

How to give a gender inclusive (IT) presentation or conference.
By Jenna Gretsch

On average I attend around 5-10 IT conferences per year. With the exception of conferences specifically geared towards women it is a blase observation to note the lack of women or the lack of an environment that is anywhere near gender balanced. In fact I often wonder how it affects my psyche to see, read from and listen to such a surfeit of men on both a daily basis in my regular job and also at the conferences I attend on a regular basis. Sometimes while daydreaming at such conferences my mind will ache and wonder what it might be like to go to a library conference or a dental hygienist conference or an educational conference. Do people at those conferences *pine* for more men to be present? And then there are the conferences where I forget that I'm an anomaly and I forget what it is like to be in a room with fifty percent women. In other words, I acclimate. How horrifying.

What is to be done? This question is also a rather perennial indulgence in the sense that I'm privileged enough to be able to consider it and attempt something, anything in response to it.
But I am, and I must, so here goes.

My goal is to give the people (sometimes organizations) in charge of the conferences and the presenters at such conferences more options, or maybe more understanding on the differences between neutral and radical. And maybe to stir the pot a bit regarding which types of practices bring about change.

There are many conferences that do an ok job. They will make the effort to get women presenters on the docket. They will make t-shirts available in small. They will do what they think they can to be gender inclusive. I applaud them. This is not a chiding. I simply think we need better fortification, better understanding of the powers of conformity and convention and more creative multi-faceted solutions even if they are not complete solutions.

The following is a list. (Then a flyer for printing or distribution) The left column is what I think acceptable, a baseline, what I think Neutral should be. We'll call it Neutral. The right column is radical, we'll call it Radical. Presenters and organizers can choose their model, to be Neutral or Radical. Or to be shades of both. Perhaps people will add to the lists, or contend them. Perhaps they'll think it's a shortsighted vision that needs altering; bring it on!! Discussions are encouraged. Implementation remains the goal.

Neutral	Radical
Ditch the gender specific pronoun “he” and use “it”. If you slip, include the obligatory “or she”.	Use the pronoun “she”, yes even for describing a TCP Handshake. Actively include “or he” as an add on.
Offer no disclaimer introduction to your presentation but proceed to include “it” as your pronoun of choice.	Offer a specific disclaimer regarding countering the ubiquity of the pronoun “he” by using “she” instead.
Include women as presenters.	Include more than 50% women presenters.
Advertise in places women might be more inclined to receive the information.	Actively recruit women to the conference. Offer monetary incentives such as reduction in fees. Pay women to sit in all conference sessions to the point that the sessions are at least 40% women.
Include unisex-t-shirts in *all sizes*.	Include differently styled t-shirts if for no other reason than having an alternative on the t-shirt table that many men will see.
Give gender neutral swag bags with gender neutral objects.	Give mixed swag bags so that men have to discard tampons or hairbrushes (I’m on the fence about this one. Is it wasteful? Is it ineffective?)
Provide information about daycare nearby.	Provide onsite daycare.
In Birds of a Feather sessions have facilitators encourage men to be aware of the ratio of speaking to listening they are doing.	In Birds of a Feather sessions have facilitators encourage men to speak less and women to speak more
Leave out stories regarding your girlfriends or wives unless you are a lesbian or the story is about their technical prowess.	Actively include stories about incredibly talented technical women.
If you must tell user error stories involving PEBKAC or layer 8’s, have the examples be male. “Poor technology challenged Uncle Jack”.	For stories involving PEBKAC’s have the PEBKAC’s be male and the “solver” or techy be female. “Poor technology challenged CIO Mr. Henry needs help of badass technical Network Engineer Rochelle .”
For female presenters with children include stories about your children do not hide the fact that you have them.	For male presenters with children include stories about your active involvement in raising your children.

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