There are very few university organizations where general body meetings consist of various props being thrown at other members, swung at high speeds, and lit on fire. Serving as the Vice President of the University of Florida Juggling Club gave me the opportunity to learn about and practice effective leadership in unconventional situations. My roles included recruitment, public relations with the international juggling community, organizing club meetings, and choreographing performances. However, steering a club built on rare talents proved difficult at times. For example, no matter how much time and practice was spent rehearsing and designing the perfect Halloween show for children with disabilities, when the children we were committed to entertaining pick up the juggling props and have the time of their lives swinging them around, a new plan must be developed on the spot.

Interns at SpaceX are given tremendous responsibility and put under extreme pressure, as their equipment is interfaced with flight critical electronics and sent to space. The relatively flat hierarchy allowed me to exercise my leadership skills every day, as the integration projects I worked on required a wide variety of engineers and scientists, from electromagnetic compatibility technicians confirming my equipment won’t break the International Space Station to mechanical engineers designing and producing enclosures to house the circuit boards. Unfortunately, these other engineers are always occupied with other projects and do not have any interest in seeking new work. In order to get the assistance I needed, I was forced to assemble my own team of engineers, which used a combination of charm, persuasion, and compromise. Ultimately, I learned many lessons about effective communication, leadership, and even taking falls and flack in order to bring the best out of those who are working for me. I also practiced negotiation, process planning, and delivering results at all costs on a daily basis.

As the team leader of an interdisciplinary team of engineers while participating in the University of Florida Integrated Product and Process Design (IPPD) program, I was faced with seemingly intractable problems, such as bringing out the best of each team member to produce a preliminary design review in