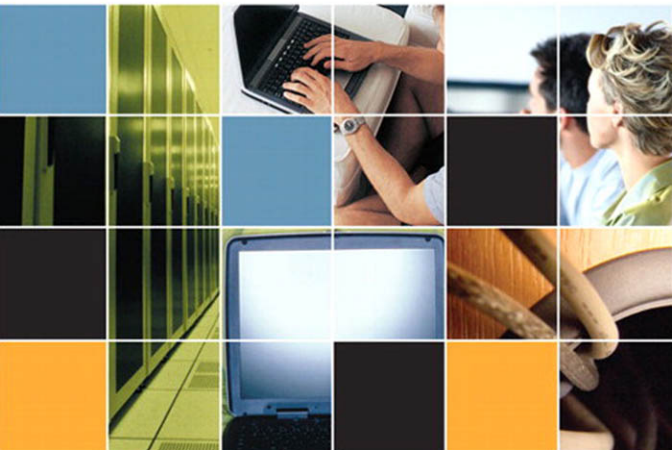


MATTHEW MORAN

BUILDING YOUR **I.T. CAREER**

A COMPLETE TOOLKIT
FOR A DYNAMIC CAREER
IN ANY ECONOMY

SECOND EDITION



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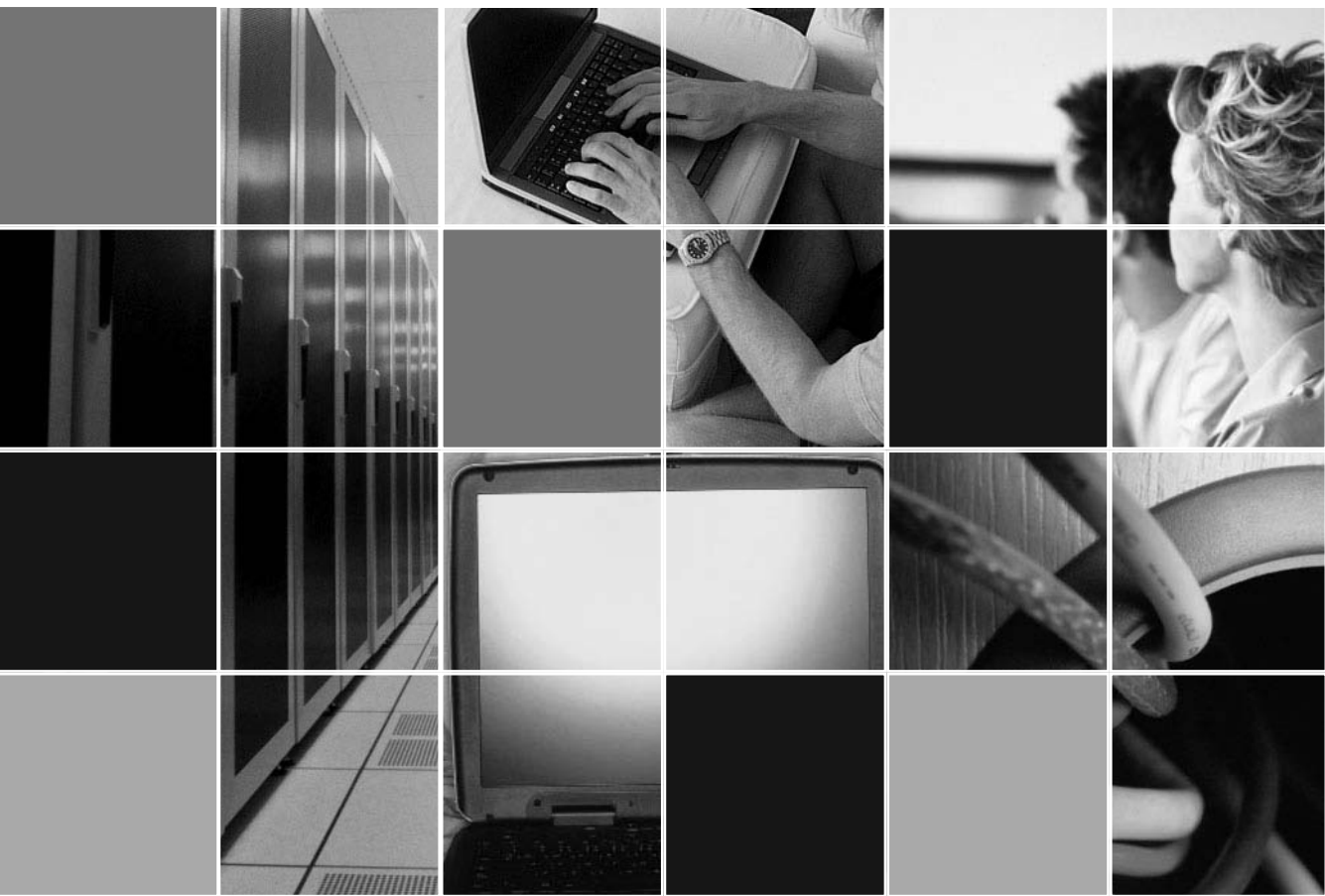


