12

ESSENTIAL SKILLS FOR

SOFTWARE ARCHITECTS

Dave Hendricksen

12 ESSENTIAL SKILLS FOR SOFTWARE ARCHITECTS

This page intentionally left blank

12 ESSENTIAL SKILLS FOR SOFTWARE ARCHITECTS

DAVE HENDRICKSEN

To my wife, Jennifer, my son, Tim, and my daughter, Katie.

This page intentionally left blank

CONTENTS

This page intentionally left blank

PREFACE

The soft stuff is always harder than the hard stuff.

—Roger Enrico, Vice Chairman, Pepsico

As you start reading this book, I hope you are prepared to keep an open mind and are willing to try some new approaches to your daily life.

My name is Dave Hendricksen, and I have the privilege of being a software architect for Thomson Reuters, where the focus of my work is on producing intelligent legal information. This includes everything from data capture to data display of legislative, regulatory, and intellectual property materials on Westlaw.com. I have been married for 22 years to a beautiful lady. We have two great kids, one cat, one dog, and a koi pond.

As a technology person, I have always considered myself to be slightly different from the rest of the "normal" world. Thinking analytically, focusing on problem solving, building things, and gaming for hours on end all come quite naturally to me. I love to learn new things. For me, going to school has always been great fun; I have a bachelor's degree in math and Bible and two master's degrees (one in computer science and one in the management of technology).

I love to work hard and am willing to put in whatever amount of effort is needed to get a project done on time. I love to hear my boss say, "Great job, Dave." Of course, my thinking would be this: Do great work, get promoted, and life is awesome—and to a degree, this has been true, at least up to the point where technology enters management. An invisible ether exists here that prevents a large number of talented individuals from moving up the organizational hierarchy and any further in their careers. This magical ether detects a lack of soft skills and quietly prevents these individuals from advancing to the next rungs of the ladder.

My goal for this book is to enable you to learn the essential soft skills that you will need to master as a software architect.

This book assumes that you already have the requisite technical skills to become an architect; as such, it does not focus on these types of skills. Instead, this book focuses on 12 essential soft skills that are critical to the daily activities of being an architect. These are the skills that are typically the most challenging for people with technology backgrounds.

The 12 skills in this book are organized into three groups: relationship skills, personal skills, and business skills. These classifications are based on the notion of relative priority; that is, if you don't have relationship skills, the other two areas don't matter. You are not likely to be promoted to the position of architect or to stay in the role of architect for long if you do not relate to people and various parts of your organization well. Similarly, if you don't have the necessary personal skills, business skills will not be deemed as important. In the end, all of these areas are important, but from a prioritization perspective, if you don't have the foundation skills of relationships mastered first, working on business skills will not have the impact that you are likely looking for.

I view this as a pyramid of skills, which is depicted in Figure Pref-1.
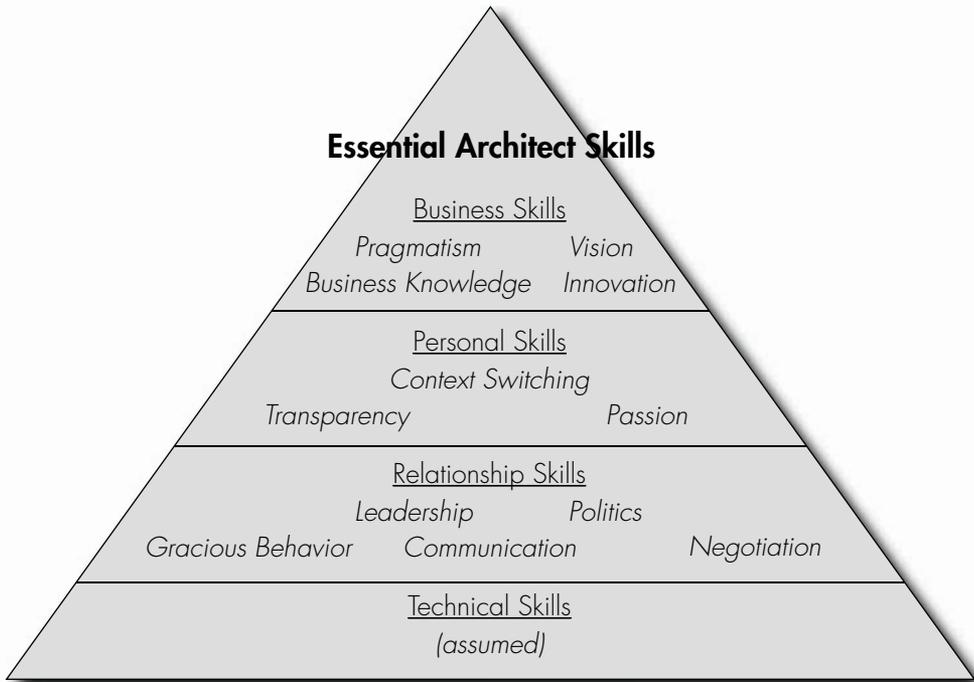
Figure Pref-1   Essential architect skills

