Top 7 Signs of a Highly Experienced Software Engineer

Know the traits that can set your software career on a high growth path

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I always feel that the software profession offers one of the most promising careers out there. It is both challenging and rewarding at the same time. With every passing year, more and more software engineers are joining the force.

Every software engineer wants to make it big in their careers. It is given that most of them are technically good and proficient in one or more programming languages. And many feel technical knowledge is all that they need to thrive.

However, only a few of these passionate software developers can grow exponentially in their careers. They can achieve the goals they set for themselves. These successful developers show exceptional maturity in their day-to-day activities.

The traits that make experienced developers successful are not hard to acquire. Once you are aware of the qualities, you can easily practice them to give a continuous boost to your career. So, without further ado, let's dive deep into the seven signs of highly experienced developers.

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1. They Stay Curious

Curiosity is good when it comes to software engineering. You cannot always know everything from day one of your job. Also, it is not like the school days, where we can expect teachers to explain to us the required details proactively.

Once you join the software world, you need to learn the nuances of it on your own. The technological society is a fast-changing one. There is always something new in the work that can be the next big thing.

Experienced software developers know that to be successful, they need to keep learning continuously. For that, they need to stay curious. They do not wait for someone else to learn a new language or API and then explain it to them.

In the same breath, they do not take anything at face value. Experienced developers always want to dive deep into the requirements until they can understand them to their satisfaction. Give them an issue, and they will try to thoroughly uncover its root cause so that it does not happen in the future.

What you can do

- Ask questions till you clarify all your doubts.

- Keep abreast of the latest technological changes in your interest areas.

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2. They Possess Integrity

Highly experienced software developers show many of the character traits of integrity in every aspect of their work. They do not try to escape from their responsibility by blaming a failed project on someone else. They prefer to work more as a team than as individuals.

With experience, developers are expected to take on more responsibility apart from coding. They need to interact with other team members, product owners, customers, senior management, other connections, etc. In every interaction, mature developers prefer to be sincere and respectful, irrespective of the other person's designation.

Experienced developers understand that honesty and trustworthiness go hand in hand with integrity. They do not paint a rosy picture of their capability in front of management to gain brownie points. If they cannot meet the promised delivery timeline, they own up to any slippage and inform their superior as early as possible.

In my career, I have seen that management wants to understand the accurate picture of any issue more often than not. It helps leaders to prepare better for future eventualities and also to handle the situation appropriately. Developers with integrity understand that being truthful, hardworking, and sincere is the best policy for their career growth.

What you can do

- If you think you made a mistake, then own up to it and explain why the slip happened.

- Be gracious and respectful in all your interactions, irrespective of the designations of other people.

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3. They Possess Humility

Developers with a high maturity level realize that they cannot grow professionally with a big ego. Hence they do not let their pride block their progress. They are always open to admitting that there might be more to everything than they know. This attitude, combined with curiosity, helps humble developers learn faster.

Highly experienced developers also understand that software engineering is not a one-person show. However intelligent and bright they might be, they cannot execute every aspect of delivery independently. Everyone in the team has an important role to play in the success of a project.

Developers with humility are quick to accept when they are not aware of a topic. If they make any mistake, they introspect about their action and try to learn from it to avoid a recurrence in the future. They stay away from unnecessary arguments at any cost.

Integrity and humility go hand in hand as personal traits of highly mature developers. You cannot have one of the signs without the other. Due to the combination of these two traits, everyone in the team loves to work with such developers, which helps experienced developers grow in their careers.

What you can do

- Value every role in the team as each of them is essential for a successful delivery.

- Try to introspect and be self-aware so that you do not let ego block your progress.

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4. They Are Quick on Their Feet

Experienced developers know the importance of time. They do not sit on an issue forever. They know when to ask for help and whom to reach out to if they cannot make expected progress in their assignments.

At the same time, intelligent developers are flexible. They can change with time and technology. They do not fixate on one solution or programming language. This behavioral agility helps the experienced developer to always remain at the top of their software development game.

I am always amazed at how effortlessly a truly experienced developer breaks down a complex problem into chunks of simple issues. They do not try to hammer down every situation as it appears. They understand the problems, analyze the root causes, break them down into smaller pieces of more straightforward issues, and then try to solve each of them.

