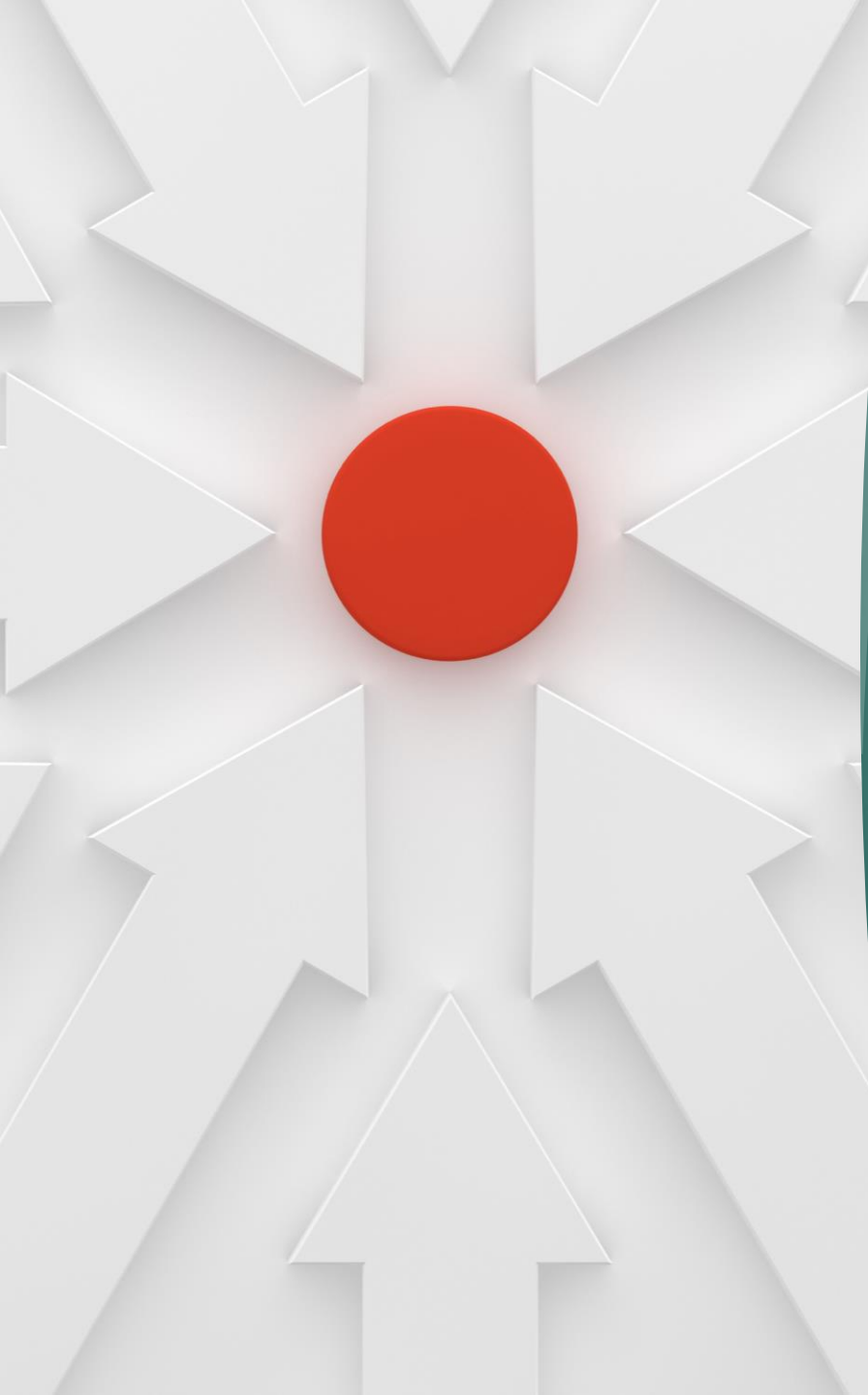
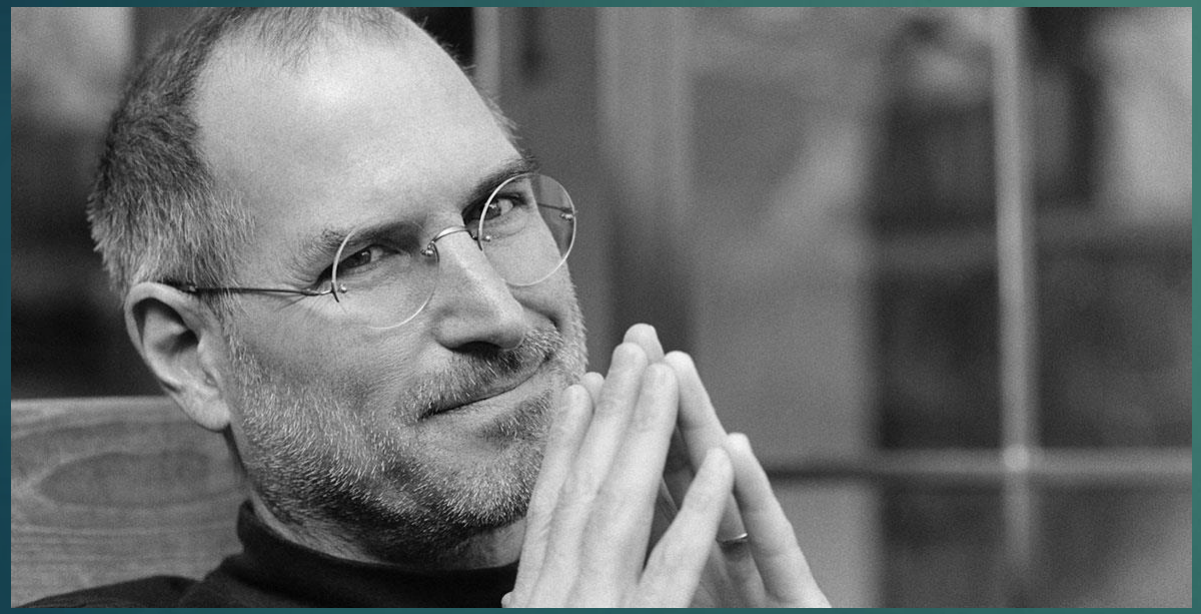