I hope you enjoy reading this book and learn some new things that will enable you to become an architect, improve your skills as an architect, or better understand the nature and role of an architect. If you have any questions or comments, feel free to email me at dave@hendricksen.org.

Have great day!

Dave

This page intentionally left blank

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This page intentionally left blank

About the Author

Dave Hendricken is a software architect for Thomson Reuters.

Dave enjoys working closely with new product development teams to create innovative legal products for large-scale online platforms such as Westlaw.com.

In his spare time, Dave enjoys mentoring the Eagan High School Robotics team, downhill skiing with his kids, fishing for large-mouth bass, golfing early in the morning, and spending time at the cabin building things like trebuchets, go-carts, and rain barrel watering systems with his kids.

Chapter 7

PASSION

Passion, it lies in all of us, sleeping . . . waiting . . . and though unwanted . . . unbidden . . . it will stir . . . open its jaws and howl. It speaks to us . . . guides us . . . passion rules us all, and we obey. What other choice do we have? Passion is the source of our finest moments. The joy of love . . . the clarity of hatred . . . and the ecstasy of grief. It hurts sometimes more than we can bear. If we could live without passion maybe we'd know some kind of peace . . . but we would be hollow . . . Empty rooms shuttered and dank. Without passion we'd be truly dead.

—Joss Whedon, American Screenwriter[1]

Nothing great in the world has been accomplished without passion.
—Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, German Philosopher and Inventor

Passion is the genesis of genius.
—Anthony Robbins, American Advisor to Leaders

If you have worked in a business environment for more than a couple of years, you may begin to feel overwhelmed by the resistance of the organization that allows it to stay unchanged, and by the glacial pace at which things sometimes move. Perhaps you have amazing ideas for all kinds of things, but getting those ideas through the gauntlet of the product business cycle to actually reach a customer can begin to wear you down.

As time progresses, that small voice (your passion, the source of the ideas) begins to quiet. The excitement you first had gives way to a slower, less exciting and more realistic cadence. You may even feel as if the weight of the organization has literally bound you up, making it hard to breath.

---

1. Joss Whedon. Great-Quotes.com, Gledhill Enterprises, 2011. Retrieved June 14, 2011, from http://www.great-quotes.com/quote/40898
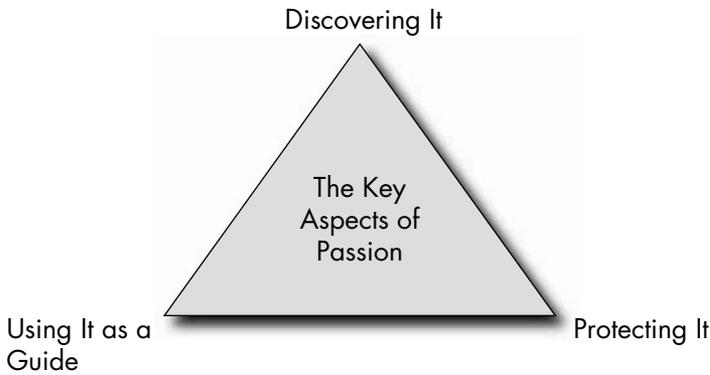
Figure 7-1   Passion is the internal fire that can propel your career.

After the initial flame of enthusiasm is quenched, it is hard to get your passion rekindled. You need to recognize the warning signs that the flame is dimming and learn to adjust your environment to allow you to pursue a meaningful life and career. If you feel your flame has been put out completely and your role is no longer enjoyable, now is the time to move on to another company to rekindle the passion you once had, rather than simply settling for a miserable job where you never strive to "do better."

This chapter shows you how to find, use, protect, and actively pursue passion as a key soft skill that will enable you to find success as a software architect (see Figure 7-1).

WHAT IS PASSION?

