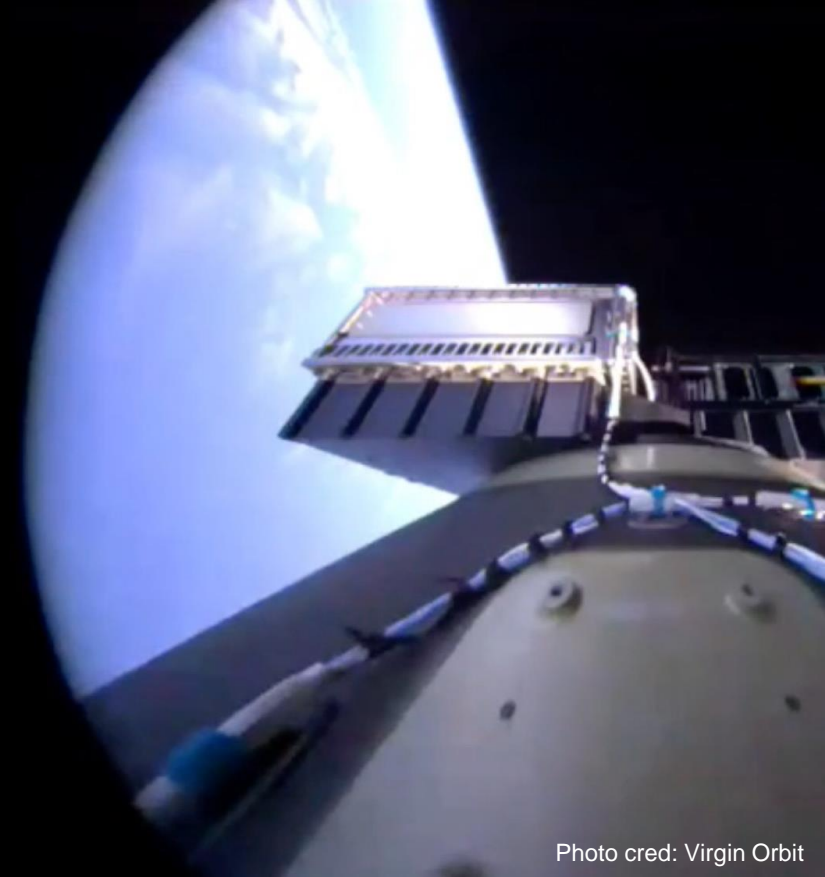Photo cred: Virgin Orbit

Photo cred: Virgin Orbit

"The importance of ~~SOFT~~ <u>ESSENTIAL</u> skills"

Dr. Michaelyn Thomas, EdD, MS, MBA

## Space Systems Engineer & Engineering Graduate Professor

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My "street cred"

My academic background
- ✓ In addition to my space systems engineering master's degree, I have an MBA and a doctorate in organizational leadership

My professional background
- ✓ Was asked by the CEO of a Sir Richard Branson company to join the c-suite to help start-up a new space company as the head of affordability and executive program manager
- ✓ Led a multi-billion dollar program portfolio with 1,500 technical staff
- ✓ Built and led a multi-billion dollar acquisition delta organization as a senior federal civilian

Tau Beta Pi
The Engineering Honor Society

Rocket Scientist
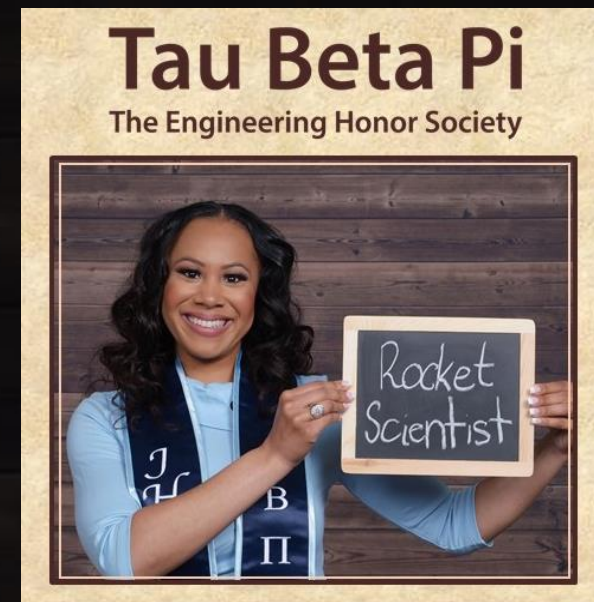
JOHNS HOPKINS
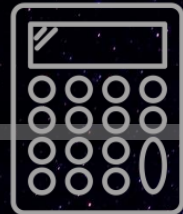WHITING SCHOOL
of ENGINEERING

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My career & academic constellation | Nearly 20 years in space!