Making Your Career Decision: Manager or IC?

Prasad Rao
https://www.linkedin.com/in/kprasadrao/

Are you currently an IC or Manager or in a hybrid role?

Should I become a Manager or should I grow as an IC?



"Your work is going to fill a large part of your life, and the only way to be truly satisfied is to do what you believe is great work.

And **the only way to do great work is to love what you do**."

- Steve Jobs

Lets find out what you love – Management or IC work?

1. Understand the expectations / roles / responsibilities of each role and see what resonates with you more
2. Learn from other people experience
3. Get clarity on the Career Ladder in your organization
4. Try both roles and decide what suits you best

"The road to success is always under construction." - Lily Tomlin

Managers vs ICs : R&R

Manager

- Set strategic vision and direction for the team
- Make high-impact decisions on resource allocation, staffing, budgets
- Communicate with and influence executives and other stakeholders
- Take accountability for team performance and growth metrics
- Create a culture and environment that fosters innovation and drives results

Individual Contributor

- Provide strategic guidance and direction within their domain area
- Share deep expertise to influence important technical decisions
- Represent technical perspectives with executives
- Take accountability for delivering complex components or systems
- Guide improvements to processes / systems and drive adoption of new technologies or approaches

Managers vs ICs : Perks

Manager

- Greater influence
- Leadership development
- Promotion opportunities
- Higher pay and equity
- Broader impact
- Relationship building
- Recognition for team success

Individual Contributor

- Specialized skills
- Focused accountability
- Technical mastery
- Individual creativity
- Work life balance
- Less politics
- Recognition for individual achievements

Managers vs ICs : Myths

Manager

- It's easier because you delegate all the work
- You have more job security once you move up
- You don't need technical skills anymore
- It's a straight path to senior leadership roles
- You'll get rich from bonuses and equity payout

Individual Contributor

- You're stuck doing the same tactical tasks forever
- There's no room for career development and growth
- Your work lacks larger business impact
- You have to work in silo with no visibility to the leadership
- You have more free time and better work-life balance

Reality for both roles

EACH ROLE HAS ITS OWN UNIQUE DEMANDS AND CHALLENGES

REQUIRES CONTINUOUS LEARNING AND SKILL DEVELOPMENT

NEED BOTH SOFT AND TECHNICAL SKILL SETS

OPPORTUNITY TO GAIN INFLUENCE AND MAKE AN IMPACT

REQUIRES SHOWING INITIATIVE AND ADDING VALUE

Management is not a promotion; management is a change of profession.

It’s all about what you enjoy

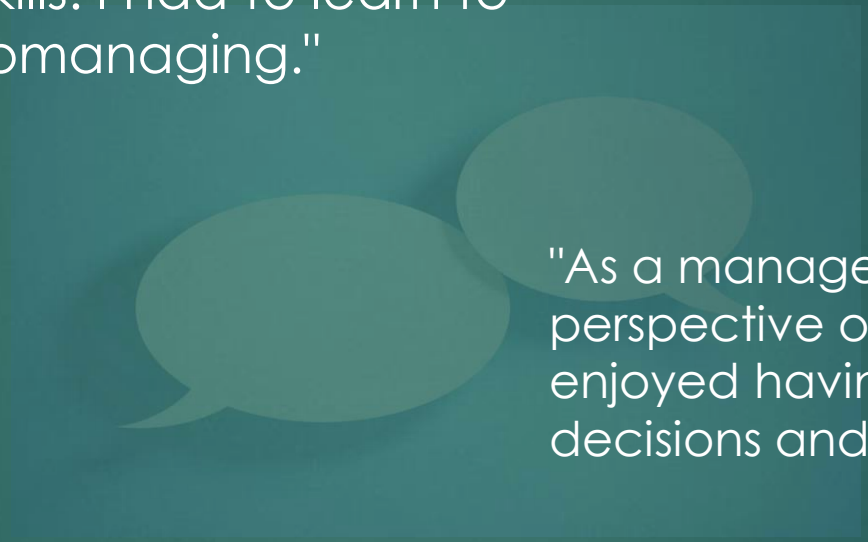
Managers are motivated by enabling teams to collaborate smoothly and deliver results.

ICs are driven by leveraging their expertise to build excellent products and systems.

Learn from other people experiences

Manager Voices

"It was an adjustment going from an individual contributor where I was the expert to being a manager where I needed to rely on my team's skills. I had to learn to delegate more and resist micromanaging."



"As a manager, I gained a much broader perspective on the organization and industry. I enjoyed having a seat at the table for bigger decisions and steering the direction of my team."

