

title: **23F | Lost job before diagnosis.**

num_comments: 18

num_up_votes: 37

upvote_ratio: 0.95

Post Text

I guess it's not programming specific but I wanted to work with Computer Systems which has always been my a childhood goal of mine especially being a young woman of color in a predominantly older, white male field. After graduation with my BSIS, I finally got a job as a Systems Engineer and I was fired after only a year and a half with my prev manager providing no other reason than "difficulty surrounding perception around work behavior". I wasn't diagnosed at the time and I'm still not medicating but being let go only increased my imposter syndrome and anxiety (for which I do take medications). Even now as I job search, I question if I'm in over my head and that I don't belong in this field because I have trouble focusing and it seems that I'm just not dedicated to portraying that "ideal" image of an engineer pulling daily all nighters in the basement that my ex-boss said I lacked. I'm coming to terms with the fact that my love for computers and technology is genuine even if I find myself interested in other things in my life. I'm also very artistic but I never wanted to do art as my source of bread and butter y'know? I may need extra help to focus especially now that I'm transitioning more into DevOps and the goal post seems to be moving further and further away but I'm trying not to let that discourage me, bc calling it quits now seems like a disservice to all the hard work I've put in so far. I definitely feel a sense of accomplishment with every technical challenge I overcome but sometimes I wonder if that is enough to make a career especially now when I don't have a huge amount of experience to begin with. I guess I want to know what helped people who lost their jobs before their diagnosis move forward? How do you combat feelings of imposter syndrome? Also do you mention your ADHD at all during interviews?

Comments

Unknown_User

ID: REDACTED! ~(o.o)~ <3, Upvotes: 27

Being a young woman in IT is HARD. You're constantly doubted, you can be years in and still be treated as junior, you often have to wait until a male engineer echoes your viewpoint for it to be taken seriously, etc. Generally victim mentalities do not help, but being blind to the discrimination and internalising it all as a sign of being a failure is just as bad. It's a constant journey of trying to find balance between the two.

Being a fresh graduate in IT is HARD. You're suddenly having to adapt to working in a team environment, working in an open office with constant noise and lack of boundaries, there are so many technologies, project management methodologies, corporate politics, finding a voice in an intimidating and often hierarchy environment, being able to communicate to product, etc. you have to learn extremely quickly that just aren't taught effectively. You are working on systems that have potentially been in place for over a decade and highly flawed, full of undocumented nuances and missing historical context for all it's quirks.

Your first job can often consist of your team mildly resenting you; you require so much upskilling with often minimal returns on the time investment for at least the first year. You feel like you are working 24/7 and trying your absolute best yet your teammates are doing easi 3x the work you are with far less effort. You feel there is a constant gap between your potential and your knowledge of the subject and what you are able to deliver within the parameters of the working environment you find yourself in.

All I can say is it DOES get easier. So much of this is more related to establishing credibility than it is technical skill. A lot of the knowledge you learn in your first job is often transferable to the second job and it is no where near as much of an uphill struggle.

There are also thousands and thousands of terrible companies and terrible managers. No onboarding process, a lack of trust towards new employees despite a ridiculous vetting process, dogmatic and dated ways of approaching problems, terrible legacy systems that require years of experience with to work with effectively, etc. As your career progresses you will start to be able to better distinguish when you are going through necessary (yet harsh) career development, and when you are grinding and grinding exhaustively trying to deliver within a fundamentally broken company. Once you establish the situation is the latter, you jump ship as soon as possible. If it is the former, you need to decide if the particular sub-field/language/technology is truly for you, deeply introspect any possible patterns in your work that are impacting performance, and ask for honest feedback.

From my experience, it's always better to work at smaller companies that haven't been around for a while. Notice how I didn't say start ups? Because they have their own problems - but IMO for a relatively new engineer are still a 1000x better.

Smaller companies have a lot less pressure from management, less communication breakdowns, a lot more pragmatism, a lot more mobility within the organisation, less legacy systems, etc. They're also a lot more trusting.