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Building Your I.T. Career: A Complete Toolkit for a Dynamic Career in Any Economy

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About the Author

Matthew Moran is a business coach and technology consultant with more than 20 years of experience. He began his career as a data entry clerk at Blue Cross of California (Anthem). Over the next 6 years, he created a variety of database systems and a large automated document assembly system. The success of this system led to several consulting engagements in the healthcare and legal industries.

His consulting focuses on business-centric application development, with a focus on workflow automation. His clients include Northrop Grumman, HealthNet, Power-one, Maracay Homes, Waste Management, Primerica Financial, and others.

He coaches I.T. departments on concept over process, a business-focused methodology for more proactive and solution-oriented technologies. He also coaches entrepreneurs and small businesses on matters of I.T., content strategies, online presence, and social media.

He is a keynote and workshop presenter, speaking to colleges, professional organizations, and I.T. groups. He is also a songwriter and performer, performing solo and with his band.

He lives in Los Angeles, California, with his youngest daughter and their three dogs.

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Finally, most of all, thank you to the readers, students, and instructors who read the book, sent me e-mails, asked me questions, and encouraged the new edition. Scott, that means you!

We Want to Hear from You!

As the reader of this book, you are our most important critic and commentator. We value your opinion and want to know what we're doing right, what we could do better, what areas you'd like to see us publish in, and any other words of wisdom you're willing to pass our way.

We welcome your comments. You can email or write to let us know what you did or didn't like about this book—as well as what we can do to make our books better.

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Email: feedback@pearsonitcertification.com

Mail: Dave Dusthimer
 Associate Publisher
 Pearson IT Certification
 800 East 96th Street
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Introduction

In 2002, I started writing some articles for Power Media Group. During that same time, I occasionally posted on the CramSession.com discussion boards—primarily focusing on the career and job discussions.

The response to my articles and to the posts was extremely positive. In June, I posted a question to the discussion board asking whether anyone would be interested in having me compile my prior posts and articles into a “career toolkit.” The response was overwhelming and led to this book.

Who Should Read This Book

This is not a “technical” book. Although this book certainly contains techniques and methods, it’s really about personal and professional growth. It is directed at IT professionals—both those who are just entering the field (the newbies) and seasoned veterans who want to advance their career.

No certifications are available to guide you on many of the topics covered in this toolkit. To a large degree, they are adopted into a total working skill set that, to many, seems vague or difficult to internalize and put into practice. Pure technical skills, such as configuring a specific brand of router to perform a function or writing a program to achieve a particular end, are often more easily defined. That’s why I have framed the book as a toolkit.

I want you to see the techniques as one more set of skills to adopt in your overall career development program. They are skills, just as your particular technical skills that you will use daily over the course of your career. Similar to the way you adopt new technical skills, use the toolkit to help define those soft skills that you must learn and put to use. The result will be a more well-rounded and complete professional skill set.

How to Use the Toolkit

You can read *Building Your I.T. Career* cover to cover, which is the ideal method for someone who is new to the field, or by topic, to fine-tune an already growing career in the field.

Information is spread throughout the book that might interest or help you. Conceptual ideas that run through the book are emphasized in each of the chapters. If you choose to read through specific topics, take time later to revisit some of the other chapters. You will likely find something of interest there, too.

The chapters include a brief introduction to the topic. At the end of each chapter are action points or key ideas. These help to emphasize ideas you have learned in the chapter.

Although it is important to play to your strength, work on those areas that are a challenge or intimidate you. Mastery of a difficult challenge or skill does wonders for your confidence. This confidence further enhances your ability in your areas of strength.

