## *Example 2*

Chasing My Goals

I have always been absolutely fascinated by the concept of creating objects for human betterment. As such, a career in Engineering was an obvious choice for me. However, due to my many varied interests, I've always struggled with choosing a particular field. So in a time of complete confusion, this assignment came as the perfect opportunity to explore different branches and help me formulate a career path. Since I had no original career direction, I searched a variety of professors from Industrial, Mechanical, and Electrical Engineering. Then, I picked one professor from each major whose research I found to be very interesting and gave them a place on my interview list. Initially, the first professor I contacted was in the field of Mechanical Engineering. Unfortunately, I didn't get a response, so I decided to move onto the second professor, Mark Daskin, from the Industrial and Operations Engineering Department. He was very prompt in his response, and we quickly arranged to have the interview within a couple days of my initial request.

Judging by his e-mail responses, I was anticipating a meeting with an extrovert. As such, I was very shocked once we began our interview. While he had been very warm via e-mail, he was extremely tightly-wound and cold in person. We started with the usual small talk about the holidays, where I was from, why I chose Michigan, etc. Needless to say, due to rigidity from both parties involved, the first couple minutes of our interview were extremely awkward.

In order to get the interview moving along (and hopefully break the awkwardness) I began shooting the questions I had prepared. As an undecided Engineering major, I started by asking how he chose his career. Looking me sharply in my eyes, he matter-of-fact-edly told me

that his father had been an engineer, and his mother was a scientist. Therefore, science and technology were strongly emphasized in his household all through his childhood. When it was time to begin crafting a career, Professor Daskin went to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology with the intention of majoring in either Math, Chemistry, or Physics. However, as his sophomore year rolled by, he had many friends majoring in Civil Engineering, and the more and more exposure he got, the more and more enthralled he became with the subject. From here, I inquired how he journeyed through his career. He responded by saying that he had always wanted to be his own boss- he wanted to research whatever interested him, whenever it interested him, so he chose to go into academia. After completing his education at MIT, he joined at Northwestern as an Associate professor, and then progressed to become a full-time professor. Eventually, circumstance brought him here to Michigan. He had originally worked in the Civil Engineering Department, the field of his expertise. However, after authoring several books on Network and Discrete Location Modeling, he realized that much of his interest/research lay in the field of Industrial Engineering, so he began to teach classes in this Department instead. As he spoke about his progress through his career, his voice rose and fell with a passion that warmed my heart. I could tell that his job was more than his career, it was his lifeblood. The more and more he talked, the less and less austere the atmosphere in the room became. In fact, I was so fascinated by his devotion that I began to yearn for a career that would ignite me the way Professor Daskin's career fueled him.

Empowered by the open atmosphere that had begun to envelope the room, I decided to take a risk and reach out with some of the more personal questions I had on my list. To begin, I asked Professor Daskin what sacrifices he had to make to get to this point in his career. He

jokingly responded that that he so predominately uses the left-side of his brain, that sometimes he feels that the right side is completely lacking. Through his education at MIT and intense technological focus throughout his life, he claims to know very little about humanities. He admitted that he wished he had taken more time in life to appreciate the arts and expand his limited knowledge of history. In fact, he went as far as to apologize for his cold behavior, claiming that he has spent so much time with his research that he sometimes feels as so though he has forgotten how to interact with people face-to-face.

Urged on by our increasingly positive conversation, I proceeded to ask a question I had originally felt slightly uncomfortable bringing up with a male professor. Still unsure about how he much he would be able to contribute, I asked the Professor what challenges he foresaw for women in the field of Engineering. He thought intently for a while and told me told to choose a career that I love. If you really love something, then no matter how hard it gets, it'll be worth it, he promised. Then as if to inspire me some more, he went on to tell me about some of his very successful female colleagues and students, and proceeded to offer me their contact information in the event I wanted to talk to them. Though I was thankful for the opportunity to interact with such people, I also felt a little unsatisfied, angered even. Though I'm sure Professor Daskin is an expert in his field, I felt like he was less than proficient in his in knowledge and/or experience with women in STEM programs. Just like most other males in STEM fields and (some females), I got the impression that he had pitied my state. I felt as though he regarded my status as a female engineer to be less that of a male engineer… as if I was some poor little doll in need of saving, instead of the vibrant, determined young engineer I

strive hard to be. I understand that he was trying to be politically correct and supportive about a problem he may actually have known very little about, so I decided to let this slide.

Swallowing my anger, I forced a smile and thanked him for his thoughtfulness, and let him know that I would look into the work the women had done, and get in touch with them if I had any questions.

By this point in the interview, the Professor had completely morphed into the eager person he had appeared to be in the e-mail. We then talked about different career options and the importance of exploring different fields. He suggested that I spend a summer researching something I was passionate about, and then take the other summers to be a time of experimentation- trying new fields and exploring different possible career paths. All the while, he stressed the importance of connecting with professors and employers. He suggested that I make the best of office hours and try to get close to the people in charge in order to get good recommendations. Overall, I'm grateful for the time and effort that Professor Daskin put into the interview, but regardless, I felt the interview feeling disappointed.

Over the course of this project, I've learned a lot in the process- from researching different fields the professors work in, to discovering what my actual interests were, to contacting and organizing an interview! Even though Professor Daskin wasn't as supportive of the interview as I had hoped, looking back, I'm grateful for his lack of encouragement. Over the course of this class, I've read several accounts of women being treated unfairly in STEM fields, but through this interview, I got the opportunity to experience one such story first-hand. Unfortunately, I realize that this probably won't be the last time I experience this, but rather

the first of many such instances. As such, I consider this interview to be practice for what expect to in the future. Instead of expecting people to willingly feed me all the information I want with a golden spoon, I now know that I should stop waiting for other people to take charge and instead start chasing my goals. I realize that if I don't fight to achieve my dreams with all I've got, then my dreams will never surface into anything more than just a dream. As such, I'm very glad I got the chance to do this project -it has been a lot of learning, both academically and emotionally.