It's good you're exploring whether this industry is right for you and considering alternatives, but truly, a lot of what you've discussed here is not specific to you, and you aren't broken. It IS hard. It DOES get easier, but it still is a difficult industry to not get burnt out from. Despite how it's portrayed in the media, a lot of aspects of the culture within most IT companies are fundamentally broken and highly regressive.

I would also highly recommend trying medication, but this is a personal decision for yourself to make.

If you ever want to talk, I'm here.

Commenter_2

ID: REDACTED! ~(o.o)~ <3, Upvotes: 7

Geez, you had me in tears for a bit. I wanted to comment to OP "you got it girl!" But then your comment hit me like a brick :')

But yea.. it IS hard. Like OP, I LOVE computers and I think I have sufficient knowledge but imposter syndrome and the constant being on "top of my game" and default (silent) distrust you receive as a woman is so tiring :(and working from home doesn't help either (but it helps with other aspects like coming on time, noisey office spaces etc) sometimes I want to just lay on the couch with a blanket over my head...

I'm now thinking of the thing you said about smaller companies. I am now working in a big Telco company, I should be a Data Engineer, but in reality i'm more a "swiss army knife of computer person" doing some DevOps, full stack dev, testing, automation, consulting, system design, the whole spectrum.. and I am in this position because somehow I know a bit about everything and people come to me with random questions. But... actually having a specialization? Actually knowing knowing something?? I don't even have time! But the expectations are so high! Among people that are just doing "tricks" for 30 years they are working there.. I find myself so confused so often about the way of working, politics, ridiculous legacy systems people seem to gush over (it's like I stepped in wardrobe portal to 30 years ago) people fighting restructures, shifting left/DevOps stuff (which I get to some extend) but no room for new people/ actual seniors to help us. It's a circus mostly haha. BUT (the point i wanted to make) is that I learn a lot from the "it's just work" attitude from the older generation. Nobody is pulling all nighters, meetings are not ASAP but "oh yea let's do it next week" and there is a lot of flexibility. When I do nothing at you know.. "those" days, nobody cares. You can be quite invisible in big companies. I'm terrified of the feeling of being micro managed or closer

knitted team where people can actually see my actual output is so low... I know a lot, I talk a lot, I explain a lot, I start a lot.. but actual work? Haha. :) help. On the other hand, I would love a helping hand of a more senior person (in technology not in age haha, those I have enough :))

Well this turned out to be just rambling.

To OP: this commenter is right, it IS hard. Don't give up! The world needs you. If you know what Git is, you know more than 80% of my department!! (That's also how I pep talk myself) Also, DevOps is super difficult, the concepts are maybe clear, but actually implementing it? Geez. It's a lot. Right now I'm struggling for a week with ansible and just grabbing a image and deploy it on a remote host.. WHY? It's so simple!! Well beats me.. my colleagues probably think I'm a joke. :')

High five to you both

Edit: OP, wtf does that comment mean from your ex-boss? Sounds like a douche to me >:(

OP

ID: REDACTED! ~(o.o)~ <3, Upvotes: 2

I wasn't ever given specific criticisms during our 1:1s just that I could be and should be doing more. The company was pretty big and I was hired straight out of college so I did spend a lot of time being brought up to speed. I realize now that he wanted me to perform on the same level as our Senior Engineers but would deny me any opportunities to take on higher-level projects bc he thought I wasn't ready. I think subconsciously started to believe and internalize a lot of those expectations which led to a decline in my productivity and performance.

I'm still not sure what I could've done differently but like the other comment suggested I definitely know a lot more this time around so hopefully I can take this experience into my next position (:

I've been trying to familiarize myself with Ansible too! There's so many DevOps tools to learn I've started going for general competency instead of mastery so I don't feel overwhelmed. All the high fives back to ya, and thank you so much for your comment!

Commenter_2

ID: REDACTED! ~(o.o)~ <3, Upvotes: 2

Ah shit thats one of my worst nightmares.. like getting a big fat confirmation stamp on your forehead for the already lingering anxiety and Imposter syndrome feelings. I'm mortified for you :(nobody deserves that kind of punishment when trying and doing the best they can. Ofcourse, expectations can misalign from both sides, but if he was a somewhat decent manager he should have given those 1:1s, feedback sessions, clear goals, clear requirements to get ready for those big projects, etc. I totally get why your performance would drop over time if you had this over your head. Did you get any feedback from your colleagues at the time? If you had good contact with them maybe you can ask what they thought? (I know, terrifying, but what do you have to loose right?)

