



ANITA
B.ORG 2023
GRACE HOPPER
CELEBRATION

THE WAY
FORWARD

How to Get a Head Start in Your Tech Career

Presented by:
Maureen Biney
Software Engineer at American Express



Intro

Name is Maureen Biney. I'm a software engineer at American Express with over a decade's experience in coding and non-coding roles. I'm honored to have won many industry awards between software engineering and the work I do in the Tech community.

Today I am here to talk to you about "How to get a head start in your tech career". This topic is very dear to me, and my presentation today covers everything I wish I heard when I was starting out my tech career. We're going to dive into practical insights and actionable tips that will help you thrive in this dynamic field of technology and set the foundation for a successful career.

I hope that this session will be useful to you, and that by the end of it you'll feel empowered to navigate the early stages of your tech journey.

AGENDA

- Identifying Your Path
- Building Your Personal Brand
- Developing Your Network
- Overcoming Challenges



INTRODUCTION

Important to acknowledge that the early stages of a tech career can be challenging
Can be remarkably rewarding at the same time depending on how you approach things

Introduction: Navigating Your Tech Career Journey



I want you to imagine your tech career as a road

- not straight...
- lots of twists and turns
- and there are also obstacles

When you're in your early stages, it can feel like like you're in uncharted territory with so many questions and uncertainties.

It can be really confusing. Each twist, each turn and each obstacle that you come across represents an opportunity for you to grow, learn and accomplish great things for yourself.

We're not just going to address challenges, but I'll provide you with some strategies to overcome them

From breaking through imposter syndrome to mastering the art of networking, I'm here to ensure that you don't only survive, but thrive in this dynamic field of technology.

With the right tools and mindset, you can unlock the potential of the tech industry and you'll also carve out a meaningful and successful career path. We'll also go

through some tried and tested key principles that can empower you to tap into this potential and create a lasting impact.



IDENTIFYING YOUR PATH

One of the fundamental steps in embarking on a successful tech career is discovering your unique North Star

When I say “discovering your unique North Star”, I mean aligning your strengths, interests, skills and values with potential tech career paths. There are so many paths in tech, so this is really important.

Let’s delve into the process of mapping your journey for a fulfilling and purpose-driven career

Discovering Your North Star: Mapping Your Tech Career

Recognizing your strengths



Pursuing your interests



Cultivating your skills



 ANITA
B.ORG
GRACE HOPPER
CELEBRATION

THE WAY
FORWARD

Strengths

Every individual has a unique set of strengths. Strengths can be technical, interpersonal or a blend of both.

Some actions that can help you identify what your strengths are:

Self reflection – reflect on your past experiences and activities where you felt confident and accomplished. Think about what you were doing, and what skills and qualities you used.

Feedback – You can use feedback as a tool to get valuable insights into your strengths and areas where you excel. You can ask for feedback from trusted colleagues, friends and mentors.

Journal – keep a journal to record moments when you felt particularly competent or enjoyed what you are doing. You can analyze patterns in your journal entries to identify recurring strengths.

Seek diverse experiences – Explore different roles to discover talents and strengths that you may not have known that you have. Internships, graduate programs, volunteering.

Pursuing your interests

Think about what tech areas ignite your curiosity. There might be one or more areas

that interest you – whether it's AI, cyber security, web dev, app development, your interests play a very crucial role in steering you toward a career path that will keep you motivated and engaged.

Cultivating your skills

Think about what skills you already have that you want to be better at, or skills that you don't have that you would like to acquire. Once you have done that, you can do these things:

Set clear objectives

Structured learning helps – enrolling on courses, using e-learning platforms

Hands-on projects

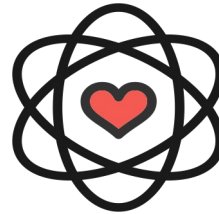
Join communities, teach others

Hackathons

---- All of these will help you cultivate your skills

Discovering Your North Star: Mapping Your Tech Career

Honoring your
values



 ANITA
B.ORG 2023
GRACE HOPPER
CELEBRATION

THE WAY
FORWARD

Your values define your ethical compass. When we talk about values, I want you to think about your non-negotiables. Values are principles and beliefs that define who you are and what you stand for.

