

Succeeding in the Business World

Jeff Ricketts

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Practice

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Topics / Questions to Address:

- What are my most valuable lessons thus far in my career – my “secrets to success”?
- What have been the biggest challenges of my career?
- Is there a key thing I know now, but didn’t know when I was in college, pertaining to my career? How would that information have benefited me if I had known it while in college?
- How do I juggle work/life balance?
- What are my insights on the workforce transition from college?

My Career Background:

- 27+ year IT career – nearly all in application development. Mostly leadership positions (since 1985). 10+ years leading organizations of 100 – 600 people.
- Technologies: mainframe; original client/server model; large-scale multi-tier “thin client” models.
- Industries: life insurance / annuities; finance/banking; telecommunications; management consulting; litigation support.
- Business functions: contact center support (desktop, IVR, speech recognition), database marketing / business intelligence, sales & compensation, insurance administration systems.
- Companies: started with Country Financial; six employers. Longest: AT&T, 12 years.
- Participated in 3 corporate mergers, several waves of outsourcing / offshoring IT teams, including downsizing parts of my team.

Most valuable lessons – “secrets to success”

- **“Success is Relative”**
- Defining ‘success’ is very personal – differs for each person. Think about what is (and will be) important to you in your career, and in other aspects of your life.
- Results focus – keep in mind the client’s and your management’s definition of success.
- Accept challenging assignments.
- Accept “special projects”, cross-team initiatives, etc. Seek good exposure / visibility through your willingness to put in extra effort. Find ways to “stand out”.
- Never stop learning – technology, business skills, and leadership. Project management will always be a critical skill.
- Leverage your strengths – and expand them.

Biggest career challenges

- Staying technical *enough*, as an application development organization leader
- Mergers & acquisitions – “changing of the guard”, corporate politics, new priorities, etc.
- Organizational staffing directives: ramp-up, ramp-down of contractor use; downsizing; off-shoring; outsourcing
- Did I anticipate all of that change in companies? All of that industry change? All of the technology change? Not a chance!

What do I know now, that would have been good to know in college?

- That engineering-related skills, degrees would be in such high demand – and would be a great compliment to my computer science degree.
- Said another way: physical sciences education can expand your career options beyond traditional the computer science / business administration combination.
 - ◆ “green industries” are opening up huge opportunities – and will continue. Renewable energy, smart grid, green building, “clean tech”, etc.
 - ◆ manufacturing industries will continue to flourish, but with fewer people and better-educated people: pharmaceuticals, medical devices, robotics, construction, embedded chips, nanotechnology applications, etc.

How to juggle work / life balance?

- Set limits – mainly on yourself (and sometimes on your employer).
 - ◆ Don't give in to the temptation to work 24/7, unless you really want to – and be prepared to accept the trade-offs.
 - ◆ Talk to your boss about your needs & plans & limits you're seeking.
- Plan well – take advantage of vacation time, weekends when you're not working, on-call rotation schedules, etc.
- Align your definition of career success with your non-work life goals and plans.

Insights / advice on workforce transition from college?

- There are only 2 weekend nights. 😊
- Being prompt, reliable and productive are imperative – “table stakes”. Expect to work overtime too.
- Bring your energy, enthusiasm, and new skills and ideas – but do so in a way that considers the veteran team members’ experience, openness to ideas, etc.
- Keep an active network of college peers – long after you graduate! Keep building on that network.
- More \$ + more free time = “freedom” ... be very careful to create good habits early on.

Final Messages and Career Advice

- “Job security” comes from your self-confidence, your skills, adaptability / flexibility, and advance planning
 - ♦ *Consider this as you evaluate mergers and corporate restructuring, outsourcing, and their impact on your career.*
- Financial advice: live below your means ... “Pay Yourself First”.
- Personal wellness advice: take care of yourself physically and mentally. Everything else will be harder later, if you don’t take care of yourself now.
- Maintain high integrity: be honest, candid, trustworthy. Treat people fairly (doesn’t always mean “nice” or accommodating).
- Attributes that make employees stand out:
 - ♦ Good independent problem solver; takes ownership; regarded by peers as a strong team member / leader
 - ♦ Strong verbal and written communication and presentation skills; persuasive
 - ♦ Takes initiative with new ideas; assertive but collaborative
 - ♦ In IT, you’re much more valuable *if you know more* than IT. The most valued IT professionals are those that really know and understand the business.
 - How can we really **apply** new technologies for differentiated, valued customer service?
- Find mentor(s).

Thank you!

- “Success is a journey – not a destination.”
- Books to consider:
 - ◆ “Outliers: The Story of Success” (Malcolm Gladwell)
 - ◆ “Never Eat Alone” (Keith Ferrazzi) – on building and maintaining your personal network, and networking skills
 - ◆ “Good to Great” (James Collins) -- on leadership, strategic planning, organizational change