"My stress shifted from individual task execution to higher level concerns like resourcing, budgeting and making sure my team was motivated and collaborating effectively."

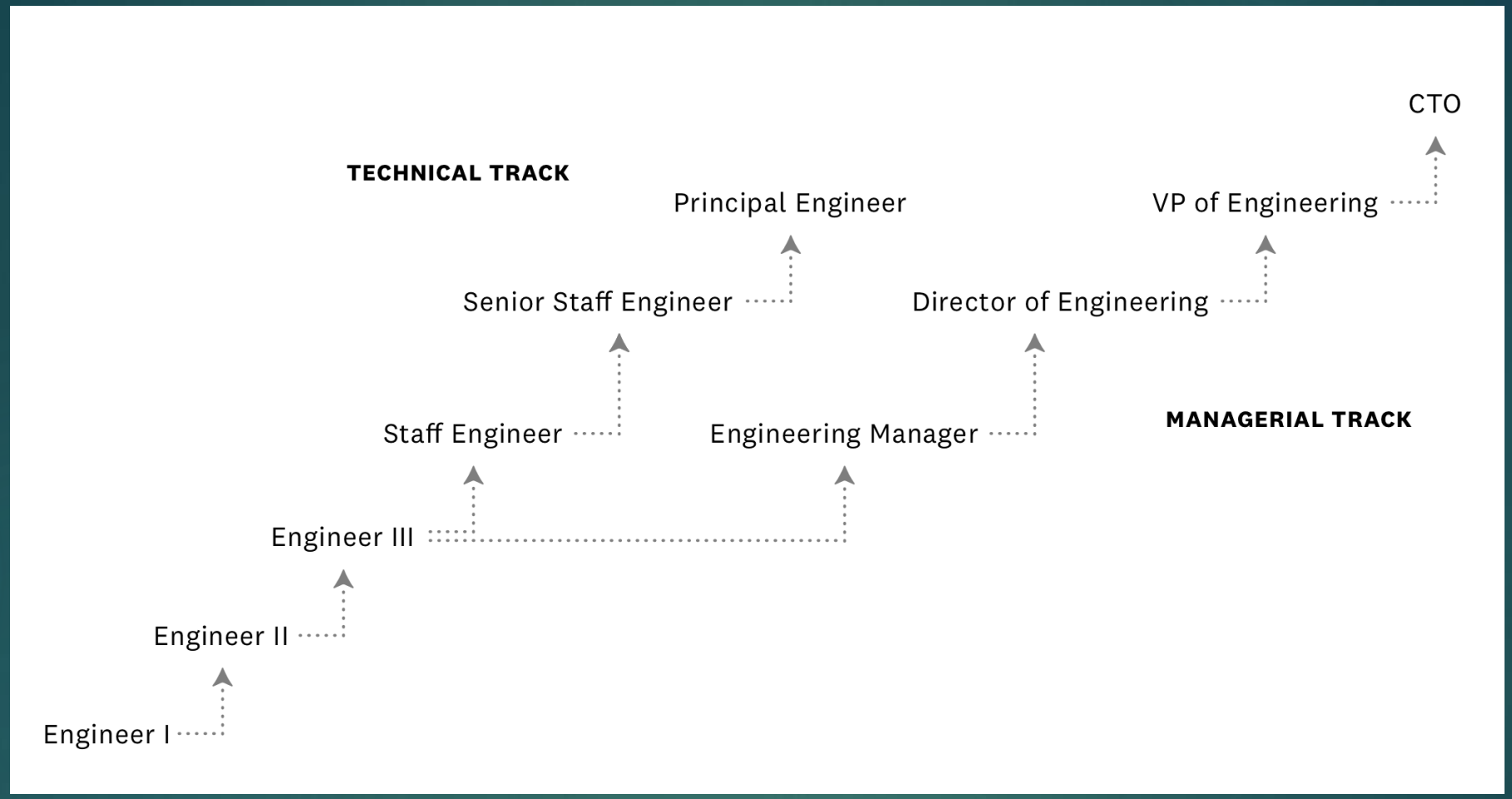
Individual Contributor Voices

"I enjoyed being able to dive deep into specialized technical work in my role. I was able to be hands-on and see tangible results rather than only overseeing projects at a high level."

"The autonomy was nice but the career progression eventually plateaued. I felt like I needed to move into management to continue advancing and developing new skills."

"As an IC, I appreciated having more control over my schedule. I could really focus in on mastering my field versus balancing multiple priorities and people."

