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Standing in line, waiting. A half an hour passes and the line has barely moved. It's a bit warm in the jam-packed space as students bustle around. This is my last year as one among the crowds. The line begins to inch forward. The lines for the more known companies are long and the competition is stiff. After waiting for nearly a half an hour I finally reach the person that is the object of everyone's interest, a recruiter from IBM. She extends her hand to greet me. She wears a face that is tired from a day of interviewing. However, she still has an aura of friendliness around her, no doubt from experience with long career fairs. I open with my elevator speech which includes all the basics, my name, how much I enjoy software engineering, and how I will be graduating in one semester looking for employment in and around Iowa. She then leads with a question I came prepared for, "Why do you want to work for IBM as a Software Engineer?"

To best explain why I want to work at IBM I will need to go back to High School. I became interested in software engineering during my junior year in high school. When anyone asks why I love to code I reply how my AP Computer Science teacher, Mrs. Goranson, helped me realize that I had potential in programming and, over the course of the year, aided in my development. I enjoyed coding so much that I often finished early and attempted to help other students with their struggles. I often roamed the surprisingly open room asking the especially shy students if they wanted a second pair of eyes to comb for mistakes. Although parsing through lines and lines of spaghetti code was incredibly challenging, I loved the feeling of

figuring out precisely what was wrong. Some problems took too long to correct so I knelt, by the time we finished my knee was sore from the hard vinyl floor. Furthering my experience, I took a local college course in the Java language before I begun my journey at ISU. The class was taught by a manager in software engineering currently working in Dubuque. There we created programs for real-world problems and datasets. Sometimes he would have us (the students) move around to act out what data in the Stack or Queue would look like. On other occasions, he would use class time to discuss what his life as a Software Engineering manager looked like, mostly late nights. This class helped me think more deeply about programming concepts.

Now, on the precipice of graduating, I finally feel as if I am realizing the visions of my younger self as a Software Engineer. One such experience that builds this feeling was a summer internship with IBM in the “Extreme Blue” program. This was a 12-week internship that tests your “passion and knowledge” to excel in both programming and business aspects of IBM (IBM Extreme Blue). As a participant, I fully lived up to its description of working “in a team to develop an idea to address a real-world challenge confronting part of IBM's business” (IBM Extreme Blue). During my time in the internship program, I became comfortable with setting deadlines, filing patents, and pushing products along with the intensive technical side of the programming. As the program pushed me intensely, I gained both hard and soft skills that would, in turn, make me much more marketable in the future.

Taken as a whole, IBM has its hands in many aspects of the industry from commerce to cloud computing to security. Cybersecurity in IBM peaked my interests. While still a freshman, I became interested in this field at ISU and sought out opportunities to learn more about it. I participated in my first CDC (Cyber Defence Competition) which I played a minor role in as the opposing team kicked our teeth in. During the following years, I signed up with the same team and began to make contributions to its success. Upon receiving my bachelor's degree, I had

completed a minor in Cybersecurity along with my major in Software Engineering. The classes I took introduced me to an advanced world of networks that I wanted to combine with Software Engineering in my future career.

IBM utilizes cutting edge technology to better secure its customers from potential attacks. I hope to eventually work at the intersection of AI, Cybersecurity, and Software Engineering within the company. There, I would be poised to do what is now groundbreaking work in advancing current techniques through the incorporation of machine learning. IBM's best technology on machine learning available to the public is Watson, a supercomputer that can do everything from "natural language processing to medicine, voice recognition, sentiment analysis, business analytics, and more." (Knight) Technologies like Watson are being put to use where it is vital to "maintain greater speed and precision" in security (ICT Monitor Worldwide). I believe many forms of AI will dominate the future of technology and so I wish to gain a grasp on how they are built and can be modified. Many people interact with forms of AI every day from asking Siri for directions, browsing the internet with personalized ads, or playing a videogame with smart enemies. One of my first experiences in making an AI was during a 48-hour game making competition. My team created an elaborate maze complete with enemies that anticipated your moves. The enemy AI we created was so realistic that some questioned if it was a multiplayer game. Working with these ultra powerful systems to better how users are protected would be my eventual goal in joining IBM. However, I also highly enjoy general coding and system development. This offers a flexibility for me to work on a variety of projects as well as manage a team due to experience with many technology stacks. I hope to become a senior designer leading a team on breakthrough technology.

The woman in front of me scribbles down some notes before looking back up at me. I look around and once again take in the monumental scale of the ISU Engineering Career Fair.

Next, she delves into the area of pay by asking what I will expect. One can not be exact or picky so I respond by saying that “I am looking for a competitive market offer but am also open to options”.

The typical pay of a software engineer at IBM is just short of \$90,000 (Glassdoor). Of course this is not to be expected of someone who has just entered the company, however, it will be within reach shortly after providing returns on investment. I find this salary rather cushy and it is partially responsible for drawing me to the profession. With advancement by moving between companies or slow growth in one company, a more senior position can fetch an even more appealing sum. In addition, as I am choosing to remain in the Midwest to begin my career, housing will consume much less of my earnings than in places like Silicon Valley where buying a house can set you back upwards of a million dollars (Fox). In the Midwest, I will remain much closer to family and friends with whom I do not wish to lose contact. This also means forsaking the potential for outlier opportunities found only where the tech talent gathers. My attachment to the midwest may lose me a chunk of what I could potentially earn out west. Despite this, I feel content that my future self will eventually be living in the midwest to stay.

