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## BOOK REVIEW:

# Being Geek: *The Software Developer's Career Handbook*, by Michael Lopp

Review by Mark Danburg-Wyld

**M**ichel Lopp is the author behind the blog “Rands in Repose” (<http://www.randsinrepose.com/>), which is worth checking out. Some of the material in this book (and his earlier book, *Managing Humans*) was originally published on that blog, but the bulk of the book is ‘new content’.

There are some obvious similarities between software developers and actuaries (analytical mindset, geeky personalities), as well as some obvious differences (no credentialing system exists for software development). But very little of the book is specific to being in software development; most of the focus is on management of smart, driven, professional geeks - yourself included.

The first section of the book is called “A Career Playbook”, and focuses on the search for meaningful work - dealing with recruiters, locating a gig, interviewing and negotiating a reimbursement structure. All good, sensible advice which translates well to any professional field. Chapter 6, “The Button”, is on surviving the interview process. Lopp suggests methods for dealing with a variety of personality types you might encounter in this situation (“Chatty Patty”, “Slick Steve”, etc.) and recommends how to deal with each of them. “Silent Bob: Don’t get rattled ... Bob’s the senior technical guy on the team, and his social skills just aren’t that good. He’s there to vet your technical chops and that’s it ... He’s not qualified to assess team fit or cultural fit, and he knows this, so show him what you’ve got.”

The second section is “Deconstructing Management”, and covers managing your manager, office politics, meetings (avoid or improve them), networking, recruiting, and so forth. Chapter 15, “A Deep Breath”, recommends a weekly three-meeting structure: a one-on-one with each person, and a staff meeting near the start of each week, and a “look what we built” meeting near the end of each week. “It’s not just during a crisis that this calm, repetitive meeting pattern pays off - it’s always ... An obsessive meeting schedule is an investment in

the boring, but by defining a specific place for the boring to exist, you’re allowing every other moment to have creative potential.”

Section three is “Your Daily Toolkit”, parts of which are too specific to software development territory for a general audience. It did not help me to learn which programs Lopp does most of his programming in, although the concept of bringing the right tools to the job is a useful one, the examples were too far outside my experience to translate. But other chapters, such as “How to Not Throw Up” (on presentations), are useful to anyone.

Section four, “Your Next Gig”, is largely about how and when to jump to the next step of your career. But parts of it are more generally about evaluating how life is going. For example, Chapter 36, “No Surprises” deals with the much dreaded annual review process, and I have found it helpful to re-read each year.

Parts of the book will be useful to you no matter where you are on your career path, and the details are different enough from actuarial work to make you have to think through how it applies or doesn’t apply.

Highly recommended. ●



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