Career Ladder



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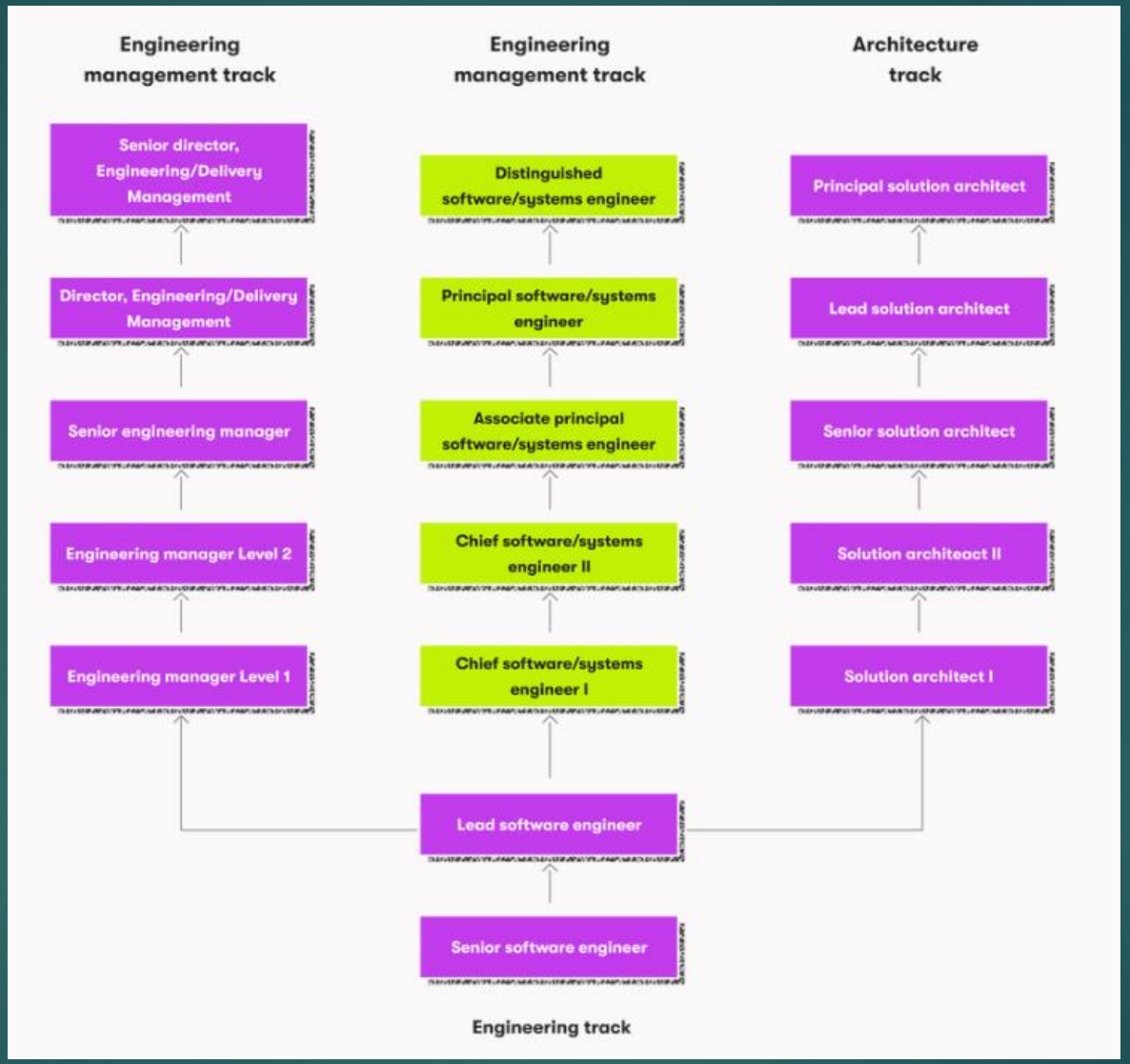

