

Girl Power Overcomes

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Six out of twenty. That's how many girls we have on our program, out of everyone who does VEX at our school. In the opinion of those girls, it's not a bad proportion, but it's not quite where we'd like it to be. We've had meetings with only one girl present, or even none at all. We know it's difficult for girls to get on VEX teams in the first place. But we are also susceptible to a mental pattern that makes us devalue our accomplishments on those teams, more likely to consider leaving, and reconsider when we have ideas to contribute.



Can we measure up?

Impostor syndrome is a common phenomenon; about seventy-five percent of people experience it at some point in their lives. To have impostor syndrome means to have "a collection of feelings of inadequacy that persist despite evident success", according to [hbr.org](https://www.hbr.org). People feel that they aren't good enough to do certain things they feel really passionate about. This can prevent qualified people from taking on projects they want to and can do, affecting their careers and their entire field.

Many women especially experience impostor feelings. As they are underrepresented in STEM and can be at a disadvantage for recognition such as promotions, they can come to feel that they don't belong. Some girls on our team have struggled with impostor syndrome. This is how two put their thoughts into words:



When I was in 7th grade and applying for the VEX team, I worried that I didn't have enough experience going into it. Other people seemed to know much more than I did and I was worried that my skills weren't good enough, even though I knew I could do it.



Knew I could do it!

I was project manager for my VEX team in eighth grade, mostly since no one else on the team wanted the job. It was my first year in VEX. Even as I learned more on the job, I constantly felt like I had nothing to offer during design conversations and leadership meetings. I gained the experience I needed, but my feeling of inadequacy didn't go away.

But we don't have to feel alone in our experience. Role models are an invaluable resource especially for those underrepresented in their career of choice.

We've learned from many, be they family, friends, or well-known figures who have been open about their struggles. They help us push through difficult times, because we know it's possible to come out the other side.

Most of us don't have just one role model, though. We draw on the strength of many to form our ambitions and passions. Now that we've lived in the STEM world for a while, we've discovered many female engineers and programmers to inspire us. Our first mentor, though, pushed girls who gravitated towards the notebook and sketches to do hands-on robotics. Mr. Nimick was our middle school STEM teacher and VEX mentor, and he put us all on the path to developing our skills. He never let us stay in our comfort zone long. He created an environment where we were free to make mistakes and grow. For those of us who struggled with perfectionism and impostor feelings, those years were invaluable.

Although we're in high school now, and our VEX leadership responsibilities have grown with us, we still use the lessons we learned in his care. We know



Everyone helps out!

collaboration may seem maddening at times, but it is vital to our success. We know we have to try new things, to seize every opportunity to improve. We know there is nothing about our gender that prevents us from excelling in STEM. In fact, our diversity of perspective helps the whole team when we need to look at a problem in a different light. Everyone on our team is valued and allowed to do the jobs they're good at, but also those in which they want to improve. We give everyone a chance, just as our very first STEM teacher gave countless chances to us.

When we hear the phrase "girl power," we think of people who are so strong as to overcome adversity just to reach equality with their peers. We think of people who step into a room of their team members, feel a waterfall of trepidation crash onto their head, and keep on walking forward. Impostor syndrome is just one of the experiences that can affect women's and girls' participation in the STEM fields. When we work to overcome it, we prove to ourselves that we can overcome any obstacle in our way. That is girl power.