Ah yes all the tools, there are a lot and all so cool! I certainly agree with your point with not getting to overwhelmed.. but they work so integrated with each other in a pipeline, it's hard to separate them haha! I have bought a Ansible book in pdf/ePub. if you want it, i can send it to you. I don't know yet if it's any good yet but still :D

OP

ID: REDACTED! ~(o.o)~ <3, Upvotes: 2

Wow this is really encouraging bc I wasn't sure if my experience was unique to my company or the

industry in general. I've been on the fence about medications but reading some of the testimonies in here definitely helps me keep a more open mind about it. I still got some fight left in me and this really offered a lot of perspective, thank you!

Commenter_4

ID: REDACTED! ~(o.o)~ <3, Upvotes: 10

Two things helped my over the years tremendously: a mentor that encourages and appreciates me and a half artificial, half justified self-esteem that is able to overshadow my constant doubts.

OP

ID: REDACTED! ~(o.o)~ <3, Upvotes: 5

Having a mentor rn would be really helpful. I'll be sure to ask companies about mentorship programs while interviewing, ty!

Commenter_5

ID: REDACTED! ~(o.o)~ <3, Upvotes: 5

Don't mention the ADHD unless you have a specific reason why mentioning it would help you do your job better. Otherwise it's an excuse for future bad behaviour. Saying "The office is noisy and I need to wear noise cancelling headphones so I can work without distractions," is a better way of phrasing things. Otherwise keep the information to yourself and your friends, who already love you for you.

For me, before diagnosis is a time I remember fondly as hell. Diagnosed at 38, struggled to keep jobs, or do anything really the whole time. Post diagnosis, finding some great doctors (ADHD specialists) have changed everything. I can work my best in a field I enjoy for 4-6 hours a day and I can't be happier. Stims quieten my mind without the hours of mental sweat you need for meditation (although that also works). Quiet mental space is all you need to be a good Dev.

OP

ID: REDACTED! ~(o.o)~ <3, Upvotes: 2

Thank you for sharing! The good thing is with most companies WFH I can get bypass the noisy offices (for now). It seems meds really do help a lot of Devs focus better so I'll explore my options while I have the luxury of it still being an option lol.

Commenter_6

ID: REDACTED! ~(o.o)~ <3, Upvotes: 6

I lost my first job as well partially due to ADHD. That was a few years ago, so I've had plenty of time to figure out what went wrong and realized I was pretty much doomed from the start. It was a devops job that combined adding onto our automation system and monitoring email for incoming requests to see if another team member was getting behind. Breaking concentration every 15 minutes or so was a disaster for productivity. We also didn't have a ticket tracking system within my part of the devops team, so I was continuously losing track of tasks. The tasks were assigned verbally, which is my weakest form of communication, so I continuously lost track of important details. I spent months constructing an elaborate test suite for one project after I thought I was given the request to do so, only to be told that it was entirely unnecessary.

When I left that job, I was a little evasive in interviews about why I left that position. I just said that I didn't feel like it was a good fit for me, which was both true and not the whole story. I also didn't mention upfront that I have ADHD. I didn't want to hurt my job prospects and I think they might not even want to know for legal reasons.

Once I finally got my current job, I did become more open about having ADHD. It's important to have some honest discussions with your supervisor so they can compensate for the difficulties that ADHD present. You may find yourself in good company. My entire team has ADHD, and apparently quite common among tech people.

As for imposter syndrome, hell yeah I had that. Not for technical stuff - I'm plenty technically adept - but my time management is not great and I felt like I might catch harsh criticism for that. My first one-on-ones were nerve wracking, though that may be because at my previous job those usually turned into a laundry list of criticisms with no end in sight. Fortunately, my supervisor and I established a solid working relationship that has helped me grow professionally and personally.

