

Career Development for Geeks.

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Why?

- Geeks are notoriously bad at managing their own careers.
 - Often underpaid.
 - Often overworked.
 - Usually under appreciated.
- We need to turn this around.

Caveats

- I am not an authority on this subject.
- I have made mistakes in my own career.
- I am still working on perfecting these techniques.
- If you're a sysadmin, this may not be too useful.

Who Needs This?

- You can probably leave now if:
 - Your name is Mark Shuttleworth or like Mark you have enough money to do as you damn well please.
 - You expect to retire in the next 12 months.
 - You have a job you love in a good company, get paid well above market rates and work sensible hours.
 - You are an independent contractor who can pick and choose their jobs and can dump all the bad ones.
 - You are your own boss and never expect to be an employee again.
 - You work for Ubuntu/Cannonical (maybe).

Working hours

- How many geeks work 40, 50, 60, 70 or more hours per week?
- How many of those hours are effective hours?
- What does this tell your manager about you?
- If you are working more than 40 hours a week and you're effective for less than 40 hours you need to re-examine the situation.
- So, why so many hours?

Working hours (continued)

- Are you simply trying to catch up to where you think you should be?
- **Common cause** : trying to meet unrealistic deadlines combined with management using Microsoft Project's Gantt charts.

The Steps to Salvation

- Managing your management.
- Managing your projects.
- Measuring your performance.
- Apply engineering principles to your management of the above.
- Maximising your potential.

Managing Your Management

- Managers need to be managed.
- If you don't manage your manager, he or she will manage you.
- You need to manage their expectations.
- You need to manage their perception of you and your projects.
- You need to keep them informed on the progress of your project.

Managing Your Projects

- Unrealistic deadlines and Gantt charts are management's reactions to uncertainty in development projects.
- Developers to provide accurate time estimates before Microsoft Project has even finished loading.
- Developers need to provide constant feedback to management on their progress in comparison to the plan.
- When requirements change, modify the plan and feed the changes in the timing back to management immediately.

Managing Your Projects (continued)

- Record the differences between your estimate and the actual time taken.
- Learn from the mistakes so future estimates can be made more accurate.

Project Estimation

- State the project goals.
- List all the tasks required to complete the project goals.
- Estimate the time for each project task.
- No task should be less than half a day or more than 3 days.
- Testing tasks **should** be included. Possibly also documentation.
- If the whole project is longer than say 3 months, split it into shorter sub projects and estimate them separately.

Project Estimation (continued)

- Add up all the times.
- Do **not** multiply the total by 2.
- Do **not** add a fudge factor.
- Do **not** be overly optimistic.
- Submit the time estimate to management and don't let them fiddle with it.

Running the Project

- During the course of the project provide management with weekly updates comparing your estimate with the time table.
- Also possible to do milestone related updates.
- Email is a good vehicle for this (ie save copies).
- Point out where interruptions caused delays (ie spent two days helping Tony debug his code). State explicitly that these interruptions have blown out the estimate.

Why Measuring Performance Matters

- It provides your manager with feedback on your performance.
- If you are performing better than your colleagues you are of more value to your employer.
- Your salary should be related to the value you provide.

Measuring Your Performance

- Managing your project and meeting goals.
- Bug tracking (number of bugs, time to resolution etc).
- Number of support calls handled.
- Keep a personal record of your wins and losses.
- Make sure your manager knows about your wins.

Performance Reviews

- Your manager will remember your failures.
- You have to remind him/her of your successes.
- This is the time to bring up your measurements of your performance.
- Ask management how performance is measured.

Managing your Long Term Career

- Diversify your skills.
- Go out of your way to learn new skills and fields.
- Don't let yourself get pigeon-holed.
- Always reach out and grab new challenges.
- Be happy to move from field to field.

Changing Jobs

- Pick the right time and reasons to leave.
 - No avenue for improving your prospects in your current position.
 - A doomed/mismanaged project is ending and its unlikely the next will be any better.
- Never leave a job without a new one lined up (including paperwork being signed).

Your Resume

- Always keep it up to date.
- Update it at least every three months.
- Keep it short.
- Keep the most important information up the front.

Recruiters

- These people have a difficult job. They're the meat in the sandwich between employers and employees.
- They are rarely qualified to understand the technical stuff on your resume.
- You need to convince them to send you to talk to their client.
- Don't talk over their heads. Find out how much they know about your field and let that be a guide to what you talk about in the interview.
- For recruiters that are not engineers, talk about project management and engineering process.

Interviewing with the Final Company

- Make sure you know who is an engineer and who is a manager.
- Tailor your answers to the person who is asking the question.
- I know you're keen, but **never** interrupt the interviewer.

References

- Never use your current manager for a reference unless he has told you he is looing for a new job.
- In fact, managers should be avoided as references.
- Your first choice for a reference is another engineer, preferably a senior one. The longer you worked with them the better.

Working Relationships

- Cultivate relationships with other geeks.
- Don't burn your bridges.
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Mailing List

- <http://www.mega-nerd.com/career-dev.html>