

Five Questions with Judy Lee

Where did you grow up? How did you get involved with engineering?

I grew up in Cary, North Carolina and even as a kid, design has always been a part of who I am. I love making things with my hands. I love the creativity and the challenge of figuring out how to make something work. It may not always be right the first time, but that's part of the learning. So far, I haven't gotten the same problem twice. I love that I'm continuing to learn new and cool things as part of my job. Within engineering, there's a huge range of what you can do.

Who was the first person to suggest engineering?

My dad is a civil engineer, so he was probably my first exposure to engineering. He never pushed for me to be an engineer, but he noticed that I was pretty good at science and math (along with sports too!). He had a big moment of pride when he found out his little girl was following in his footsteps.

Prior to hosting Design Squad Nation, did you design anything that you're particularly proud of?

One project I'm proud of is the IKEA children's toy – Snurrig (spinner in Swedish) that I designed in grad school. It's a toy that needed to be sold for under \$20. That means for IKEA to make a profit, 1) the manufacturing and materials had to be relatively low cost and well designed and 2) the design had to be cool enough for people to want it. It was the perfect example of design and engineering coming together.

As a woman in engineering, how do you work to break down barriers and misconceptions?

My first job out of college was in a very typical engineering environment where most of the engineers were older white males. I remember that it was a great challenge to work with a few of them. They thought that just because you were young and female, you were clearly not a competent engineer. Unfortunately, that ignorance is out there and sometimes women have to work twice as hard just to get their voice heard. I hope that with my work on Design Squad Nation, I can show that women can be amazing engineers.

What advice would you give girls who are thinking about a career in engineering?

Everyone has a talent, whether at sports, or music, or even fashion design. If you combine those skills with science, technology, engineering, and math, you have the power to be creative and make a difference in the world.



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