To know what your values are, you need to do an exercise of deep introspection. Values are not static – they can evolve depending on where you are in life, so you need to regularly reflect on your values to assess whether your career path remains aligned.

When your career path aligns with your values, it leads to greater job satisfaction, fulfillment, a sense of purpose.



MY STORY: IDENTIFYING MY CAREER PATH



BUILDING YOUR PERSONAL BRAND

In the tech industry, you'll find that your personal brand is something like your digital fingerprint.

It is how you showcase your skills, your experience and your unique value proposition to the world.

In the next couple of minutes, will be delving into crafting a strong personal brand that sets you apart and opens doors to exciting opportunities.

Crafting Your Tech Identity: Building Your Personal Brand

Power of perception



Identifying your unique value proposition



Creating a digital presence



ANITA B.ORG 2023
GRACE HOPPER
CELEBRATION

THE WAY
FORWARD

Perception

It is important to note that your personal brand isn't just about what you think or what you say it is; it's also about how you are perceived.

It is the intersection of your expertise, your reputation and the impact you make. If you're able to craft a compelling personal brand for yourself, you stand out in a very good way.

UVP

Think about what makes you you. Your UVP is a combination of your skills, your experiences and the qualities that set you apart from the next person.

Your UVP is the answer to the question: Why should someone choose you over others.

Once you are able to nail down the answer to that, you'll be in a very good place.

Creating a digital presence helps.

We're in a digital age so your online presence is your calling card.

So think about how you're using LinkedIn, Instagram, X or tiktok to tell your story.



MY STORY: BUILDING MY PERSONAL BRAND



DEVELOPING YOUR NETWORK

Networking is a powerful tool that you should keep in your tech career toolkit. We'll be talking about cultivating relationships, connecting with mentors, peers, people who are in the position to advocate for you and how you can leverage these connections for your professional growth.

Network Navigator: Developing Your Tech Career Connections

The power of relationships



Navigating mentorship



Building peer alliances



 ANITA B.ORG 2023
GRACE HOPPER
CELEBRATION

THE WAY
FORWARD

The power of relationships

In the tech industry like many others, relationships are more than just connections. Relationships are opportunities. Cultivating a strong network doesn't just provide support, it opens doors to collaborations and new perspectives.

Navigating mentorship

Mentors are people who guide you on your journey. They can offer you advice and a roadmap based on their experiences. Most of the time, mentors have been where you are. Mentors are separate from sponsors. You can have mentors for different things. And don't feel pressured to stick to one mentor forever. Mentoring relationships can end once they have fulfilled their purpose.

Building peer alliances

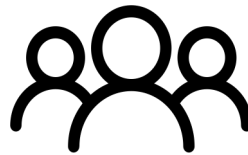
Your peers will always be an invaluable resource in your career journey. It is important that you learn to build alliances with fellow professionals and learn to create a space to share experiences and grow together.

Network Navigator: Developing Your Tech Career Connections

Advocates and supporters



Professional communities and events



Nurturing your network



ANITA B.ORG 2023
GRACE HOPPER
CELEBRATION

THE WAY
FORWARD

Advocates and supporters are people that believe in your potential and are willing to advocate on your behalf.

They can speak for you on rooms that you're not yet in, and on tables that you are not yet on.

Professional communities and events are also great places for networking. Conferences like Grace Hopper, online forums and communities like Global Tech Advocates help.

There are so many others so it's important to see what's out there

Networking is a two way street

It's not just about what you gain; it's also about what you can contribute.

You can contribute by offering your expertise and support to others. By doing this, you strengthen the bond

Remember that your connections are a source of strength and inspiration for you, so you should be very intentional about the process.



MY STORY: DEVELOPING MY NETWORK

Joining affinity groups like the Women in Tech Colleague network
Finding mentors there – I have mentors for different things.
Volunteering to teach a course or to talk about my career journey
Online communities that I am part of
- Tech London Advocates
Tech Women Africa
Atana Women



OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

Challenges are inevitable.

The important part is how you respond to them because your response defines your path in many ways.

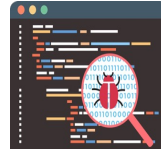
In this section, we'll be exploring some of the common challenges and setbacks that early-career professionals face and we'll talk about strategies to overcome them.

