Leaving Facebook After 1.5 Years as a Software Engineer

When a dream job doesn't feel so dreamy

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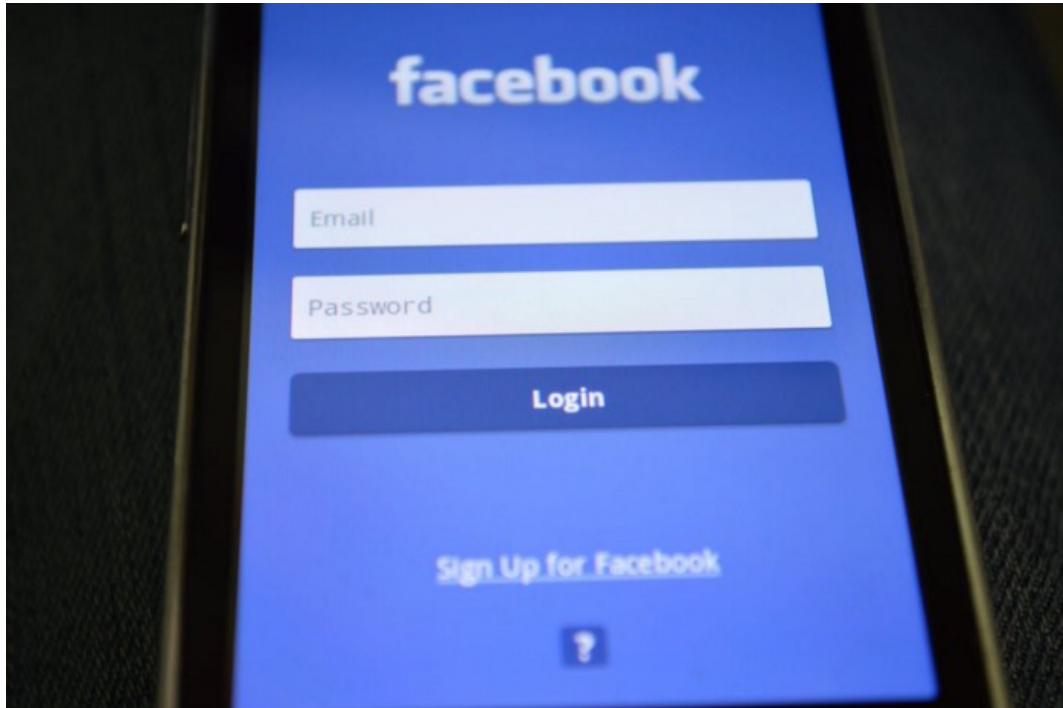
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Despite being buried in student debt, I left my cushy job this past March as a Software Engineer at Facebook to start my own company. For many (including my parents), this was the craziest thing I could have done.

On top of that, I didn't even have a business idea that I wanted to pursue. There was so much uncertainty in my future, but there was *one* thing that I was absolutely sure about: I didn't want to be a Software Engineer anymore.

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Don't get me wrong — working at Facebook was my dream job. *Was*.

How could it not be? In 2015, it was one of the fastest-growing companies in the world with no sign of stopping. It had everything: talented engineers, ridiculous compensation, happy employees, etc… Don't even get me started on all the free food.

Dozens of cafeterias filled with *every* possible cuisine you could imagine.

Micro-kitchens jam-packed to the ceiling with tasty treats that you gobble down between meetings.

And it *was* great…until it wasn't.

The beginning of my time at Facebook was like the start of a new relationship. There's nothing quite like it. Everything feels so new and exciting. Colors seem brighter, food tastes better, and every love song feels like it's about you.

But then quickly, the honeymoon period fades and you see the relationship for what it really is.

This is the pivotal make or break moment where a relationship either blossoms or fades. Compatibility is crucial, but so is timing and little bit of *luck*.

Bootcamp

I always found it comical that Facebook's onboarding program for new employees is called "Bootcamp" as the actual experience is quite the opposite.

"Bootcamp" is a 6–8 week program where new engineers get the chance to explore the company with the eventual goal of choosing a team.

Yes, employees get to *choose* their own team at Facebook. Not typical for a

tech company, but one of the reasons that I fell in love with the Facebook culture early.

My bootcamp experience, in particular, was some of the most fun I've had in my life. Having previously interned at Facebook, I was very familiar with the tooling and infrastructure. Ramping up for me was not a problem.

Bootcamp is a lot like an accelerated version of a typical 4-year undergrad program. Just like freshmen year, it starts off with loads of boring info sessions and an obnoxious amount of beer with fellow freshies.

Week 2: Picking a Specialty. Whereas in college, you'd pick between Psychology, English, Economics, etc…choices in bootcamp are restricted to specific technologies: Android, iOS, Web, ML, etc…

Week 3: Team Matching. Resumes are sent out to prospective mangers and thus begins the intricate dance between new hires and hiring managers. Except, in this scenario, new hires have *all* the power.

Managers desperately try to woo new hires by inviting them to game nights, team dinners, or even to fly across the country to attend a conference with the rest of their org.

It's the closest I've ever felt to being an NBA all-star who was about to become a free agent.

