

“Because I am a woman, I must make unusual efforts to succeed. If I fail no one will say, ‘she doesn’t have what it takes.’ They will say, ‘women don’t have what it takes.’” - Clare Boothe Luce

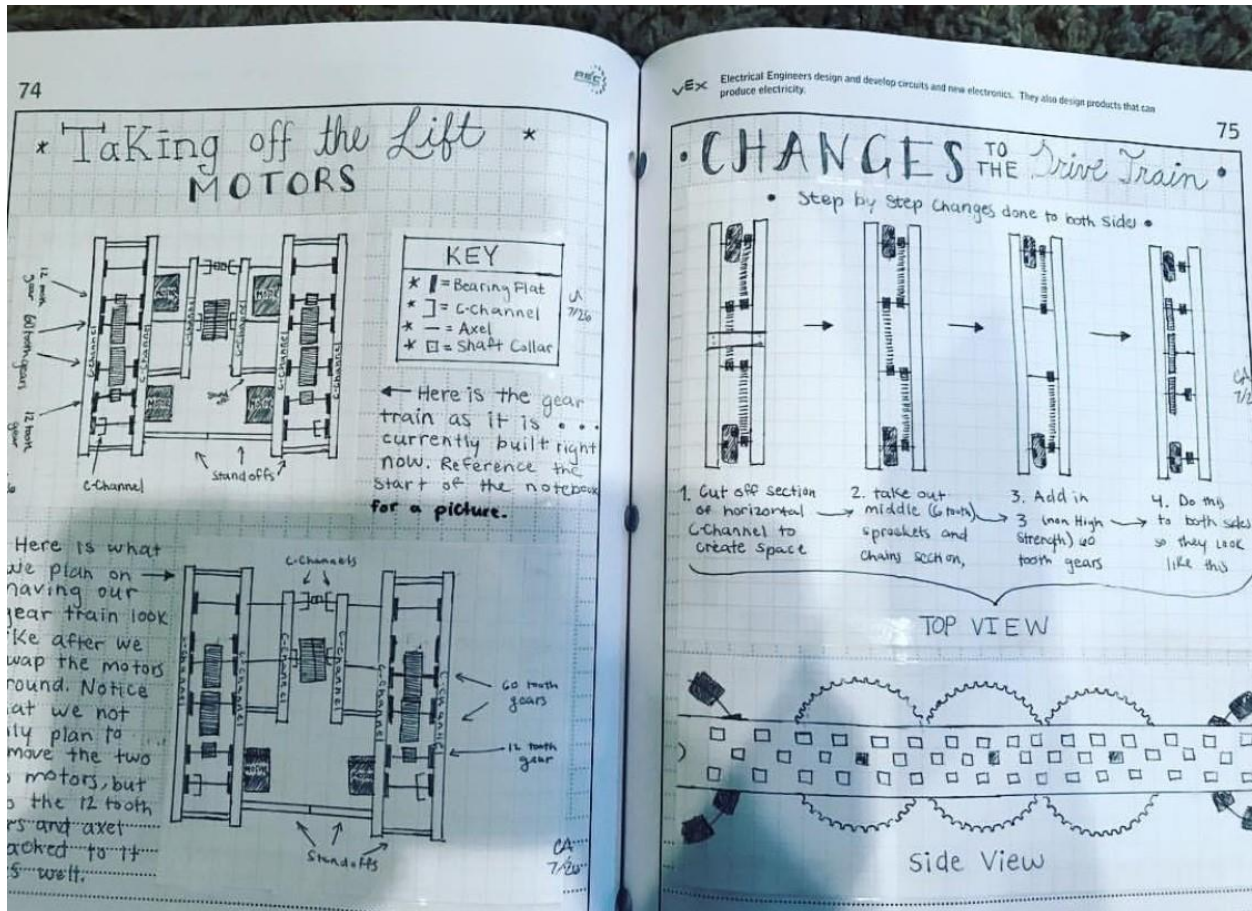
A girl is strong, vibrant, and bold. A girl encompasses every potential to drive a robotics program. A girl has POWER.

In an environment dominated by men, it is important for girls to know that they have the same potential, the same opportunity, and the same rights to failure and success as men have... because at one time I didn't.

In the fall of 3 years ago marked my initial discovery of the VEX Robotics program. I was sitting in homeroom, and we were on our computers. I looked over and saw my friend Sam playing an interesting computer game, and asked him what it was. He told me that this wasn't a game, it was for robotics. I didn't know what robotics was, because the middle school I went to at the time didn't offer it. Sam explained to me that he was programming for something called Virtual Worlds, and that you had to tell the robot on the screen what to do in code, and shoot little green balls into nets to score points. I was extremely intrigued by this, but moreover wondered how Sam was involved with robotics if I had never even heard of it. As it turns out, Sam rode a bus to the high school every day after school to work for a high school team with his brother Matt. I didn't know it yet, but the very next year I would go to that school, and work for that very team with Sam and his brother.



