

# “Education is the foundation for a strong society”

by Janine Braun



Eilif Holte's physics studies helped him handle large public projects later on in his career, for instance for the Norwegian Ministry of Finance.

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Eilif Holte is a successful software entrepreneur from Norway. In this interview, he reveals the challenges he faced when building his company, shares inspiring stories of polar research pioneers and explains the importance of supporting young talents.

*You studied physics at ETH Zurich. What do you remember about your first day at ETH? What was going through your mind?*

**EILIF HOLTE:** I was both awed and happy to be starting a demanding physics degree at a top-tier university, especially in a country that prioritises quality and precision.

*What experiences during your degree programme shaped you the most?*

First and foremost, being taught how to think holistically and how to do systematic analysis and fact-based problem-solving. This turned out to be invaluable later on in my career. I'm convinced that high-quality education is the foundation for a strong society.

*Is that why you're supporting young talents today?*

Yes, for me it's a privilege to be able to help ETH offer targeted support to excellent young researchers. In my view, supporting the next generation is an incredibly important task. It was also great to meet Fredrik Nestaas, an Excellence Scholar with Norwegian roots, during my last visit to ETH.

*You ended up going the entrepreneurial route for your own career. What inspired you back in 1977 to found Holte Consulting?*

After finishing my degree, I joined my father-in-law's construction company and had a very interesting job managing important construction projects.

After six years, I decided to become my own boss. As a physicist, I understood that there's only room for one sun per solar system.

*What were the main challenges you faced when establishing your company?*

Project management is a service that you have to sell without being able to present the result during your pitch. That makes it a question of trust, and I've put a lot of emphasis on building and maintaining our reputation as a trustworthy company. Here it probably helped that I once uncovered a big government construction scandal.

*Do you have a personal motto to get you through all the highs and lows?*

Always prioritise quality and planability. One of my role models for project management is polar researcher Roald Amundsen. Thanks to planning ahead and setting the right priorities, his expedition reached the South Pole as planned and was able to return with all parties. His rival Robert Scott, on the other hand, made horrible mistakes when attempting the same route, causing his expedition to fail and his crew members to lose their lives. For me this highlights the importance of project management, which is one of the reasons I founded Holte Academy in Norway over 20 years ago, in order to train specialists in this area.

**Holte Consulting**



“It was great meeting Mr. Holte and hearing about how he and his Norwegian classmates experienced ETH at the time. I’m very thankful for people like him who help today’s cohort of students. Thanks to my scholarship, I was able to fully concentrate on my studies. As a counterbalance to all my academic work, I enjoy doing alpine sports in Switzerland’s breathtaking mountain scenery.”

**Fredrik Nestaas**  
Excellence Scholar 2021



Eilif Holte received an honorary doctorate from the University of Oslo in 2024.

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