Dan Reich  
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Troops

What is your favorite Madison/campus memory?
The best memories are really blurry. Just kidding. Sort of. Probably the best Madison memory is my first one ever, before I was even a Badger and still a junior in high school. I traveled from New Jersey with my friend Steve for a long weekend. We were visiting his older brother Danny who was a freshman at the time. I can’t pin-point to any one moment during that trip but all I know is that the next week I was sold, and knew that UW-Madison would be my home for the next four years.

What has helped you achieve success in your career?
My grandfather was a holocaust survivor. He lost his entire family and most of his friends when he was just a teenager. I don’t really talk about this much but I think about this every single day of my life. I think about how he narrowly escaped Nazi Germany and then worked incredibly hard to make a life for himself and for his family. I saw that work ethic up close for over 30 years in my father. That sort of thing weighs heavily on me and I’m reminded how there are many others that never had a chance at life like my family had, and, still has today. Those are incredibly high stakes and I don’t want to look back at life and regret not making the most of this gift that I was given. And like my father, I try to work hard every day and earn the right to that gift.

Outside of class, what experiences did you find most meaningful?
I started a company called Runaway Productions with my friend Steve Weisman. He was also an ECE major. What started off as a hosted charity event at a bar on State Street quickly evolved into a nationally franchised business. We had local and national advertising partners including RedBull, Sony, and other companies you’ve heard of. In fact, I recently learned that we hosted the first-ever live event that promoted a very small company at the time called SkullCandy. It was also kind of funny that the giant banner-sized posters we made to promote the events were made off of plotter printers in Engineering Hall. I already told the Dean I would pay him back for the ink and paper.

What excites you about the future of Engineering?
My college roommate, Jesse once told me that he was studying finance because “money is how the world works, so he figured he’d study money.” There is a lot of truth in that statement. However, I think about the future and I believe technology is what determines how the world will work. So I figured I’d study that. And I think the future of engineering makes way for a world where computers and technology can finally adapt to human beings versus human beings having to adapt to technology. It’s when the science fiction movies like Iron Man and Star Wars come to life. That is a world I want to live in and they say the best way to see the future is to invent it. So that is what I am doing now with Troops.ai, which is a venture-backed business that is building artificial intelligence for people at work. Think of it like “Jarvis for work.”

Besides engineering, do you have another passion you have pursued or would have liked to pursue given the time?
I think in an alternate universe it would have been fun to be an EDM DJ aka Electronic Dance Music DJ. I can’t think of a better genre of music that is the literal intersection of “electronics” and music. Plus, flying and touring around the world wouldn’t be a bad perk either.
Who was an influential peer/professor from your time at UW-Madison?
I had a lot of great professors but Nick Hitchon left the biggest impression on me and for a simple reason. In short, he made engineering fun. He was enthusiastic about what he did and that enthusiasm was infectious. He let me do an independent study with him for 3 engineering credits, and I used that opportunity to build my first real ‘technology’ company with two other friends and fellow ECE students, Steve Weisman and David Nosbusch.

What are you most proud of in life? What is your greatest achievement?
Joining National Ski Patrol as one of the youngest patrollers at age 15 definitely tops the list. For those people that don’t ski or snowboard, Ski Patrol is kind of like being a paramedic on skis. And in that role, you have the ability to change someone’s life in the deepest and most literal way possible. I once got a call from the resident doctor on the mountain I worked at 24 hours after I rescued and transported a 15 year old boy off the mountain. The doctor called and said, “Dan, he had a 50/50 chance of living but the work you did saved his life.” It’s kind of hard to top that.

What would be your advice to current students? What do you wish you had known?
Think big and take chances and be comfortable being uncomfortable. I rather try something and fail than never try at all. But, people never try things because they are afraid. And to those people I say this. Fear is not real. It is a fake thing in your mind that might never, ever happen. So, take advantage of your time in college and take chances because the second worst thing that can happen is that the endeavor fails and you wake up and go to class the next day. The worst thing however that can happen is you wake up 25 years from now and regret not ‘going for it’ whatever ‘it’ may be.