Passion (from the Latin verb *patior*, meaning "to suffer" or "to endure") is a very strong feeling about a person or thing. Passion is an intense feeling, enthusiasm, or desire for something. It can be expressed as a feeling of unusual excitement, enthusiasm, or compelling emotion toward a subject, idea, person, or object. A person is said to have a passion for something when he has a strong positive affinity for it.[2]

For me, passion revolves around those things that I would be naturally inclined to want to do or to think about in my free time. No one has to

---

2. "Passion." *Wikipedia.* (2011). Wikimedia Foundation, Inc. October 9, 2010.
   http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Passion_(emotion)

ask me to do it. No one has to pay me to do it. It just naturally consumes my thoughts. The key is to begin applying action toward those thoughts. Obviously, we are referring here to the business context and your role as an architect; any other passion wouldn't be appropriate in the workplace. As you slowly gain expertise in a particular area, your interests and fascination with that particular area can grow and provide you with new opportunities—opportunities that can help you enjoy what you do every day.

Work surrounded by passion feels less like an obligation and more like a great day to do what you love to do.

DISCOVERING PASSION

One of the best things you can do to help your career is discover the things that you are passionate about.

How Do I Find Passion?

The people you work with know what you are passionate about. When you talk to them, certain topics and activities cause your eyes to light up, your voice to be enthusiastic, your body posture to be engaged—you don't need to tell anyone, because your whole body will shout the message. The reverse is also true: If you truly lack passion about something, there is almost nothing you can do to overcome your body shouting, "Please, just put me out of my misery now!"

Listen to what you say to others, and how you say it, when you are consumed by the conversation and the rest of the world fades away.

Learn about body language and study the way other people present themselves and their ideas to figure out what they really feel about a subject—and then apply the same techniques to look at the way you present yourself. If your body language contradicts what your lips are saying about your passion for a subject, look for some nuance to pique your interest when communicating with others. Make yourself passionate about your work and the quality of your work, but recognize that there are always some things we are more interested in than others; that is, we have a natural desire to spend more time on some things than others.

What is that small voice saying? It may not speak loudly, but listen to it once in a while; it is usually a dream that is trying to get out. Let it out—don't bury it in the endless set of activities that are clamoring for your attention. These are areas you are likely to be passionate about.

Find some quiet time to sit down and write out your interests (see Figure 7-2). This exercise may start out slowly. The ideas may seem odd or goofy at first, but write them down anyway. As more ideas start coming, keep writing everything down—there are no wrong answers.

Let a few weeks or months pass. Try the exercise again. Do you see repeated patterns when you compare the lists? Have some things already happened? (Don't be too surprised—things have usually already started to manifest themselves.)

I usually keep the list of these things in my wallet; they are always with me. Some of the items may never become reality, but at least I am aware of them. Over time—sometimes years later—I forget what was on an earlier list, and I find that I have addressed many of the items and new opportunities have managed to present themselves in ways not quite as I imagined. Nonetheless, the outcomes are clearly related to some of the earlier thoughts that were merely seeds.

Identification of your passions gives you additional information when you are weighing options in making a particular decision and gives you a better understanding which path to take. At least for me, the answers are not always clear.

My final decision usually comes at the last moment, after I have had time to write down the pros and cons related to a decision (usually from both sides—if I choose one path, what are the pros and cons; if I choose a different path, what are the pros and cons—and then compare the options). For some reason, it is not until the last minute that clarity presents itself.

By consciously capturing areas that you are passionate about (and these areas are likely to change over time) and by being willing to take some
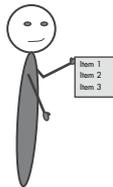

Figure 7-2   Keep a list of the things that grab your attention—wishes, dreams, things that seem interesting or fun. These are the seeds of your passion.

risks to pursue the things that inspire your passion, you may find that your dreams are probably just around the corner. Even if they aren't, or even if the destination isn't quite what you expected, you may still enjoy the journey.

Persistence and Passion: The Ultimate Killer Combination

Mastery of a particular area usually comes only with dogged persistence. It seems like there are 10,000 ways to do things wrong and only a handful of ways to do them right. For me, mastery usually requires running at a problem repeatedly, making mistakes, learning, running at the problem again, and repeating the process again. Each time I learn from the previous iteration and try something slightly different or take a different approach.

Each time I approach the problem from a different angle, I try to step back and think, and perhaps study the area by examining documentation or books to see what I was doing wrong. Usually, however, I end up giving it another try.

