International Newsroom

Diversity Helps STEM Education Reach Its Full Potential

by Julie Ragland, Senior Vice President, Chief Information Officer

One of the many things I find rewarding about working at Navistar is our support for STEM education – Science, Technology, Engineering and Math.

So many of the functions required for Navistar to succeed are STEM disciplines. This includes everything from product development to finance to the function I manage: information technology, or IT.

And I'm a firm believer that these functions are at their strongest when we actively encourage diversity at the same time we encourage STEM.

For example, it's heartening to see the diverse teams of high schoolers that

Navistar engineers and other employees are mentoring as part of our commitment to FIRST Robotics. When you speak to the members of these teams, their insights and collaboration serve as living examples of the power of diversity in action.

I believe IT folks should also stand up for diversity in our field. That's why one of the organizations I support is the National Center for Women & Information Technology (NCWIT).

I recently had the opportunity to deliver the keynote remarks at NCWIT-Wisconsin's "Aspirations in Computing" awards ceremony. This event has a very important mission: supporting young women who are active in technology at the high-school level, and encouraging them to stay in the IT pipeline.

In preparing for this event, I reviewed a number of great points NCWIT shared with me about the value of diversity in IT. And I think one of their best points is one that applies beyond IT, to embrace all of STEM.

It is this:

Research shows that diverse teams of people designing technology will result in improved products and solutions and a broader array of problems being addressed.

To me, that feels absolutely right.

When new solutions are developed by diverse teams, it stands to reason that those solutions will have a better chance of being impactful – simply because they are based on a more far-ranging set of ways of looking at the world, which is more likely to provide a comprehensive understanding of the human needs technology ought to address.

Technology should be as broad and creative as the people it serves. And in a world that is increasingly dependent on innovation, diversity gives us added power to innovate.

That's why my key message to the young award winners was this: IT needs women.

The IT profession already has a strong representation of women … but based

on the growing importance of IT, including its growing role in business, it's going to need a lot more women, with the diverse perspectives, skill sets and attributes that women bring to the field.

That point is critically important in its own right; but it also applies beyond IT, and beyond women alone, to the role of diversity in helping STEM education … and STEM innovation … live up to its full potential.

As I watched those young women receiving their "Aspirations in Computing" awards, it gave me new hope that we can indeed tackle the world's problems. And it made me feel good about the role of Navistar, in encouraging both STEM education and the diversity that gives STEM its strongest impact!

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