

The IT Career Builder's Toolkit

Student Guide

Matthew Moran ISBN: 1-58713-156-0 Cisco Press © 2005

Applying the Toolkit Approach to Your Career Development

The IT Career Builder's Toolkit is a comprehensive IT career planning and development resource that has become increasingly popular within college and university IT/MIS/CIS programs. Instructors have found that the book provides a structured format for their students to build the necessary soft skills and effectively navigate the technology career marketplace.

This guide is meant to prompt the application of strategies and techniques covered in the book that make up the “Toolkit Approach” to career development. Key concepts covered in each chapter of the Toolkit are highlighted within a set of questions in this guide. The questions encourage you to think about the topic, perhaps even share your ideas among fellow students (the notion of personal networking is therefore beginning to be developed and put into practice.)

Whether you are studying programming, CIS, networking, systems management, or other IT related disciplines, the lessons taught in the book and this guide will be a valuable addition to your knowledgebase. Each section of the book adds to your personal “toolkit” of skills, increasing your overall employability.

You will find that the questions provide excellent material for classroom discussions as well as individual reflection. The responses may also be integrated into your resume or portfolio. The questions are presented in such a manner that you will learn about yourself and others as you prepare your answers. The discussion questions are designed to convey to you the importance of career development and planning. This, in turn, will effectively increase your odds of landing a job.

How to Use This Discussion Guide

The IT Career Builder's Toolkit is a five-section book covering various career development ideas, strategies, and techniques. This guide breaks up the questions and activities similarly into 5 sections. You can use a journal to record your answers. The guide is offered in Word format so you could also create an online journal.

In this guide, each section includes

- Preparation instructions
- A series of questions per chapter to prompt your thinking about the topics
- Page references to definitions or concepts or reference to the supplemental CD-ROM material so you can easily turn to that material in the book

We highly recommend reading the whole book but if time is a critical factor, we suggest focusing on Parts I, II, and III. In particular, the following concepts and chapters are critical for career preparation:

- Chapter 2, “Career Building Defined”
- Chapter 7, “Communication Skills”
- Chapter 8, “Technical Skills”

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- Chapter 11, “Breaking into IT”
- Chapter 12, “Building an Active Contact List”
- Chapter 14, “The Interview”

You could read through it and do a little at a time or focus it on your last semester of school when getting a job is imminent. It's up to you. There are many nuggets of information that will be helpful along any part of your career. This effectively allows you to use *The IT Career Builder's Toolkit* as more than a supplemental text. It can be used to focus on employability.

Of course, your utilization of *The IT Career Builder's Toolkit* and this guide will be dictated by your personal goals and available time. Do not feel that each question must be answered in detail. In fact, the guide was developed with a high-degree of flexibility to allow you to pick and choose the questions and sections most pertinent to your goals.

Orientation to the Book

The IT Career Builder's Toolkit book has two valuable components: “Chapter Overview” and “Actions & Ideas.” They provide a way for you to gain a quick familiarity with the material in each chapter.

Chapter Overview—Every chapter includes a one to two paragraph introduction to key concepts

Actions & Ideas—Every chapter concludes with an “Actions & Ideas” section. These are questions or activities you can do on your own if you choose.

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Part I: An Introduction to Career Building

Preparation: Read Part I, Chapters 1–4 of *The IT Career Builder's Toolkit* and complete the “Action & Ideas” section at the end of each chapter. Also read the section titled, “What Is the Toolkit Approach to Career Development,” from the Introduction (pages: xxi–xxii). Also review the PowerPoint presentation, “The Value-Added Technologist,” on the supplemental CD-ROM.

Chapter 1 – The Toolkit Approach to Career Development

- Most of the ideas covered in *The Toolkit* are simple but often overlooked. Many professionals look for secret strategies to help them grow their careers? How does the knowledge that well-executed planning, not secret strategies, encourage you?
- While we cannot control luck, we can control preparedness. What “lucky” situations might arise during a career that proper preparation allows you take advantage of?
- IT as an industry is maturing. How does this affect your career planning?
- What does a “career toolkit” look like to you? What tools do you currently have? Which ones are missing or need maintenance?

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Chapter 2 – Career Building Defined

- Read the definition of a career (page 13): Does that broaden your understanding or idea of a career? How does this understanding help you build your career?
- How does the builder analogy (pages 13–14) help you understand the idea of a career toolkit?
- What is your idea of a career plan or career planning?
- Why do the highly-specialized areas of IT (pages 15–16) help create a “tool-driven mindset?”
- Why is it important to *not* be defined by the title you hold or your current role/position? (page 15)
- Careers are non-linear (page 16). Discuss what this means and why it is important to career development?
- A working plan makes tedious and unrewarding jobs bearable (page 17). What does this mean and how does it help you grow your career?

