Why learn data science?

Written by **KATIEDAVE**
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I discovered data science one morning while walking my dog and listening to a podcast aimed at people in career transitions. I had heard of it before, of course, but only in the context of a new, burgeoning field for people embarking on their careers. Young people that had come of age in this world of technology. Not someone like me– a middle-aged stay-at-home mom of two teenagers. But the more I listened to the podcaster explain data science in the context of today's digital world as well as the numbers and types of jobs it encompasses, the more I thought maybe this could be for me.

I graduated with degrees in Mechanical Engineering from the University of Michigan in the mid 90s. I spent the next several years working as an automotive engineer and eventually became a Six Sigma blackbelt for Ford Motor Company. Six Sigma uses a data-driven, problem-solving methodology, along with statistical evaluation, to improve processes and eliminate waste. I believed in this process and enjoyed the work but decided to leave my job for family reasons upon having children. I spent the next 15 years raising kids, volunteering, and pursuing my woodworking hobby. As my children grew older and more independent, however, I found myself having more time to devote to…something else…a new pursuit. A return to my previous position felt virtually impossible, too much time had passed, and the auto industry had changed immensely. How could I use my skills and make a contribution going forward? That's where data science comes in.

Data science is finding insights and valuable information from data. I have done this before in my career with different methodologies and terminologies, but the essence is the same. Data science requires a methodical approach, attention to detail, and an understanding of statistical and mathematical concepts. These too are things I have done and demonstrated in the past. It feels like a good fit for me. It feels like a new

career option that will allow me to make good use of my skills and have a positive impact on a business or organization. It will, however, require a good bit of work!

I have very little prior experience in programming, except for one required college course in the FORTRAN language (that dates me!) I can remember when cell phones didn't exist, and email was a brand-new thing only accessible on college campuses. I would be lying if I said I was not feeling just a little out of my depth. But the ability to learn is universal and all it takes is dedication and hard work– something I'm committed to giving.

Harvard Business Review labeled data science as the "Sexiest Job of the 21st Century". Employment demand is forecasted to be on the rise along with competitive salaries. Opportunity seems to abound in the near term for data scientists so why not try to join the ranks? I believe I have the skill set, drive, time, and am in the right stage of life to devote myself to becoming a data scientist. So now, a couple of months into my training program, I walk my dog and think about my future in data science.