

STEM SPOTLIGHT

Stewart Young

R&D Director
Medtronic, Inc.

Bachelor of Science in Mechanical Engineering
University of Memphis



Q How did you select your college major?

A It started with my love of basic mechanisms- ever since I was young I loved disassembling things. As I got older, I started to enjoy working on things, and understanding how and why they work (or don't). I have also always loved cars, and that meant learning how to work on them pretty early on.

Q What was the biggest influence in your selection of major/career?

A Probably my dad- he was an aerospace engineer in Huntsville, AL, back in the days of the Saturn rockets. He worked on things all the time when I was a kid, and I guess I picked that up.

Q If you could go back to high school and select any elective course to take that would have better prepared you for college, what would it be?

A SHOP! Yea, that almost doesn't make sense, I know- but manufacturing is a huge part of engineering, and it's a weak spot in schools and colleges for the most part. Is it critical that an engineer know how to weld? No. But it does help them understand when welds are appropriate, and when they are not.



Q What is your favorite aspect of your job?

A Working with surgeons; taking a need that they help identify, and pushing a solution to market. Many jobs require focus groups and large-scale customer feedback routines, and we do some of that too. But working with the end-user gives immediate and occasionally painfully direct feedback on my ideas.



Q How do you/your company make a positive impact on society/our community?

A Lots of ways! Our products are an easy example- we provide solutions including pacemakers, stents, diabetes products, and of course spinal hardware (Memphis is our Spine HQ). But beyond that, Medtronic has a program called “Project 6” that organizes and encourages employees to volunteer locally. In the West Tennessee area, for instance, we have regular volunteer efforts at the Memphis Food Bank, we have organized clean-up efforts at the Memphis Greenline, and have visited local schools, hospitals and assisted living communities.

Q What is the most interesting thing you have been able to do in your career?

A Product launches. There is nothing like working hard on an idea, getting it through all the many hurdles into a surgeon’s hands, and seeing it used. If the customer connects with it, you’re the king of the world!

Q What makes you get up each morning excited about your profession?

A I love working in the medical industry- widgets are all good and fine, but knowing that they are positively impacting peoples’ lives is amazing. Every 3 seconds a person somewhere in the world is helped by a Medtronic product- I’m thrilled to be a part of that.

Q What advice would you like to share with K-12 students who are considering your profession?

A Do what you can to get involved with a co-op or intern program. That experience is really helpful with looking for a job right out of school. And once you find a position, NEVER be afraid to get your hands dirty and do whatever is needed to move ahead. Too many people come out of college and/or school thinking that they’re ready to run the company and don’t want to do the “grunt work.” That’s really looked at negatively by everyone, including management. But more importantly, that’s the work that forms the foundation of what you’ll be doing, and it’s not something you can afford to skip.