

URL: <https://stvp.stanford.edu/clips/empowering-girls-through-play>

GoldieBlox Founder and CEO Debbie Sterling recalls the moment she discovered what she wanted to do with her engineering degree. She says construction toys for little girls was something she wish she had as a kid and talks about how that would give them something more educational and empowering to play with than what was traditionally found in the girls toy aisle.



Transcript

- [Debbie] I had been searching, ever since that day I graduated, to find my passion, you know.. The thing that Steve Jobs said, "Go out and find your passion".. I wanted to find that for myself, but I didn't know what it was.. And so I spent about seven years with different jobs.. And finally, I found it.. And it happened one day, I had got together with a group of friends and we started this tradition called Idea Brunch, where we'd get together and each person would get up in front of the group and share their latest hare-brained idea for an app or a company or whatever.. Just like one of those things you kind of muse about when you're driving in the car.. Of course, over breakfast.. And in that session one day, my friend Christy, who studied engineering with me here at Stanford, got up.. She started complaining about how few women there were in our engineering classes..

And she said, you know, as a little girl, I got interested in engineering because I grew up playing with my older brother's hand-me-down construction toys, like Legos and Erector sets and Lincoln Logs.. And that's what got me interested in engineering.. And I kind of, in that moment, thought back to my childhood growing up with me and my little sister.. We never played with any toys like that at all because those were boys' toys.. And I remember, in my engineering classes, a lot of the assignments that we did, we built out of construction toys.. And I realized that if I had grown up with this stuff, I might've thought of myself as an engineer far younger than by the time I was 18 years old.. And so, it sounds really corny, but the moment she had this idea at Idea Brunch of engineering toys for girls, was the moment where it was like, the fireworks went off, the lightning bulb, like I just knew, oh my God, this is what I was born to do.. I knew it instinctively in that moment.. And so, the very next day, I decided I'm going to go to the toy store and get a lay of the land here.. I'm sure times have changed since Christy and I were kids..

I'm sure there's got to be a lot of toys for girls that encourage engineering thinking.. So, I went to the toy store and this is what I found.. I couldn't believe it.. The pink aisle.. So, this was like the most disgusting, like dolls that look like street corner girls.. It was fairies, princesses, tea sets, ironing boards.. I mean, it was all about domesticity.. It's all about the way that you look.. Meanwhile, in the blue aisle, was all of the smart math and science games, heroes, action figures, and it just felt like, this isn't fair..