I won't say managers "lie" perse, but some definitely bend the truth. Managers will say things like: "Yeah you know, we don't really have any Machine Learning opportunities right now, but down the road, we'd definitely be open to you leading the initiative for something like this…"

Translation: "No you, sucker. We don't have ML opportunities, but you should join our team anyway."

I saw so many fall victim to these false promises. To make it worse, you've lost all your leverage once you've committed to joining a team. The game

nights, fun offsite activities, and team happy hours will quickly start to decrease in frequency just as the dread of a day job creeps in.

The Cost of Ego in a Workplace

I *breezed* through Bootcamp.

I knocked out Bootcamp tasks left and right which grabbed the attention of a few managers and started a bidding war of sorts.

The whole ordeal went to my head. And in a moment of irrational decision-making, I decided to commit to a team despite having only been in Bootcamp for about five weeks.

Some lessons are so important that it's not worth waiting until the end to discuss so I'll just say this now:

If you ever find yourself on the brink of making a big life decision, don't rush it. Take every bit of time you can and make sure it's the right one for god sake.

I sure wish I had.

My decision to join a team was purely based on the fact that I loved the people on the team as well as the technology that I would be working with. The manager, on the other hand, was just okay.

But that's ultimately where things went wrong. As a new grad, more important than the work you're doing and the co-workers you're doing it with, you need a *great* manager. Someone who supports your dreams and aspirations while also pushing you to grow.

A bad manager will make your life worse is every way.

Fast-forward 3 months

The honeymoon period had definitely worn off and I was unhappy in every way.

The most senior engineer on our team had left leaving four junior engineers to fend for ourselves. As a growth team, we had the most aggressive six-month goals in the entire organization, but we weren't even close to reaching them.

For my manager, this meant going into *lockdown*.

When a team at Facebook goes into lockdown, they're put in a conference room turned into a dedicated workspace. This is primarily a mechanism meant to be used for teams that need a focused space leading up to a big launch or are severely behind on goals.

We were the latter.

Being in lockdown put a strain on my manager who in turn put that strain on us engineers. Work-life balance quickly faded. I remember one meeting distinctly where he said: "I don't believe in work-life balance." Concerned expressions quickly emerged around the conference room.

Eight hour days became ten-hour days which became twelve-hour days.

To make it worse, we weren't even coding. Our primary job for this three-month stretch was to optimize the click-through rate for various Ads. I was a professional, button-pusher now. So much for my Masters in Computer Science.

This *wasn't* what I signed up for. Only if I had stayed the full eight weeks in bootcamp…I surely would have seen this coming.

Who was I to turn to? Any issue I brought to my manager was dismissed as a temporary hurdle. Plus, he now had *eighteen* reports across four teams. He wasn't in any position to support *anyone*.

Three Months Later

…three out of four us left the team. It's quite unusual at Facebook for an engineer to leave a team before the one-year mark, but circumstances had

gotten bad.

I dragged it out for another nine months, but my decision had already been made. If it could get that bad this early on, it could happen again.

And I *wasn't* going to let it happen again.

My new team was fine, but the work wasn't all that full-filling. I was now working on an internal tool that helped manage employee records.

The excitement that I had in the early days of Bootcamp was long gone.

It Wasn't All Bad

There is definitely a sore spot as I reflect on my time at Facebook, but I think that's quite heavily tainted by one truly terrible experience. But to be honest, it wasn't all bad.

I know in the current media news cycle, it has become quite trendy to accuse Facebook of being a group of evil scientists tirelessly working to get the rest of us addicted to our phones, but that's just not true.

The people I worked with at Facebook were genuinely good people…at least most of them.

The data breaches and privacy concerns that have come out over the past two years is what happens when a fast-moving culture mixed with a healthy dose of complacency goes too far.

I will say — no company, that I've heard of, puts as much into employee happiness as Facebook. While the work could be tough at times, it was surrounded by a quirky atmosphere that actually made the place seem like Disney World at times.

At the end of the day, it wasn't for me.

What Makes a Dream Job

Recently, I've been thinking a lot about what makes a dream job. Working at Facebook was my dream job…until it wasn't.

A lot of college students nowadays tell me that working at Facebook, Google, or Apple is their dream job, but I wonder if it's just the *idea* of working there is their dream job.

Don't get me wrong, the all-you-can-eat sushi bar and rotating smoothie station was pretty rad, but underneath it all, it wasn't what I wanted to be doing.

I didn't want to be *just a* Software engineer. I've always loved marketing, product, design just as much. Why waste those skills on a job that doesn't let me bring my other passions to work.

Through this entire ordeal, I've learned that a dream job is not to work at Facebook, Google, or any other company you could imagine.

A dream job is doing something that lets you bring your passion to work with the people you want to be working with.

I truly don't think you can know that a job is your dream job from a job posting on LinkedIn. You only find out in the first six seconds of waking up on a workday.

You'll know in those six seconds whether you're excited to get to work or if the thought of going to work fills you with dread.

What's Next for Me?

It was always going to be the startup world for me. Ever since I was a little kid, I've been obsessed with creative projects and building mini-businesses.

Nothing has given me more satisfaction than building something from scratch. That's exactly what I'm doing now.

Seven months in and I'm happier than I ever was at Facebook. I own my time. No set hours, no dress code, no rules.

I can work from *anywhere*, *anytime*.

Look, I know it's not for everyone, but it's *my* dream job. And this I know for sure.

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