After a while, the nuances of the real problem I am trying to solve emerge, and I finally start to understand what needs to be done and why it needs to be done a particular way. The next time I am faced with a similar problem, I can reuse all of the knowledge that I so painfully gained to shorten the amount of time to solve the current problem.

On the surface, someone who has mastered a particular area makes it look easy. If you talk to the person, however, you usually find the individual traveled a long and winding road to gain the knowledge and experience she now possesses.

For me, it usually is not until I have resolved in my heart, "No matter what, I am going to pursue this problem until it gets resolved," that the solution begins to emerge from the faint details of each new piece of information discovered. Each piece of the puzzle reveals itself only when diligently pursued.

The areas you are passionate about require the same kind of tenacity. You must be willing to deal with setbacks, course adjustments, and putting in the extra effort to bring what you are passionate about to life. It seems as if challenges are the universe's way of asking you, "Do you really, really want this?" Until you are willing to answer, "Yes, I am committed—not just today, but for the long haul," the universe will keep asking the same question.

By combining persistence and passion, you will create the ultimate killer combination: something you love to do and the strength and endurance

to keep on going even when obstacles are put into your path. This is how dreams live and die. It is also how we learn—by making mistakes and picking ourselves up to try again.

Passion over Position

Occasionally, the desire to advance in the company for which you work may overwhelm your thinking, so that you consider taking positions that are not in areas that you truly care about. Perhaps the position looks great from a monetary perspective and an increased responsibility perspective, but fails to capture your heart. In these situations, consider the long-term effects of taking the position. If you are not able to advance beyond this next position:

- Can you enjoy the work required of this position?
- Can you enjoy working with the people associated with this position?
- Can you enjoy solving the types of problems this position is responsible for?
- Can you work in the political environment the position brings?
- Can your family survive the extra time commitments needed?
- Does this position align with your long-term goals?

If the answer to any of these questions is no, you need to seriously consider what will happen when the honeymoon period of getting this position wears off and the daily grind sets in. Can you find something that makes you want to get up in the morning to do the required work (and no, making more money is not the answer)? If you lose your passion for doing the work, your ability to produce excellent work will diminish. Your boss and those around you may question whether you are the right person for the position. Even if you never get to the point where you job is jeopardized, do you really want to spend your valuable life doing something that fails to inspire you?

If the answer to most of the preceding questions is yes, you should seriously consider applying for the position. Change is a good thing. It gives you the opportunity to learn new things, find out different ways to solve new problems, expand your network of relationships, and grow as an individual. Even if this position is more of a lateral move, it will show those above you in the organizational hierarchy that you are capable of handling a broad set of problems and are resilient to change. This is a great message to share, because businesses are constantly changing and they need to know that as new and more challenging business problems arise, you are up to the task of slaying the new dragons.

Rekindling Passion

Occasionally, life loses its sense of excitement and a sense of a dull routine seems to engulf you—you can feel it, you can sense it. In this environment, the enthusiasm to do much of anything seems to be absent. If you sense this lassitude coming on or you are already bogged down in ennui, it's time to take a break, regroup, and consider which ideas might energize you.

Sometimes, just getting away for a few days can help clear your head. For example, I usually take every Friday off during the summer. These three-day weekends at the lake allow me to unwind from everything that has happened over the course of the week. As the summer progresses, I can feel myself being rejuvenated, and the things that were beginning to bore me start to take on new life. It's like a breeze fanning the flame. My outlook brightens and I am ready to take on a whole new set of problems with vigor and enthusiasm.

The Value of Exercise

Another strategy that can dramatically improve your outlook is to get out and exercise, even if it's just walking for a couple of miles in the morning or evening. If you can't do this, park a few blocks from work or take the stairs. It's amazing how just a little activity can have a dramatic impact on your perception of what is happening around you and your ability to be more accommodating (and less irritated) by life's daily hassles. The higher the level of stress associated with your position, the more activity you may want to pursue. Exercise will truly help keep you healthy, wealthy, and wise.

If a vacation isn't possible, exercise produces endorphins that can stimulate and relax the body, thereby producing a positive attitude. All it takes is just a little change to help rekindle the spark.