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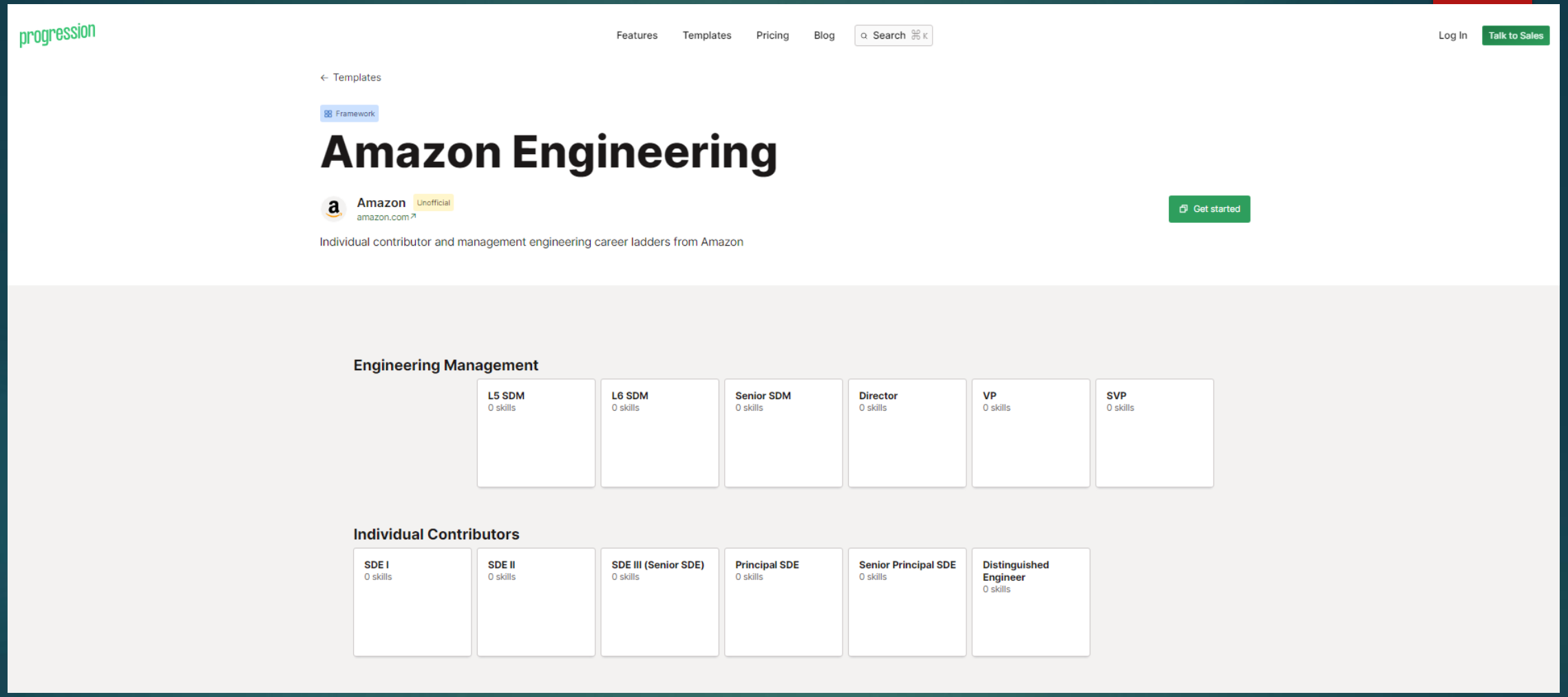
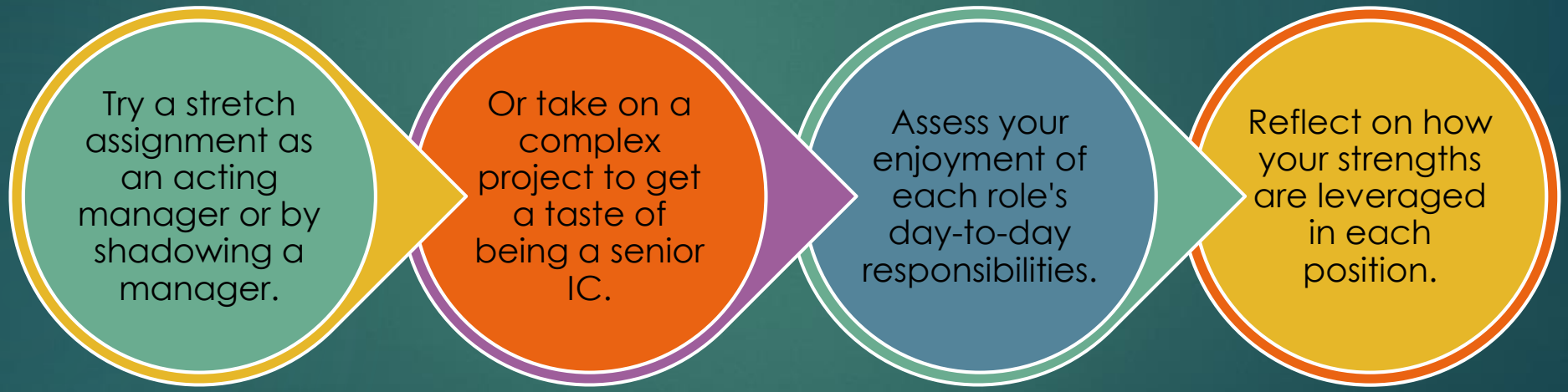


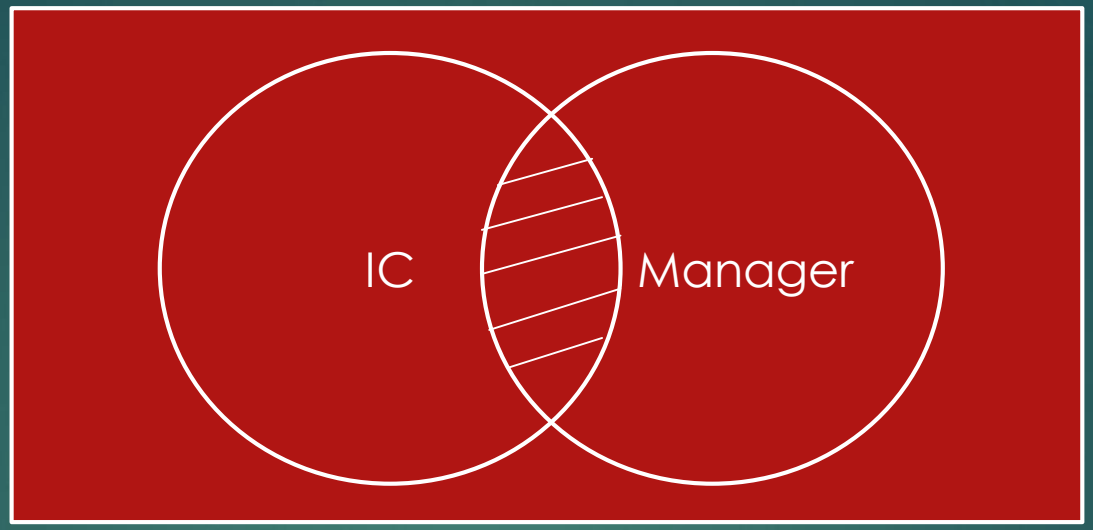
https://progression.co/publishers/amazon/frameworks/amazon-engineering-x7lqobjsovn9

Try both roles and decide what suits you best

Gaining experience in both management and IC roles can provide valuable perspective.



Is there is a middle ground / sweet spot?



Of course, there are those interested in both.

