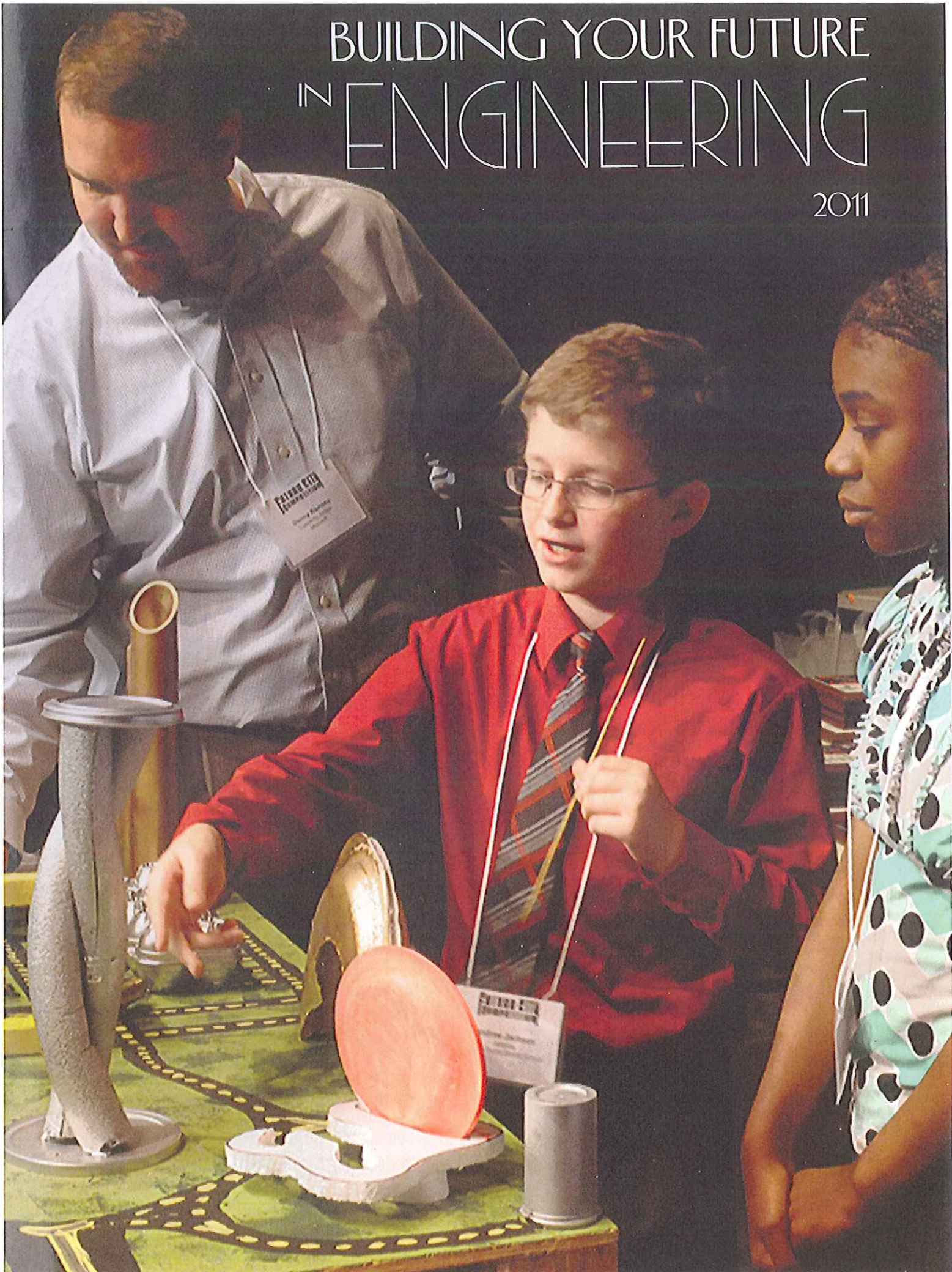


BUILDING YOUR FUTURE IN ENGINEERING

2011



Your Future & Wazi-Wazi

By Dr. Ruth Middleton House | President | Middleton-House & Company

The Mbuti people of Zaire believe we travel through life surrounded by a protective sphere. When we stay at its center, the sphere separates us from the turbulence and chaos outside. But if we move too abruptly or too quickly, we are driven away from our center, toward the shell of the sphere. As we move closer and closer to the shell, we experience more and more turbulence from the outside. At some point, we become more and more like the chaos ourselves: hyperactive, unpredictable, out-of-sorts, noncompliant. The Mbuti say someone in that space is in Wazi-Wazi. (House, 2005, p. 35)

Nanotechnology, bio-medical engineering, agricultural engineering, mechatronics engineering are just a few of the emerging applications of engineering. Whichever specialty you set as a goal, it will have changed by the time you get to it. And it will keep on changing.

The world in which your specialty is applied will keep changing, too. So will the organization that employs you to apply it. In the meantime, the economy, social trends, and relationships in your own life may be spinning, too.

In order to remain standing at your center in the midst of all this change, it is important that—whatever else is going on—you know where you stand with yourself. If you use up your capacity (your time and energy) in Wazi-Wazi, it won't necessarily be the least important thing that goes undone. Instead, it will be whatever was going to happen next, if only you hadn't exhausted yourself first. All too often the thing that you didn't get to was something that really mattered—time for yourself, time for your family, time for your health, time for your faith.

The same risk holds true in organizations. The organization is under pressure to add one more thing to the list of *to-do's* (when jobs are combined, when organizations are merged or acquired, when there is a change in direction). This one more thing could look like a great thing to do on paper, but will the organization have the capacity (the people, the time, the money, the focus) to make this change and keep doing the everyday work well at the same time? Often it does not. And the thing that doesn't get done or doesn't get done right is often important: a follow-up with a customer, a special customer request, a plan.

The key to steering clear of Wazi-Wazi is to know what is important and to stick with it. That principle holds true for individuals, for organizations, and for societies. As you

move forward into your exciting future, the place to start is with yourself.

What is important? To answer that question for yourself start with a deck of 15 index cards. Then follow these instructions to develop a Personal Constitution. (House, 2005, pp. 39-42)

1. What are the things you value most in life? Identify between five and 15 items. Write each one on a separate index card as an affirmation. Examples: I am a loving family member.; I am confident.; I am financially prosperous.; I have a worthwhile and satisfying career.
2. Which values are the most important? Select the index card you would give up if you had to sacrifice one value. Assign it the highest number in your deck of cards (number 15 of 15 values, for example). Throw it on the floor (or just set it aside on the table.) Repeat the process until you have only one left.

Now go back and review at least the top six index cards. If things were perfect in the movie of your life, what scene would you write for each value? Get as many senses involved as you can. In this scene, what would you see, taste, smell, touch, hear? Write the scene out on each index card. Or you can use a separate sheet of paper. If you use a separate piece of paper for your scenes, be sure to put them in priority order with the most important one first.

Example: I have a worthwhile and satisfying career. My career provides the income I need to prosper financially. At the same time, it allows time for a full personal life. I continue to work hard but I also work smarter so other higher values are not sacrificed to my career. It challenges my talents. It taps those skills through which I make a unique contribution. It fosters my development intellectually, socially, emotionally, and ethically. My own career success requires that I foster the success and the development of other people.

The composite of these scenes from your perfect life serve as your personal constitution. You can read it over morning and night to get centered. You can use it as a measure to size up school and career opportunities. You can use it as a platform for decision making. Knowing what is important to you and sticking with it and living it can help you flourish during times of uncertainty and rapid change and stay out of Wazi-Wazi! ❖