USING PASSION AS A GUIDE

Let your passion help guide you to the right path (see Figure 7-3). Passion can be used as a force in helping you decide

- Which things you should pursue
- Which things you should ignore

You   Passion
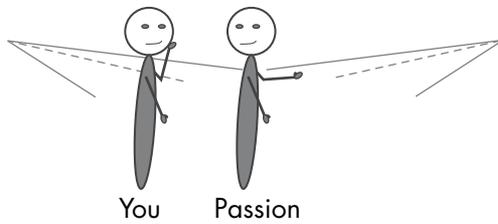
Figure 7-3   Let passion help you decide which roads to follow.

Watch for Opportunity: It Usually Seeks You and Speaks Quietly

It is an odd paradox, but the best route to goals (at least for me) is not always a straight-line, forward path. Most of the areas that, when I look back, have turned into areas of success for me were not things I was directly pursuing. It seems that whenever life gets noisy and the number of distractions is running high, opportunity seems to present itself off to the side, not with a lot of fanfare, but speaking in a faint voice that compels me to listen closely. When I can unravel myself from the commotion surrounding me and not be caught up in the brew-ha-ha, I can begin to hear the voice of opportunity—the chance to pursue what I am passionate about. This opportunity is usually not packaged in the manner that I had imagined, but it still presents the essence of what I am fascinated in pursuing. The challenge for me is to listen diligently enough to hear and internalize what is being said, and not to be drawn away by the loud distractions.

This situation has arisen in relation to many of the job opportunities I have had over my career—I have had my mind clearly set on one path when a unique opportunity presented itself. Such an opportunity can come from an unexpected direction and at a time when I least expect it. The first challenge is to see the opportunity, given the current momentum and focus on what is directly in front of me. At first, the change seems like a 90° hard left, at least until I begin slowing down and contemplating the essence of what has presented itself.

Think about such an opportunity this way: The situation is analogous to speeding down the highway and seeing some glimmer out of the corner of your eye. At first, you are not quite sure what it is, but you have a gut feeling that is important. Do I keep on truckin' down the highway (I have deadlines to keep and plans formulated) or do I take the time to slow down, turn around, and find out more about the glimmer off to the side that I just

missed? When I have the presence of mind to disengage for just a moment and fully consider the opportunity, I have rarely been disappointed in pursuing it.

If you enthusiastically engage with everyone you work with—from colleagues, to managers, to customers, to vendors—and show tenacity and skill in everything you do, opportunity can be around every corner. Often, those you engage with will be the source of these events. Customers and vendors may bring opportunities to learn and excel, so don't neglect them; your willingness to embrace such opportunities will reflect back on the company.

Follow Your Instincts

In today's media-centric world, trying to find and hear your inner voice (your instincts) can be challenging. When you first start to estimate projects, try guessing first. You may be surprised to find that, after you have done your top-down analysis and your bottom-up analysis, your initial guess (read gut feel, instinct) was in the ball park. If it's not, learn a little, and try again the next time. Often, rough project sizing requests come up with extremely small time frames (sometimes less than 30 minutes). You need to learn how to build some form of a model from which you can begin viewing the problem from multiple perspectives. This mechanism will help validate that your "guess" is somewhat reasonable.

If you get in a situation where things just don't feel right, and you can't quite explain why, back out. Your instincts should guide you. After a while, you will notice a sixth sense about situations—either you are at peace with what is happening or you sense something is wrong. Listen to this sixth sense; it can guide you out of troublesome areas when you don't know all of the details.

When you get ideas in your head, write them down. Ponder alternatives and other details about the ideas. The idea may be a great new design or an approach, so take the time to capture it. The still, small voices that inject ideas into your thinking can often produce the breakthroughs that you need to solve a particular problem.

There is a scientific basis to this process—that is, the way your instincts highlight things to you. The human brain consists of two hemispheres, with the left brain doing slow and thorough conscious analysis and the right brain doing the creativity and looking at "the big picture."[3] The conscious

_____

3. http://viewzone2.com/bicamx.html

thought you put into your work in IT is primarily the work of the left brain, whereas the subconscious and the right brain are looking out for you at a more expansive level. The little voice? It's your subconscious telling you that it has done the "big picture" work and spotted a problem—it just doesn't have the detailed communication skills of the left brain that would enable it to explain the idea directly to you. That's why we solve so many problems in our sleep and wake up with ideas for solving problems. Learn to listen to your subconscious!

Choose Areas That You Are Passionate About

When opportunity knocks, try to keep the financial considerations at bay for at least some period of time. Think about the pros and cons of each opportunity from the perspectives of "if you take it" and "if you don't": What are the impacts? Think about how the opportunity will affect both you and your family. Think about how well it aligns with the areas that excite you and cause you to melt away in your thinking.