Contracts Administrator (Boeing, 2007-2009)
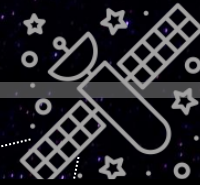
Material Cost Manager (Boeing, 2009-2010)

Cost Estimating SME—Cost Volume Leader (Boeing, 2010-2015)

Chief of Staff to the VP of Gov't / Commercial Space (Boeing, 2015-2017)

Head of Affordability & Executive Program Manager (Virgin Orbit, 2017-2022)

Deputy Director, (Space Force, 2022-2023)

Program Manager-National Security Space & University Engineering Professor (Johns Hopkins, 2023-Present)

Cal State Long Beach

BA Poli Sci, 2007

University of Redlands

MBA, 2010

University of La Verne

EdD, 2017

Johns Hopkins University

MS, 2021

Tau Beta Pi
The Engineering Honor Society

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Transferrable skills are essential skills

Transferable skills are often referred to as *soft skills*, and I prefer not to use that term. Instead of calling them *soft skills*, I call them *essential skills*. The term *soft skills* imply they are less important than technical skills, and they are often overlooked because the perception is that *soft skills* appear to be less valuable. I call this misconception a professional faux pas because very talented individuals could be mistakenly overlooked.

I define essential skills as… (1 of 2)

Critical thinking: The ability to objectively evaluate, synthesize, and analyze complex information while producing a recommendation or a decision rooted in data-driven best practices. Someone who is a critical thinker will set their egos aside in order to move out on the best path forward.

Problem solving: The ability to apply critical thinking by collectively converging towards appropriate approaches to solve complex issues. Someone who is a problem solver aims to get to the root cause of problems as quickly, efficiently, and affordably as possible.

Flexibility and adaptability: The ability to pivot and adapt to evolving requirements or a new organizational structure. Someone who is flexible and adaptable will thrive in ambiguous technical environments, take on new challenges with a positive mindset, and is not adverse to change.
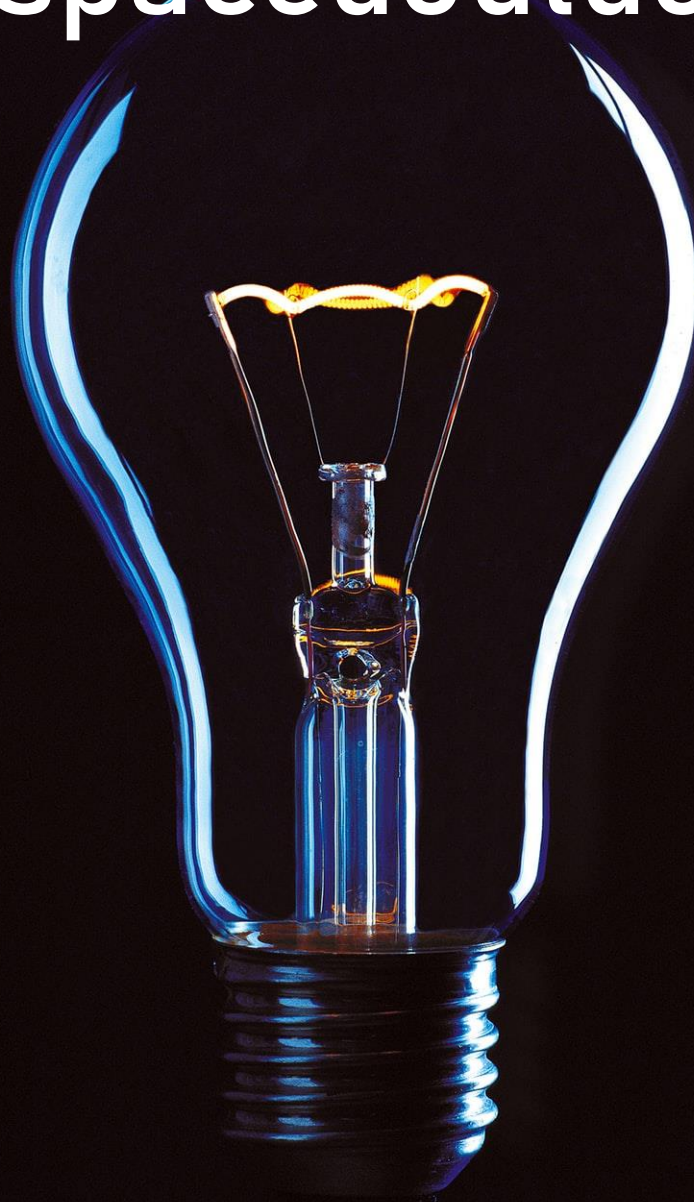
I define essential skills as… (2 of 2)

Cross-functional collaboration: The ability to demonstrate strong communication skills across all employee and leadership levels. Someone who is a strong cross-functional collaborator can communicate the details as well as provide executive-level presentations as deemed appropriate.

Leadership: The ability to create a positive sphere of influence by providing a diverse, equitable, and inclusive environment for all to be successful and to thrive. Someone who is a good leader can lead from any chair, regardless of rank or title, and encourages everyone to bring their authentic selves to work.

If you possess these *essential skills,* YOU WILL THRIVE. Be sure to highlight your transferable skills, both technical skills and *essential skills,* throughout your journey. This will most likely be a distinguishing factor between you and others.
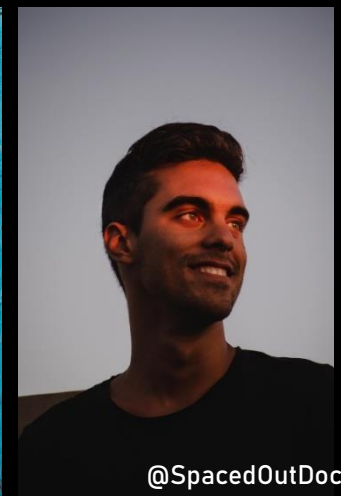
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