

# Steven Deobald

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## Experience

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### Founder and CEO, Endatabas (2023-2024, Canada)

- *Product management, funding, pre-sales*
- Defined product UX, APIs, SQL dialect, open source license & business model
- Prioritized features, validated architecture, reviewed all code
- Defined brand and marketing - [endatabas.com](http://endatabas.com)
- Created all investment memos, pitch decks - [pitch.endatabas.com](http://pitch.endatabas.com)
- Wrote all documentation - [docs.endatabas.com](http://docs.endatabas.com)

### Product Consultant, XTDB (2020-2023, Remote)

- *Market research, product/project/engineering management, funding, legal*
- Researched and successfully pitched open source, serverless business model
- Managed developers and artists for branding, website, documentation - [xtdb.com](http://xtdb.com)
- Managed team packaging and distributing software
- Wrote all expository technical essays on immutable and temporal databases

### Engineering Manager, Pariyatti (2019-present, Volunteer, Remote)

- *Open source project & engineering management, R&D, architecture*
- Complete development of Clojure and Rails backends (GitHub: [pariyatti/kosa2](https://github.com/pariyatti/kosa2))
- Maintenance of Flutter (Dart) mobile apps (GitHub: [pariyatti/mobile-app](https://github.com/pariyatti/mobile-app))
- Prioritization of projects and tasks
- Managing staff and volunteers across the team

### Founder and CEO, Nilenso Software (2012-2018, India)

- *Marketing, sales, recruitment, product leadership, project management, mentorship*
- Championed worker-owned, cooperative model
- Wrote and open-sourced first international worker cooperative constitution in India
- Drafted and implemented menstrual leave policy
- Trained all staff in Clojure and functional programming on the JVM
- Engineering Management for Rails and Android teams that built [simple.org](http://simple.org)
- Built company to ₹15cr ARR, with 20 staff members

### Chief Product Officer, C42 Engineering (2011-2012, India)

- *Product management, mentorship, architecture*
- Managed team building [rubymonk.com](http://rubymonk.com), including a self-sandboxing Ruby interpreter

### Tech Lead, DRW Trading (2008-2011, USA)

- *Systems architecture in C#, Java, Ruby, Clojure, and Rails*
- Helped champion re-architecture of entire trade and positions management platform
- Led development of instrument reference data system in JRuby

### Tech Lead, ThoughtWorks (2005-2008, Canada / USA / UK / India)

- *Development in C#, Java, and Ruby; mentorship, architecture, analysis*
- Scoped and sold projects at inception
- Built and maintained systems through delivery

### Senior Developer, Adxstudio (Acq. Microsoft) (2004-2005, Canada)

- *CMS systems design and implementation in C# and .NET*

## Education

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### **B.Sc.Hons.Coop. in Computer Science, University of Regina (2005)**

- Graduated with Honours in the Cooperative Education Program
- Participated in five work terms across public, private, and cooperative sectors
- Held Top Secret security clearance with Canadian government

## Activities and Interests

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- Third wave open source
- Vipassana meditation
- Pāli, Sanskrit, Hindi
- Off-grid solar, construction, waste management
- Swimming, cycling, running, yoga, kayaking, canoeing, backpacking, kempo, skiing

## Projects

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**Pariyatti Digital Library and Mobile App** (ongoing open source, [github.com/pariyatti](https://github.com/pariyatti))

