

# When is it too long for someone to return to a development role from other roles? [closed]

Asked 15 years, 11 months ago   Modified 12 years, 2 months ago

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What would be the best way to bring people back to "their first love", i.e. programming, from other roles, e.g. sales, management, support, testing, etc.

This may become an issue given the current state of the economy.

I'm not talking about the CEO who last programmed ALGOL using punch cards, but someone who has more recently moved away from programming into a role that they realise is not for them.

When is it too long "away from programming" for someone to make the switch back and make a useful contribution?

roles

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edited Oct 8, 2012 at 22:11



RegDwight

25.2k ● 10 ● 46 ● 52

asked Jan 2, 2009 at 15:16



Rob Wells

37k ● 13 ● 84 ● 147

5 Answers

Sorted by:

Highest score (default)



4



I don't think the time away should be used to define whether a person is ready to come back. I was a dev for a long time, moved into management, and then into executive management, and finally decided I had to come back to development. The key to my ability to do it was that while I was "away", I was still following the industry closely and I still did little side projects to keep my skills (and my lust for development) sharp.

So, I was away for almost ten years and I am back at it and having a blast.

HTH,

## Colby Africa

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answered Jan 2, 2009 at 15:22



[Colby Africa](#)

1,376 ● 9 ● 13

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You can always come back.

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It's more a matter of; how long will it take to ramp back up?



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answered Jan 2, 2009 at 15:58



[John MacIntyre](#)

13k ● 13 ● 69 ● 107

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I'm afraid the unhelpful answer is that it depends entirely on the person.

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Just as I would never judge someone by how long they've been in the industry, I also wouldn't judge on how long they've been out of it - if they can be a useful member of the team and contribute, then that's all that matters.



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edited Jan 2, 2009 at 15:24

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answered Jan 2, 2009 at 15:19



Stevo

462 ● 3 ● 14



1



If the person realises he's wrong at the new non-programming position, then "coming back" probably works even after quite some time. He might even be a better developer than before, since he had some helpful insight somewhere else, probably towards the "bottom line".



If not, if he's being demoted back to development monkey, then probably a single minute is too long.

All in all it's a dynamic process. I've seen people changing roles in the lapse of 2 years, when in the beginning they seemed stuck to programming and did not feel good doing "the management thingy" when later they

could not develop properly anymore, liked the job they were now doing, and said they'll never get back.

And then of course, it's a personality thing: Personality of the person, and personalities of the surroundings: If somebody out of a group gets their leader, it might be harder to get back into the lines.

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answered Jan 2, 2009 at 15:38

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**Ilmbus**

1,588 ● 3 ● 14 ● 25



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I hope we have learned from the Y2K era when many people from liberal arts areas were brought into IT to try and address a shortage of IT personnel. I am not saying people from other fields can't make great programmers, but I think they have to at least have the logic/problem solving skills and some training.



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answered Jan 2, 2009 at 15:48

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**Jim Anderson**

3,622 ● 2 ● 26 ● 21