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Biography of Gayle Laakmann McDowell – An Influential Software Engineer

**Biography of Gayle Laakmann McDowell – An Influential Software Engineer**



Gayle Laakmann McDowell is a software engineer whose work has had a great impact of individuals around the world. She is also the founder of CareerCup, the author of multiple books, including the infamous ‘Cracking the Coding Interview’, a consultant and public speaker. Throughout her career life she has strived to improve the hiring techniques of those in search for developers, while also trying to educate engineers on how to best display their skills.

**Education**

McDowell graduated with a BSE/MSE in Computer Science from the University of Pennsylvania in 2005 and went on to achieve an MBA from the Wharton School in 2011. She earned herself a software design engineering internship at Microsoft three years in a row and then an internship with Apple in 2004.

**Career**

After completing her education, she went on to work for Google as a software engineer. In 2008, she became the VP of engineering in Keenscreen, a web-based software company.

While at Google, she was part of the hiring committee and the top one percent of the most active interviewers. Through this, she developed her philosophy for hiring capable employees and commercialised this knowledge by becoming a tech hiring consultant. I found this quite impressive as this was during the surge of tech start-ups globally. To this day being able to hire the right employees is a skill that is highly sought for in the industry. Fast growing companies need people that are not only smart but also those that are passionate about the field they are working in. Tech firms cannot risk the liability of an inefficient employee. McDowell recognized the skills she had acquired during her time working for the ‘big guns’ and decided to market them.

CareerCup

In 2008, McDowell founded CareerCup, a free website/forum, publishing company and consulting firm that is oriented around technical hiring. The firm advertises itself as the world’s biggest and best source for software engineering interview preparation.

CareerCup brings McDowell’s wealth of experience to candidates around the world. The firm has successfully led more than 15 start-ups through acquisitions with companies such as Google, Facebook, LinkedIn, Yahoo and AOL. CareerCup also provides assistance, preparing teams for interviews, which results in more successful acquisitions, higher valuations etc. Their consulting services also enables companies, large or small, to improve their technical hiring process, raising their standards and organising their hiring process. Facebook has hired CareerCup to prepare their staff for conducting interviews and has increased the frequency of classes after seeing the extremely positive results.

CareerCup’s website is well known among software engineers. It helps people prepare for jobs at tech companies, particularly for software engineering roles. With a database of over 6000 interview questions, it provides candidates an idea of the standards required by specific companies. The website has more than 1.5million pageviews per month and reaches roughly 12600 unique users each day.

McDowell manages the company’s social media presence which has gathered up around 100000 followers across Facebook, Twitter, and Quora. McDowell has received the title of ‘Top Writer’ on Quora for four consecutive years, while being Quora’s 10th most-followed person and the most-followed woman. Her presence on Quora is much appreciated by followers as she is quick to respond to her followers’ questions and doubts about CareerCup as a firm or its contents/services. Her responses are often very well thought out and display her commitment and consideration for her followers.

McDowell’s Books

To add to her flourishing career, McDowell’s most significant achievement has to be the three books she has written: *Cracking the Coding Interview*, *Cracking the Tech Career* and *Cracking the PM (Product Manager) Interview*. The most popular is *Cracking the Coding Interview* and it is ranked as Amazon’s #1 book in the “Interviewing” section and averages around #250 on Amazon out of all books. It has an average star rating of 4.5 even after 600 reviews. From the three books above, McDowell self-published two and established distribution in online and physical stores (US, Canada, India, and Europe). She also negotiated nine foreign deals right across two books.

In writing *Cracking the Coding Interview*, McDowell was not just commercialising her widespread knowledge of coding interviews, she was also helping thousands of software engineers around the world with the intimidating idea of this examination of skillset. Many computer science and engineering students consider this book their holy grail not just for interviews but also for understanding many programming topics. She uses comprehensible, concise language to convey the subject matter. Personally, many acquaintances of mine and I have used this book to prepare for interviews. All of us found it as great material to clear last-minute doubts and give practise questions. Although the book is designed for software engineers or those that have an in-depth idea of programming, it can be a great learning tool for those that would like to come into the field, making this book suitable for anyone with a will to learn.

HackerRank

Throughout her search for new ways to create better skilled developers, she was offered the opportunity to become an advisor for HackerRank. HackerRank is a platform that helps companies find the right developer based on their coding skills and it is also a great tool for developers to improve their problem-solving skills and practice for their coding interviews. After she accepted the offer, she released the Cracking the Coding Interview tutorial series with HackerRank. It includes 20 tutorial videos featuring McDowell and these videos contains practice coding challenges alongside short tutorial videos and general interviewing advice.

**McDowell’s Impact**

As a woman in a male dominated industry, Gayle Laakmann McDowell has strived to exhibit and expand her knowledge. She conducts talks and speeches at many public events where she continues to help software engineers or those that seek such a career to become more efficient in their work. I also see her as an inspiration for many women, using her education and talents to advance her business. She also serves as an inspiration to those in the software engineering field but would like to move to a more entrepreneurial profession. McDowell displays how your degree and field of study can be used in a variety of ways, contrary to popular belief.

To conclude, Gayle Laakmann McDowell is a software engineer who has successfully established a company and written three books. Both of these achievements have strived to help both companies in their hiring and those training for career defining interviews. She has cleverly managed to market her skills and knowledge. In all manners, I believe this woman is an influential software engineer.

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