Rising Strong: Navigating Challenges on Your Tech Journey

Imposter Syndrome:
Taming the inner critic



Technical Roadblocks: A
journey to mastery



Work-life Balance: Navigating
the tech marathon



ANITA B.ORG 2023
GRACE HOPPER
CELEBRATION

THE WAY
FORWARD

Imposter syndrome

What is it? It's that nagging self doubt – inner critic. We are our biggest critics regardless of any level of success. It's when you feel like you're not good enough, and that you'll soon be found out. It's when you feel that you don't belong. How to deal with it? Have a reality check... If you're feeling unqualified or undeserving, write down everything you're feeling and thinking. For each one you write down, you're going to also write its counter/ evidence of your accomplishment that proves the negative thought wrong. Counter the negative thoughts with evidence of accomplishments, skills and feedback. This is something that I learned from listening to one of the episodes of Vusi Thembekwayo on his podcast. Affirmations are also a good way of reminding yourself of how remarkable you are.

Technical roadblocks

The hurdles that we face are part of the learning process. Think back to a time when you were learning something new, and you were making a lot of mistakes. The important thing here is to not give up. If you make a mistake, think of it as one way to not do something. Ask for help. This is the time to tap into your network or to lean on those peer alliances that you have formed

Work life balance

It is easy to get sucked so deep into work and to neglect other things. Tech is fast paced, and you need to keep up, but you need to make the time for yourself and the other aspects of your life too. Take time to rest and look after yourself and your mental health.

Rising Strong: Navigating Challenges on Your Tech Journey

Navigating diversity,
equity and inclusion



Resilience and growth



 ANITA
B.ORG 2023
GRACE HOPPER
CELEBRATION

THE WAY
FORWARD

Navigating diversity, equity and inclusion

DEI or the lack of it is a challenge for all. If you're in a space where everyone is different from you, you're probably in the right place. You're bringing perspectives and experiences that probably no one else in the group has. Think of it as a superpower. Use that superpower to educate people and to create an environment that welcomes diverse perspectives.

Resilience and growth

Embrace challenges that come your way. By embracing challenges, you develop resilience, problem solving skills and the ability to adapt. If it gets super hard, remember that you don't have to do it by yourself. You can always put your hand up and ask for help



MY STORY: OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

Moved from Ghana to the UK for uni, came on to join work. I felt different from everyone else. Learnt the art of storytelling to share my journey with anyone who was ready to listen.



CONCLUSION & SUMMARY

Before we close off for Q&A, I'll share some advice that has been really helpful to me along the way.

Charting Your Path Forward: Embrace Your Tech Journey



Embrace your
unique journey

CRAFT

Craft your narrative



Face challenges
fearlessly

 ANITA
B.ORG
GRACE HOPPER
CELEBRATION

THE WAY
FORWARD

Embrace your journey

Everyone is on their own unique journey. We might be in the same place or be working on the same team, but my career journey and my experiences are different from yours. Don't compare yourself or your journey to anyone else's. I remember when I was trying out different roles, I knew people that I joined the company with that had already figured out where they wanted to be and were excelling. I had to be very intentional about not comparing how long it was taking me to figure things out. Right now, I have experiences that I wouldn't have had if I forced myself to move faster and not go through the process.

Craft your narrative

Your story is a powerful tool that can connect you with people. So make sure that you are being authentic

Face challenges fearlessly

Don't crumble when you are faced with something that you are not used to. Grow through it. Ask for help

Charting Your Path Forward: Embrace Your Tech Journey



Build meaningful
connections



Visualize your success

 ANITA
B.ORG 2023
GRACE HOPPER
CELEBRATION

THE WAY
FORWARD

Build meaningful connections

Build connections with people who can lift you up when you feel down, and people that you can turn to when you want to hear the truth. I have a few people like that in my corner

Vision

Visualize yourself thriving in the role of your dreams or doing things that you dream of doing. I'm proud to say that I manifested and visualized speaking at Grace Hopper. And guess what? I'm doing it now. I've done it. So can you.

 ANITA B.ORG 2023
GRACE HOPPER
CELEBRATION | THE WAY
FORWARD

THANK YOU

Connect with Maureen:



<https://www.linkedin.com/in/maureenbiney/>



maureen_biney