Chapter 3 – Information Technology: A Great Career

- How did past industry excesses (pages 21–22) lead to a more negative perspective on IT careers?
- Of the options listed that make IT a great career, which is most appealing to you? (page 24)
- What additional factors make IT a great career choice for you?
- How critical a factor is outsourcing for those pursuing an IT career? (page 28)

Chapter 4 – Defining Yourself: Aptitudes and Desires

- How important are personal satisfaction and interest to you when selecting IT as a career choice?
- As you look at the factors for selecting a particular job, which is most important to you? Which is least important? Are there others you have or would consider important?
- *The Toolkit* warns against *analysis paralysis*—the inability to make a choice between two competing jobs—how can you avoid this situation? (page 45)

Part II: Filling Your Toolkit

Preparation: Read Part II, Chapters 5–10 and complete the “Action & Ideas” section at the end of each chapter. Prepare a resume and a cover letter based on the respective chapters in this section. Look at the sample cover letters and resumes provided on the supplemental CD-ROM.

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Chapter 5 –Self-Assessment

- Review the four self-assessment questions (pages 54–55). If you are a full-time student, apply them to your studies and your instructors.
- Do you feel your answers reflect a positive self-assessment? If not, what can you do to change that?
- Are the questions valuable as a self-assessment tool? What might you add to your self-assessment?

Chapter 6 - Attitude

- How important do you view a positive and proactive attitude in long-term career development?
- How do you maintain a positive attitude?
- Have you ever held an “us versus them” attitude toward management where you worked? Do you believe that it is warranted? Have you met other employees with such an attitude? How does it hinder career advancement? (page 64)
- What is an attitude of “personal value?” (page 66) What is your current strongest value? What do you think will be your strongest value in 5 years? In 10 years?
- What does career “ownership” mean? (page 67)

Chapter 7 – Communication Skills

- How strong do you rank your combined (written and verbal) communication skills? What about written alone? Verbal?
- Why are communication skills so critical for career success? (page 74)
- Discuss the “well-crafted paragraph”—how does this idea simplify the written communication process? (page 76)
- Of the rules listed in conversation, which do you find most critical? Are there others you could add to this list? (page 78)
- If you had to give an important presentation to management, would you feel comfortable? If not, what might you do over the next two years to make you feel more comfortable?

Chapter 8 – Technical Skills

- Prior to this chapter did you believe recognizing the “next hot technology” was critical for career success? How did that change after reading the chapter?
- What is meant by *transcendent skills*? Why are they important? (page 87)
- What are some important ideas you can use to help reduce the time and anxiety in learning new technical skills? (pages 88–90)

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Chapter 9 – The Cover Letter

- Does your cover letter include a significant accomplishment? (page 97) If not, what can you add so that it does?
- Is your cover letter clear and to the point?
- Review a peer's cover letter and provide feedback based on the previous two questions.
- Tell them one thing you like about his or her cover letter. Tell them one thing you would change about his or her cover letter.

Chapter 10 – The Résumé

- Does your résumé demonstrate how you provide value with your skills?
- How long is your résumé? How long do you believe it should be?
- Review a peer's résumé and provide feedback based on the previous two questions.
- Tell them one thing you like about their résumé. Tell them one thing you would change about their résumé.
- How important do you feel your résumé is in your overall career development plan? (pages 101–102)

Part III: Putting Your Toolkit to Use

Preparation: Read Part III, Chapters 11–16 and complete the “Action & Ideas” section at the end of each chapter. Print out the “Networking and Opportunity Tracking Form” from the supplemental CD-ROM.

Chapter 11 – Breaking into IT

- Have you ever run into the “need experience to get experience dilemma?” Did you overcome it? If so, how? If not, how might this chapter's strategies on seeking “opportunity over position” change that? (page 115)
- What are some ways to build your IT career outside of a “traditional” IT department or role? (pages 115–118)
- How do the non-traditional avenues into IT open possibilities you were not aware of before? (pages 118–120)

Chapter 12 – Building an Active Contact List

- How important do you view your professional network?
- How strong is your professional network?
- Are your professional contacts spread between IT and in other industries?
- What are some techniques you need to master to strengthen your professional network?
- How do you currently track your contacts?

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- How does sharing opportunity help build your professional network?
- Discuss how you might use the “Networking and Opportunity Tracking Form” you’ve printed out (from the CD-ROM). How will this form help you build your network of contacts?

