

Meet the Pinnacle Awards Finalists: 5 Questions for CNSI's Jennifer Bahrami

[Jennifer Bahrami](#) serves as chief marketing and communications officer and senior vice president at [CNSI](#) and is a [Pinnacle Awards finalist](#) in the STEM Advocate of the Year category. Here, she talks about her strong passion for advocating for STEM, how the STEM field has impacted her professional career as the child of an infectious disease researcher, her STEM role models and more.

Why are you so passionate about advocating for STEM? Why is it so important to the nation's future?

We live in an increasingly complex world. As a recovering liberal arts major, I became a STEM advocate later in life. What I found was that for many young people, STEM learning and careers was not something they either had access to – and in the case of girls in particular – they were not encouraged to pursue careers in these areas.

It's exciting to see how far we've come even in the last decade. STEM is critical to our nation everything from the economy, to health care, food production, our safety – it's all backed by science, technology, engineering, and math. Sparking and nurturing an interest in STEM and providing young people the right tools to create change is critical to our future.

How has STEM impacted or influenced your professional career?

As the child of an infectious disease researcher and a nurse, I spent the first few years of my life in laboratories learning how to use a pipette for “fun.” However, being right-brained and growing up in a time where technology was not as

prolific as it is today, I chose to explore a marketing communications career after college.

What I found as my career evolved was that technology was driving so much of what I did from social media, to websites, to data. Then, 10 years ago, I moved into the government contracting sector and saw firsthand how critical technology is to driving our national priorities. This is when I truly understood the value of STEM education.

Most importantly, I'm excited about STEM career opportunities for women because there is still so much room for growth!

How do you help advocate for STEM? In terms of the development of STEM advocacy and outreach, what are you most proud of having been a part of?

At CNSI, my team leads companywide STEM Days in conjunction with Take Your Kids to Work Day each year. This effort held across offices in eight states not only provides a unique opportunity to help inspire youth to learn more about STEM topics and careers in STEM but also allows CNSI employees to show their children how the critical nature of the work they do contributes in helping improve the health of millions of Americans across the country.

We also developed a strong partnership with an incredible organization called [Learning Undefeated](#). They initially asked our team at CNSI to help them develop a health IT curriculum for underserved youth. A cross-functional team of CNSI leaders came together and supported the development of a program that empowered children to build and use technology that could improve health outcomes. It was inspirational to see our engineers and leaders applying the expertise they share each day with our federal and state customers to teach future STEM leaders.

In addition, we volunteered to help the Learning Undefeated team as they went through a rebrand effort in early 2018. The

CNSI marketing team provided an in-kind donation that included market research, thought leadership and graphic design to help develop a new brand that reflected national growth and expanded programming.

I have also been incredibly proud to support Learning Undefeated when they came to the aid of thousands of students in Texas after Hurricane Harvey destroyed so many schools. It was through Learning Undefeated's mobile laboratory that students across Texas were able to finish high school and graduate despite their science labs being destroyed by the hurricane.

This spirit to serve and innovate which is core to the organizations culture led them to launch Drop Anywhere Labs in the summer of 2019. This is one of the most exciting things I've been able to be part of while working with the organization. Inspired by their disaster recovery work in Texas, Learning Undefeated created custom-built high-tech shipping containers that will provide state-of-the-art laboratory and classroom space for middle and high school students in communities in need.

Their programming will touch nearly 200,000 students across 18 states in the next year. I couldn't be prouder to be involved with their work which continues making a difference in the lives of so many.

What's your best advice for aspiring leaders who want to follow in your footsteps?

Today, more than ever technology has leveled the playing field. Everyone has an opportunity to have an impact, to transform lives and to empower others. It doesn't matter where you sit in an organization or what job you perform, we all have the ability to make a difference each day. Given an opportunity to support the leaders of tomorrow – take it.

Who are your role models/mentors in the STEM space?

My STEM role model has always been my father, Dr. Robert Gilman – his love of science is contagious and his commitment to improving the health of so many, especially those living in poverty, has always been a guiding light for me.

My STEM inspiration for the future is my 6-year-old daughter, Mina. Her excitement about wanting to be an engineer to create things, to fly to the moon and to understand the world more deeply inspires me each day to continue to advocate for a world where every child has the chance to be exposed and encouraged to explore STEM careers.

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