The first day of robotics came sooner than expected, just before the summer season. I am more or less introverted, so I was extremely nervous. My first day, there were no other girls. This made me even more worried, and I thought that everyone would judge me. I didn't know my team, but if I had known how accepting and kind they were before, I wouldn't have felt so bad! They asked my opinion on designs and asked if I had any of my own, but naturally I kept quiet most of the time. I was then asked what I wanted to do on the team. I remembered earlier I had seen a particularly interesting book sitting on the counter. I asked about it, and they explained to me that what I had seen was "the notebook", which was something they used to document how they build and design. They told me they didn't have someone to do it. I loved to write and draw and am extremely detail-oriented. It was a match made in heaven...or so I thought.



As the weeks went on, I progressively began to think of the notebook as a minimal job, and I had wanted to do something important. I thought that maybe my team wanted me to do notebook because they didn't think I was good enough to do anything else, maybe notebook was just a "girl's job". I wasn't quite as happy coming to vex anymore. I wondered why such a thing as "the Notebook" existed if it didn't matter. I tried other jobs, but it wasn't the same. I went through the motions of taping, drawing, and writing with as little interest as before I known what VEX was. It wasn't until my second tournament that I realized that Engineering Notebooks MATTER. The tournament was in Osseo, and it wasn't a particularly good day for us and our robot. Early in the day we weren't having a consistent autonomous, our Skills scores weren't as high as we hoped they'd be, and we weren't in any ranking destined for success. The day passed and we weren't on the path to really winning anything. Just when I was beginning to give up any hope of qualifying for state at that tournament, they announced the Design Award. We

had won! I was so excited, I was beginning to like Notebook again! We ended up going to 4 tournaments during our main season, winning 3 Design Awards and one Excellence Award overall.

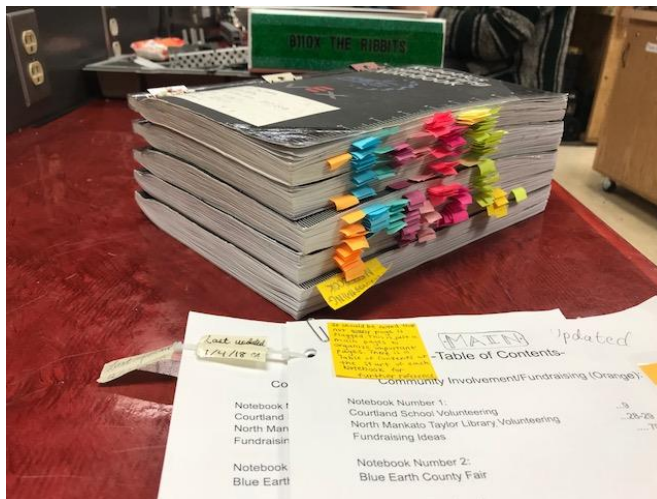


At this point, we all had our minds set on going to Worlds. We had a good robot, a good code, a good notebook, and all the motivation we needed. But alas, not everything was all peaches and cream, as the 8110X team had hoped. The State tournament went just as well as Osseo had gone, and we were counting on being picked for an alliance for finals. However things didn't quite work out that way, and at that point our only hope was in our notebook. We were all seated and ready for awards to be announced when Design Award came up. "...And the winner is 8110-B Kabuum!" We were absolutely thrilled...at first. We were "8110X The Ribbits" and as it turns out, another great team from our program won Design Award instead.

We were devastated. The bus ride home was a long one, and most of us weren't strong enough to fight back the tears. I fell into a depression as soon as I had realized it was all my fault. Had my notebook been better, had I worked a little harder, had I been a good teammate, we would be going to Worlds. As much as my team assured me that it wasn't my fault, I knew better. I didn't eat, I didn't smile, I overslept in the morning but couldn't fall asleep at night as the thought of failure haunted me at all hours of the day. My teammates and I still went to Worlds, just as spectators, and with time I overcame this hole in my life. It took a while, but I had begun to learn what VEX really is.



Jump forward to this season, the day after Worlds. I was motivated even more to qualify this year after seeing how awesome Worlds is. I had a new notebook, a newfound determination, and a whole season ahead of me. I kicked it into overdrive: looking up more unique methods to do notebook, spending hours on it at a time, and searching for ways to improve myself after each page. I am currently on my fourth notebook, with the support of my team helping me all along the way. When I thought I had failed my team a little under a year ago, I was just learning what VEX really is. It took me a while, but I now understand. VEX is all about trial and error: the Design Process itself. Failure is just as important as anything else in vex, be it a good notebook or a consistent program. Failure is the only true way to success, and as scared as I was of it, I now realize that sometimes it is more important than succeeding the first time.



Now, as the new Co Captain of a once all male team, I have walked into this season more driven, more knowledgeable, and more hardworking than I ever thought I possibly could have. I volunteer more often than ever, have become involved in helping mentor the younger VEX generation, and am even doing this online challenge, with the sole intent of passing on this experience. Like success, failure is important, and girls need to know that like boys, they have every right to it.

