

The Ethical Computing Professional and the Inner-Net

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1. Introduction

The Internet and the multitude of devices that connect billions of people online has undoubtedly changed the way in which people live their lives. No longer is an individual limited in who they can communicate with by their geographical proximity. No longer is an individual limited in what books they can read by the inventory of their local library. Technology has, by and large, overcome the physical challenges of connectivity. However, the most important connection that people will experience throughout their lives has yet to be strengthened by technology. This is the connection with one's self and one's mental well being. In fact, it's become more and more common to neglect that self connection for the sake of efficiency, multi-tasking, and productivity, all the while stubbornly ignoring the negative consequences. By constantly directing our attention outward, we miss out on the benefits of introspection, of looking inwards. In *The Internet to the Inner-Net: Five Ways to Reset Your Connection and Live a Conscious Life*, Gopi Kallayil reveals the importance of allocating time to ensure that we pay attention to our own mental health, what he calls our "inner-net." Kallayil, a self-proclaimed "Yogler," works at Google and practices yoga and meditation on a regular basis. He offers advice to readers who wish to reconnect with that which makes us human in order to live fuller, more ethical lives. Throughout the five major sections of his book: Login, Clear Out Your Inbox, Optimize Your System, Just Google It, and Thank You for Subscribing, he provides personal experiences and practical methodologies for improving the reader's inner-net. I have chosen to focus upon the first, second, and third sections. I will first summarize the author's advice in the chosen sections. Then, I will follow up each section with a personal reflection and examine how I am currently following the advice or how I plan on incorporating it into my daily habits in my own pursuit of personal development. In addition, I will make use of the work of several engineering ethicists studied thus far in 300 in order to supplement discussion on my identity as an aspiring computer professional. Through the advice of Kallayil's book, my personal experiences as both an aspiring computer professional and student of computer ethics, it becomes apparent that the cultivation of the inner-net through engagement and introspection provides an individual with the opportunity to make a positive impact on the world and improve their own quality of life.

2.1 - Part 1

In part I, titled "Log In," Kallayil recommends that his readers fully engage in the physical world. This includes bravely facing challenges, seeking new experiences, being inspired by role models, and setting goals. Through the example of the ice cube in the ocean, we investigate how worldly status symbols, such as our jobs, our bodies, and our wealth not only falsely define our sense of identity but also impose self-defined limitations which separate us from our potential. Kallayil explains, "And it is that sense of separation that leads to other forms of suffering as we make comparisons with the wealth, beauty, success, possessions, and an endless set of other stories we carry in our head." It is through our engagement with the world that we work towards easing our sense of separation and realizing our own potential outside the confines of rigid identities.

My decision to study computer science has provided the basis for my academic and professional identity. After reading Kallayil's book and my experiences in CSC 300, I have

begun to question why I choose this career path. I need to reconsider the way in which my personal identity will incorporate my professional identity in such a way that I don't feel a sense of separation between the two. In order to be completely honest with myself, I have to admit that I wouldn't be studying computer science if I didn't believe that it would better my future and provide opportunities for lucrative and steady employment. However, the prospect of a higher quality of life is not the only motivating factor for me - I am intrinsically motivated by my own curiosity and desire to learn. The way in which computer science is evolving will require me to constantly adapt and learn new technologies and methodologies in order to stay relevant. I choose to see this as a good thing rather than as a negative aspect. Adaptation and the evolution of technology will provide me with the opportunity to continuously learn, overcome challenges, and change the world in new ways.

I always wanted to make an impact on the world, and through my experiences in 300 I have come to appreciate the social and political influence that computing professionals possess. Before 300, I believed that ultimately it is the individuals who exert influence over the world through the use of technological tools and that the tools themselves are just that: tools. Under this belief, the computer professional was not responsible for the actions that such tools were used to complete. Now, after studying the ideas encapsulated in both Lessig's "Code Is Law" and Moor's "invisible complex calculation," I have come to appreciate that computer professionals are the legislators of the virtual world, and that the design decisions that we make directly influence the way that real people behave and interact within one another. In "Code Is Law," Lessig reveals the way in which technology inherently enables or disables certain values by regulating behaviors. Moor's concept of "invisible complex calculation," draws from the fact that it is improbable and difficult to precisely follow what a computer performs throughout its execution of algorithm. Such computations are largely invisible to the majority of the population, and even those within the profession are unable to follow them on a large scale. Therefore, the ability of computer professionals to promote certain values in ways that are largely unseen by the public adds a facet of ethical responsibility to their identities. By my own acknowledgement of such social and political powers and associated ethical responsibilities, I will be better prepared to fully engage with the ethical dilemmas and challenges of a computing professional.

2.2 - Part 2

In "Clear Out Your In-Box," we learn about the importance of prioritization and finding peace among the chaos. The author describes the value of focusing on a single task and reserving large time blocks for specific tasks in order to avoid the negative effects of multitasking. Then Kallayil shares what he considers to be the essential components of his life, the parts of his life that he can focus on when he needs to find himself among the chaos of modern life. His top three: sleep, nutrition, and exercise. Interestingly, work doesn't show up until number seven, which he recommends not to disclose to an employer. However, he's recognized that if he takes care of the higher ranked essentials, he not only delivers a higher quality of work in less time, but he also finds more fulfillment in completing the work; two positive outcomes in which everyone benefits. He stresses that the most important relationship that an individual can develop and maintain is the relationship with themselves. "Take the time to friend yourself, listen to the tweet of your heartbeat, pay attention to the status update from your body, and respond to the urgent chat request from your brain." By "friending" ourselves and acknowledging the signals from our

body, we gain insight into the health of our inner-net connection. Paying attention is the first step. Then we can take action as in order to strengthen the connection. Self-friendship is how we maintain a healthy connection with our inner-net.