However, there is another issue that I will need to address in the future, job hopping. In the tech industry, especially those involving programming, job hopping can make a big difference in potential earnings in the long run. By employing the technique of job hopping one worker may make approximately 25% more than a counterpart that did not job hop (Dietrich). This will be a boon to my future self who could aspire to this. Nevertheless, I must weigh the consequences such as a less stable life, working environment, and location of work. Currently, I believe that I will probably be doing some job hopping at a reduced pace but this could easily change with family and relationship commitments. These could either limit me to certain

constraints if I require stability or allow me to try to grow my experience and salary, in turn, more quickly.

Over the years at ISU I have found that, in order to impress the recruiter, one must impress them with self-confidence in yourself and your future. I straighten my posture and re-compose myself for the home stretch. “So Jameel...”, she says. “Why should we hire you?”

“A career at IBM will provide me with an exceptional opportunity to learn while adding value to the IBM with my ideas and execution.”

During my undergraduate study at ISU, I completed several summer internships at various startups before interning at IBM, one of these being the company Source Allies. I worked directly with the team of employees in SCRUM (fast paced and iterative) development of essential software for clients. It was a demanding schedule with quick turnaround times but was ultimately rewarding. While one day I was implementing a new user interface for a client, the next I was debugging another client's app that they were receiving complaints on. At Source Allies I was always forced to learn on the fly, this made me super adaptable to many situations and bolstered my problem-solving skills. These skills that I took away will easily transfer to any work environment that demands quality products quickly.

I also held many leadership roles in student organizations at ISU including in NSBE, Game Development Club, and Student Government. In my near future, I expect that the skills I learned in these positions will give me a massive boost in my potential for advancement. Countless times I was put in charge of a small group that was to create an event for members and the public. Sometimes I designed fliers, other times I created an outline of the necessary preparations, still other times I tracked the budget and spending. With aspirations to lead a team of Software Engineers some day in a senior role, I am glad that I spent my time leading. I will be the one held responsible at the end of the day for both successes and failures alike.

I finish talking to the recruiter clad in IBM blue, shake her hand as she says that I will be hearing from IBM, and once again and continue walking around. As I walk I begin to think how these professional decisions will shape my personal life as an adult. Even though the questions from the recruiter have stopped I can't stop questioning myself personally. Part of me wonders, "How will I be able to stay healthy and active in a sedentary job with odd hours?"

I think back to a professor I had who always told his students that his work as a senior software manager often made for very late nights. As a college student I was and am no stranger to those but I wonder if my adult self will crave something more stable? If my sleep habits will suffer due to the job I need to keep up my health in other areas so that I can become the fit adult I envision myself as. I decide that I should include a flexible workout and healthy meals in my daily life.

I look at the map of the career fair and scan it for the next company I will talk to. "Maybe Microsoft?" Looking at the map reminds me that my family is spread across the map. I consider, "How will I keep up with my spread out family while working?"

As an adult, I will want to keep up family connections with those who are dispersed between Iowa and Illinois. This will require some amount of travel on my part which means that I will either need to work on the go or have vacation days. Software engineers working on the go is often a viable option when the company will allow it. This could possibly free me up to keep in touch with more extended family.

On one particular occasion, most of my father's side got together on a reunion in Los Angeles during one summer for a week. We swam, played games, and shared huge meals. During this period I was able to talk to relatives I never see otherwise. One of my favorite experiences there were the waves of Seal Beach. I had never experienced the raw power of the ocean before, wave pools were no match. I had to pick sand out of my scalp for weeks after that

but it was worth it tenfold. Although I am not sure when something like this will happen again I definitely am hopeful that I will have a flexible enough schedule to get away from work for an extended period of time.

I bump into an old friend from my freshman year. After he switched majors we talked a lot less and eventually never saw each other as we went our separate ways. As we part I wonder If I will ever talk to or see him again? For that matter “How will my friendships with those back home fair when I permanently uproot myself from my hometown?”

Personal relationships and family plans are another matter to consider that I sometimes avoid. It is difficult to consider what friends I will make and keep over the years and how my career will affect my relationship with others. It's entirely possible that the on-call nature of the job might lead to me sacrificing time with whoever I call my friends. At the moment I have managed to stay friends with some people back home, but can I make that last? On the flip side, I may develop lasting relationships with my team members and enjoy their company over others who don't understand the field as well. The future of my social life is uncertain, however, I'm sure I'll be spending a ton of time alone, coding.

At the moment this is the best future I envision for myself within reason. I look and see huge gaps in my loose plan of sorts and get slightly worried although I understand that they will eventually be filled. It's a lot for me to consider who I will be in the future because my ideal view of me and who I am is constantly changing and fighting with who I believe I actually am. Thus looking too far ahead is often unnerving.

All of these thoughts race through my head as I wander and plan who I will be. None of them tend to stick around very long as they usually make me quite anxious. Although I tell myself that “it doesn't matter now” because it's time to repeat the process with the next company. Clear my head and vie for a spot securing my future.

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