And that working late hours? You're right not to put up with that. It's a sickness that's reached far too many corners of our industry. It's not just bad for employees, it's a great way to get unnecessary bugs introduced.

OP

ID: REDACTED! ~(o.o)~ <3, Upvotes: 3

Wow, I'm glad you found a manager who's willing to work with your conditions. I really hope my next position that I have a supervisor who is more understanding and we can build that relationship as well. I struggle a lot with verbal instructions too bc I tend to 'generalize' and just do the gist of what I understood was required. I'm definitely trying to develop a habit of having some sort of paper trail that outlines any tasks given to me so I don't miss out on crucial details. I really appreciate you sharing!

Commenter_6

ID: REDACTED! ~(o.o)~ <3, Upvotes: 4

Since we share that as well, I'll add a few coping mechanisms or workplace practices I've found helpful:

- * Bullet journaling: it's a lightweight form of to do list and journal keeping.
- * A ticket tracker is central to my workflow. If someone requests anything that isn't incredibly trivial, I want it in our ticket tracker. If it is incredibly trivial, it has to go in the bullet journal or it is unlikely to get done.
- * Slack automatically means a searchable record of any conversations, though it is inherently unstructured.
- * We keep meeting notes with Google Docs, which allows for assigning action items. There is always one assigned note taker, a meeting agenda that everyone can edit before hand, and the notes are projected on the wall.
- * When designing a REST API, I design it using OpenAPI first. Then when I go to actually implement it, I'm not constantly going back to rethink things. I have a straightforward roadmap, so I don't get distracted as easily.

Some of these would require buy-in from others, but I found that people are often receptive if you can make a good case. It also shows initiative, which supervisors and other coworkers appreciate.

Commenter_7

ID: REDACTED! ~(o.o)~ <3, Upvotes: 5

Coming from someone who is both white, male (though younger) and does fit that "daily all nighters in the basement" trope, I completely relate; unfortunately, I was fired under similar circumstances.

I definitely don't feel under any obligation to acknowledge my ADHD during the interview process. What's your regiment look like with medication?

OP

ID: REDACTED! ~(o.o)~ <3, Upvotes: 3

I currently only take Celexa for anxiety and I meditate to help with focus. I'm still not as disciplined as I'd like to be when it comes to longer periods of dedicated work but I'm reading that's

where other meds can come in handy.

Commenter_8

ID: REDACTED! ~(o.o)~ <3, Upvotes: 3

Hey, don't give up. I've lost a few jobs because of this too but it's important you don't give up. I would suggest the next time you apply for a job, ask about their work culture and flexibility in working hours. Try to get a feel for it.

I'm a female, woman of color and a lead engineer. I first came to understand I had attention issues when I was frequently called out on it over the years in my career. Then I dated a guy with ADHD and he was adamant I had it too.

I'm generally always late, sometimes take days off when I'm overwhelmed. What I've found over the years though, is what works for me is to try to communicate whether or not I will be away, late, or working from home. This is easy when you find a workplace that is kind, supportive and flexible. I also never mention my ADHD in interviews.

As long as you get your work done, you shouldn't have any issues. Never be afraid to ask for help too.

Also, imposter syndrome is a real thing and I still have it, even 10 years later in my field. Hope this helps :)

Commenter_9

ID: REDACTED! ~(o.o)~ <3, Upvotes: 2

Just here to say you arnt alone. Also lost my first programming job within a year and a half, also got diagnosed after it was too late during the job.

Commenter_10

ID: REDACTED! ~(o.o)~ <3, Upvotes: 1

I lost 4 jobs in a row early on in my career. I had been diagnosed with ADHD but was still in major denial at the time and had no idea. I had gotten diagnosed and was taking meds (no therapy which was a mistake on my part, my ego decided that maybe I can get by with just the meds), my sleep schedule eventually became be super out of whack and I would show up late all the time and oversleep, had trouble finishing things, stopped caring etc. This cycle repeated for a couple of years and a couple jobs.