What Is the Toolkit Approach to Career Development?

The toolkit approach to career development is a holistic, proactive, and ownership-based approach to career development. Whereas other books cover the mechanics of preparing your resumé, writing a cover letter, and even interviewing, this book provides the information to help you plan and create a rewarding career over the long term.

This book does not neglect those important topics, but it expands to include them in an overall assessment and plan of action. Armed with this information, you can begin to plan and implement concrete steps into a complete career development plan.

The approach is planned but agile. Because your desires and interests might change during your career, it is important that you are flexible in overall objectives. However, planning and developing key tools and attitudes are necessary for any career. Also, conceptual knowledge should be, wherever feasible, transferred into any new career path.

The toolkit approach positions you as the primary commodity of your career. This means that you need to create a strong sense of the value you provide and your worth to an organization.

For the career technologist, I go even further. You must view and position yourself as a service company. Your employer is in a very real sense your client. You need to think in terms of personal marketing, service level, and client retention.

This is part of the ownership mindset I want to give your career. You should study and understand your career, just as you would a business. You need to understand the various and changing factors that can and will impact your career in both positive and negative ways.

Most of all, you must be able to make changes when necessary. If elements of your career plan are not working, you need to work to understand why and then take corrective action. It is not enough to say that it is the economy or some other exterior factor. Your career must belong to you.

As with any business, negative events will occur. Your overall career plan should include an understanding that such events will happen. Layoffs transpire, companies are sold, and companies go out of business. Your response to these events cannot be shocked resentment. You have been forewarned. Prepare for these events with the tools presented in this book. It will make them far less traumatic when they do occur.

Most of all, have fun! You will hear this theme throughout the book. Every year, people advance along the path to career stardom. Endeavor to be one of them. Don't accept mediocrity as a career objective; demand more of yourself.

Good luck and happy building!

How This Book Is Organized

Although you can read this book cover to cover, it is designed to be flexible and allow you to easily move between chapters and sections of chapters to cover just the material that you need more work with. The book is divided into five parts, each with several related chapters. The intent is that each part and each chapter builds on the previous one. If you do intend to read them all, the order in the book is an excellent sequence to use.

Part I, “Your Career”—The chapters in Part I give an overview of the career development process and introduce you to the toolkit. Part I includes Chapters 1 through 4, covering the following topics:

- **Chapter 1, “The Toolkit Approach to Career Development”**—This chapter serves as an introduction to the contents of the toolkit and what you should expect to learn. It explains the importance of a comprehensive approach to career building and describes how the toolkit can help you adopt such an approach.
- **Chapter 2, “Career Building Defined”**—This chapter covers the concept of career building versus simply getting a string of jobs. It covers essential ideas to place career building in perspective with the hope of providing you with a framework for pursuing your education, the skills you use, and the relationships you develop. Understanding career building can help you grow your career more rapidly and with greater satisfaction.
- **Chapter 3, “Information Technology: A Great Career”**—With the advent of outsourcing, the notable failures of the dot-com debacle, and a general malaise in the industry, this chapter paints a more balanced picture. The premise is that all those events are largely to be expected and must be viewed for the impact on how you approach your career. Rather than focus on those areas of struggle, the idea is to direct you toward areas of opportunity and how to best recognize them.
- **Chapter 4, “Defining Yourself: Attitudes, Aptitudes, and Desires”**—This chapter explains some ways to better understand what drives you. By understanding those things that you believe are important for your career and professional growth, you can better assess the opportunities that come your way.

Part II, “Filling Your Toolkit”—The chapters in this part are more concerned with the development of key skills and ideas that you will use throughout your career. Part II includes Chapters 5 through 10, covering the following topics:

- **Chapter 5, “Self-Assessment”**—This chapter covers a simple set of techniques to help you assess your performance and attitude. The goal is to provide you with ideas to remedy problems prior to performance reviews. In doing so, you increase your job satisfaction and management’s perception of your value.

