

**University of Texas at Arlington – College of Engineering Commencement Address**

**Jeff Smith**

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Dr. Nedderman I was here when you set UTA on its course to be the world class Research and Teaching University that it is today. Exceptional Facilities, Campus Life, and recognized worldwide for its diversity and affordability. You have been a great service to The Metroplex, The Great State of Texas, The United States, and the World. Thank you.

Class of 2017, I know what you may be thinking, oh great, one more old, balding, chubby, white guy with a PHD between you and your diploma. I promise - brief and relevant.

Engineers are creators, problem solvers. Puzzle masters. Curiosity seekers. Inventors. How will you use these traits to make your mark on the world? Will you be timid? We all have self-doubt. Will you let your self-doubt prevent you from making a difference? Keep you from a life filled with joy?

My advice? Do not be timid. SPEAK UP, STEP FORWARD, WALK ACROSS THE ROOM, OPEN THE DOOR, TAKE INITIATIVE,

Snoopy has always been my hero. No, not snoop dog. Snoopy. You remember...Charlie Browns Christmas special? <<SNOOPY NODS HEAD>>

Remember the intrepid World War I flying ace or the French Foreign legion soldier behind enemy lines? Mr. Cool? The perfect millennial role model he exudes confidence by creating his own identity. All of Snoopy's roles have something to teach us about the human condition. Bravery, chivalry, gallantry and dogged determination - If you take away one thing from my comments it is that you will strive to be like Snoopy.

Snoopy would never let self-doubt prevent joy.

I remember the day that I fell in love with computers. It was 1965 - I was 5. My parents took me to the Franklin Institute Science Museum in Philadelphia. At that age every child has a security blanket. I had my Snoopy. I carried him everywhere. Snoopy was my hero, my inspiration, and he made me feel secure.

There was a large room with a glass wall. Behind it was a huge Univac computer. Although others were afraid to go in, my precocious and confident self opened the glass door and walked inside the cold room. The operator was cautious but inviting and asked me to introduce my friend. He said hello to Snoopy and proceeded to load a deck of punch cards into the machine. He asked me to type my name into a card punch, searching for each letter I typed J E F F. He added the card to the deck. The tapes whirred and after several minutes on the printer was an ASCII rendition of snoopy with my name at the bottom. It was love at first sight.

Never let self-doubt prevent the joy of curiosity

I was in the 5th grade in 1971. I wrote a poem They's riots in Boston and o'er de nation because the answer was forced integration - the poem went on and so did I to Dunbar elementary. An hour bus ride, white flight to private schools made it about 500 black kids and 50 white kids. For several weeks I got harassed, lunch money stolen, and beaten up. The math teacher had trouble with fractions and word problems so I helped teach the class. Reginald was the biggest kid in school. I was very afraid of Reginald. The white kids didn't ever sit with the black kids in the cafeteria. I walked across the room and sat next to Reginald. I learned that Reginald was held back in 1st grade and flunked 3rd. His dad would whip him when he didn't make the grades. So I helped

him with homework before school and at lunch. Later I would teach him to play chess. We became good friends. I kept his Dad from hitting him. He kept everyone else from hitting me.

Never let self-doubt prevent the joy of friendship.

As a Sophomore in College I sent out 100 resumes for a summer job. I got 100 rejections. I was downtrodden - defeated - and was resigned to a red white and blue polyester uniform delivering Dominoes Pizza. One frustrating day I skipped work and drove to the Motorola Offices. The HR person said they were not hiring summer students and asked me to leave. It might have been easier to get in if I was delivering a pizza. I said confidently that I had programming skills. I must have said it loudly enough that the VP of engineering overheard me and asked me some questions. I got the job and helped develop technology for the first cell phone

Never let self-doubt prevent the joy of success.

As a UTA graduate Student in 1990, I remember seeing a team of engineering students working on an Unmanned Autonomous Flying Robot built from scratch. It could take off and land like a helicopter and also fly like an airplane, one of the first Autonomous Drones. Everyday I walked past that room in Nedderman Hall thinking that I had nothing to offer. One day curiosity got the best of me and I opened the door and walked in. They were working on a flight control system and needed some help on altitude control. Not only did they welcome me on the team, but I was later chosen as the project manager. We won the first International Flying Robot Competition against well funded corporate sponsored teams like Stanford, MIT, CalTech, Georgia Tech.

Never let self-doubt prevent the joy of competition

I completed my Masters degree and it was time to rejoin the workforce. I did not think that I was worthy of a position at the Superconducting Supercollider - a grand experiment with the greatest scientists, and engineers from around the world developing the largest and most powerful particle accelerator. I interviewed. I was hired.

On my first day at the SSC I was in line to get my ID card. Lisa, a very cute Industrial Engineer was in line with me. I barely said hello, and although I saw her many times over the next year, I knew she was way out of my league and I didn't have the courage to ask her out.

When congress decided to shut down the Supercollider project and end the USA's lead in particle physics, That night I scanned a picture hanging in the office of one of the magnet delivery shafts where we would lower 55 miles of 40 foot long 17 ton superconducting magnets that would hold the proton beam. I printed 100 t-shirts that read - Congress Gave Texas the Shaft, Death of the SuperCondunducting Super Collider Oct 21, 1993. My intention was to just give them away. That cute Industrial Engineer came by and asked for some to take to another lab. She came back a few hours later with a handful of twenties. I took the money and printed more t-shirts. With her help we sold over 700.

The world wide web was conceived at the Geneva accelerator to collaborate with the SSC and other labs through the internet.

That year there were rumors that the internet would be opened up for commercial use. Since we knew quite a bit about how it worked, Joe Bush, a UTA grad and fellow SSC Engineer and I decided to use the money from the t-shirt sales to buy equipment to start one of the first commercial Internet Service Providers. In 6 years with a lot of help, OnRamp/Verio grew to one of the largest ISP's in the world and hired over a hundred UTA grads.

Never let self-doubt prevent the joy of entrepreneurship

Young girls in Honduras get gang insignia tattoos to protect them from rape and murder. By their early teens when they need to get jobs they can't because of the tattoos. I learned this while on a mission trip to build a house in a dangerous place for people that live on a dollar a day and have little hope. I was able to get donated goods from the USA sent down in empty banana shipping containers. We opened a tv repair shop, a bodega, a Cuchina, an Internet Cafe, a Leather Purse factory, and yes a Tattoo removal clinic.

Never let self-doubt prevent the joy of helping others

By the way, you remember that cute Industrial Engineer back at the Supercollider.? Well Lisa is here today.

Yes, I finally got the courage to ask her out. I figured I would never see her again so I might as well try.

She said yes and now is my bride of 20 years, and next to her is my 16 year old son - Kyle.

Do not let self-doubt prevent the Love of your life.<<SNOOPY STANDS UP AND CLAPS>>

Do not be timid. SPEAK UP, STEP FORWARD, WALK ACROSS THE ROOM, OPEN THE DOOR, TAKE INITIATIVE

Never let self-doubt prevent the joy of curiosity, friendship, success, competition, entrepreneurship, helping others, and the Love of your life.

Be Snoopy

University of Texas at Arlington Class of 2017

You are Mavericks

Godspeed.