

Challenges and Motivation: A Journey from Student to Professional

In my final year as a high school student, I sighed and reminisced about the moments that had passed. The journey was bumpy but smoother than the one I had in primary school. Thanks to modern medicine, I could easily manage the atopic dermatitis symptoms that had been so persistent in my young life. I pondered deeply on what I wanted to pursue and became fixated on electrical engineering. During that time, my school invested in motivating us through speakers and sessions that provided access to online uplifting material. I still vividly remember watching Nick Vujicic's story and Malachi's audition on America's Got Talent. The underlying message was clear: "You can do it! You can be disadvantaged, but you will find a way to succeed! You can be scared, but with the right people reassuring you, you can do it." As a result, I knew I could do anything I wanted to, drawing inspiration from such stories.

I am grateful for being sponsored by the government in university, which alleviated a significant financial burden from my parents. However, I encountered a different set of challenges. At that time, I was unaware that other students faced similar challenges since they seemed to have everything under control. I thoroughly enjoyed my classes in electrical engineering, from power systems to telecommunications, from control systems to mobile computing. Perhaps I enjoyed it too much, as I became confused about which path to pursue. I took online tests and spoke with a few people to gain clarity on my direction. The first major challenge arose during my specialization selection. I ended up choosing Computer and Electronics Engineering because I had the least knowledge in that area, and I aimed to upskill.

Upon graduation, I was almost certain that I knew exactly what I wanted, but I was mistaken. The job market was harsh, and I applied to various opportunities within engineering field and beyond, blurring the lines between securing a job for survival and choosing a path that I was truly passionate about.

Social media made me aware that there are other adults living with atopic dermatitis, and our struggles were relatable, albeit varying in severity. This presented another challenge for me. I always kept up with my classmates, although some days were harder than others. To console myself, I would say, "Life is hard, and everyone is facing challenges. My challenge is not

special." In reality, I experienced difficulties that a student with healthy skin had not encountered. We did many things together, but most of the time, there was that struggle—discomfort, itchiness, sometimes pain, mostly discomfort. I hid this well because I was embarrassed and never wanted anyone to see this side of me. I worried that I might not thrive in harsh outdoor environments that I was preparing for. I feared I would be limited to indoor environments because the harsh outdoors might exacerbate things.

I am currently an engineer in process automation. Control systems was a major area of study in my curriculum, but I cannot claim that this was the path I was certain to pursue. When I got the opportunity, I wasn't sure if I would like the industry or the work. The challenge shifted from having too many areas to pick from to deciding if the chosen path was the one. I now realize that sometimes there is no way of knowing until you do it! I still face challenges, but I also get motivated to overcome them. I have little pockets full of stars, I have a great support system, and sometimes, I just do it!