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LaunchToLead

→ PIVOT PATH • Free Starter Kit

Don't Start Over At Zero

How I Pivoted From Mechanical to Software — No Degrees, No Bootcamps

You don't need a new degree or a \$40,000 bootcamp to pivot your career. Your engineering background is an asset, not a liability. Here's the exact playbook I used.



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Why I Decided to Pivot

I Was Paying Attention

A lot of people get so tunnel-visioned and deep in their work that they don't lift their heads up to see what's happening around them. They just keep chugging away without understanding how the entire landscape is changing.

I noticed that **software was becoming huge in every industry**. John Deere was pivoting into a tech-heavy company with a massive focus on precision AG. We had a new CEO emphasizing technology. There were public acquisitions to position Deere in the software space.

My Original Plan

I was a mechanical engineer testing engines. I thought: *"All these engines have software that controls them. If I learn a little about software, I'll be a more well-rounded mechanical engineer."*

I wasn't planning a permanent switch — I had a bachelor's and was finishing a master's in mechanical engineering. I just wanted to dabble and eventually come back to mechanical with broader skills.

The Question Most People Don't Ask

Before you pivot, ask yourself: **Is this area going to have shrinking opportunities or growing opportunities?** Where could I possibly pivot that might have greener pastures, more room for growth and promotion?

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STEP ONE

Validate the Pivot

Make sure it passes the three-part test

The Pivot Triangle

Your pivot needs to check **three boxes**. If one is missing, you're going to struggle:



Value

Does it have opportunity now and in the future?



Aptitude

Are you good at it (or can you be)?



Enjoyment

Do you actually like doing it?

What Happens If One Is Missing

- **Useful + Like it + Not good at it** → You'll struggle constantly
- **Like it + Good at it + Not useful** → No money, no opportunity
- **Useful + Good at it + Don't like it** → You'll be miserable

How I Validated Mine

Value: Software was clearly where John Deere and every industry was headed. **Aptitude:** I picked up scripting fairly quickly. **Enjoyment:** I loved the instant feedback loop — write code, run it, see results. It felt like a superpower.

STEP TWO

Start Learning (For Free)

You don't need a \$40K bootcamp — you need a project

The Tutorial Trap

It's hard to stay engaged going from tutorial to tutorial. You really need a **project that has meaning to you** — something that delivers value, so when you hit a roadblock, you're motivated to push through.

What I Actually Used

I'm not talking about paid bootcamps where you spend \$30–40K in a 6-month full-time program. I'm talking about:

- ✓ **Udemy.com** — cheap courses on specific skills
- ✓ **YouTube** — free tutorials on everything
- ✓ **Coursera** — university-level content for free

You can finish a bootcamp working a couple hours a week in two months — this is NOT the multi-month, full-time, immersive \$40K programs.

My First Project

I applied basic scripting to my graduate coursework — data analysis, cleaning, organizing, creating charts and graphs. When I saw how much time I was saving, I thought: "*OK, I can apply this to my actual job.*"

Apply It to Your Current Role

This is where the magic happens

What I Did at John Deere

As a PV&V engineer running engines in test cells, part of my job was processing data after tests — making sense of sensor data, checking that tests ran correctly, creating reports for stakeholders.

The Results Were Incredible

I wrote scripts that cut down activities that normally took **hours** down to **seconds**. Charts, graphs, presentations — all automated. It felt like a **superpower**.

The Ripple Effect

Other mechanical engineers got interested. I started teaching people how to write scripts, sharing my code where it was applicable. The impact was noticeable — any manager paying attention could see the productivity boost.

Leveling Up

I partnered with engineers on the Applied Mechanics team who had deeper software knowledge. We worked on joint projects — I learned from them, and we built tools that added value to PV&V together.

Key Lesson: Nobody Told Me to Do This

I didn't wait for anyone's approval. I saw the writing on the wall, learned the skills on my own, made sure they'd be valuable, made sure I was good at them, and made sure I liked them. This takes **initiative** — nobody is waiting for you to pivot or pushing you to do it.

THE REALITY

Yes, It Takes Extra Time

But it pays dividends either way

Where The Time Comes From

A lot of people worry about the extra time commitment. The answer is: **yes, absolutely**, especially in the beginning.

Before work

After work

Lunch breaks

Some weekends

But Here's the Thing...

If you're learning skills you can apply to your current role, they'll eventually **pay dividends** that give you time back. The extra hours you invest upfront come back as increased productivity.