- **Chapter 6, “Attitude”**—This chapter addresses the critical issue of attitude. It is not meant to provide you with positive encouragement but to provide you with concrete steps to help you improve your attitude. The central theme is to create an attitude of value about the work you perform.
- **Chapter 7, “Communication Skills”**—This chapter covers the critical area of written and verbal communications. It explains how these skills impact your career and provides you with resources and ideas for improvement in both areas.
- **Chapter 8, “Technical Skills”**—This chapter addresses the need for excellent technical skills. More important, it removes the anxiety of learning the “next hot technology” by focusing on strategies for more rapidly learning and adopting new technologies through an understanding of their common elements.
- **Chapter 9, “The Cover Letter”**—This chapter explains the role of your cover letter. It offers a formula for building one that will make a positive impact on a potential employer and tells which key elements to include.
- **Chapter 10, “The Resumé”**—The resumé is the mainstay of your professional marketing tools. It serves as your ambassador to the professional world. This chapter explains how to build one that focuses on the value and strengths you bring to an organization. Whether you are new to the IT field or building a more robust resumé, this chapter can help you.

Part III, “Putting Your Toolkit to Use”—The chapters in this part of the book help you put the various skills and tools from the previous section to use. This is the actual groundwork of the career-building process. Chapters 11 through 17 cover the following topics:

- **Chapter 11, “Breaking In to I.T.”**—The entry-level dilemma is the idea that you need experience to get experience. This chapter explains how you can gain valuable experience and jump-start your I.T. career. For the more seasoned professional, this chapter offers some tips on how to move into new areas of I.T. or find technology-related opportunities outside the I.T. department.
- **Chapter 12, “Building an Active Contact List”**—This chapter covers the basics of professional networking. Using the adage, “It’s not who you know but who knows you and knows what you know,” this chapter discusses the importance of continually building a professional network. It also covers key ideas to help you rapidly build a thriving contact list.

- **Chapter 13, “The Job Search”**—This chapter covers techniques that will result in more rapidly finding a job. It covers how jobs are found and how to locate better opportunities.
- **Chapter 14, “The Interview”**—The interview is the moment of truth for most job seekers. It is the moment that you get to better explain your accomplishments, find out if the opportunity is a good fit, and make a direct impact on the potential employer. This chapter gives some concrete tips for what to look for in an interview and how you can have the greatest impact on your potential employer.
- **Chapter 15, “Salary Negotiations and Employment Agreements”**—This chapter explains how to get the most from your current or potential employer. It provides ideas to help you at the start of the interview and as you get to know your employer more. In addition, it helps you create a vision for what constitutes career growth and advancement for you.
- **Chapter 16, “On-the-Job Promotion”**—This chapter covers why on-the-job advancement is your greatest potential source of job growth. It explains how to maximize your current skills and relationships and turn these into advancement opportunities.
- **Chapter 17, “Your Career and Social Media”**—The growth of social media websites and tools deserves special mention. This chapter explains the proper mindset and methodology in utilizing your social media profiles to enhance and not detract from your career development.

Part IV, “More Options to Build Your Career”—This part covers some ideas to help further your career. These ideas are often overlooked or apply to specific situations. Chapters 18 through 20 cover the following topics:

- **Chapter 18, “Telecommuting”**—This chapter explains the benefits and challenges of working from home. It covers ideas to help you and management come to an effective telecommuting relationship.
- **Chapter 19, “Consulting”**—The consultant has the potential to work on the most exciting projects, create a high salary, and gain incredible respect from his peers and clients. This chapter explains key concepts and ideas for those who are interested in the consulting life. In addition, it covers the importance of marketing and the vital need for a sound business mindset.
- **Chapter 20, “Management”**—This chapter explains the skills that are crucial to moving into management. It covers ways to begin using the skills prior to being placed in a management situation and how to assume the role before you assume the position.

Part V, “The Value-Added Toolkit”—The chapters in this part teach some specific value-added skills that you can use throughout the life of your career. These ideas add a dynamic dimension to the career-building process and involve a greater effort and a more comprehensive skill set. Chapters 21 through 28 cover the following topics:

