Thor, the god of engineers

(After a dinner organized for charity by Engineers, and other well wishes.)

Engineers, Spouses and Well-wishers ... lend me your ears.

I come to maketh a speech so you might not doze off and try to kiss thy table.

That is one of the three things I was asked to do when I was told to do this speech; “Do not let them sleep”

The second one is, do not talk too long. Apparently there are people who hate long talks.

Thirdly I was asked not to over analyse things.

This was new to me. Over analyse? How can one over analyse?

I am told that this is not my problem but a commonality amongst engineers. Ah I see spouses nodding. When I say spouses I can see some bankers and some doctors. I don’t know what you people call it, but we call it the analytical “skill”.

Now the people in the house reminded me of a story. Don’t worry it is not the one with a banker, a doctor, and an engineer walks in to a bar and only the engineer ducks. It is about our analytical “skill”.

A banker, a doctor, and an engineer were waiting at a golf course till the previous group finishes. Time goes by and there is no sign of those people coming out.

The engineer fumes; “What is up with those guys? We were waiting for an hour now!”

The doctor says; “Never have I seen such inept golf”

The banker exclaims; “Here comes the green-keeper, let’s ask him”

“Hi, George! What’s up with the group ahead of us? Kind of slow, aren’t they?”

The green-keeper replied; “Yes. Sorry about that. They are a group of blind firemen.”

The banker says; “I am sorry? Did you say blind firemen?”

“Yes. They lost their sight saving our clubhouse from a fire last year, so we always let them play for free anytime.”

There was a moment of shocked silence.

The doctor says, "I'm going to contact my colleagues and see if there's anything they can do for them."

The banker says; “I'll see if I can do a fundraiser for the medical procedures required.”

The Engineer asks; “Soooooo, you always let them play for free anytime?”

“That we do!” Says the green-keeper.

“Anytime?”

“Yup”

“Then why can’t they play at night?"
We, engineers are known as problem solvers. To be precise, the best definition that I found online for an engineer is; "Someone who solves a problem you didn't know you had, in a way you don't understand."

Problem solving “skill” is well and good. But in cases like the golfer incident; we might come off as a tad bit insensitive in the eye of the average observer. But the fact is, we cannot help it. We like to solve problems and everywhere we look, we find problems. And we get this itchy feeling when we see an unsolved problem.

This inclination to voluntary problem solving yet again is well and good if not for the fact that we all think we are Thor the God of thunder! Thor has this Golden Hammer that he uses to solve any problem. Some of us engineers think our skills to be a golden hammer and sees every problem as a silver nail! I’ll give you a classic example.

One day an electrical engineer, a mechanical engineer, and a software engineer were on their way to a meeting in a hybrid car. They were climbing down a steep mountain when suddenly the car stopped responding. Steering was malfunctioning. Breaks did not work at all. The car almost slid down the mountain path. Repeatedly bouncing off the crash barriers. Finally it came to a halt scraping the mountain side.

The engineers are shaken but unhurt. After a minute of calming themselves. They assessed the situation. "This is clearly an electrical problem. Surely the hybrid car's motor is malfunctioning. I could have fixed it if I had my tester." Says the electrical engineer. "Humbug!" Says the mechanical engineer; "This clearly is a mechanical problem. I do not have my tools either. But I have my Swiss army knife. I'll strip down the car's engine. Isolate the fault. Fix it. And we can be on our way."

"You guys are wasting time." Says the software Engineer. "Let's try what solves most software problems. We'll cut power to the engine, get out of the car. And get back again. We call it 'restarting' works always"

Before they do anything "miraculously" the engine came back online. Since the engine was running; they unanimously decided to turn back, ride up the mountain and come down again to see if the brake failure would happen again to see if it is statistically significant.

Most people will cut us some slack for trying to solve every problem in the way we are trained. But discord comes when we “volunteer” to try and solve other people's problems uninvited. Ah some spouses are nodding so much so that I cannot tell if they have fallen asleep or agreeing with me at this point.

Once upon a time in France, when it was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness. When it was the time of order. When it was the time of anarchy. Simply put, when it was Robespierre's Reign of terror, three men were sentenced to death at a rural village. One was a poet, the other was a lawyer and the third was (yes, you guessed it right,) an engineer. The villagers had built an improvised Guillotine. First to be guillotined was the poet. When he was asked whether he has anything to say; he said that he is innocent and should be judged as such. Nevertheless he is placed on the Guillotine. The blade falls. And it stops an inch above the poet's neck. "Can't you see? Innocent me!" Shouts he, the mob agree, and he is free. Next is the lawyer. He pleads guilty and is put on the Guillotine. Again the blade falls and stops an inch above his neck! "Double jeopardy!" Shouts the lawyer. "You cannot punish me twice for the same crime" the mob let him go too. Next up is the engineer. When he is asked what he has to say, he says; "I have been observing the previous two experiments. You have captured the essence of the Guillotine pulley system correctly. Albeit with a minor problem. I think I can fix this for you".
But you know what? This "applying your skills to everyday life" thing is not so bad when it comes to having a good time. Once a new engineer asked an old engineer, "How do you estimate how long a project will take?" The old engineer said; "I add up the time required for each task, then multiply the sum by pi." "Why would you do that?" asked the new engineer. "I do that because then I can laugh my head off when the project manager accuses me of having an irrational budget."

I can see that more interesting items are being prepared. So that means, nap time is over! Ladies and gentlemen, wake your neighbours up. For the sake of those just woke up, and the ones that drifted off, let me give you the gist of the talk so that you can avoid feeling awkward when you talk with me later in the evening. Engineers, no matter how tempting (and possible) it is, do not try to model all situations as problems to be solved. And dear Non-engineers; spouses, sons and daughters and second-cousins who are here, as long as your thumb is not on a silver nail, you need not fear the golden hammer of Engineers. If you happen to see one of us brandishing one, just keep your thumbs off all the nails, silver or otherwise.