Robert R. Johnson  
(1928 – 2016)

What is your favorite Madison/campus memory?  
Robert’s favorite memory was playing the french horn in the marching band.

What has helped you achieve success in your career?  
His broad education in fundamentals was instrumental in his success. He was one who never forgot anything, and he was able to use and adapt knowledge in ingenious ways. He was exceptionally skilled in applying mathematics to difficult problems.

Outside of class, what experiences did you find most meaningful?  
Being Editor of the Wisconsin Engineer his senior year was extremely meaningful. He wrote several articles for the magazine, including one on "fracking" (which showed the process to be uneconomical).

What excites you about the future of Engineering?  
New ideas – He loved ideas. He had an 8-fold plan of possible solutions for scientific, social, and political problems facing future society, which were intended to get people thinking outside the box. He believed strongly that solutions would be possible with use of fundamental knowledge applied in new directions.

Besides engineering, do you have another passion you have pursued or would have liked to pursue given the time?  
He loved growing Heritage apples. He started doing this in the 1970s in Michigan and later extended the passion to a small ranch in Utah.

Who was an influential peer/professor from your time at UW-Madison?  
His father, a UW-Madison Electrical Engineering professor, was a thorough and exacting engineer who set high academic and work ethic standards that lasted a lifetime.

What are you most proud of in life? What is your greatest achievement?  
Professionally, as a young PhD he was given the job of directing development of the first automated banking system (ERMA) for the Bank of America in the 1950s. That system proved that computers could be used successfully for non-scientific or military projects. Fun fact: He was responsible for the font of the numbers on the bottom of bank checks, which is the oldest standard in the computing industry still in use today!

What would be your advice to current students? What do you wish you had known?  
Get as strong an education in basics as you can. He would also be an advocate for the liberal arts, as he firmly believed a person should be more broadly educated than the training usually provided for specialized professions.