- **Chapter 21, “Making Yourself Indispensable”**—The ideas and techniques in this chapter apply universally to many careers. Specific ideas for the technologist are also covered. This chapter demonstrates ways to become as valuable as possible and how that can translate into career advancement.
- **Chapter 22, “Concept Over Process”**—This chapter covers what is both a mindset and an approach to project development. By focusing on strong conceptual understanding of your employer or client’s business, this chapter explains how to build solutions that have incredible value and focus on the solution, not the specific technologies used. In addition, this chapter explains how this mindset and approach help in the adoption and learning of new technologies.
- **Chapter 23, “The Role of Mentoring”**—This chapter explains the need for strong mentors in your life and career. It explains the role that a mentor takes and how you can benefit by serving as a mentor, too.
- **Chapter 24, “Career Coaching”**—Expanding upon the idea of both having and being a mentor, this chapter explores the benefits of a personal career coach. It also discusses how you can take your career knowledge, share it with others, and become a paid career coach.
- **Chapter 25, “Financial Control”**—This chapter explains the need for financial control and its impact on your career. It discusses how financial stress can reduce your effectiveness on the job and how financial struggles reduce your ability to pursue good opportunities. It also provides some tools for controlling your finances.
- **Chapter 26, “A Professional Blog”**—A well-written blog containing valuable knowledge for the reader, is an excellent career development tool. This chapter explores ways you can start blogging and specifically discusses WordPress, a free, feature-rich, blogging and content management tool.
- **Chapter 27, “12 Weeks To Profitable Consulting”**—The chapter takes the information that was started in Chapter 19 and creates a 12-week plan of action you can put into place to begin consulting part time or full time.

- **Chapter 28, “Be Proactive! Be Positive! Add Value! Share Opportunity!”**—More than simply “rah rah, you can do it” platitudes, this chapter offers some perspective to help you navigate both challenging times and times of dynamic career growth.
- **Appendix, “My Reading List”**—This appendix describes some of the books and other reading material I find important, both technical books and more broadly applied books on leadership, creativity, and marketing.

Online Supplements

The first edition of this book shipped with a CD-ROM. However, I continue to add and adjust tools from the CD-ROM as necessary. For that reason, I’ve established www.ITCareerToolkit.com as a dynamic resource for this book. I will be uploading new tools, blog entries, and providing topics of discussion at the IT Career Toolkit website.

You can find updated versions of tools from the original CD plus many new downloads there.

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The Entry-Level Dilemma

One of the most frustrating elements of breaking into a career in technology is that initial job. This chapter identifies the quandary facing the entry-level professional.

This chapter analyzes the “need experience to get experience” dilemma that those who are new to the field often encounter. More important, however, this chapter discusses methods you can use to break past this barrier.

CHAPTER 11

Breaking In to I.T.

For many technology graduates, the past few years have been frustrating ones, because they have tried desperately to enter a seemingly shrinking job market. They had bought into the “get a certification—get a job” promise fostered by the marketing of many training programs. These graduates had been excited that their school had placement services to assist them in entering the growing and lucrative field of information technology (I.T.).

Unfortunately, although some technology graduates might have found their dream job as promised, many discovered a different reality.

Having followed the promised path, these eager students have discovered that many colleges have also struggled with placement. Although the schools have programs to help with resumé, and they work diligently to link graduates with employers, the fact remains that a tighter job market and a more skeptical employer pool have made job placement a nearly impossible task.

Adding to a tighter market is the fact that more experienced technology professionals have been forced to take a cut in pay and position. This has increased the competition for entry-level positions. Sometimes new graduates are competing with senior-level technologists for the same job.

Part of the fault of unsuccessful job placement lies squarely on the shoulders of the job seeker. Unrealistic expectations have many believing that a certification or degree qualifies them for positions that require hands-on knowledge.

I know of individuals who received their MCSE certification after attending several months of class. They passed the test, did some lab work, and got into the job market. Many of them expected to be hired as network engineers with salaries of \$60,000 to \$80,000. Their logic was that they were, as the certification implied, “certified engineers.” As they perused want ads, lesser jobs, such as those of help desk or I.T. clerical support, were undesirable to them.

This attitude has contributed to ongoing “certification cynicism” with many employers. Employers hired the “certified engineers” only to discover that many could not complete the most basic and mundane tasks effectively.

A correction has taken place in the corporate world. Companies are no longer willing to provide pay and opportunity to an unproven commodity: the entry-level technology professional. Many new technologists are unwilling to give up the idealistic dream of instantaneous job satisfaction and a high salary. Unfortunately, this is also leading some to listen to the doomsayers moaning about the lack of opportunity in I.T. Talent that would do well in the I.T. industry is leaving to find opportunity elsewhere.

If you are in that group—ready to leave your hopes of I.T. success and find greener pastures—wait!