**Atlantic Canada Vipassana Meditation** (ongoing non-profit, [atlantic.ca/dhamma.org](https://atlantic.ca/dhamma.org))

**Vipassana for Hackers** (ongoing papers, [vipassana-for-hackers.org](https://vipassana-for-hackers.org))

**Optimistic Computing** (2024 essay, [deobald.ca/essays](https://deobald.ca/essays))

**Third Wave Open Source** (2024 essay, [deobald.ca/essays](https://deobald.ca/essays))

**The Grift, the Grind, and the ग्रंथ** (2024 keynote, [IN/Clojure](https://IN/Clojure))

**Democracy at Work: The Case Study of Nilenso** (2023 podcast, [WorkWise](https://WorkWise))

**Trucks, Tubes, and Truth** (2022 essay, [deobald.ca/essays](https://deobald.ca/essays))

**Blockchain Without the Crypto** (2021 essay, [deobald.ca/essays](https://deobald.ca/essays))

**The Strength of the Record** (2021 essay, [deobald.ca/essays](https://deobald.ca/essays))

**Ethical Software for Everyone** (2019 essay, [deobald.ca/essays](https://deobald.ca/essays))

**Transparency in Work** (2017 talk, [CreativeMornings](https://CreativeMornings))

**Vipassana for Hackers** (2016 talk, [HasGeek TV](https://HasGeekTV))

**Nilenso Cooperative Agreement (CC0-1.0)** (2016 legal template, [github.com/nilenso](https://github.com/nilenso))

**Two Years Wiser: The Nilenso Experiment** (2015 keynote, [The Fifth Elephant](https://TheFifthElephant))

**Clojure is my favourite Ruby** (2012 talk, [RubyConf India](https://RubyConfIndia))

# The Story

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I have told my story to many people. Someone recently suggested I write it down. So here it is.

## Youth

I started my first web development company when I was 15 years old. Search [archive.org](https://archive.org/details/omnisite.net) for `omnisite.net` or [click here](#). Yes. It's very 1996.

During my university years, I was more interested and excited in hacking on my own things and "real jobs" than I was in my degree. I started a couple more little companies: MonoHost, which sold ASP.net webhosting on Linux, and Citygroup Consulting. I worked five cooperative "work terms" (internships, to non-Canadians) and, by the time I started my first fulltime jobs at the RCMP and Adxstudio as a programmer, I was a bit disillusioned with software development. Even as a recent graduate, I had plenty of experience watching software teams struggle to deliver software in Java and C#. I started writing Ruby and experimenting with Rails before 1.0, but I wasn't confident a little web framework could survive in a world of Microsofts and Oracles. I quit Adxstudio, thinking maybe I'd go teach English in China.

## ThoughtWorks

Instead, I joined ThoughtWorks. ThoughtWorks appealed to me for two reasons: First, they were already a massively international company when I joined in 2005 — they had offices in India and China that I was very excited to visit. I was a small town kid. I wanted to see the world. Second, they seemed to *get it*. Developers at ThoughtWorks obsessed about quality. At ThoughtWorks, pair programming, TDD, and CI weren't just novel ideas. (And they were still somewhat novel back in 2005.) They were the company's way of getting ahead.

I hacked away in C#, Ruby, and Java for companies like Enmax, Shaw Cable, Suncor, rockthetvote.org, and Liquidnet. I scoped and planned projects, coached other developers, and learned about sales and capacity planning... it was a pretty intense couple of years. I got to work alongside the people who normalized Lean, kanban boards, unit tests, continuous integration, distributed version control, build pipelines, and continuous delivery.

With a competing offer in hand, I managed to convince ThoughtWorks to send me to India to help start the Pune office, near Mumbai. After spending a year in India I desperately wanted to stay. But the 2008 financial crisis had other plans and I was sent home to Canada.

## DRW Trading

Almost no one does well in high-volatility, high-uncertainty markets. Almost. But algorithmic trading firms do very well in precisely those kinds of markets and when DRW offered me nearly three times what I was making at ThoughtWorks, I couldn't turn them down.

I moved to Chicago, joined the team that would ultimately rewrite DRW's entire trade capture and positions management stack, lead the team that wrote a completely new instrument platform, and then... got bored, I guess.

High finance has many things to offer: great people, technology, work, and money. But rarely does it ever feel like you're making much of a difference in the world. Some friends I'd made during my first year in India kept pestering me to join their little startup. Finally, I relented and moved back to India.

## C42 Engineering

I thought that, perhaps, I'd kick around India for a year. Before that year was out, though, C42 closed doors and let go of all their (young but exceptionally talented) staff. While C42 wound down, the rest of us went for long lunches and talked about what we would want a company to look like, if we started one.

## Nilenso Software

My only stipulation for starting Nilenso with these folks was that it must be *aworker cooperative*. No one should own any more than anyone else and it shouldn't suffer the fate of so many other little companies, where the people who own the business don't even work there.

We had other fundamental rules, too. We refused to build weapons. We refused to spy on people. We refused to create software that manipulated human behaviour. Integrity was key. Beyond that, we wanted to build a business where any one of us would be happy to work for the rest of our lives.

We wanted to work with great tech. Over the years we wrote Clojure, Elixir, PureScript, Haskell, Java, C, Go, and other languages. We built large ML models, dynamic pricing systems, experimentation platforms, streaming video services, large distributed systems, embedded systems, and some of the world's first local-first software.

We wanted to work with great clients. We built software for Staples Labs, Flipkart (India's Amazon), PayTM Insider (a large Indian entertainment company, if you're not from India), GoJek, MapBox, and Simple.org.

