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Cox: Opening Remarks

# Opening Remarks

## In Search of an Engineer's Mind

After reading Jonathan Hay's feature on the history of the L.C. Smith College of Engineering and Computer Science ("Synergetic Strength," page 30), I couldn't help but wonder what Lyman Cornelius Smith would think of engineering today. A century ago, the Central New York businessman was clamoring for skilled workers to produce typewriters for him. Today, Smith would be heartbroken to see the typewriter teetering on the brink of extinction, but he would surely be impressed by the science and engineering feats of the past century. Just wandering about campus, he could exchange thoughts with rocket scientists, bioengineers, and parallel-computing experts.

As one of those people who has a difficult time operating electric windows on a car, I am always amazed at the work of engineers. Without engineers providing advancements for civilized society, I fear we'd all be overcome by boredom, not to mention more work. Just think, for instance, of all the mathematical contortions that those pocket calculators with glowing-red LED displays saved us from. Somewhere, buried in a drawer at home, I actually have my first pocket calculator. It's survived several moves around the Northeast, been lost in storage boxes, and been dropped numerous times, but it can still add, subtract, multiply, divide, eat batteries, and put my math skills to shame.

Some folks today may scoff at such a mundane gizmo, smugly snuggling with their Palm Pilots and color-coordinated wireless messaging units. That's fine with me. And it sure beats hauling around a couple filing cabinets, which is what they'd be doing if they wanted to have instant access to all the information they store on those things. Call me old-fashioned, but I prefer to actually write appointments down on a calendar, rather

than poke a screen with one of those little styluses that either my cats would steal or I'd accidentally drop down a heating vent.

For me, anything that requires more than flicking a switch has the potential for turning into a nightmare. I obviously don't have an engineer's mind and feel like I got ripped off in that department. In retrospect, I guess I should have listened more closely to my engineering friends in college when they were talking about viscous flow, electro-magnetism, and software programming.

I'm sure Lyman Cornelius Smith would give me a good whack upside the head, even though I still own a typewriter. He definitely would have questioned my intelligence if he'd seen me trying to assemble a roof rake this winter. Even I thought: How hard can this be? I didn't flinch when I couldn't find the instructions in the five-foot-long box. It's nothing but a shovel with an attached handle long enough to knock down a hornet's nest from a safe distance. By the time I finished, I felt like I'd turned the screws on myself. It certainly wasn't the no-sweat effort I'd envisioned. Fortunately, I did get the contraption together and my dread of having the shovel pop off and vanish in a pile of snow never materialized.

mike prinzo

I considered this a minor victory and added it to my list of such accomplishments as changing a lawnmower spark plug and recharging a car battery without blowing it up.

This may not seem like much to the engineering corps improving our world, but they'll have to accept me as a slow learner.

JAY COX  
EDITOR