I understand that you are frustrated and disenchanted, but I ask that you seriously consider the corrective behavior described in the section that follows. In it, I believe you will find a rekindled hope that comes with understanding the reality of the situation.

Correcting Perception

The first battle in overcoming frustration in not finding the “job you deserve” is to correct the perception of the new technologist. As discussed earlier, I.T. will remain a great career choice. However, it is no different from many other good careers. You must make a degree of sacrifice to reach the heights of professional success.

A perspective that places emphasis on long-term career goals and month-to-month personal growth is critical. You must understand where you want to be in the coming months and years. You must also set about creating the short-term plans to achieve that longer-term success.

I’m not necessarily advocating a start-at-the-bottom mentality. I don’t perceive that each person’s path, even with similar goals, will be the same. I advocate more of a start-where-you-can mentality.

If a company is willing to hire you as a full-fledged network engineer based entirely on your schooling, more power to you. However, beware of overselling yourself without first developing the aptitude that is required. Taking a job where the expectations

greatly exceed your production capacity can be just as professionally damaging as it is to take a job that never makes use of, or stretches, the talents you have. In fact, I would say the former is more damaging.

It is more difficult—both mentally and from a perception standpoint—to move down the corporate ladder. It does not look good on a resumé, and more important, it can damage your confidence.

I.T. is an industry that provides ample opportunity to learn new and challenging skills. However, substantial failure early in a career can create a professional timidity that stops you from taking the necessary chances to take on the challenges that come your way.

The perception that you need when breaking into I.T. is one that seeks opportunity over position. If you have been trained as a network engineer but you find an opportunity to take a position in a clerical capacity, consider what opportunities that job might offer.

Some of the factors to consider in whether to take this slight shift in employment are as follows:

- Does the company have an effective training program?
- Is it possible to find mentors in the field you want to enter?
- Is the company growing?
- Does the opportunity exist to greatly expand your professional network of contacts?

Remember: You can safely make this consideration because the job itself is not your career. You have the freedom and ability to move within the company or to a new company when needed.

The most important factor is that you are moving toward a career goal. You might not get the title or job you want right out of school. If you can master those skills at your current position, while simultaneously building your network of contacts that lead to your dream position, you should be satisfied. You must build your career piece by piece. It won't happen all at once.

I.T. Happens Outside of I.T.

One of the most important ideas that I coach is the concept of breaking into I.T. by staying away from I.T. Scratch your head for a moment and get past the nagging thought that what I just said makes no sense. Now move on. I'll explain.

Many who are struggling to enter the I.T. field view their first major career step as getting a job in an I.T. department. This myopic view has been advanced to a degree by the growth of the industry over the past few years. The advent of the chief information officer (CIO) as a corporate executive is a new concept.

In the past, IT largely fell under the watchful eye of the chief financial officer (CFO). Technology managers existed, but not technology senior executives. A somewhat rogue and decentralized culture formerly existed in the I.T. world.

The pressing need to ensure that technology closely aligns itself with corporate objectives drives the requirement for a strategic executive. This tighter level of executive management promotes the idea that all technology jobs necessarily fall under the purview of the CIO.

In a traditional I.T. organization, you might see a senior-level executive (CIO, director of technology, VP of technology), managers over working groups (application development, networking, user support), and their staff. Furthermore, you might be under the impression that you must find a way into this structure to start your I.T. career.

That idea is far from the truth.

For many who are currently at the top of their I.T. careers, their path was much different. In fact, a majority of senior technologists who I know started out working in a user department, not in the I.T. or data processing units. Several reasons can explain this:

- Working in an I.T. department typically provides a higher degree of specialization.
- I.T. often creates a myopic view of the business world.
- You can develop numerous valuable relationships outside of technology.

Working in an I.T. department typically provides a higher degree of specialization.

In most cases, you fall under a specific classification, as in *help desk*, *network support*, *application development*, *systems analyst*, and so on. Rarely do the job classifications cross. When a task hits a particular level, it is passed on to the appropriate group.

However, when you are a technologist in a user department, you are expected to handle almost everything. The idea of different roles disappears. You are the in-house technology professional. Whether that places you in the capacity of installing hardware and software, supporting and training users, or writing code, you are expected to take on the tasks.

User departments make no distinction between a help desk/PC technician and an application developer. Both are known as the “computer guy.” User departments’ lack of distinction in this area makes working for them both exciting and dangerous. You are given charge over all of the technology, whether hardware or software related.

