Being a part of a VEX Robotics team has not only taught me about engineering, it has taught me a lot about working with other people, and myself. I joined my high school’s robotics team, the Clockwork Knights, about 7 months ago, just as summer was beginning. Mostly I had joined to hang out with friends and because I was interested in looking into doing something related to math and science. At the time, engineering seemed to be a foreign concept and I wasn’t really sure whether I would enjoy building a robot. The whole process, from building a robot to programming it to complete tasks in an autonomous mode seemed very advanced. I couldn’t even begin to imagine coming up with an idea for a robot design; to me it appeared to be a near impossible task. Over the course of the summer, my views about robotics began to change. I found that as I went to more meetings, I was quickly able to pick up the general idea of building. Granted, I wouldn’t be designing my own arm or intake any time soon, but I could distinguish a shaft from a standoff, and that was a start!

However, the real impact that VEX Robotics has had on me really became apparent once the school year started. With our more regular meetings after school, I began to notice the fact that many of my team members were not as involved in the process of building the robot. Being new to the team myself, I wasn’t really sure how to handle the situation. But as our first competition of the year, as well as the first competition in the VEX Sack Attack program, came closer, I realized that something needed to change. I started to pay closer attention to the function of different pieces of the robot, and as I was doing that, I paid closer attention to our team itself. Often times, we would all be working on one piece of the robot, and while many hands make for light work, there’s a point when too many hands makes it impossible to work. We were constantly scrambling to finish putting together our robot, and it was by sheer luck that we made it into the alliance rounds of our first competition. Afterwards, I was proud of how far our robot had made it, but I knew that our team, and myself, had a long way to go. As we went back to prepare for our next competition, I took a more active role in leading the team. I tried to offer ideas when problems arose, as well as delegated tasks to people according to skill, so that the person would be able to learn something, and the robot would be built quicker.

This new leadership wasn’t easy for me, and it still isn’t. I find myself slipping back into old habits of trying to do all of the work by myself, and only asking for help when absolutely necessary. While there is a time when you just need to work through the problems in your head so that they can be fixed quickly and simply, there is also a time when you need to get others involved. Being part of a VEX Robotics team has really helped me become attuned to others strengths and weaknesses, and how to help them so that they are able to be successful. It has taught me a lot about working to meet deadlines. Becoming a leader of my team has helped me to outgrow some of my shyness, as has meeting other schools and teams at robotics competitions. VEX Robotics has also helped me to realize that engineering is definitely a career field that I am interested in pursuing. The robot designs and programs that once seemed like impossible problems have now become interesting challenges, beckoning me to think creatively and to look for solutions that I wouldn’t originally have thought would work. I’m currently working on writing our team’s autonomous program, and find it challenging, yet a great learning experience. VEX Robotics has made both my mind and personality become more outgoing, and it has been a very enjoyable, fun experience. I enjoy going to meetings and competitions, and am glad that I am now a proud member of a VEX Robotics team.