of SurveyMonkey.

- 4 Based on the article, Serena Williams would MOST LIKELY agree with which statement?
- (A) Silicon Valley companies like Google, Apple and Facebook should strive to have diverse workforces.
  - (B) Lack of diversity in Silicon Valley is a new problem with no easy solution.
  - (C) Finding women and minorities who want to work in Silicon Valley will be a problem.
  - (D) Silicon Valley tech companies should be constantly changing their workforces.