

WomenInc.

BUSINESS BOARDS ENTREPRENEURSHIP ENTERTAINMENT WORKLIFE INDULGE EDITORIALS SHOP CONTACT

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EDITORIALS

Viva la Différence

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author:

WomenInc Staff

In the French language, each noun has a masculine or a feminine character. A dog, le chien, is masculine; a cat, la chat, is feminine. From an outsider's perspective, some of these gender constructs can appear quite random, even humorous. But, we are guilty of similar gender constructs regarding items in this country, such as food and even jobs.

My husband and I enjoyed a wonderful steakhouse near the airport in downtown Indianapolis when we would rendezvous while I worked in Paris and my husband worked at Indiana University in Bloomington. Invariably, I would order a martini and strip steak-rare. My husband would order a Cabernet Sauvignon and filet mignon-medium. Displaying equal consistency, the waiter would serve the vodka and strip steak to the man and the red wine and tender filet to me. We would laugh and discreetly switch what the waiter placed in front of us.

The assignment of gender differences, even to inanimate objects, leads to differences in expectations from women and men. I am very proud to serve, since 2012, on the Board of LKQ, a recycler and distributor of auto parts. Yet, when I joined the company, many of my friends and business associates were surprised to



learn that I would have an interest in the auto parts business. Their reactions emanated from their expectations of a woman's interests and from societal assumptions about the automotive industry. The days of conceiving of any company's output as interchangeable "widgets" has thankfully passed. We all take pride in the specific materials we produce, customer needs we serve, and social interests we address. I may not have spent my youth crawling under cars or looking under their hoods, but, I value conservation and efficiency, beautiful design, and enhancing peoples' lives through affordable products and service. LKQ addresses these concerns. As a woman, I am no less capable than any man of guiding a company in pursuit of these goals.

Luckily, many of the executives and board members with whom I interact share this perspective. LKQ serves as one of the best examples of a company in a male-dominated industry that is making changes to offer more opportunities for both men and women. This oftentimes involves educating both women and men to women's capabilities. Education as a means of enhancing the development of talent, regardless of gender, has been endorsed at the top of LKQ. Our CEO thoughtfully recommended we use some of the extra cash generated from the 2018 federal tax cut to increase wages at certain jobs and to offer over 100 scholarships of \$2,500 to men and women who want to continue their schooling at a community college, university or trade school.

Furthermore, we employ very talented people. At the annual Sales Masters awards trip this past June, which recognized the best and most productive sales people in LKQ's North American business during 2017, more than 25% of the award winners were female. In addition, the board recruited three new board members, two of whom are women, this August as our business expanded from \$6 to \$12 billion over the last six years and from a largely U.S business to one that derives about 50% of the company's revenues from outside the U.S.

I have loved learning about a new industry and integrating my understandings about it into my broader knowledge of consumer goods, financial strategy, technology and accounting. We at LKQ never have a dull moment, as the business grows and our employees, male and female, continue to stretch their talents and knowledge in a traditionally male-dominated business. Auto parts are "gender-free." All of us on the board grow through our experiences together and keep us true to our motto of "LKQ Proud."

Contributed by: *BY BLYTHE MCGARVIE, Former Professor, Accounting & Management, Harvard Business School*

