Raf Gemmail

Scaling SaaS platforms & leading globally distributed teams
Ex-Booking.com, BBC iPlayer, Morgan Stanley

in www.linkedin.com/in/rafiqgemmail
github.com/fiq
www.infoq.com/profile/RafiqGemmail

✉ raf AT dreamthought.com
📍 North of Auckland, NZ
🛂 British and New Zealand Citizen

Summary

Engineering Leader with proven success scaling high-growth SaaS platforms and leading globally distributed teams. I specialise in building resilient, cost-effective systems while fostering high-performance engineering cultures.

Currently leading ~50 engineers across the Philippines and NZ. I bring hands-on expertise in cloud architecture, DevOps transformation, and high performance product delivery. I am passionate about mentorship and growth. My own leadership style balances technical depth with business impact - I am equally comfortable cutting code or driving technical strategy, as I am enabling business partners at all levels.

Thought Leadership & Community

Regular contributor to engineering community through conferences and podcasts:

- **InfoQ Culture & Methods Podcasts:** 2022, 2023, 2024, 2025
- **Conference Talks:** Growing Junior Developers, Mob/Pair Programming, Technical Debt at BBC
- **Community:** Organised remote conferences, NZ DevOps Days, Techweek workshops, maintenance of AURs and nixpkgs

Senior Leadership Experience

Senior Director of Engineering
Marigold Loyalty (Remote NZ with teams in the Philippines)

March 2025 – Present

- Led engineering org for a Forrester-wave loyalty platform, serving global brands
- Headed a 50+ engineer org with teams shipping multi-region AWS stacks from Rails to Scala
- Drove technical strategy for high-scale AI, event-driven, POS and ecommerce integrations
- Built a culture of security, SRE and cross-org collaboration within leadership team
- Invited to C-suite coached SLT program tackling ELT-level challenges
- Introduced AI, Eng Productivity, Functional programming and other guilds

Director of Engineering (Platform Capabilities)
Marigold Sailthru (Remote NZ with teams in India, Philippines, US, NZ)

July 2024 - March 2025

- Oversaw platform engineering including UI, Mobile Push, Data Engineering, and Platform
- Led migration from managed services to internal platform capabilities.
- Established engineering practices for distributed teams across multiple time zones
- Led petabyte-scale data eng team while backfilling, and optimised for cost and reliability

Engineering Manager
Marigold Sailthru (Remote NZ with teams in NZ, US and India)

July 2022 - July 2024

- Led Platform and Mobile Messaging teams delivering billions of messages monthly
- Hands-on leadership with ECS/EKS/Kafka/AMQ/Rails/Elixir/Java services
- Implemented data-driven leadership using cost, delivery, and reliability metrics
- Active participant in PagerDuty rotation and incident management

Head of Technology (and formerly Head of Product)
Developers Institute

November 2020 - July 2022

- Led scale-up from single-digit to hundreds of learners with cloud-native SaaS platforms
- Architected and delivered AWS-based platforms and IT infra with security by design

- Managed full technology stack, from product development to enterprise IT
- Recruited, mentored, and developed technical leadership and early teaching teams
- Designed NZQA-approved vocational pathways for learners from diverse backgrounds

Technical Leadership & Engineering

Hands-on Technical Consultant & Agile Coach Roles
2019 - 2020

Companies: Assurity Consulting, NZTA, MPorium
- DevOps coaching and BDD consulting for government and enterprise clients
- Led AWS serverless implementations and ML stack development
- Agile transformation coaching for distributed teams

Technical Lead & Architect Roles
2013 - 2018

Companies: BNZ, Stuff.co.nz, Catalyst IT
- Microservices migrations and cloud-native platform development
- Technical coaching and team leadership for high-traffic platforms
- DDD workshops and event storming for complex domain modeling
- Led Agile delivery of Cabnet legislative-workflow for NZ Government

Senior Software Engineer Roles
2002 - 2015

Companies: BBC iPlayer, Morgan Stanley, ING, Booking.com
- High-performance systems development for webscale platforms
- Platform optimisation and scalable architecture design
- Early adopter of cloud technologies and DevOps practices

Software Engineer Roles
1999 - 2007

Companies: Codix.net, Sportingbet.com, VisionOSS, Santander
- Full-stack development and systems administration for commercial applications
- Early career experience across financial services, gaming, and web platforms

Skills & Capabilities

Leadership: Engineering Leadership, Coaching, Lean, Agile, XP, DevOps, FinOps, Security & Compliance

Frameworks: SpringBoot, React, GraphQL, Spark, Camel, Rails

Datastores: PostgreSQL, MySQL Elastic, MongoDB, Databricks, DynamoDB, NoSQL

Languages: Java, Node, Scala, Ruby, Python, Go, Perl, Elixir

Platforms/Ops: AWS, Kubernetes, ECS/EKS, Terraform, Kafka, GitHub Actions, Jenkins, CloudWatch, DataDog

Other: AI/ML adoption, NixOS enthusiast, Vendor Management

Education & Certifications

BSc Hon. Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence
University of Birmingham and University of Pisa
1994 - 1999

ICP-ACC ICAgile Certified Professional - Agile Coaching
Trained by Shane Hastie, Director of Learning at ICAgile
2016

Interests

Homeschooling dad passionate about science and futurism🖐. Amateur astronomer and outdoor jogger. Lifelong musician playing guitar🎸 and ukulele. Exploring VR, oss AI models, video transcoding and NixOS in my spare time.