“Eric, I’ve got a job for you.” I was exhausted. It was day three of the World Championships. We had finished 12 hours of Round-up matches. I was looking forward to grabbing some food in the 30 minutes before our next match. But when my team leader said these words, I knew that wasn't going to happen.

However, I knew I could handle anything he threw at me. Nine months in VEX had vastly improved my engineering skills. As the designated programmer, I’d learned to make elegant and easily modified code, and had also begun using proportional integral derivative (PID) control loops. As a member of the Green MacHHHHine, my communication and teamwork skills had improved. I could perform reliably in high-pressure situations, such as the one presented to me that day of the Worlds.

He showed me what he wanted and I worked to make the code changes. On the practice field, we tested the routine. In those 30 minutes, we created a program that moved us from 30th to 6th in the world for the programming skills challenge.

Everything I had learned over the past nine months showed itself at the Worlds. Because I had confidence in my abilities, I improved my team’s autonomous program, which helped us win the Math division Excellence Award. This year, we hope to place first in the programming skills challenge. But whether or not we win, the VEX experience has already helped me build a solid foundation of technical skills and confidence.