

# You Go (Goldie) Girl!

**New doll and toy set geared for inspiring young engineering misses—not misters**

Are you familiar with the *Bob the Builder* or *Jimmy Neutron* franchises? How about *Lego Man* or *Sid the Science Kid*? No matter. But notice they are all male-focused? Indeed, these kiddie icons are representative of the fact that most anything pop-culture-related having to do with instilling in youngsters an interest in engineering and manufacturing is directed towards boys. It is therefore not surprising that about 90 percent of America's engineers are male gendered.

Well, forget all that and meet Goldie and her start-up “engineering firm” GoldieBlox ([www.goldieblox.com](http://www.goldieblox.com)) — the alter ego, if you will, of Debbie Sterling, a San Francisco-based engineer and entrepreneur with industrious plans and grand vision.

As reported in various newspaper and online reports, Sterling's vision entails turning the tide in the boys club better known as the field of engineering.

A Stanford-educated engineer, Sterling was one of among 181 women — and more than 500 men — graduating in 2005 from the university's engineering school. The eye-opening disparity in those graduation numbers inspired her to strike a blow for the distaff side of engineering.

So is Sterling more entrepreneur than engineer? “Engineer first,” she says, “although, I did have a pretty impressive raspberry stand in front of my house growing up. This is my first company. I haven't done anything like this before.”

Sterling adds that the GoldieBlox venture has been a daily learning ex-

perience; learning, for example, that there's a grass-roots passion in the country regarding the apparent disregard for women in high-tech manufacturing. “There are so many people that are passionate about this cause, and they are springing up left and right to help out,” she says. “It takes a village to build a company.”

What sort of toy experience will engage girls in engineering, you ask? What could distinguish it from the male mainstays like Lego, Lincoln Logs, Tinker Toys and the venerable Erector Set? Sterling reportedly spent more than a year researching these questions and, eventually, Goldie — Sterling's female engineer persona was on the job — supported by a GoldieBlox tool set that includes an accompanying storybook about its heroine (also available as an iOS app); a line of interactive, build-oriented book chapters; plastic “parts”; some ribbon; and a group of five toy friends.

As Goldie's story progresses, the book instructs participants to design and build a series of increasingly complex devices that will help Goldie accomplish certain tasks. Every time the “build” icon is displayed, girls are required to replicate Goldie's illustrated construction efforts; failing to do so ends the “round” (story). A good example is the book's first scenario — Goldie must create a spinning machine for her dog. Sterling believes that by getting girls to build for Goldie, they'll come to see design-and-build as functions with their own social value. Not much of a reach, actually, given the long history of social reform initiatives credited to women.

In a 2012 *Atlantic* online piece by Rebecca J. Rosen, Sterling explains that “Girls really want to help people and they care about nurturing,” Sterling says. “And engineers are solving some of the world's biggest problems and helping people.”



The *Atlantic* story relates that one big highlight for Sterling during her research was “when (the girls) wrap this ribbon around this wheel and they pull it and it spins. It's such a basic engineering principle of a wheel spinning on an axle, but it is this magical moment for every girl (that was) tested.”

To date, Sterling says her company has shipped “over 35,000 toys and we are now launching into retail stores. We're expanding into a series of book-and-construction toys that will take Goldie on new adventures and introduce new engineering principles.”

Speaking of principles, it appears that Sterling's reasons for creating GoldieBlox transcend profit alone. Yes, turning a profit is important — financial success is sure-fire verification of Sterling's belief that there exists an untapped pool of would-be female engineers. But she also believes the fate of U.S. manufacturing lies in encouraging *all* of our young people to put down the joystick and pick up a slide rule.

“The reason I've created GoldieBlox is to get more potential engineers into the pipeline,” she says. “I worry we lose kids before they even enter middle-school. As young as age four, kids start to form opinions on what gender belongs in what career path. We need engineering as part of the core elementary school curriculum — at the time when kids are forming their identities, what their interests are, what they want to be when they grow up. I didn't discover engineering until my freshman year of college and sort of fell into it accidentally. We need to spark that interest and passion (when they are) much younger.” **PTE**

(Sources for this story: [theatlantic.com](http://theatlantic.com); [parenting.com](http://parenting.com); [time.com](http://time.com); [forbes.com](http://forbes.com).)



Debbie Sterling, GoldieBlox creator.