Things started turning around when I finally started going to therapy and taking stimulant medication. I really really recommend doing both therapy and medication enough for most people with ADHD. If you live in the US your insurance should cover it and you can find a therapist through the Psychology Today website and see which providers can take your insurance. If you don't have insurance some providers will offer sliding scale and you'll still be able to find help.

<https://www.betterhelp.com/> Is another website you can use.

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In terms of combatting imposter syndrome? While a lot of engineers say that imposter syndrome is common, for me my imposter syndrome was pretty uhh I guess you would say worse than at the time. I had a lot of false beliefs about myself at the time and unhealthy thinking habits. Therapy alleviated this.

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In terms of mentioning ADHD, there seem to be two opinions.

One is don't ever tell since you might be judged or treated unfairly since people might not "understand".

The other one which I'm starting to lean towards I think depends on how diverse and open the company is. My company that I'm at now is big on diversity and bringing awareness to mental health issues so I feel like I would be comfortable one day disclosing this to my manager if issues in my performance arose and were brought up to me.

Commenter_11

ID: REDACTED! ~(o.o)~ <3, Upvotes: 1

Late to party, but...

(BTW, White, mid 30s, male, so this won't totally line up to your experience. Sorry.)

Was diagnosed almost 3 years ago (I think?). Boss and Supervisor pulled me aside after a series of um... creative miss-steps, lets say. (I took down the user devices on the entire second floor for a day, as an example. But I DID get Java auto patching, so... yay?)

Was basically told that I was not meeting expectations, and before they took any official action (which at that point the ice was so thin it would mean being fired) they wanted to take one last try to work with me because they knew I could do the work, I just was not... engaged most of the time.

Very much the "oh God... they found out I am fraud..." moment we all dread.

This was what kicked my ass in gear to finally figure out what was different with me that i always knew in the back of my head but never dared face.

They were very gracious with me and so long as I kept them in the loop with my attempts to figure this out they were fine. Some days all I did was dig into "what is wrong with me" while at work.

It took 7 months or so to finally get a diagnosis. By that time I was already trying to use what I was learning to help cope. I think the terror of maybe losing my job and not being able to support my wife and foster son was ... ah... motivating, and work was sorta improving anyway. But omg, when I first started on meds it was like... having worn sunglasses all my life and then taking them off.

Of course, the inevitable issues of never having to control switching away from a work task ended up with MANY nights of me working on my laptop until 4am or later and then realizing what a mistake I had made with not sleeping... But I got through it.

What worked for me was finding a place where I am constantly working on problems, not pushing the same thing over and over. (Not a programmer by trade, only for funsies. I do Desktop Support.) PC crashing? Let me dig into that event log! Fiber line get cut and the entire company can't talk to our servers AND we don't know why they are not failing over to DR? Lemme hop in a car to the nearest store and start testing ideas! (Did that like... 2 weeks ago.) I thrive on fixing problems.

Punching boxes on a checklist for things to code? ... eh. Doesn't interest me.

Building a PC for a user? Gag. Manage some interns on a project? Please, no, have mercy.

Have the entire Point of Sale system hardware reboot every 20-60 minutes for no reason anyone can figure? (Happened.) PLEASE! I love that stuff!

What about the job did you like? What got you excited for work?

What job does more of that, and how can you self-select into those roles moving forward?

As to telling them or not... I've been pretty vocal at work because I didn't know not to (per most advice, anyway). By the time I heard the common advice I was already "out", so... I dunno.

If I go anywhere else, I probably won't advertise it. But I won't hide it. If asked about it, it is a dual layered issue where it really helps for when there is a major problem that needs my full focus to troubleshoot and resolve, but makes a challenge for things like documentation or highly repetitive/low effort tasks. Then I would highlight steps I take to combat those issues. (Make it a game to see how quickly on Monday I can get my weekly update to my supervisor before it is due on tuesday, etc)

Don't give up on the work. My guess is that you fell into the wrong type of job, something that had little interest and the results were not stimulating enough to get you moving. I bet with a little mental sweat you can find a job description that covers the parts of the job that got you happy to be there, and with little of the stuff you dreaded. Maybe it'll take a bit to get there, but I believe you can do it.