

Andrea Wong, '88

"It's a great time to be in television!"

Andrea Wong grew up in Silicon Valley attending the high school that Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak went to. Technology was all around her. "I was a good math student, so everyone told me that I should be an engineer. I wanted to go to the best school possible, and MIT was it."

Though she is used to working hard, Andrea says that studying Electrical Engineering at MIT was the hardest she ever worked in her life. She says about her training, "I think every woman or girl who is even remotely interested in science should get an engineering degree because it trains your mind. When you walk away from MIT, it just trains you to break down very difficult problems."

While she was at MIT, Andrea Wong never questioned that she would be an engineer. So, it took her a while to figure out that she could do something else. But once she did, she realized she could do anything. She started at an investment bank as a financial analyst, followed by a job at PepsiCo. Both positions allowed her to master the fundamentals of business and professionalism.

From this point, however, Andrea knew that to reach a really fulfilling career, she needed to focus on what she was passionate about. For her that meant what people do for entertainment – how people relax and escape, how they use their leisure time and income. Shaping her ideal life's work took the kind of analytic and focused attention that she had built during her MIT experience.

While gaining her MBA at Stanford Graduate School of Business, Andrea explored the worlds of entertainment, travel and leisure, and food and wine. "I talked to anyone in those fields that would give me ten minutes and read everything about those industries."

Andrea fell in love with TV news when she got a summer job at NBC. So, when she graduated from Stanford in 1993, she decided to start all over again, at the bottom of ABC News as a production associate making less money than she made in her first job out of MIT. But, she climbed the ladder from there.

She also made use of her thorough exploration of entertainment as she built her career at ABC. As executive vice president of alternative programming, specials and late night, Andrea developed hit shows such as "The Bachelor", the U.S. version of "Dancing With the Stars"



and the Emmy-award winning "Extreme Makeover: Home Edition".

Again, the discipline she gained at MIT played a key role – but with a twist. "In engineering at MIT, she explains, "you're trained to take a whole bunch of complex issues and solve them down to an answer. But when I went into the creative world, I had to train my brain to do exactly the opposite – take a kernel of an idea and grow it into a show."

In terms of technology's impact, Andrea notes that technology is making tv more powerful every day because it is allowing people to consume more and more content – how and when they want.

In 2007 Wong followed her multiple contributions at ABC, taking a new position as president and CEO of Lifetime Networks, where she quickly guided the company to strong ratings with shows like the top-rated original series "Army Wives" and "Project Runway". Both of these shows were the highest rated series on Lifetime. She also over-

saw the development of digital experiences aimed as a destination for women online.

Today (and since fall, 2011), Andrea is the president of international production for Sony Pictures Television (SPT) and international president for Sony Pictures Entertainment. In her SPT position, Andrea oversees the studio's international television production business – including eighteen owned and joint venture production companies around the world.

As the global tv audience continues to expand, Andrea is also exploring content creation for a wide range of geographic and cultural diversity. She says, "One of the most exciting things about my job right now is that I get to make tv all over the world. We make comedies in Russia; we make talk shows, game shows, and tele-novellas in the Middle East; we make tele-series in Colombia and Mexico. It's endlessly interesting." On her way to Stockholm, she points to the potential tv markets not only in Scandinavia but also in India, China, South Africa, and eventually in Australia.

How is it possible to relate to all these varied markets? Andrea says: "There are certain things that resonate or provoke people and the best global hit tv shows tap into that, and that allows great shows to travel around the world. For example," she continues, "we own 'Who Wants to be a Millionaire?'. This show has been in 88 countries. It resonates because it's about betting on your own knowledge and it's something that is universal."

Although she is responsible for overseeing content creation companies worldwide – regardless of technology platforms – Andrea's electrical engineering background has meant a lot in terms of her awareness of the benefits of constantly evolving technologies. She notes that although technology may occasionally provide a degree of freedom creatively – such as interactivity – technology developments provide more opportunity for distribution.

Paired with her love for her work, Andrea credits her success to the fearlessness that she got from her MIT engineering education. "The greatest thing I got out of that education was I have absolutely no fear about solving problems because I will never solve harder problems than I did on a daily basis when I was at MIT."

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