At this point in my life, I would list out my top three priorities as: sleep, work, and not being hungry. These are not my ideal priorities, but rather how I am currently allocating my time. I would like to restructure them so that they more closely resembles Kallayil's, with nutrition and exercise as my second and third priorities. The manner in which I would do this would be to block out specific, recurring times for the essential components. The only reason sleep makes it as the top priority is because I have conditioned myself into a regular sleep pattern. In fact, I even have the time scheduled on my google calendar and alarms on my phone that tell me when it's time to sleep and time to wake up. For my own well-being, I need to be willing to allow work to drop to a lower ranked priority, down to a position where it would be able to benefit from a more energetic and focused version of myself. As for the third priority, it is different than Kallayil's priority of "nutrition" because I haven't been putting in the effort to manage what I'm eating. The primary goal of my meals is simply to stop the feeling of hunger from interfering with my ability to keep working. Often times, I don't even stop working in order to eat - I'll scarf down an entire plate of food without taking the time to enjoy the flavor or consider the nutritional value. In addition to scheduling the essentials into time blocks, I would like to try further explore the idea of meal prep and perhaps incorporate it into my Sunday ritual so that I can enjoy nutritious meals during the chaos of the week. If I can successfully reorganize the way in which I prioritize my time allocation, I believe my body, mental health, and work will appreciate it.

2.3 - Part 3

"Optimize Your System," reveals the importance of being practical and of mindful meditation in order to maximize performance of spiritual, emotional, physical, and emotional states. Kallayil shares his invented branch of vegetarianism: practical vegetarianism. The author defines it as, "A practical vegetarian is someone who almost always eats plant-based food when that choice is available. And when that choice is not available, she is open to eating whatever food is available and doing so with gratitude." This allows the practitioner to gain the physiological benefits of a plant-based diet, positively impact the planet, and be a gracious dinner guest. When in the process of eating, Kallayil recommends being mindful of the various sensory experiences of the meal, the tastes, textures, and smells of the food. He goes on to extend mindfulness beyond meals and into the practice of meditation and yoga. The author squeezes these activities into his busy schedule by forcing himself to make time for a minute of each every single day. He noticed that once he found the time to start the activity, he would often get lost in the act and willingly take more time for himself. Taking the brief amount of time everyday allows him recenter himself and rediscover the sacredness and meaning inherent in the present moment.

While I certainly have a long way to go before calling myself a practical vegetarian, I am interested in increasing the quantity and variety of colorful vegetables in my diet. Furthermore, I've attempted to do both yoga and meditation sporadically in the past, but perhaps I can incorporate them into the restructuring of my priorities. Inspired by both Kallayil and Turkle's "Stop Googling. Let's Talk," I have been making a conscious effort to put away my cell phone

when eating meals, even when alone, so that I could be more mindful of the experience. In her New York Times article, Turkle identifies the emerging lack of empathy among individuals who are constantly connected to their cellular device. She further goes on to emphasize the role that solitude and quiet reflection has in connecting with oneself. Turkle states that when we, as a society, are constantly connected to other people through our phones, we miss out on the valuable time to listen to ourselves, to our inner-net. Rather than recommend that people stop using technology, she suggests that we redesign technology to complete a task and then release our attention, instead of designing it to enslave us with every beep, bleep, or buzz. Personally, I am in favor of such a design suggestion, and as an aspiring computer professional I may one day be in the position to develop such liberating technology. In my own experience, breaking the cellular tether has been harder than I thought it would have been. I constantly catch myself searching or reaching for my phone whenever a lull occurs in the conversation. For two weeks I attempted to limit my phone usage to specific, standard times throughout the day, each about three hours apart. Eventually, my discipline broke and I fell right back into the old habits. When I successfully resist such urges, I notice just how many non-verbal and emotional cues I'm able to pick up on throughout the course of a social interaction. However, making a meaningful change in my own behavior will not happen overnight, it will happen with small changes that persist and become part of my daily life. It starts with a minute of yoga and meal of mindfulness.

3. Conclusion

CSC - 300: Professional Responsibilities was stated to be “a journey toward repositioning our identity as technical experts.” My experience studying the works of the numerous engineering ethicists and Gopi Kallayil's book has taken me through the first step on a journey of both professional and personal development. The class overall shed light on the components of the profession that extend beyond the purely technical means of implementing algorithms or exploring computer systems. The class examines the influence that computer professionals possess over the modern world and the responsibility that comes with such power. Overall, CSC 300 first dispelled my own notion of technological neutrality and then exposed me to the social and political ramifications of everyday technology use. Kallayil's book portrayed a better way to live both mentally and physically. From the way in which I perceive myself, to the structuring of my day around the essentials, and lastly to being present in the moment, I have examined my own life through Kallayil's lense. The way in which Kallayil lives his life may not be perfect, but it is worthy of emulation in my eyes. Observing my own way of life with a critical eye, I see a multitude of ways in which I am neglecting to nurture essential aspects in my life. As I continue on my own journey of professional and personal development, I can rely upon the guidance provided in the teachings of the Yogler and computer ethicists in order to be the best version of myself and impact the world by leading my life in an ethically responsible way.

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