

EDUCATIONAL

## Five mindful engineering career tips: Set a vision and live it out

**Engineers need to begin working on their careers with the end in mind, to paraphrase author Stephen Covey. Engineering career decisions should consider opportunities, balance, the long view, flexibility, and developing well-rounded expertise.**

BY DAVID P. HOSTETTER MAY 19, 2020

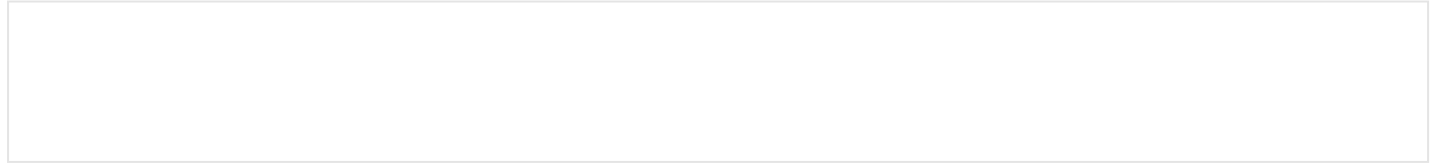


*Courtesy: SCE Engineers and David P. Hostetter*

I never could have predicted the path that I took to get where I am now, as I look back on the first quarter of my engineering career. That said, I am where I planned to be at this point in my life. I had a vision for where I wanted to be and where I want to be 10 years from today, and after another decade.

An engineering career vision is not a pathway engraved in stone, but instead should be approached as a series of goals to achieve, with a set of principles to stay on track. Five tips to help an engineering career follow.

# 1. Engineering opportunities in life



One way to look at our lives is as a series of choices or opportunities. We are all living an adventure.

Little things add up. We are presented with a multitude of mini-opportunities each day:

- Do I eat cereal or eggs and bacon? (But seriously, who chooses cereal when offered BACON?!)
- Do I catch up on email, or do I spend time mentoring a younger engineer?
- Do I read the article about best practices, or get my fourth cup of coffee?
- Do I eat lunch at my desk, or go out with coworkers?
- Do I leave work on time to spend time with my family, or stay late to work on my presentation?
- Do I work out, or watch TV?
- Do I do the dishes today, or maybe tomorrow?

Some individual choices may not have an enormous impact on our lives, but every choice adds up over time, which collectively does impact our lives. Be consistent with principles and choose the small opportunities that align with the chosen vision.

Stephen R. Covey's "[The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People](#)," Franklin Covey Co., offers more details on how to apply these ideas, in the second habit, which discusses starting with the end in mind.

## 2. Balance engineering life

Live a life of balance in engineering and elsewhere. Life is not all about work. Work hard and play hard.

Know when to say yes and when to say no. Sometimes in life, clear-cut life altering decisions present themselves. In these times, it is easy to know whether to say yes or no to the opportunity. Other times, the "right decision" may not be as clear. In these times, cling to your principles, get guidance from trusted advisors and be firm in your choices. Your "yes" should be a final-yes and your "no" a final-no. Make the decision and move forward with your life. It is neither helpful nor tenable to live a life of constant doubt and "what-ifs."



*Work hard, and play hard, advises David P. Hostetter PE, LEED AP, CEM, regional RMC manager at SCS Engineers. It's important to be intentional in your career and personal life. Courtesy: SCE Engineers and David P. Hostetter*

### 3. Engineering: Take the long view

Engineers often can see the longer view with many projects. They should apply that practice to their careers. Charles R. Swindoll is quoted as first saying, "Life is 10% what happens to you and 90% how you react to it." What did I learn from my 90%?

### 4. Be flexible in engineering, career, life

We can use our goals and our principles to help guide us through sometimes tough decisions. Use opportunities and hardships to mold yourself into the person that you want to be. Setbacks are normal and to be expected. Our path towards our vision is not a straight line. Instead, it is a flexible path that routes around and sometimes through unexpected obstacles in life. It isn't easy.

### 5. Engineer a well-rounded expert

Be well-rounded overall and an expert in specific fields. We are passionate about particular areas in our companies or fields; it might be technology, building relationships, design, art, teaching, mentoring, etc. For me, it's making a difference in the world through my work, helping my clients and coworkers, mentoring and technology.

Listen to yourself and invest time and resources into developing skills in your areas of passion. Do as much work in these areas as you can. Become the person other people call when there's a problem. This expertise will help advance your career.

On the flipside, push yourself to understand all aspects of your company and field from a high level. You never know what you might be doing next or who your next boss may be. Having a good general understanding of everything will help during the inevitable changes in life.

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