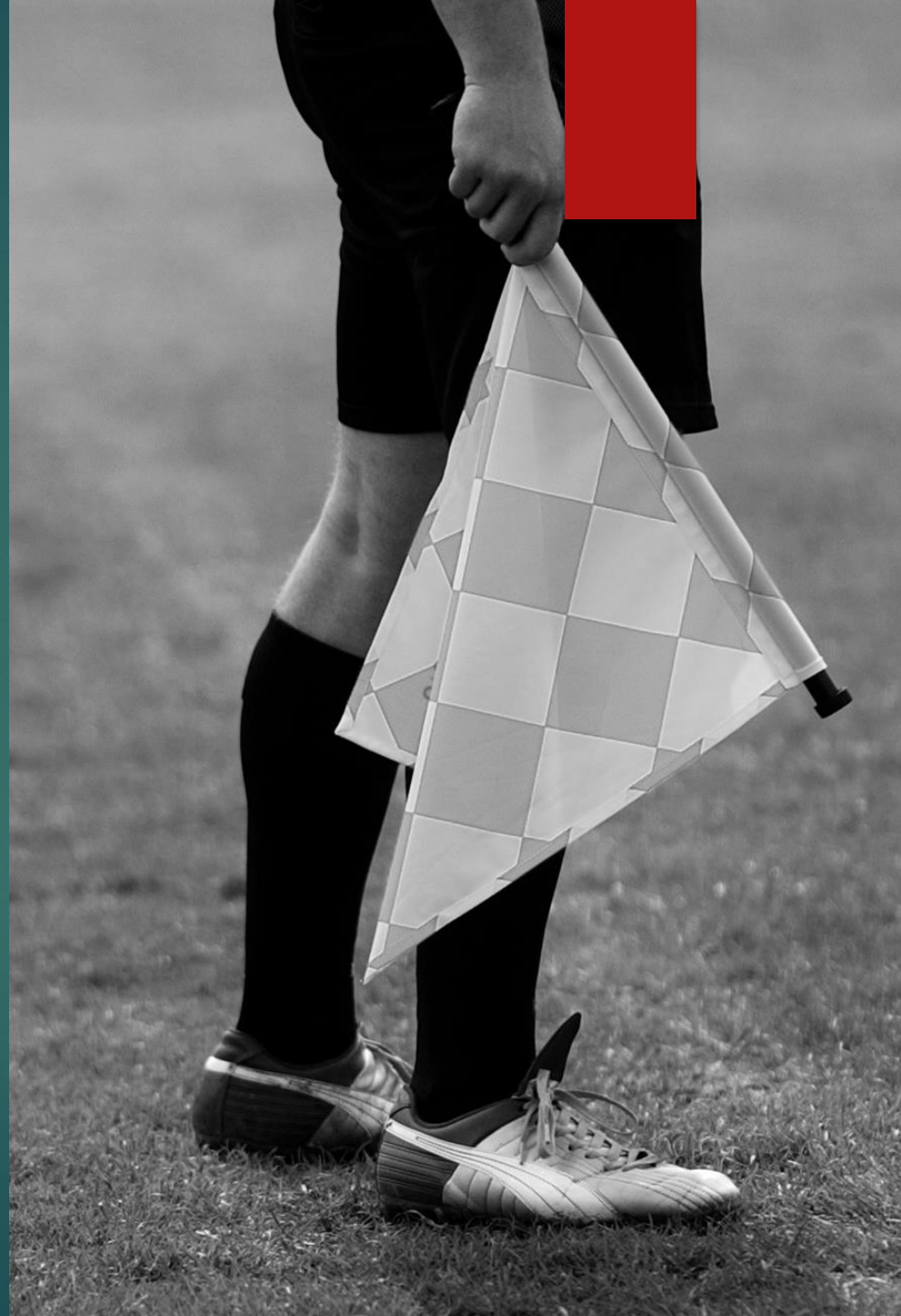
But at some point in your career, you often have to choose between the solution track or the team track.

Find the Right Fit for You

- Evaluate your career values, interests and strengths
- Is your strength individual brilliance or enabling group brilliance?
- Choose the role with the best growth opportunities for YOU

Made your career decision?

Mistakes to Steer Clear of in Your Role



What not to do as a Manager?

- Micromanage your team rather than delegating appropriately
- Take credit for your team's work instead of highlighting their contributions
- Under communicate plans and expectations rather than aligning the team
- Avoid difficult conversations and feedback with employees
- Blame your team for failures instead of taking accountability

What not to do as an IC?

Pursue solo projects without collaborating cross-functionally

Keep your head down instead of sharing expertise with colleagues

Resist participating in team brainstorms and planning

Do only the bare minimum rather than driving impactful results

Lack curiosity and defend the status quo vs learning new things

Want to become a great manager?

Become a great
Individual Contributor first!