Recognize that you, like every other human being, have different motivators. According to Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, people have a series of needs (read: motivators) that are organized into a pyramid, where needs must be fulfilled from the bottom of the pyramid upward. At the bottom level are physiological needs such as the need for food and water; they are built upon by safety needs such as a home, health, and employment, along with love needs such as a family. Money at its most fundamental is associated with these levels, because it enables us to live securely. The upper levels of Maslow's hierarchy consist of esteem, where we look for respect from others and self-respect, and self-actualization, such as occurs through creativity and problem solving.

Within the hierarchy of needs, we seek first to fulfill our needs at the bottom of the hierarchy and then move farther up the pyramid. Thus, once we have enough money to be secure in the first three levels of the pyramid, our motivators become self-respect, which we may achieve through the way we behave honestly and professionally, and respect from others, which we may get from our status in management or from our colleagues through our interactions and professionalism.

When evaluating any proposed new role, consider your passions and determine whether the top level of the pyramid would still apply to you: Would you still be able to express your creativity and solve problems in your own unique way? If not, then the job probably isn't for you unless you yearn to

adapt to solving different types of problems and creatively handling new challenges that are different from those you face today.

Pick the path that you will love, and the money will follow. If it doesn't, at least you will enjoy the journey you are on.

Change: The Kick in the Pants to Get You Moving Again

If you have finally reached the point where that once sparkling and exciting career has turned into drudgery, and it seems like going to work will continue to suck the life out of you until you evaporate, you seriously need to consider change. Don't run out and quit your job; unless you are independently wealthy, you probably need the cash flow to keep yourself financially afloat.

Think about what excites you today, what makes you happy, what gives you a sense of fulfillment. If you don't know, consider helping out someone else. It might seem odd, but sometimes helping others find or achieve what they are looking for can help you rediscover what you were looking for. Even if you don't find it right away, your sense of self-worth and general outlook on life will improve dramatically when you help others.

Consider learning a new skill or technology that could be applied at work to bring some sense of change into your current role. At one extreme, contribute to books, magazines, standards bodies, and the general industry community as a way of bringing change to your current role by changing yourself; this effort will bring increased self-esteem along with the more tangible results.

Once you fan the embers of your daily living, you may begin to see ways to change and opportunities that you can begin pursuing on a small scale. Try to figure out if the new interest is really what you want or which aspect of it you like. If this interest really engages you, look for ways to turn it into more of a full-time pursuit.

Once you have made the change, you will be amazed at the amount of energy it produces and how it reinvigorates your life. Your new pursuits will make you want to smile every day, simply because life is good. You may not be making as much money, but money—although necessary—truly is not everything.

Lack of Passion Acts as a Ceiling to Your Career

In my position as an architect, I get the opportunity to interview people on a regular basis. Over the years, I have had a chance to see some hiring decisions turn out to be amazing and others turn out to be less than stellar. Among the ones that did not turn out so well, a definite pattern cannot always be seen. In contrast, among the ones that have excelled, the pattern is clear.

During the interview, as I look for details about the work the applicant has done in the past, a clear story emerges when the great candidates begin to talk. Not only can they speak to the positions they have had, but they can also recall large volumes of specific details—the kind you would remember if you truly loved solving the problems and spent the time to fully immerse yourself in the nuances of the problem and the solution.

The great candidates typically work on technology even in their spare time. They are fascinated with particular areas and learn everything there is to know about those areas. In many respects, their thirst for knowledge is unquenchable.

This kind of drive and interest in a particular area will get you noticed. Your knowledge and expertise will naturally draw people to you when a particular set of problems crops up. In areas that you are passionate about, your ability to communicate clearly and with authority is demonstrated with the greatest of ease.

The reverse is also true: If you go to work just to punch the clock and get a paycheck, your attitude, approach, and level of knowledge about what you do will be adequate, but it will be clear to everyone around you that you lack any level of passion about your endeavors. When it comes time to finding someone who can get the job done right and on time, the person selected typically will have a passion for attacking the problem. These individuals may include a lackluster employee in the effort, but likely only as a team member, not the leader.

When looking at yourself and when hiring others, what should you look for? Are you seeking lots of skills or experience only? Or is the lack of some small skill worth ignoring if it is offset by a great attitude—by enthusiasm and passion? Enthusiasm and passion are likely to triumph over skills any day, as long as the general skills and background are there to build upon.