We also experimented a lot with product development at Nilenso, producing a lot of open source as a consequence: <https://github.com/nilenso>.

In 2014, I had a bicycle crash in California while visiting a client. Thanks to the joys of the United States healthcare system (or lack thereof), I ended up with a crushed optic nerve and a permanent scleral buckle, after a couple botched surgeries. I couldn't program for a few years, so I took on even more of a leadership, mentoring, sales, and hiring/HR role at Nilenso.

I left in 2018 (as explained below) but Nilenso still exists, it is still owned by its employees, and it remains a very successful and well-regarded company.

## Travel and Covid

After many years, my partner and I were finding Bangalore's pollution and traffic noise to be too much for us. We decided to leave. After leading Nilenso for the better part of a decade, I hired my replacement and spent a year traveling, trying to decide what was next (and whether or not that thing even involved software). I spent a lot of time considering meditation research but, as you can see from my resume, I'm not a neuroscientist so this was really a non-starter. We had actually decided we would move to the Himalayas when the Covid lockdown hit.

While stuck in the Himalayas — Himachal and Kashmir — for most of 2020, I began volunteering with Pariyatti (a 501(c)3 nonprofit from Washington state) to help them build a digital library. My eyesight was getting better, so I thought this was a good way to get back into a little bit of programming. In a fit of over-engineering, I decided this digital library needed a graph database. I'd begun with Neo4j, but ultimately landed on XTDB (née "Crux"). After spending significant time with the XTDB team as a user, they offered me a job. By this point, I was back in Canada for Covid's Third Wave because I couldn't stay in India on my visa.

## XTDB

I began by writing long-form articles for XTDB, explaining exactly what an "immutable, bitemporal, time-traveling graph database" was — and why anyone would want one. I hired the team that redsigned [opencrux.com](https://opencrux.com) (the old brand, which was sued out of existence) into [xtdb.com](https://xtdb.com). I led the team that defined the brand and hired a designer to consult with us on the new XTDB logo. I spent months on market research with potential customers — a move that coincided with our shift from XTDB 1.x (a row-oriented, datalog queryable OLTP store) to XTDB 2.x (a columnar, disaggregated HTAP store). XTDB was receiving a lot of interest at the time, including interest from VCs. Håkan Råberg, XTDB's architect, and I contended that XTDB needed to become its own company, separate from the consultancy (JUXT Ltd.) which spawned it. The owners of JUXT disagreed, so we left to begin Endatabas.

## Endatabas

We built, marketed, and pre-sold Endatabas throughout 2023 and 2024. By the time we felt comfortable looking for the venture capital to take Endatabas to market, however, the VC world had changed a great deal. 2021 was a great time to find funding for a funky, open source database. 2024? Not so much.

Some VCs even went so far as to say things like "This is a great idea. If you brought me this two years ago, I could write you a cheque for \$2 million today. But... it's 2024." I at least admire their honesty.

As we wound up Endatabas, I spent significantly more time working with the three non-profits I contribute to: Pariyatti, The International Vipassana Technology Association Inc., and Atlantic Canada Vipassana Meditation. This was a wonderful way to spend the latter part of 2024.

## What are you looking for, exactly?

Good question! From someone like me, there isn't a single answer. I've led software teams as large as 30 and as small as 2. I've designed databases, distributed systems, and SQL dialects. I've built teams, companies, and products.

There are two spectrums I think about the kind of work I'd like to do.

On one spectrum, there is *meaning*: is the thing I'm doing really important? Over the past 5 years, I've really enjoyed working more and more with nonprofits and open source. But I also interviewed for a Staff Engineer role at Stripe recently. Arguably, India's UPI is the meaningful equivalent of something like Stripe, but I still think what Stripe builds is useful.

The second spectrum is one of the role's *responsibility*. I'm quite happy to work in any of the roles I've been doing over the past 10 years: Program Manager, (Technical) Product Manager, Engineering Manager, or CEO. I love working with people and helping teams build a great product, so all of these make sense to me. But I'm also quite happy to step back into an IC role. Especially if I found a job where I could work on open source or open data or work in the tech stack I use in my volunteer work (predominantly Rails and Flutter), I might find that really gratifying. Sometimes it's fun just to write code.

## Now what?

I'm happy to answer any questions you have. If you live in or near Halifax, I'd rather meet you in person. If you don't, I'm happy to spend a couple hours on a no-obligations call just to get to know each other.