Girl Powered is a phrase that has impacted my life and will continue to do so past my time in robotics. As it is my fourth year in the VEX Robotics program, I have had the pleasure of being a mentor for young girls in STEM. From being able to speak to young women and empower them to be their best to hosting Girl Powered events, it is embedded in my way of life.

It all started when I joined the Project Lead The Way program at my school as a freshman. My instructor was a young female straight out of college and I saw her frustration with the male students in my class not taking her very seriously. While she was a brilliant and intelligent person, they only saw gender and age. This aggravated me, as I had seen the same treatment as a peer of all boys. This didn’t stop in the classroom.

When I joined the VEX Robotics program at our school, I was confident that I was just as good as the boys in the room and could accomplish just as much. To my surprise I was met with comments such as “girls don’t use power tools” or “that’s mans work.” Anyone can imagine my reaction. I was baffled that a male student had the audacity to say such words to me. In the moment I responded quite quickly and with a lot of attitude. Looking back on it today, I would’ve simply just laughed.

I can laugh at these comments now because I have proven myself. Not that I ever really had to but when you’re trying to convince a young male that you are capable of doing what they can, proof helps. After years of being captain on 2886A, I have done every role. What I liked best was managing and doing notebook work. I enjoyed coaching the driver and having an outside look on it all. Once I stepped over to do the notebook work, management, and global/community outreach, I was taken less seriously.

The year I programmed, we broke and held the world skill score for a few weeks. The year I drove, we earned more trophies in a season than in John Hardin history, and the year I pulled over to notebook we won the World Championship design award. Before I was accomplished in the VEX world, I had confidence, I knew I could do it. Now that I am more involved and a senior in this program, I have done it. I proved and earned my spot to be amongst the ‘boys’ and showed that I could keep up with the pace.

To conclude, the point of my story is to show that this is a program for females, just as it is for males equally. Maybe right now, you have to prove yourself in the classroom for respect. Maybe you have to be confident and loud to get your points heard. Those are things that will be around for awhile as females push their way into the STEM world. That in no means means that we can’t do it. It doesn’t mean that we won’t. It simply means, we have to work a little harder, be a bit bolder, and be brilliant.