



Stanford eCorner

What Engineers Bring to the CEO Role

Brian Murray, *HarperCollins*

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In response to a question from STVP Executive Director Tina Seelig, HarperCollins CEO Brian Murray explains how his early engineering background continues to serve him as leader of a major publishing company. Murray believes engineers are solvers of complicated problems by training, and that, "a publishing company, any company, is one big, complex problem" needing to be solved.



Transcript

So, you were an engineer by training? I was. And so, how has your engineering training - we've got a room filled with lots of people who are... Right. ...engineering students. Why should an engineer go into something like - and how are your skills being used today? I always try to make decisions in education and in career that, one I had to be curious about something, and two, I wanted to do something that opened a door. And I've just kind of followed that path and that's how I wound up here. How it's helped me? I think, I have undergraduate degrees in physics and electrical engineering and I wrote a lot of software. My whole background I feel like was really in solving complex problems. And let me tell you a company, a publishing company, any company is one big complex problem and so I actually - I love that part of the job. And I also find working with creative people as well as business people and operations people, that kind of cross section is fantastic.

So I think that's really how it helps me, but - so it's kind of training that I had a long time ago. But the problem solving, thinking about different things that we could do, thinking about now the people - because the more senior you get in an organization, the less you actually do the work. So it's really about asking the right questions and asking how are you thinking about solving this problem than it is of actually doing the problem solving yourself.