Chapter 13 – The Job Search

- Prior to reading this chapter, what were your primary or planned sources for finding available jobs or opportunities?
- What affect does a directed and proactive career search have on your attitude? (page 142)
- Discuss the differences between the standard “passive” job search and the proactive job search? (page 146)

Chapter 14 – The Interview

- What are your biggest fears or challenges with the interview process? How do the Toolkit ideas alleviate those fears or challenges?
- Of the interviewer styles listed, which do you feel is most difficult? Which do you prefer? (page 153)
- Questions about self-assessment and weaknesses pose serious problems for interviewees; how can you best answer these? What other difficult questions might you face?
- Why should you follow up before you are selected? Why should you follow up if you are not selected? (page 159)

Chapter 15 – Salary Negotiations and Employment Agreements

- When should pay/salary negotiations start? (page 163)
- What are *your* minimum requirements or considerations (refer to the list in Chapter 4 – page 37, for ideas) when you start negotiating with a potential employer?

Chapter 16 – On-the-Job Promotion

- What do you consider the most important factor(s) for on-the-job promotion?
- What is your first step when dealing with a difficult boss? (page 177)
- Of the types of bosses discussed which is the most desirable? The least desirable? (page 178)
- How does *The Toolkit* recommend dealing with difficult coworkers or managers? (pages 179–182)

Part IV: More Options to Build Your Career

Preparation: Read Part IV, Chapters 17–19 and complete the “Action & Ideas” section at the end of each chapter. If you are interested in consulting, print the document “Tips on Winning Your Client” from the supplemental CD-ROM.

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Chapter 17 – The Boundaries and Benefits of Working at Home

- Is working at home something you would enjoy? Have you done any telecommuting in the past?
- What do you consider the single biggest drawback to working from home? The single biggest benefit?

Chapter 18 – The Toolkit Approach to Consulting

- Have you ever considered consulting? If so, what about consulting interests you? If not, explain why?
- After reading the chapter, do you consider consulting a more viable career option? Less viable? Explain.
- Understanding that sales and marketing is critical, discuss the “Tips on Winning Your Client” document (found on the supplemental CD-ROM.) What do you consider the three most important tips for winning clients?

Chapter 19 – The Move to Management

- Would you like to have a career in management?
- What would you consider to be the most important management idea or skill presented in this chapter?

Part V: The Value-Added Technologist

Preparation: Read Part V, Chapters 20–23 and complete the “Action & Ideas” section at the end of each chapter. Create a sample budget and income plan using the worksheets on the supplemental CD-ROM. The data can be real or made-up just to get into practice.

Chapter 20 – Make Yourself Indispensable

- *The Toolkit* places a premium on the value you bring the organization(s) you serve; how do you define value?
- Where can you better apply standards in your computing practices, in your studies, in your career—and how will they enhance your career development?
- What is a peer knowledge network? How do they help your career? (page 231)

Chapter 21 – Concept Over Process

- Explain the difference between process-driven and concept-driven? Are there strengths in each? (page 242)
- Do you agree with the stated role of technology? If not, what additional roles would you add? (page 243)
- What is the most valuable idea in “Concept Over Process”? How will it help your career?

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Chapter 22 – The Role of Mentoring

- Do you have mentors who are not IT professionals? (page 258) How often do you correspond with them? Why are these “cross-industry” mentors important?
- Do you mentor anyone? What advice or insight do you have to offer?
- Describe the ideal mentor? (page 258)

Chapter 23 – Financial Control

- Do you have a budget that allows you flexibility in your career choices?
- Have you identified salary objectives?
- Review the “Budget and the Income Planning Worksheet” on the CD-ROM. How can their use help your career?

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General Questions

- What is the single-most valuable idea or strategy you discovered in *The Toolkit*? How will it change your career for the better?
- What additional information might help you reach your professional/career goals?
- Where are you in your career development plans? Are you entry-level or a seasoned pro? Do you have a demarcation point—a time when you switched from one to the other?
- What does the term *career ownership* mean to you? Do you feel as though you own your career? If not, how can you change that?
- The Introduction presents the idea of you as the primary commodity of your career. What does that mean to you? How can this perspective help you in your career development efforts?

Additional Resources

Career/Job Sites		Training/Community
www.careerbuilder.com www.computerjobs.com www.craigslist.org www.dice.com www.guru.com www.hotjobs.com	www.jobmarketonline.com www.jobsahead.com www.jobsdb.com.ph www.jobsearch.org www.jobstreet.com www.monster.com www.timesjobs.com	www.cbtoolkit.com/forums www.tek-tips.com www.experts-exchange.com www.techrepublic.com www.securelyspeaking.com