Even if you don't pivot: Being more productive, doing more with less — that sets you up for promotion conversations anyway. Whether you follow through with the pivot or not, you win.

The Self-Motivation Factor

There has to be a lot of **self-awareness** and **self-motivation**. No one is going to push you to do these extracurricular activities that take up more time. This is something you're taking on by yourself. Nobody is waiting for you to pivot or hoping you pivot — you have to drive it.

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STEP FOUR

Network Before the Pivot

Find your target role before you need it

My Networking Strategy

I spent a lot of time networking with managers in groups I thought I'd be interested in pivoting to:

- Set up **one-on-ones with managers** to learn about their teams
- Asked about **day-to-day work** — what it was actually like
- Asked what **skills they valued** and what gaps they saw in my resume
- Talked to **peers on those teams** to understand the real work

The Two-Way Street

I tried to understand: Could I add value there? What blind spots does that team have? What skills do I have that they might be missing? I wanted to **minimize my gaps** and **maximize the unique skills I could bring** — even if I was weaker on the software side.

The Result

After talking with multiple managers, I narrowed it down to one. He agreed to have me on his team. He was kind enough to see the other skills I brought to the table — and the motivation behind how I'd gotten there.

THE SECRET WEAPON

The Trojan Horse Method

Don't ask them to have faith — show them proof

What Most People Do (Wrong)

Most people say: *"Give me the role and I'll prove I can add value. Trust me — I'll learn the skills, I have the motivation."* This is asking a lot of a manager. You're asking for **blind faith**.

What I Did Instead

When a manager sees that you've already gone out and learned skills on your own — skills not required for your previous role — it tells them:

You're Motivated

You did this without being asked

You're Capable

You actually learned the skills

You Have Character

You showed follow-through

The Key Difference

Instead of saying *"Give me the position and I'll show you"*, you say:

"Look — I've already shown you. Now give me the position."

The manager doesn't have to feel like they're going out on a limb, taking a gamble, rolling the dice. You've already demonstrated everything they need to see.

THE TROJAN HORSE (CONTINUED)

What the Manager Can Now See

You paint a complete picture without saying a word

✓ You have the **ability to learn** new skills

✓ You had the **motivation to go out and learn** by yourself

✓ You **applied what you learned** to your current role

✓ You're **aware of your gaps** in knowledge

✓ You **identified an area** where you can add more value

✓ You **reached out proactively** to a team that could benefit from you

The Full Picture

You're essentially saying: "*I don't need you to have blind faith that I will do these things — I already have done them. I've gotten to 70% capacity in my previous role, and now I'd like to close that 30% gap (or get to 150% and become an expert) with the help of your team.*"

THE RESULT

My First Embedded Software Role

I got the position on his team. They were generous with their time and taught me a ton about embedded C development. I went through their mini bootcamp and learned embedded software development from the inside.

And Then...

From there, I moved into a **Systems Engineering role** and learned more about embedded software from a systems engineer lens. The trend kept going — I kept using the same methodology to move from position to position.

A lot of later positions combined aspects of the **Pivot Method** (moving into new areas) and the **Accelerate Method** (getting promoted and recognized for the value I was adding).

What Made the Difference (Recap)

- 1 Paid attention to where the industry was headed
- 2 Validated the pivot (Value + Aptitude + Enjoyment)
- 3 Learned skills using free resources + real projects
- 4 Applied those skills to my current role (proof)
- 5 Networked with target managers before I needed them
- 6 Used the Trojan Horse — showed, didn't tell

YOUR ACTION PLAN

Pivot Path Checklist

Use this before you make your move

Validation Checklist

- Identified an area with growing (not shrinking) opportunity
- Confirmed I enjoy it (not just that it pays well)
- Tested that I can be good at it (or already am)
- All three boxes checked – not just one or two

Skill-Building Checklist

- Found free/cheap resources (not \$40K bootcamps)
- Have a meaningful project (not just tutorials)
- Applied new skills to my current role
- Created measurable impact (hours saved, etc.)

Trojan Horse Checklist

- Identified target teams/managers
- Had one-on-ones before I needed the job
- Understand what skills they value
- Know my gaps and have a plan to close them
- Know what unique skills I can bring
- Can show proof, not just make promises

Ready to Make Your Pivot?

This playbook gives you the framework. Check out our Pivot Path packages at LaunchToLead.io for personalized coaching to navigate your specific pivot.

[Book a Free Discovery Call →](#)

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