

## Five Things I Learned During My First Ten Years as an Engineer

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**Go to graduate school.** A rigorous, unwavering graduate program will propel you into your career with a level of independent problem-solving ability that you wouldn't have garnered as an undergraduate student. Throughout your time as a graduate student and into your career, people will tell you that you've wasted your time—none of those people went to graduate school.

**Write requirements.** The most successful people in your workplace are those that can distill noise and chaos into a formal set of requirements, then develop toward and test against those requirements. Requirements define when your work is finished; there is no other way to drive a project to completion. Oddly enough, this ability does not come naturally—it's a learned skill that takes time and discipline.

**Take notes.** Keep an engineering notebook—each time you run an experiment or investigate a problem, record your steps one by one. Take time to write down all of your observations and measurements. You will quickly gain your coworkers' trust and admiration by citing notes on paper rather than recalling data from memory.

**Keep your opinions to yourself.** Don't share negative feelings about a coworker's performance or your perceived lack of value in something. You're probably wrong anyway—so give others the benefit of the doubt. If something is truly a waste of time, it will come to light without your help. On the other hand, it's almost impossible to dislike someone who continuously offers praise and encouragement.

**Get scared.** Periodically seek new projects and roles that force you to learn new skills and interact with unfamiliar people. These experiences need to be terrifying and challenging; that is how you grow both personally and professionally. Spending several years in your comfort zone with a familiar role is ultimately a disservice to yourself.