



Nita Patel, NH Engineer of the Year Acceptance Speech

Thank you. I am truly humbled, honored and, at the same time, quite excited to accept the Engineer of the Year award. This is very cool.

First, I want to thank my parents for their unwavering support. I've heard it said before that as we grow older, we don't really change. We just become more clearly ourselves. As my mom will tell you, I have always been different. I thank my parents for nurturing and encouraging me as I grew to become more clearly myself, the black sheep, an engineer, in a family of medical and business professionals. When I joined Texas Instruments Defense after graduation from Southern Methodist University in Dallas, I worked on infrared and fire control systems for Bradley tanks. My parents, strong Jains and ardent believers in pacifism, were a bit surprised but encouraged me nevertheless to build the best equipment possible if that is what I was going to do. My parents' wise guidance led me to have pride in my work and shaped my success. Thank you, Mom and Dad.

Second, I want to thank the person responsible for starting my volunteer involvement with IEEE, the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers. When I was a junior at college, the IEEE student branch vice-chair (Alex Relyea) encouraged me to chair a student professional awareness conference. I was hooked and have been an active IEEE Volunteer ever since. Even after 16 years of marriage, Alex never complains when I come home to tell him that I have volunteered for yet another role, whether it be a mentor for a local robotics team, part of the computer society board or, as I announced recently, candidate for IEEE-USA president-elect. Alex, thank you for challenging, encouraging and helping me in ways unimaginable.

I have been extremely blessed to have been surrounded by wonderful colleagues at work and encouraging volunteers in IEEE, Toastmasters, Society of Women Engineers and the United States Chess Federation who have shaped and transformed me. A few of these individuals join me in celebration tonight. Don, Roger, Tom, Jim, Madeleine, Stoney ... Each of you have inspired me, helped me discover hidden passions and made me stronger. Thank you for shaping and sharing my life's journey.

There are so many others, teachers, co-workers, friends and strangers, whom I don't have the time to acknowledge. Also, I have no idea who some of you are! You may think it unusual not to know those who have influenced you. But it's not really.

In each of our lives, unseen forces (people, events, inventions) affect us. Often, we, as engineers, are the unseen forces affecting and advancing humanity. Engineers turn ideas into reality, transform dreams into inventions and change the world around us. Let me share an illustrative story.

A few weeks ago, my father had double heart bypass surgery. An EKG and heart catheter made possible by engineers allowed the doctors to detect several blockages during a routine, yearly check-up. Engineers who he never met and will never know saved his life.

The night that IEEE NH chair, Don Sherwood, tried to reach me to inform me of the award, I was in the midst of changing plans to travel to Louisiana. For my dad, a half-day in the ICU had turned into three. His blood pressure was bottoming out and bouncing around like crazy. He was on extreme blood pressure medication. Shortly after we arrived, we discovered that my dad had been given this extreme medication because of a faulty blood pressure monitor. Technology that a few days before saved him from having a massive heart attack was now the cause of his suffering and our anxiety.

Once he was taken off the medication, his recovery was lightning fast. He was dismissed after just one day in a regular room. At home, he enjoyed connecting with his grandkids and other family via iChat and watching live cricket from around the globe, which ironically was raising his blood pressure— all of this was made possible by engineers.

Engineers affect humanity in ways both large and small. Our vast impact on the lives of others is simply amazing. Think about the work you do and how many people you have touched without them or you knowing it. We, as engineers, enjoy the honor of affecting, advancing and improving the lives around us. With this incredible impact and reach also comes an awesome responsibility. A responsibility to perform work to the best of our abilities, to uphold the ethics of our profession and to design for the benefit of humanity.

One of my favorite quotes comes from Mahatma Gandhi, “Be the change you want to see in the world.” As an engineer, I am proud to be part of a community that not only has the capacity but also the opportunity to truly change the world around us. This award is a reminder of not only the fantastic technology I create – systems that protect and enable our soldiers in the field. It is also a reminder of the awesome responsibility I have to uphold the highest ethics and standards of design in my service to humanity. I am humbled and honored to have been selected to be your representative and standard-bearer this year.

Thank you for this fabulous privilege.