

Spotlight on Marshall Massengill



We are so excited to catch up with Marshall Massengill, a FIRST alumni working as a senior consultant at VMware's professional services organization. Marshall was on FRC 900 The Zebracorns for two years, and has been a mentor for the team for 13 years.

What is one highlight of your time on the team?:

At the time I joined the team as a student, NC had only a few FRC teams and helping craft the image of The Zebracorns (though at the time it was known as Team Infinity) was by far the highlight of my time on the team. I still remember working with mentors and parents of the team in a physics classroom at NCSSM (North Carolina School for Science and Math) to stitch together the first sets of zebra striped pants and winning the first ever award in the team's history - the Imagery Award at the Palmetto Regional in SC (there wasn't an NC regional at the time).

What are the top three skills you learned from your FIRST experience that has made an impact on your current job?:

I have learned and continue to learn a lot of important skills on The Zebracorns but when reflecting on my time as a student, I would say that the three most important ones were communication, empathy, and teamwork.

Communication - Prior to joining the team, I was a lot more of a shy introvert. Interacting with judges, with mentors, and with other students taught me a lot about communicating with other people and relaying complex ideas and thoughts to others. I also spent a lot of my time as a student writing emails to keep the mentors and other students informed about the team's progress as well as organizing logistics and a lot more.

Empathy - My experience as a student taught me one of the most valuable skills I have in my possession (and it continues to teach me!) - the ability to empathize with other people. It may seem trite but understanding others and their unique situations help to provide insight into problem-solving. It's a skill that has served me well throughout my career in IT and has enabled me to truly understand my client's needs and challenges.

Teamwork - If there is one skill that I think every single FRC team member learns then it's teamwork - even if you are part of a team that is struggling to work as a team - when you have to collaborate and compete you learn the importance of working as a member of a team. It's a hard skill to master and one that I keep practicing regularly including with my team at VMware and with our clients and partners.

How has FIRST impacted your choices (school, career, etc...)?:

From my education to my career and even in my personal life - nothing has been a straight line - it's a long meandering path. I grew up in Johnston County as the son of two teachers (one of them is sarcastic and the other is hardheaded so I inherited the best of both worlds from them!). I was fortunate to be accepted into NCSSM for my junior and senior year of high school and I was fortunate in that NCSSM had an FRC Team when there were so few in the state. With the support of my parents, and the aid of my mentors I discovered a lot about myself in a short period of time and I was able to capitalize on my passion for technology and dedication to being part of a team and turn that into an amazing career. After I graduated from NCSSM I kept mentoring the team so I could give back to the community what it had given to me - a passion for technology and a desire to share it with everyone. My participation in FIRST and my desire to share it with others has been a cornerstone of my life. FIRST has been a part of me as much as I've been a part of it throughout college, through several jobs, and through marriage and divorce. I sometimes wish I could go back in time and tell the ten-year-old me that not only is he going to be playing with autonomous robots 2 decades later but he'll be mentoring inquisitive students like himself on how to build them.

What words of wisdom do you have for current FIRSTers?:

Stay active with the program - whether that is mentoring or volunteering (or both!). Through my participation, I've been able to meet a lot of like-minded people who share similar passions for robotics, technology, science, and education. I've made friends with people in other counties, other states, and other nations that I talk to regularly (mostly about robots!). I also want to tell all the existing students to never stop being marveled by the technology surrounding you and try to find the crossroads of that technology with your other interests. Crossroads are where people meet devils in the middle of the night to learn how to play guitar, where accidents happen, and where progress is made. Find those intersections and life will never be boring.

