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How to be a successful developer: 5 tips to help your hiring prospects

There's more to coding than coding. Check out our top tips for making it as a software developer.

Written by **Owen Hughes,** Senior Editor on March 1, 2022

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Image: Maskot/Getty

Carving out a successful career as a software developer is about more than the ability to code. Programming is a multifaceted profession that requires an equally varied set of skills, habits and attributes which, if practiced, can set you up for better job prospects and more rewarding work.

The following five tips will not just help you keep your knowledge current, but also make you stand out in the eyes of recruiters, employers and colleagues -- not to mention equip you with some useful tools for navigating day-to-day work.

Know what's in demand

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Knowing what employers are looking for will give you the best chance of honing your skills to the needs of the marketplace. JavaScript, CSS and HTML continue to be staples for web development, while data science languages like Python are rapidly gaining popularity as organizations seek to harness their troves of data and create exciting new machine-learning and AI applications. If you know your way around a Rust or Clojure script, you'll be more likely to be sought out by top-paying companies for your skills.

SEE: Developer jobs and programming languages: What's hot and what's next

Besides keeping your technical skills up to date, staying on top of the hiring market is also important for keeping track of the wider trends affecting the software industry, particularly as companies start to rethink their employee propositions and invest in the employee experience. By knowing your worth, and therefore what to ask for, you'll be in a much stronger position to take advantage of remote- and flexible-working options, professional development opportunities, and health and wellbeing support.

Keep your code in ship-shape

This one seems pretty obvious, but given that one of the topmost complaints of developers -- not to mention one of the biggest <u>sources of developer burnout</u> -- is <u>hunting for bugs in code</u>, the value of being able to write clean, high-quality code should not be understated.

The more time you can spend making sure your code is error-free, the less time that needs to be spent on backtracking through old submits to figure out where things have gone wrong. Or, even worse, explaining to customers, clients and co-workers why your product doesn't work as intended. Your fellow developers will also like you a lot more if they don't have to spend their precious time double or triple checking your work for issues.

Speed and quality is not an easy combo to crack, particularly given the tight deadlines and limited resources that dev teams typically work with. But having a reputation as a diligent and meticulous coder is something that will always catch the attention of recruiters.

Work on your 'soft' skills

We've already stressed the importance of robust technical skills for a career in coding, but they don't account for everything: your interpersonal skills are also a key facet of your future success. You could be a JavaScript dynamo, but this won't account for much if you're lacking in <u>the type of 'soft' skills that employers are looking for</u>.

Think about it from the company's perspective: if it came down to the choice between two candidates, the hiring manager is far more likely to go with the person who has a few gaps in their coding ability but is open-minded, adaptable and a great communicator, as opposed to the candidate who thinks they know everything there is to learn about JavaScript and prefers to work as a one-person team. The key is to think about the type of person *you* would want to work with and emulate those qualities.

Find ways to collaborate

Remote working might afford us greater flexibility and a better work-life balance, but it's undoubtedly also made collaboration more difficult. Particularly when you're working in software development, effective communication and teamwork are essential to keeping projects on track and on time, knowing who's working on what and generally making the working day more interesting.

Companies are gradually sending employees back to the office, although it's perhaps not a return to office life as we once knew it. Developers have been particularly vocal about their desire to continue remote working indefinitely; if they are to get their wish, tech teams will have to get more creative about how they collaborate when they're not sitting across a desk from each other. This could be allocating days when teams meet up to work from the office, virtual brainstorming sessions over Zoom, Teams or Google Meet, sharing their to-do lists on platforms like Trello or Asana, or simply maintaining a healthy chat on Slack.

How you do it is really up to you, but keeping communication flowing will not just ensure you stay productive at work, but will also make work itself a lot more enjoyable.

Have a thirst for knowledge

Learning on the job is the key to any successful career, and given the fast-moving nature of the software industry, being open to new projects and programs will keep your work interesting and your skills sharp. Thanks to the rising popularity of coding bootcamps, online-learning platforms and free web resources, you no longer need to hold a computer science degree to become a programming whiz.

If you're passionate about coding, your education won't stop at the end of the workday either. YouTube, Github, Stack Overflow, W3Schools and FreeCodeCamp offer a multitude of ways you can continue to learn new skills and refine existing ones in your spare time at no extra cost. There is also a wealth of paid-for online-training platforms where you can learn new programming languages, tools and frameworks. Some of the most popular include CodeAcademy, Udemy, PluralSight and Udacity. Alternatively, you could spend your free time contributing to open-source projects like Django, Srapy, Tensorflow and the Python project.

