

Diversity matters

Much media attention is rightly directed at General Motors CEO Mary Barra, who started as an engineer (and SAE Member), working her way through the ranks and into the corner office of one of the world's largest automakers. She serves as an inspiration for all engineers, but especially for female engineers.

There are plenty of female rock stars in the various mobility industries that SAE serves, doing innovative work that sometimes goes underappreciated. So it's appropriate for the organization, committed as it is to DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion), to bring their accomplishments to light. One need only read through past issues of *Update* to see how extensively SAE has put the spotlight on them.

"Diversity matters," said Lori Gatmaitan, SAE Foundation Fundraising, Awards & Scholarships Director. "A simple Google search will demonstrate its strong business case—it's better for employee morale and retention and more widely sought-after products, thus increasing the bottom line. Diverse teams make better business decisions. Diversity ensures that companies have the right mix of people, which includes the interconnected nature of categorizations such as race, class, and gender, and encourages unity, not uniformity. Inclusion is the actionable part—



Maura Chmielowiec was one of the hosts of the “Women in Engineering & Effective Communication” Mentor Mixer.

do people feel welcome, can they come to the table as their authentic selves and feel valued, safe, and understood?”

“These conversations are important,” Gatmaitan added. “45 percent of all U.S. employees, and 42% of women, report experiencing discrimination in the workplace. A commitment to cultural competence is paramount within all organizations, and SAE is well positioned to tell the stories about the impact our members are making each and every day.”

[Member Connection](#), SAE's online community for members and volunteers, offers several channels through which SAE gives voice to diversity. One of them,



SAE International's AWIM program, funded by the SAE Foundation, reaches over 100,000 students annually.

[“Mentor Mixers”](#) has diverse professionals offer their insights on technical and/or “soft” matters. In May, a Mentor Mixer was held on the topic of [“Women in Engineering & Effective Communication.”](#) Six distinguished women served as hosts and offered their insights. Ninety comments were posted.

Maura Chmielowiec, a young engineer and strong SAE advocate, offered the following insight during the mixer: “As a super car nerd personally and working in the automotive industry, I have had

experiences with people assuming that I wasn't as knowledgeable about vehicles as my male counterparts. I bought my first car when I was 14 off the side of the road as a project car and to learn more about how a vehicle worked. Working on the car growing up was an amazing experience and gave me enough knowledge about the car as a whole system to talk with other car enthusiasts.

“Additionally, my exposure to my project car growing up encouraged me to pursue a career in the auto industry. I have found

that in situations where I feel that someone has made a wrong assumption about my background knowledge on cars, I find a professional way to connect with them and share my experience of owning a project car and try to tie my prior experience into that conversation. Although it can seem a bit frustrating to have to overcome some individuals' preconceived assumptions, with just a bit of tact and communication the assumption can be eliminated and changed for the future!!"

Host Kinsey Olson Sovern had an interesting comment in that same chat: "I would describe myself as a tomboy, or really, just a regular person who disregards traditional gender roles and appreciates the uniqueness of individuality."

The [Chat with the Expert Discussions](#) is another Member Connection channel through which DEI was explored in 2020. Two corporate directors of engineering and a CEO were among the nine women hosting the year's first female-focused chat, "[Women in Leadership](#)," held in March. In that thread, host Elizabeth Griffith posted a quote from Eleanor Roosevelt: "No one can make you feel inferior without your consent."

Griffith also offered a quote of her own: "The passion and drive for success that women have brought to industry has started

a slow seismic shift that benefits everyone."

More recently, in October, a chat was held on the topic of "[Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion and the Future of the Workforce](#)." The subject matter expert was Cheryl Thompson, Founder and CEO of CADIA (Center for Automotive Diversity, Inclusion & Advancement).

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- Elizabeth Griffith

"In my experience, there needs to be commitment from senior leadership, which comes from them defining why diversity, inclusion, and equity are important for the success and sustainability of their business," she wrote. "The next step is for senior leaders to listen without

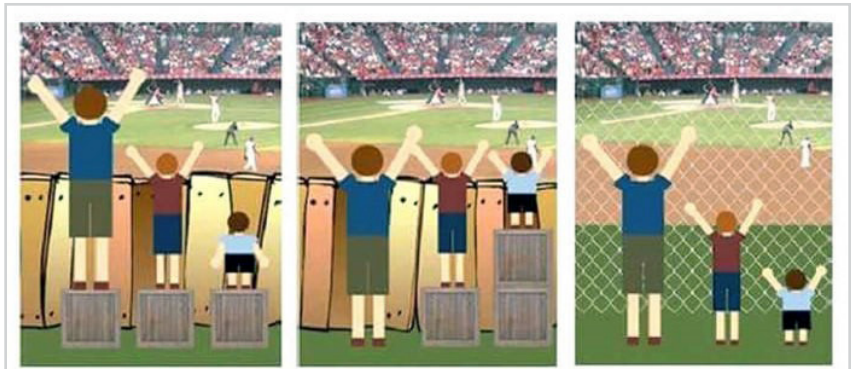
trying to solve to gain feedback on what the culture gaps are, which will lead to allyship and solutions that include everyone to create that productive and comfortable working environment."

In a summary video post, Thompson spelled out the chat's take-aways: "Number one, diversity in thought, perspective, and experience really leads to better solutions, products, and services. Number two, being intentional with expanding our talent pool is really critical to building our future. And number three, we have to be intentional about making our cultures more inclusive, building more trust and empowerment, to be able to retain and develop all this great talent that we're attracting because these

are our future leaders.”

In the mixers and chats, the importance of eradicating stereotypes at a young age was often noted. Unlike many STEM programs, SAE’s award-winning A World In Motion (AWIM) program is conducted to reach ALL students, building equity and empowering young learners to spark their natural curiosity, build confidence, and impart the knowledge they need to succeed. With challenges tailored to four grade bands, the program provides educators with all the tools they need to help make STEM fun and engaging for students regardless of gender, ethnicity, or geographic and socioeconomic background. By combining practical, experiential learning with mentorship, AWIM delivers solid results with measurable impact.

The SAE Foundation is committed to deliver hands-on, project-based STEM learning experiences to ALL PreK-college students, paving an equitable path to future STEM career opportunities. Join us in the mission to fill the



“I thought this graphic does a great job of visualizing the difference between equality and equity. The first box to the left represents equality, the middle box represents equity. Equality assumes the same for everyone regardless of the situation or circumstance. Equity provides people with what they need to succeed—it can be different. The last box to the right is an example of systemic change—reviewing the ways we recruit, hire, assess performance, and promote to ensure everyone has a fair chance.”



- Cheryl Thompson, Founder and CEO of CADIA (Center for Automotive Diversity, Inclusion & Advancement).

talent pipeline with diverse, STEM-fluent future innovators. Learn more at www.saefoundation.org. ■

By Patrick Ponticel, *Update* editor