

## **The Pink and the Blue**

*By Rianne Heffel*

When discussing the issue of gender diversity, it helps to first distinguish it from the more commonly discussed issue of gender equality. Gender equality issues are easy to spot: the fact there are far less than 50 women in the US Senate, far less than 250 women CEO's in the Fortune 500, far less than 25 US governors ... these are examples of gender inequality. And any reasonable member of a representative democracy would find offense to these inequities and would be devoted to correcting them.

However, the issue of gender diversity is more subtle. It refers to an old mindset many of us adopt almost by default. It is the code of the pink and the blue – the idea that some activities are just for boys and some activities are just for girls, and any deviation from these rules is a degree of abomination.

Is gender diversity still a problem in modern American society? All one has to do is take a walk in your own neighborhood and observe the businesses around you. For me, there is a gas station and an elementary school on my block. Every time I walk by, I see female school teachers and male gas station attendants. The pink and the blue, alive and well and right outside my door.

Some may debate the possibility that each gender is genetically predisposed to excelling in certain skills. Whether or not this is true is moot. Regardless of any potential predispositions, there is simply nothing to be gained by locking ourselves into these gender roles. Whenever a qualified man interested in a nurturing profession (teacher,

nurse, etc) rejects it due to a misguided fear of emasculation, our society is not being best served. Whenever a mechanically inclined woman feels discouraged from pursuing a profession in a male dominated service industry (car repair, construction, etc) due to fear of being harassed or perceived as less feminine, our society is not being best served.

So it is in our interest to promote gender diversity, to shatter the pink and blue code. But what is the best strategy to achieve this?

Change does not come easily to our more “traditionally-minded” citizens, and forcing gender diversity onto them can sometimes yield less than favorable results. Quotas and affirmative action might be necessary today, but they also inspire resentments. Instead, efforts to promote gender diversity should be focused on teaching our children that there are no boy careers or girl careers.

We do this by showcasing everyday people who are blazing their own trails in gender diversity. We introduce our children to the male nurses and female mechanics that live and work in their own neighborhood. And we give them the confidence to follow their own bliss regardless of stereotypes.

We the people have a constitutional right to pursue our own happiness, and when that pursuit is obstructed by archaic notions of gender roles, society as a whole suffers. The solution lies in the hands of a more tolerant future generation, one that sees the foolishness in gender-related limitations, and collectively rises above them.