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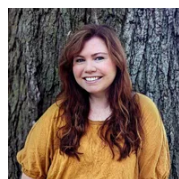
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How Women Who Code is narrowing the developer gender gap

The non-profit organization aims to help women to pursue their developer skills and career paths.

Written by **Allison Murray,** Staff Writer on March 1, 2022

The tech industry as a whole has a gender problem, and the developer role is no exception: according to last year's FRG Technology Consulting Java and PHP Salary Survey, only one in every 10 developers is a woman.

Another grim statistic is the number of women who have entered the computer science field: that number has actually decreased from 32% of the total workforce in 1990 to 25% in 2021. Here's another depressing statistic: a study from 2017 found that the approval rate for code written by women was actually higher (78.6% compared to 74.6%) than that for code written by men. But the acceptance rate for women's code was only higher when they were not identifiable as women.

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One organization trying to turn the negative statistics into more positive ones is Women Who Code. The not-for-profit organization works to get more women

involved in software development, as well as provide a safe space for those currently in it.

"Tech jobs account for some of the highest paying and most stable careers, and yet women only make up about 26% of technologists," Women Who Code's president of product and communications, Joey Rosenberg, tells ZDNet. "By empowering our community with the tools and support they need to succeed in tech, we hope to elevate different perspectives from leaders who will in turn uplift other women, helping to create a pipeline of change for good."

Women Who Code's mission is to provide a range of services for women coding professionals and assist women in expanding their developer careers. The organization offers coding resources like tutorials and educational materials, a job board, scholarships and leadership opportunities to 290,000 members across 134 different countries.

Naomi Freeman, a senior leadership fellow at Women Who Code, first got involved by attending a meetup in Ireland. She says it was refreshing to be with a community of women and share things they were working on, as well as skills and how they could help each other.

"[With women], there's usually this glass half-empty mentality, like, 'I don't know how to do this JavaScript,' or, 'Someone told me that I didn't have enough formal experience'. And I think Women Who Code helps flip that lens to look at things glass half-full, and to really identify what women are bringing to the conversation and the industry by saying, 'Great, you've already had experience in a different industry, how do you bring that over?'" Freeman tells ZDNet.

These meetups are a stark contrast from what Freeman has otherwise seen in her developer career. One memory that sticks out to her is when she spoke at a conference with hundreds of men in attendance compared to about four women.

"When you're in a room full of guys -- and it doesn't matter what continents or countries -- they do the same thing: they all seem to kind of talk down to you like you're a baby," she says. "And there are a lot of women who have PhDs who've been working in technical fields for 10-plus years, and men will approach them with that same tone."

Freeman says one of the main reasons she is so passionate about speaking out and working with Women Who Code is that she has had terrible experiences as the only woman in a room.

"I would rather put my energy into finding ways to build forward so that other women don't have to experience the barriers that I came up through," she says. "One of the hardest things is when you're completely alone in a room, representing a group. You can start to feel a little bit crazy and doubt yourself."

A new view of coding

Freeman believes that the industry can allow women to feel like they belong and that their skills are valid by reshaping how people view creating code and what developers do.

"I think we need to really talk about how code is a tool that allows us to connect

people. It allows us to have creativity, to express things in a new way, and to learn more things about the world," she says. "The way it's marketed right now is a little hyper-aggressive and that you have to have all these computer science standards, but you don't necessarily need a lot of computer science or math these days, not for every area."

Instead, Freeman argues that reframing the developer industry as a creative industry would allow more women to believe that they can come into it and utilize their skill sets without thinking it's so much of a boy's club.

"[The developer industry] is a connection industry where we work collaboratively and review other people's codes and pair on things together," she says.

That's why the Women Who Code's networking events are essential to its mission: to bring women developers together to work alongside each other. And Women Who Code isn't the only organization doing it; there are plenty of other communities for women developers out there, such as Rails Girls, Write/Speak/Code, Black Girls Code, Girl Develop It, and more.

Rosenberg says the organization is also looking to focus on the leadership aspect of its mission to make sure women move up the ladder in the developer industry.

"We offer a global leadership development program that is currently empowering over 500 women to be and become leaders in the industry by giving them support, training, and opportunities to demonstrate their leadership qualities and technical know-how," she says. "Women Who Code will continue to work towards a technology industry where women are better represented at every level."

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It is clear the developer industry has a lot to work on regarding gender inclusivity, but Freeman adds that diversity on a broader level would improve innovation throughout the entire sector.

"Diversity creates creativity and innovation because different ideas are bumping up against each other," she says. "When you're in a room where you have an imbalance [of diversity], it's going to be really hard to innovate and create new things because a lot of people have the same background and thoughts, and they're going to reach the same conclusions -- I think that is a disadvantage for the entire industry."

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