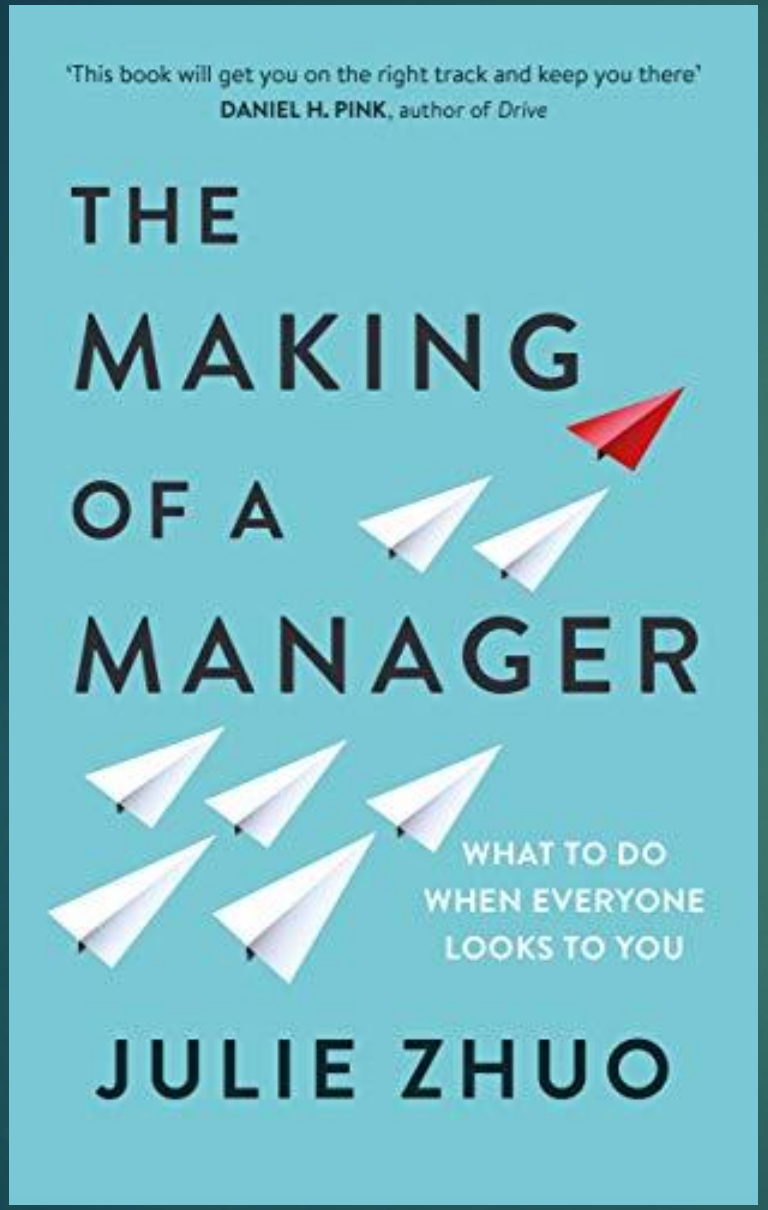
We're going to be a big company, we thought. So let's hire "professional managers." We went out and hired a bunch of professional management, and it didn't work at all.

They knew how to manage, but they didn't know how to *do* anything.

You know who the best managers are? They're the great individual contributors who never, ever want to be a manager, but decide they want to be a manager, because no one else is going to be able to do as good a job as them.