Whatever you choose to do, do it with everything you have. Find something about the problem that motivates you, and that will fully engage your heart and soul.

Do the Hard Things Well and Give It Everything You Have

Sometimes you may be asked to do tasks that seem small, unglamorous, and downright hard. The first reaction to this kind of request is typically to contemplate saying no. In your head, you think, "I have better things to do and this certainly was not on my priority list." After a brief amount of time, you reluctantly agree to do what has been asked. Your challenge now is to find the energy to fulfill the request.

The first thing to realize is that someone has asked you to perform the task because the individual trusts that you can solve the problem and get it done. The second thing to realize is that they may be testing you to see whether you can deal with the less desirable tasks and nail them before the higher-profile tasks begin flowing in your direction. Those above you in the organizational hierarchy need to know that you can jump in, take charge, and clean up whatever messes might be lying around. Your successful completion of the task will give them the confidence that you are capable, and not just a dilettante seeking the spotlight. It serves to build up their trust in you—and trust is a valuable commodity. It should also boost your own confidence, by proving that you can take on nearly any task and bring it to completion.

Passion: The Internal Fuel That Supplies Drive

After a while, it seems as if almost any pursuit can lose its sparkle. At first, the drop-off is imperceptible, but over time your energy level slowly dwindles and the enthusiasm you once possessed fades. It is usually at this point in time that you need to dig deep to rediscover what inspired you to begin this pursuit in the first place. Knowing what your passions are and knowing that they may change over time can supply the energy that is needed to keep your momentum moving forward when the environment seems a bit rainy and dreary.

PROTECTING YOUR PASSION

Passion is like a flame. You need to be careful not to let others throw water on it; they will quench it. Learn to protect your passion.

Ignore the Critics: It's Your Passion, Your Vision—Not Theirs

When you are truly passionate about something, that enthusiasm sometimes seems to attract negativity from certain people. Be cautious about sharing your dreams and goals. Not everyone will share your enthusiasm. It is hard to hear people say, "Awww, that's impossible," or "What a silly idea." At this point, your passion is like a fledgling starting out: The dream or idea is not especially strong yet, so it may not take that much to kill it.

If you do choose to share your interest, be prepared to overlook the detractors and realize that it truly is *your* passion, and not theirs—they have their own goals and ideas to pursue. The naysayers may not be actively trying to dissuade you from pursuing your passion; rather, it's just not important to them and they don't share your enthusiasm.

After you have had more time to pursue your goal and you have some success under your belt, it seems like the amount of positive feedback grows naturally. Everyone is drawn to success.

Avoid Distractions

At any given time, there seems to be a never-ending stream of activities that are competing to consume your time. If you are not careful, these activities will sap your time and energy, and result in you losing your focus on what is truly important to you.

Take the time to figure out what your values are and what your priorities are. Write it down. If you don't know where you are trying to go, time will escape you. Even if what you write down is not all that inspiring, simply having some direction is better than having no direction at all. You can improve your vision and change it over time.

Create a "to do" list every day and maintain a list of outstanding tasks to carry over from one day to the next; any additional tasks picked up along the way can then be integrated and prioritized. This helps focus your mind on the tasks linked to your highest priorities, ensuring that you do not lose track of tasks and shove them to the bottom of the pile.

By formalizing what is important to you, you have a better shot at prioritizing what you do each day. This approach allows you to put the blinders on and pursue your passions. You will have a much better sense of which responsibilities you can decline, and which responsibilities (a limited number) you can accept. One of the chief things that you should put aside is the TV. Television has a unique way of devouring time; although it is certainly

entertaining and fun to watch the latest programming, it will rob you of the most precious resource you have in pursuing your passions—time.

One of the things I always strive to put high on my priority list is my kids. If they want to play, do something, or buy something, I work to find ways that I can say yes. If they want to buy something, I offer to pay half. If they are willing to put up some of their own money, it must be important; if not, it probably wasn't. If they want to play, unless what I am currently doing is extremely urgent (it rarely truly is), I try to drop what I am doing (or if I can finish it quickly, I do so) and engage with them. After all, they took the time to actually include me in something that is important to them. If you say you will play later, do it; your word is your honor.

