

The importance of promoting equal opportunity and How cultural diversity for Asian and Pacific Americans working in the Federal Government could be improved.

By Erin Derosa

Equal opportunity is not just an important idea to me, but also something I personally strive for in my every day life. As a female in the year 2010, I have dealt with several situations, in both the public and private aspects of my life that have created challenges for me to overcome. I mention this not to get sympathy, but to reinforce that, despite common attitudes, equality is still a very huge issue in our world today.

I will never forget the first time I told a male friend I wanted to pursue a career in aviation. He looked at me, laughed, and said, "You can not be serious about that. Do you really think you will be able to fly planes?" Not only was I surprised to hear his response, but I was also shocked by his mentality of aviation only being for men. At the time, I was naive about what I wanted to pursue in the aviation industry, but I was still not ready for someone else to question my goals.

From that conversation forward, I was on a mission to prove that I was indeed capable of achieving everything and more than the guys around me. After high school, I enrolled in an aviation program in Ohio, and I set out to fulfill my dreams and passions in aviation.

It did not take more than a day at school for me to realize that I truly was in a man's world as I sat in my first orientation class as one of only three girls in the program that year. Unfortunately, I decided that being a pilot was not my dream job. Despite this realization, unlike one other girl in my class, I never turned back on my aviation dreams. I have continued to pursue my goal of one day working within the aviation community, not only because it is my passion, but also to prove that everyone has a fighting chance for what they truly desire.

Throughout my time spent learning the ins and outs of aviation, I have been questioned by many people, including my own parents, as to why I want to be part of the aviation community. My answer to them is, "First I love air transportation, and I am very passionate about it. Second, there are not a lot of women in the industry." The second comment always throws my father into a tizzy, as he yells at me that people are going to think I am a feminist, and this and that.

In reality, I am not for or against feminism, but I do believe in equal representation throughout all aspects of life. It is not fair to deny someone anything based on the color of their skin, gender, religion, etc. It is also not fair to question anyone's mind and ability based on their physical appearance or beliefs. In my opinion, we are all people, and we all deserve the chance to prove our strengths.

Unfortunately, what seems like a majority of the population, disagrees with the attitude I hold towards equality. Numerous employers pay little or no attention to the notion of equal opportunity. Many times, an employee is hired based on who they know, not their level of education or performance. In my opinion, there should not be such thing as a question of whether

or not to hire a man or woman, Asian or African American, Christian or Muslim. I feel that people should get the chance to share their own story, and the chance to achieve their own goals.

I have mentioned my challenges and opinions not to preach, but because I feel it is my duty to help empower other minorities to conquer their goals. I personally feel that “equal opportunity” is a concept that no one should even have to contemplate or consider because we are all already at the level of equal, but that is not our world today. It has become a personal mission of mine to work towards equality for all by educating myself and others because equality is simply what I believe in. We have come far as a nation, but as the saying goes, “we have miles and miles to go before we sleep.”