Steve Jobs

https://www.inc.com/jeff-haden/37-years-ago-steve-jobs-said-best-managers-never-want-to-be-a-manager-science-says-he-was-right.html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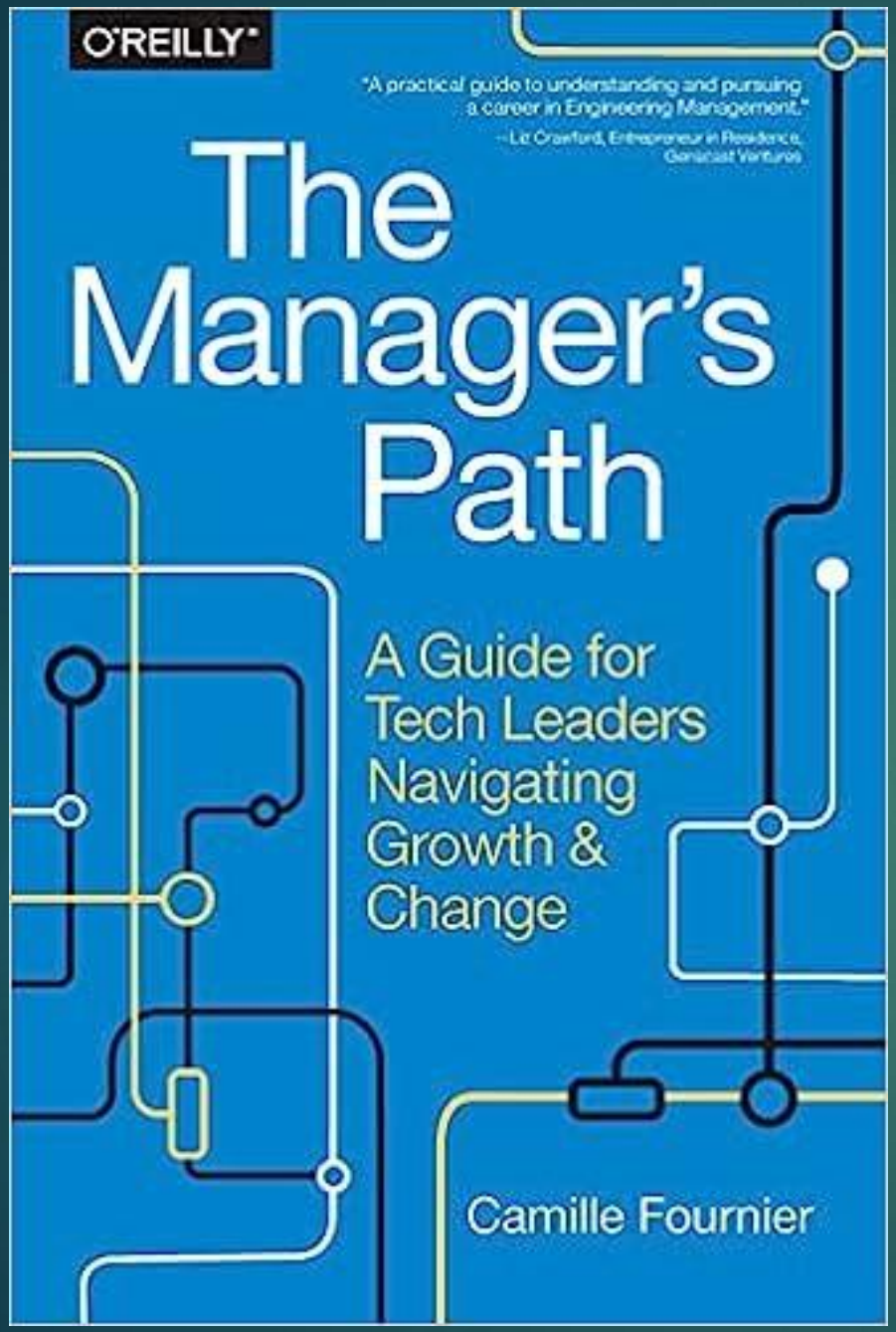
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-- Liz Crawford, Entrepreneur in Residence, Genacast Ventures
The Manager's Path
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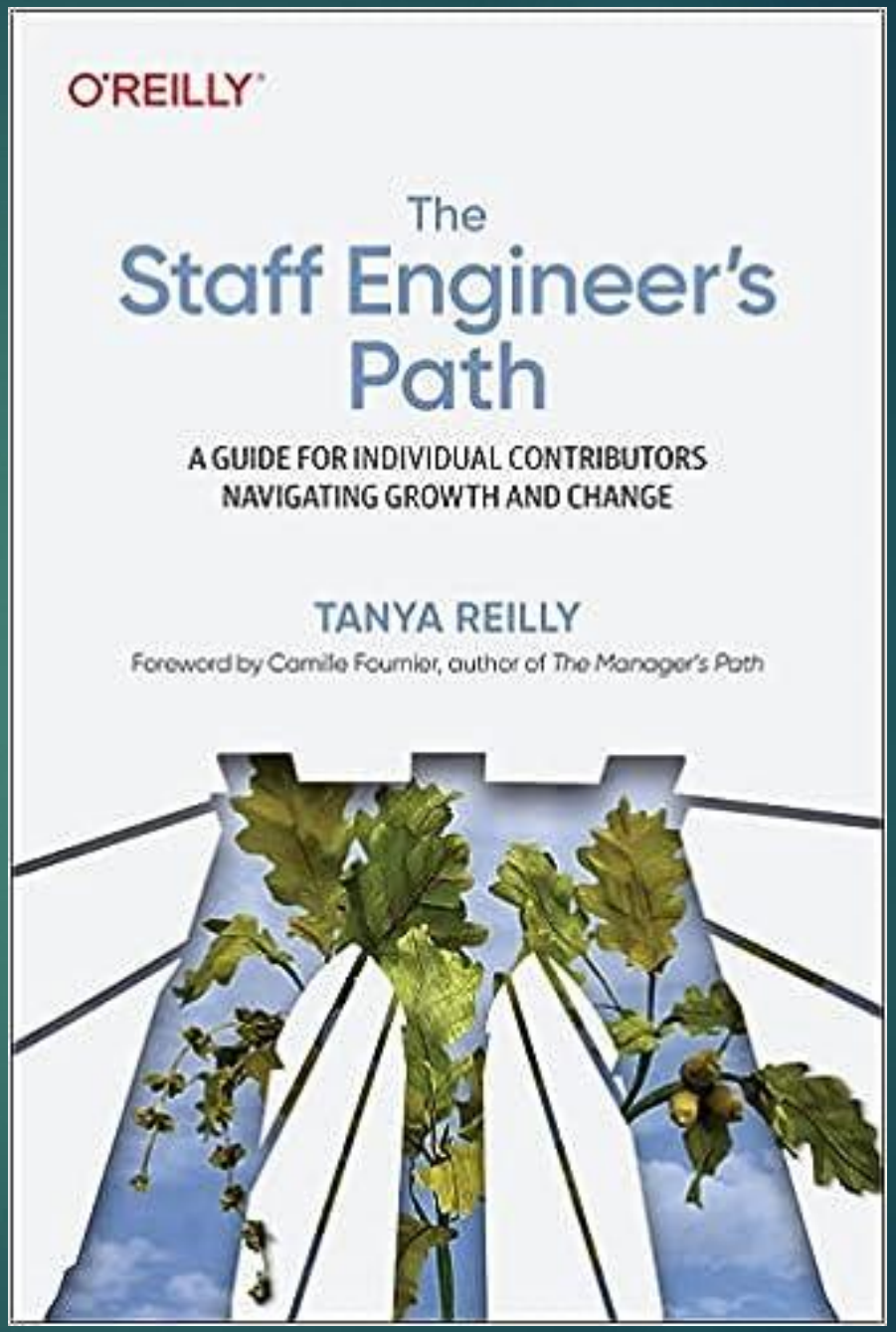
Camille Fournier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TANYA REILLY
Foreword by Camille Fournier, author of The Manager's Path

Q&A

THANK YOU