



Missed Opportunities

Posted by [Tony Velocci](#) at 5/23/2010 9:00 PM CDT

In an era when women have eclipsed men in college enrollments in the U.S., and are leaders in science and industry, but have not selected engineering careers in aerospace as often as they have chosen other science-based fields, you have to wonder what companies need to do to encourage more technically-oriented females to join their ranks.

This is about more than just meeting HR guidelines and building a more diverse workplace in a world hell bent on political correctness. The aerospace industry, comprised mostly of men, is graying and will be losing much of its engineering and technical talent in coming years. The fact that the industry has been so slow to reach out to women in the past is also why there are relatively few females in aerospace boardrooms.

Eventually the industry will reach the point where gender no longer plays a role describing accomplishments-whether that role is an engineering manager or a member of a board of directors. Realistically, aerospace will remain a male-dominated business for some time to come. In the meantime, self-enlightened aerospace companies of all sizes would be well served to think harder about how they can tap the larger talent pool and fill more engineering and technical jobs with women.

Women in Aerospace Foundation, Inc., recently hosted a conference in Washington dedicated to expanding women's opportunities for leadership and increasing their visibility in the aerospace community. On the agenda was a 75-minute panel discussion that examined the topic of women in the boardroom. Participants included such prominent female executives as Deborah H. Alderson, president of Defense Solutions Group, SAIC, and Kay Sears, president of Intelsat General Corp. All of the panel members believe the aerospace industry is changing in terms of expanding women's opportunities for leadership and expanding their visibility, but the rate of progress could be faster. The biggest obstacle: the traditional "good old boy's network" that is rooted in the industry's culture, and cultural change comes slowly-all the more reason for aerospace companies to be more aggressive in recruiting women.