



Profiles of Electrical Engineers and Computer Scientists



Carolyn Kerr

**Electrical Systems Engineer
Boeing Commercial Airplane Group
Seattle, WA**

Education:

B.S. - Electrical Engineering, University of Washington

Job Description:

Carolyn Kerr is a Systems Engineer who works in Electrical Power Generation. She is responsible for procuring generators, contractors, and control units, the main sources of electrical power on an airplane.

Advice to Students:

"Network - don't wait for opportunities to come to you. Make use of the opportunities to visit companies and be part of them before you get out of school."

Video Transcript 1:

"I got the job through a family friend, of a friend's parents. He took my resume into the company to a group that he knew was hiring people and that's how I got the job."

Video Transcript 2:

"I don't have a lot of experience with other companies, but Boeing is a good place to be a woman engineer. There aren't a lot of us. In a group of 15 or 20 there's usually one woman engineer, and means I usually the only woman engineer in the group. It's fun. The guys are fun to work with. They respect your work. But, on the other hand, you can still be a woman. You are treated - you are the special one in the group sometimes. If the guys think they need flowers in the office, they'll usually put it on your desk, you know, cause it's not macho to up it on theirs."

Interview:

Carolyn Kerr enjoys her work as a systems engineer for Boeing. She considers herself very lucky. "I came into a group that did a lot of the fun things that I like to do. I like to work with people; I like to travel a little bit. And so I've lucked out." Moreover, being one of the few women in the company has not been a problem. "Boeing is a good place to be a woman engineer. There aren't a lot of us. In a group of 15 or 20, there's usually one woman engineer. But the guys are fun to work with. They respect your work." And the notice she gets as a

woman is well-intentioned. "You are the special one in the group sometimes. If the guys think they need flowers in the office, they usually put them on your desk because, you know, it's not macho to put them on theirs."

Kerr believes women engineers contribute to a company in several ways. "I think that women bring some special things to a team. I don't like to emphasize it too much, but we bring paying attention to other people's feelings. Sometimes guys forget to do that. And it helps when things are tense." The rewards for such interpersonal contributions may have to be personal satisfaction rather than public acknowledgment.

Of course, the rewards for their technical contributions are the same as those of male engineers. Kerr recalls the day the 777 was flight tested for the first time: "I got to be on the flight deck to watch to see if my generators came on line, and they did. That was neat that was probably the most exciting thing." When the airplane was flown, "We all walked out and watched it take off, and, when we heard it was going to land, we all ran out and watched it again."

Kerr considers herself fortunate to have found such a position, but advises students not to depend on luck when looking for a job. She, herself, originally went through all the typical channels. "I had turned in my resume through the college placement center, and I'd had an interview, and several months passed." When she made a contact at Boeing, things changed dramatically for her. "My resume was taken and hand carried to a group that was hiring, and I had a job within a week." Incredibly enough, the group was working on projects she enjoyed!

Kerr tells students to network and not to wait for opportunities to come to them. "You need to go find an area that you're comfortable in. If you want to go do design or you want to be locked in an office, you need to find that area. Make use of the opportunities to visit companies and be part of them before you get out of school."

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