Your Knowledge Portfolio

Did you know there are more than 27.7 million developers worldwide?

When I first read this data, I was stunned. If you sit and think about it for a moment, you'll realize it's quite a significant number. Now, what makes you different from the others? What skills do you have, compared to the other developers, that will get you a new job? And most importantly, how can you ensure you'll get the next job after that?

Well, the answer is simple – by investing in your knowledge.

In this article, I'll discuss learning and building your knowledge portfolio.

Dealing with Old Technology Stack

Why is your knowledge portfolio so important?

Consider the following scenario: Imagine yourself working with Java 7 for, say, a decade. Your employer has this big client using old technology stacks, such as Java 7 and portlets.

While you're stuck with Java 7, the world continues to move.

Initially, you thought, "Okay, this is just a temporary project; once I'm done with it, I'll work with cutting-edge technologies.". Nevertheless, months and even years have gone by, and you remain working for this customer. Ultimately, you felt at ease as everything was already familiar to you. You liked your life, and you worked 8 hours straight. Your slogan was, "Don't worry, just go slowly; there is no rush.".

Furthermore, everyone has an understanding for you since you're using old technologies. Sometimes, you copy the answer from Stack Overflow without reading the described issue. So far, so good.

Day after day. Year after year.

The Only Certainty is Change

One day, your employer stops by your desk and says: "We just lost our client. But don't worry; we found an even bigger one. You'll need to switch to Java 17 and work in a cloud environment with Docker, Kubernetes, AWS, Apache Kafka, and MongoDB."

"What? Have I just heard right? No, I don't want to do this. I'll quit my job.". You might feel discomfort and a tremendous amount of stress. Worse, you didn't even hear about half of the stuff your employer just mentioned! You start searching for a new job. After a while, you're so overwhelmed that you can't even think straight. Every job offer you can find requires a similar technology stack.

You feel cornered. What are you going to do next? "Would it be too late to change my career?" you may ask yourself.

In our job, the only certainty is change. Everything can change overnight. Customer requirements. Your team members. Even the technology you use.

Knowledge Saves the Day

You should invest in yourself to successfully deal with changes lurking from a distance. Moreover, you should invest in your knowledge.

If nothing changes, nothing changes.

In development, many things change. Changes are good. A change could mean an opportunity for improvement. However, many things stay the same. For instance, the same while loop has been used since Java was introduced.

Yes, some technology can become outdated in the future. The keyword here is could. We are still determining what the future brings. However, if we don't keep up, we can be sure we'll become outdated. This should be our biggest concern.

Now, to prevent this from happening, it's essential to keep pace with technologies. You don't need to be an expert in every single thing. For instance, if you don't use one technology in your daily job, it would be enough to know how it works and what problem it solves.

"Knowledge itself is power." – Francis Bacon

Regarding our work, knowledge is the only tool we have. Moreover, its impact is in our hands. Unfortunately, our knowledge comes with an expiration date. Technologies change, new programming languages are developed, and new ideas emerge. Consequently, our knowledge becomes irrelevant over time.

You would not like to find yourself without the necessary skills to do your daily job.

Consider other job types. If the law changes, the lawyers must know about it. They need to be up-to-date with the law.

"An investment in knowledge always pays the best interest." – B. Franklin

Additionally, our knowledge is reciprocal to our value to the employer. Our value will decrease if we don't invest in our knowledge regularly. In the end, our employer may choose another, more competitive developer over us.

The Importance of Learning

We should invest in our knowledge to be competitive in the labor market.

Besides keeping your job, you can have multiple benefits from learning.

Firstly, learning can expand your horizons. When you learn about new technology, you don't just learn how to use it. Instead, you know how technology is developed. Moreover, you understand the ideas behind it and the problem it solves.

Secondly, you can deepen your current understanding. When you learn, your brain connects your existing knowledge and the one you're trying to master. It updates the things you know with the new set of information. This way, you can come up with new conclusions and insights about something you thought you understood. Of course, reading Crime and Punishment won't help you figure out how the equals method works in Java. But reading Effective Java will.

Lastly, it can help you boost your creativity. For instance, reading improves the creative side of the brain. While reading, you create visual images in your head. Your imagination works. Therefore, you can gain a new perspective and many new ideas that can help you solve problems in both your work and private life.

When you get a new idea, write it down. Other ideas will follow.

In the end, with new skills, you'll become more competitive; thus, you'll have more job opportunities.

Tips and Tricks

In this section, you can find some valuable tips to help you learn.

Start small

The Japanese word Kaizen means that even tiny changes, over time, can make a significant impact.

According to R. C. Martin, you should use additional 20 hours a week to invest in your knowledge. Even if you invest additional 2 hours, over time, you'll notice the difference. Better some than nothing.

To start, you can define small goals. Nothing big. Keep it simple. You want to break down your big goal into smaller chunks. You'll get overwhelmed if you list your big goals, like, "Become Java Champion" or " Write two books this year". Small goals prevent this from happening. You can research and check what steps you need to follow to achieve your big goal. Suppose you need to help the developers' community. One way to help the community is by answering Stack Overflow questions. Now, for this to work, you need to commit yourself to answering a question once a week.

You should define small goals that'll help you achieve the big ones. Moreover, they'll keep you motivated.

The Power of Prioritizing

Each person has different priorities in life. Each day we do one thing instead of another because of our priorities. Whether we go out with friends or take a relaxing bath at home depends on our priorities.

To find time to work on your goals, they need to become your priorities.

Your goals don't have to be your number one priority. However, they still need to be high on the list, so you'd still consider them.

Therefore, you should carefully pick what you will do each day through some planning.

If you'd rather scroll up and down on social media – that is fine. But then, you shouldn't be mad because the year is over, and you're still working on your first small goal.

What I found helpful is giving myself small rewards. For instance, when I finish the work I planned for the day, I watch TV shows or do something unproductive. I can watch TV guilt free since I know I have done everything I planned. But, this could quickly become a trap. I fell into it myself a while ago. I thought, okay, I'll reward myself upfront and then do the work. Unfortunately, that isn't how it works. I ended up watching TV shows and doing nothing the whole day. To sum up, do the work first and reward yourself after.

Books and Audiobooks

In the morning, instead of hopping on social media or some other kind of entertainment, you can read a chapter of a book or some interesting technical articles.

In the beginning, it might be hard to resist the pull of your phone. However, you should be aware that social media won't do you any good. It probably won't help you achieve your goal. It'll just distract you. You can read more about distractions and how to deal with them in my post: 7 Habits of Highly Productive Developers.

Furthermore, audiobooks are an excellent substitute for radio if you're traveling to work by car. They can be a good companion on long drives.

Key Takeaways

To sum up, don't live in a cave. The world won't stop moving just because you did. Learning new things has never been easier than it's today. You can even learn in the comfort of your home. All you need to do is type some words in a search engine, and voila – you can start filling your brain with valuable information.

Thanks for reading. If you found this post helpful, share it with others so they can benefit too.

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