

Our team was founded with recognition that there was a disproportionate lack of female participants in STEM programs at our high school, and we derived, and still derive, our strength as a team by a mutual determination to change that reality.

Originally, our school only had one robotics team that was involved with a different STEM competition than VEX. Many of the girl participants currently on our VEX team, including myself, attempted to join this team in our freshman year. However, we were quickly disillusioned by the predominately male work environment, but more importantly, the lack of respect that was demonstrated to all members equally. As the team was ostensibly structured to reward members who had the most experience, this seniority-type structure meant that incoming girls were the highest demographic likely to drop out because they felt initially inadequate, and then were told that their opinions were not important because they knew nothing. Yet, we were told that experienced members of the team did not have the time to teach us what they did not know. This fed into a cycle of rejection and ignorance. My experience was that while I wanted to learn about robotics, I felt that my opinion was not valuable I did not have knowledge or skillsets as others. I also knew that I would never learn these skills because it was more burden than immediate reward to teach me.

It seemed as if only the boys that took STEM classes in middle school were enthusiastically taught and praised, but many of my female colleagues opted for language requirements or other electives instead, and felt that we could not enter a new STEM world because of it. Thus, when I, and many of my female friends, quit our school's robotics team, we thought that maybe we would be appreciated in another activity outside of the STEM community. I was disheartened at the fact that I could not do something that I really enjoyed: building objects, figuring how things worked, and using math to solve real-world problems. However, I knew I had to quit because my emotional well-being came before all else.

What happened next was a complete surprise. When I, and 2 of my female friends, quit the school's robotics team, we were quick to overgeneralize: that men did not want us to be part of the STEM, and that we needed to find an activity with more girls than boys in it to prevent this from ever happening again. However, we quickly learned the fallacy of that statement. First, there were other women, a select few that were already in the robotics team, that seemingly did not want us to be part of it for one reason or another. And secondly, that 5 guys quit the robotics team as well. While many of them quit because they also felt devalued, they collectively agreed that they could not stand for, or compete with, a team that had forced others out and made us feel inadequate.

I realized that day that people should not be judged by their gender, or any factor that leads to prejudice, but instead as an individual whose character is theirs alone. A person's actions should not be reflective of their gender, nor should their gender reflect them. We are our own people, and should take responsibility of that alone.



That day was also one of the most memorable days of my life because us 8 kids, dropouts of our school's established robotics team, pushed to fringes and told that we were inadequate, decided to make a new team, compete in a new competition, and uphold new values. We formed Team 3050A.

Our VEX Robotics team is an amalgamation of students from all different genders, ethnicities, walks-of-



life, backgrounds, and experiences. We believe that our diversity isn't our weakness, but our strength. And we utilize that strength to think differently, creatively, and as a motivation to work harder than anyone else. And because we were founded out of that traumatic experience, we work everyday to make an inclusive environment that teaches incoming members and that values, and listens, to other's opinions, no matter how much experience or

confidence they may have.



In addition, we do not want to risk becoming insular in our own team. We work hard to change the STEM community around us and at our school. We hold monthly informational community meetings that anyone can attend to learn about VEX Robotics and our team, and we were the leaders in organizing a STEM festival at our school to encourage all different types of people of join the STEM community.



We reach out to the middle and elementary schools to empower the younger generation be leaders in their own schools, and build young boys and girls with the same values they will carry on into high school, and the world beyond.

As a girl on our team, I can honestly say that it has not been easy in the slightest to change the preconceived notions of others. But what I do know is that my purpose is not to just build up my team in competitions, but also to build up a community that values girl participation and looks at the character of person instead of their superficial appearance. Us girls must band other to build each other up, not tear each other down.



Our team, 3050A, has resolved upon the strength of conviction that while competitive success is important, it is more important to leave a legacy that invites the next leaders, no matter who they are, to feel welcomed, and valued, in whatever community they choose.

We believe that a true sign of a leader is not the amount of people following them, but the amount of people they build up. We strive, with each practice, build-day, and competition, to be leaders in local, and global community.