I.T. often creates a myopic view of the business world. It is a well-documented complaint of senior management that their I.T. departments do a poor job of understanding or speaking in business terms.

Many years ago, a study conducted by KPMG and ComputerWorld asked CEOs and senior management about how they felt their I.T. dollars were spent. To a large degree, the CEOs believed that I.T. did not deliver solutions that were well aligned with actual business objectives.

Many went even further, stating that they distrusted their I.T. departments, feeling that in many cases, their convoluted language was being used to hide ineffective projects, create confusion, and pad budgets.

This condition and perspective is still prevalent. As an aspiring or growing I.T. professionally, you must deal with this reality. If you do so, and adopt a more proactive and business mindset, you can separate yourself from the crowd.

Note

This perspective by CEOs is something that I have shared for years. In 1996, I started giving a presentation titled “Why Technologists Must Learn to Speak Business.” (You can find an article of the same name at www.ITCareerToolkit.com.) In the article, I admonished technologists to begin speaking to management and businesses in business terms and removing techno jargon from their language entirely.

One advantage to breaking into I.T. by becoming a departmental technologist is that you are forced to speak in terms that the general department speaks. You learn the business from the business unit—the people managing and performing the work. Your work is directly applied to production of the product or service of the company.

This was the path I took, and it has served me well. Many of my clients in my technology consulting practice rely on me for assistance in operations, marketing, and other nontechnology-related ventures. One commented once that he did not view me as a technology professional but as a business consultant and mentor who had extremely strong technical knowledge. I associate that skill with the experience I obtained as a business analyst in a nontechnology department.

You can develop numerous valuable relationships outside of technology. These relationships can easily become the core of your professional contacts network. Many will provide you with opportunities at other companies when they leave or through their extended contacts.

I developed many relationships during my years as a business analyst. Some of those relationships became or referred me to contracts when I became a consultant. These people knew the types of solutions I offered and knew of my professionalism. They were happy to refer me to associates or to recommend me to their employers.

Politically, and from the perspective of production, you often gain much more visibility in a nontechnology department. Your solutions are more apparent to the users, and your name becomes synonymous with what you produce. This, of course, can be a double-edged sword. If you do not produce, this will be apparent, too.

Working in a department other than I.T. offers more interaction with users. This increases the opportunity to develop your interpersonal skills. Over the life of your career, this interaction and the development of the associated skills can pay tremendous dividends.

Given the choice between obscurity and the risk associated with being in the forefront of solutions, I'll choose the latter.

A technologist/programmer who builds an application within the I.T. department typically is viewed as one of many producers in that venue. However, the same developer who is working to create an application in a user department, while working with and within that department, gains a sort of "hero mystique."

The hero stands out because he is providing a valuable service that no one else in the department can. In addition, a departmental technologist is often exposed to technology and projects that would never enter his area in the traditional I.T. department structure.

Exposure to new technology and nontraditional I.T. projects is a key reason not to overlook opportunities that place you outside of I.T. Remember that each job is a progression toward your long-term goal. However, the perks and opportunities offered outside of the technology department can have long-lasting effects on your career. They can provide you with a greatly accelerated path of professional development.

Other Avenues into I.T.

As with most career moves, every turn has options. Part of the challenge facing many professionals is the idea that a wrong decision will have lasting repercussions on their career. I want to alleviate this fear.

Seldom will any single career move make or break you. As indicated in Part I of this book, “Your Career,” the idea of a career is based on long-term objectives and planning. Plans can change, and even long-term objectives can be altered without negatively impacting your career.

The fear of changing those objectives and plans is exactly what causes many individuals to effectively freeze in their tracks. They fail to make effective moves, afraid that taking that new position might be the “wrong” move. But a job is always just that: a job.

Typically, if you weigh your decision using the factors of compensation, opportunity, insurance, training, commute, travel, and so on, it is unlikely that you will move to a position that is dramatically worse than your current situation. Even if it turns out that you do not enjoy the work, you can simply begin looking for the next opportunity. In most cases, there is a redeeming lesson or skill to take from every situation. That is the way careers and life work out.

I am not advocating leaving your current job just to try something new. If your current position affords you adequate compensation, a learning environment, access to mentors and peers who are actively advancing in their own careers, and any number of other intangible benefits, I advocate trying to advance within the organization.