Developers need to work with a lot of stakeholders playing various roles in the project delivery. Each of these roles has a different perspective about the exact requirement or issues. An experienced developer knows how to explain the same topic in an understandable manner depending on their audience.

What you can do

- Always try to break down a problem into smaller, simplified blocks and approach them individually.

- Observe someone who you think is good at this trait and learn how they approach the problems they face.

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5. They Understand the Power of Reciprocity

Like I said before, software engineering is a team game. We cannot win it alone. As software developers, we cannot flourish in isolation. To thrive in our careers, we need to work together, help one another, and at every opportunity pull each other up as we progress.

Highly experienced software developers understand the benefit of reciprocity. They never hesitate to help anyone within or outside their team. While helping others, they also make sure that they learn through the process. It is always a mutually beneficial action.

In my experience, I have found many times helping others helps me learn too. When people ask me a question that I don't know anything about, I reach out to people I think might know the answer. In this process, I learn something new that I might not have learned if I hadn't been ready to help others.

Highly skilled developers understand that they can succeed better from helping others than from staying isolated. When they perform the act of reciprocity, they continuously gain knowledge. Their area of expertise broadens along with it. By helping others, they grow faster than by trying to hoard knowledge.

What you can do

- Help others as much as you can at your workplace.

- Do not worry about people who take your help but are not ready to return the favor. You can always find someone willing to help you when you need it.

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6. They Know When to Speak

You can easily spot an experienced and mature developer in a meeting. They are usually the quiet ones. That does not mean they do not speak at all or don't know what to say. Highly experienced developers know when to talk during meetings, and their responses are mainly to the point.

Have you noticed people who keep on talking tangentially in a meeting? They don't get the cue about when to stop. But experienced developers know when to drop a topic and move on. They do not try to change minds in a meeting by enforcing their opinion.

Highly experienced developers also do not speak unnecessarily in meetings. If they are not aware of a subject, they try to listen and learn. They talk when they are asked to provide their thoughts. If they do not know the answer to a question, they politely state the same without feeling ashamed.

With experience, skilled developers learn how to create space for others to talk in a group discussion. They try to give equal opportunities to everyone in the meeting. They understand that just because someone is introverted does not mean that they do not have anything valuable to contribute.

Not just in group discussions but even in one-on-one conversations, developers with maturity pays attention to what the other side has to say. They try to understand the

context first. They always try to speak once they have paid due attention to the thought process of others.

What you can do

- Pay attention to what others have to say in a meeting. Ask questions if you do not understand the details.

- Create space for people who might not be comfortable speaking up in group discussions.

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7. They Are Fact-Driven

Have you ever been part of meetings where people discuss a topic at length, but no one has any data to substantiate their side? Yes, it is way too common in software project meetings. Seldom are facts placed to justify the points made.

Without facts, people make up their minds on one side of the discussion or the other. Next they try to justify their side of the story. But intelligent developers are aware that without data, the decisions are just gut feelings. And such decisions mostly fail to deliver the expected outcome.

Data might not always tell the truth, but it often helps to uncover it. How data is derived is a significant factor in the accuracy of the details. Hence, when an alternate set of facts is presented that does not align with the earlier conclusions, competent developers reevaluate their decisions. Their humility also helps them to know that they might not be right all the time.

Another trait of highly experienced developers is that they generally do not argue during decision-making. They place the facts and explain the details so that people can derive their own conclusions.

Highly knowledgeable developers do not manufacture data to align with their conclusions. They do not play with facts to please senior management. Misrepresented facts can do more harm in the long run. Hence, they stick to putting points on the table even if that's not what others want to hear.

What you can do

- Do your own research to find facts.

- Analyze available facts before you arrive at any conclusion.

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Final Thoughts

These signs are not the only ones that can indicate that the developer is highly experienced. But they are some of the most critical indicators.

Also, it is not expected for developers to possess these traits when they start their careers. Competent developers observe and acquire many of these qualities as they spend more time in the software industry.

> Recognizing that you need work is an excellent sign that you are on the right path in your software career.

If you feel you are missing out on some of the traits, that is all right. All you need to do is pay attention to the qualities you want to acquire and act accordingly. Recognizing that you need work is an excellent sign that you are on the right path in your software career.

What traits do you think have helped you grow in your software career? Please feel free to provide your perspective, based on your experience, in the response section.
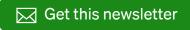
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Thanks for reading the article.

Thanks to Anupam Chugh.

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