Teaching Career

by Jack Wilson

ACM's career consultant, Jack Wilson, answers questions from students about their forthcoming careers in computing and information technology.

Q: I'm very interested in using my computer and multimedia skills in a teaching career but do not want to work in a college or university. Is there another alternative?

A: Yes. I think an area you should begin to explore is corporate training and development. There is a growing professional field in technology training, supported by conferences, seminars, web sites, journals, etc. The Internet and intranets have added more fuel to both interests and capabilities in this field.

A good place to start your exploration would be with a new magazine called ``Inside Technology Training'', published by Ziff-Davis and free to ``qualified readers''. You can subscribe via their web site, www.ittrain.com or call 1-800-769-2075. Their first issue contains a comprehensive list and description of various training and development web sites, including a job mart, www.tcm.com/trdev/jobs/ .

You may also want to look into the ``Multimedia & Internet Training Newsletter'', www.brandon-hall. com.

Q: My primary interest is in applications development. What tools should I be studying and becoming familiar with?

A: I think it's fairly clear that skills in packaged client/server development tools are now very much in demand, i.e., Visual Basic, PowerBuilder, and Visual C++. And the demand continues to exceed the supply of qualified programmers, so it is potentially a lucrative area because of salary premiums being paid.

I believe anyone interested in a software development career should be conversant with the in-demand tools, as well as with the industry trends. A good source of information on both is ``Dr. Dobb's Journal'', www.ddj.com. Their Spring 1997 issue, #279, featured a special report on ``Software Careers: Strategies and Tactics''.

Q: In a recent interview on campus, the interviewer said I had a good technical background but suggested I should work on my ``interpersonal skills''. What do you think he meant by that?

A: ``Interpersonal skills'' is a broad category covering one's ability to communicate with, relate to, understand, and work effectively with other people, at all levels: bosses, peers, and subordinates. It has become an increasingly important criterion for employment in today's world of IT work because of the emphasis on teams and teamwork, plus the need to communicate with users and customers.

I can only guess at what the interviewer observed in the interview, and it probably had something to do with your need to demonstrate better oral communications ability. You can work on this by practicing with a counselor in your career center.

Q: I will soon be starting my first full-time job after graduation, and I'm a little nervous. Other than just doing my best and keeping my boss happy, what else should I be doing?

A: Obviously your first priority, as you have implied, should be on performance, doing your best not only to meet the requirements of the job, but to exceed them. The degree to which you excel above and beyond the job requirements is often the basis for higher performance appraisals, salary increases and promotions.

I would also recommend that you maintain a detailed record of each and every task that you accomplish and problem that you solve; including the time period, what the situation or problem was, what you did about it, and what results you achieved. This record will come in handy when your appraisal time arrives and will serve as a useful, periodic reminder of your value to the employer.