If you are a person who is trying to break into I.T., advancing within your own organization requires you to make contacts in your company’s I.T. department.

Interning

One of the most powerful ways to create connections and kick-start your I.T. career is through interning. Many I.T. and management information systems (MIS) training programs require this; however, you do not need to wait for a school to place you to begin interning.

Interning may allow you to work in a given discipline long before you have your degree and even prior to receiving any training. In addition, if you go out and find your own internship, you might be able to find one that is geographically advantageous to you.

I had an employee who has gone on to become a senior-level consultant. He approached me while in school and asked if he could intern. This unpaid internship turned into a part-time job with me a month or so later. Soon after, I hired him full time. After my company was purchased by a client and he worked there for a couple years, he went to another employer, quickly becoming a senior developer.

Ask for What You Want

I must give you another piece of advice: Ask for what you want. This is one of the most underutilized ways to help advance your career. For some reason, we feel hesitant to make our desires known.

However, if you are hoping to get into I.T. at your company, your chances improve considerably if the manager of that department knows this. I know that sounds obvious. But I meet person after person who fails to introduce himself to his company's I.T. managers and explain his desired career goals.

Part of this reason might be a feeling of inferiority when considering the seasoned professionals who work there. However, personal promotion is a key factor in how rapidly you rise in your career. In marketing vernacular, personal promotion is referred to as *reach and frequency*. Simply put, get your name, accomplishments, and good attitude in front of as many people as possible.

Ask for Advice

The owner of a small marketing company once told me the most noticed/desirable words for people to hear are *you* and *free*. One strokes our pride, and the other strikes a pragmatic financial chord.

Don't be afraid to ask for what *you* want, but just as important is the ability to ask for advice. When you approach an I.T. manager, ask him what you might do to break into the field. More specifically, ask him how you can break into his department.

Let the I.T. manager know up front that you are asking for his advice. More important, take it. If this person provides you with a profile of what he would like to see in an employee, do what you can to model that profile. Asking advice pays dividends in a few ways:

- **It serves notice that you are serious about your career**—You want to know from the top how to succeed in this endeavor. From this perspective, it paints good public relations. As a business owner, I was always impressed when someone would approach me for advice on my line of work. I considered it a compliment and considered the individual wise for seeking it.
- **You'll probably receive some good advice**—Don't overlook this. If you are asking advice just to paint a good picture, but your attitude is one of disdain for the actual advice received, it will show up somewhere else. Most people in management have actually produced to get where they are. Their advice is valuable and should be heeded.

Don't make the mistake of assuming that the managerial tasks are simpler than the hands-on technology work. I'm here to tell you that the opposite is true. You should aspire to learn from *effective* managers, even if you believe your technical skills far surpass theirs.

Beware Your Online Persona

I cover this topic more fully in Chapter 17, "Your Career and Social Media," and Chapter 26, "A Professional Blog." But it is worth mentioning here.

Even your e-mail address should be professional. Vanity e-mail addresses or those that imply immaturity in an attempt to be clever should be avoided. In addition, fully expect any prospective employer to do some research on you. If you are in the habit of posting information that an employer could find objectionable, just be aware that it could hinder your ability to get hired.

Conclusion

Breaking into the I.T. field can, at times, seem to be a daunting task. However, if you look past the obvious door through the I.T. department and see, instead, opportunities elsewhere, your chances are greatly enhanced. Don't be afraid both to ask for advice and let your desires be known. These two ideas alone will serve you well.

Actions & Ideas

1. Analyze your ideas about breaking into I.T. Do you have the perception that all I.T. careers take place in the I.T. department? Can you see areas where technology expertise would be helpful in nontechnical roles—perhaps even a job you have held?
2. Introduce yourself to an I.T. professional of some influence—whether at your current company, your local church or religious organization, or other sphere of influence. Let this person know your career motives and ask for advice.
3. Create a short-term plan of technology projects that you can perform outside of an I.T. department to advance your skills.
4. Look for ads for I.T.-related jobs (or jobs that require I.T. related skills) in non-I.T. departments. Compare job descriptions, prerequisites, and expectations.



EXPAND YOUR TOOLKIT

Remember to visit the book's website at <http://www.ITCareerToolkit.com> for supplemental and ongoing advice, tips, and data relevant to this chapter.

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