Don't procrastinate. If there are tasks you can do now that are higher priority than what you are actually doing (and particularly if what you are doing is staring out of the window wishing for the sun to come out before the weekend), get moving with them now and don't put them off until the last minute. With those tasks safely out of the way, there will be no concerns that they haven't been done; if they take longer than you expected, at least you have completed them and now have time to daydream or do something else. While there are always tasks that need to be done, address the important ones early.

WHAT IS ONE THING YOU CAN DO TODAY TO PURSUE YOUR PASSION?

Sometimes when you look at the goal you are passionate about pursuing, it can be nearly debilitating just to get started. You see the mountain. You see all of the work it may take. You begin to see the obstacles. Fear creeps in. This is your body telling you to get moving, not in the opposite direction, but toward the goal that consumes your thinking.

Look for one small step that you can take today that will help you get started. Here are a few ideas:

- Is there a book you can read or listen to? (I listen to five or six books each year in my truck on the way to and from work every day; it is only a five-minute drive, but I can still put the time to good use.)
- Is there a class you can take?
- Is there a conference or user group you can attend? Typically, these gatherings have birds-of-a-feather meetings you can attend and meet others with similar interests.

- Is there someone who is already doing what you want to pursue? Could that person act as your mentor?
- Can you join a club or organization in the area where you live that focuses on your interest area?
- Are there blogs written by experts on the Web or tutorial presentations they have written?
- Are there online chat rooms or forums that you can participate in?

Engaging with other people, particularly experts in the field, to bounce ideas off them and learn from them, is a great way to gain experience quickly by learning from others' mistakes. Most experts will happily discuss the wrong turns they took as a warning to others—they learned the hard way, which is why they are experts. If you can't find a local expert, try to find a user group or vendor contact who can introduce you to an expert, even if the contact is only via email.

Write down the things you learn, as a way to accelerate your navigation of the road to "expert." If you know from first principles how things work "under the covers," you always have something to build on. We often learn that following the old medical student adage, "Watch one, do one, teach one," applies just as well to IT. You will learn more by explaining to others what you have learned about your area of passion, and by listening to their questions and trying to answer them. I often hear a little voice in my head saying, "Good question. Why didn't I think of that?" If I can work out the answer, then I have learned something; if not, on my road to being an "expert," I can say, "I'll find out"—and then I have another task to follow up on that aligns with my passion.

The key is to just get moving. The momentum you generate will help refuel your inner commitment and give you the strength to take the next step. After a while, the steps you take become automated—they are now a habit.

LEARN TO JUMP IN AND ENJOY THE RIDE

First you jump off the cliff and you build wings on the way down.

—Ray Bradbury, American Science-Fiction Writer

The only real way to maintain your passion in life is to jump in and, as Nike says, "Just do it." We get enjoyment out of our passion only by engaging in it, not by avoiding it through fear. You need to remember that
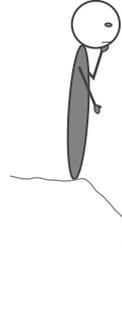
Figure 7-4   Sometimes you have to jump without knowing all the details.

- You will never be able to remove all of the obstacles.
- You will never be able to reduce all of the risk.
- You cannot do everything.
- You have to prioritize and choose.
- You have to make the rest of the world vanish, follow your instincts, and jump. Try the small cliffs first.
- Enjoy the journey: Smile on the way down, and if you hit the bottom, get up, dust yourself off, climb back up the hill, and jump off again (see Figure 7-4).

BECOMING A PASSIONATE ARCHITECT

The road to becoming a passionate architect begins with the following steps:

- Understanding what passion is.
- Discovering passion:
    - Understand how to find passion.
    - Combine persistence and passion.
    - Choose passion over position.
    - Rekindling of your passion is occasionally required.
- Using passion as a guide:
    - Watch for the quiet voice of opportunity.
    - Learn to follow your instincts.
    - Choose areas that you are passionate about.
    - Change your environment or circumstance.
    - Realize that a lack of passion will limit your career path.
    - Do the hard things well, and give them everything you have.
    - Supply your drive by using passion as the fuel.

- ▪ Protecting passion:
  - ▪ Ignore the critics.
  - ▪ Avoid distractions.
- ▪ Pursuing your passions beginning today.
- ▪ Learning to jump in and enjoy the ride.

Becoming an architect who embraces passion means navigating a road filled with excitement, wonder, and a positive outlook. The biggest hurdle to overcome is recognizing when you are going off course and taking corrective action. The good news is that it takes relatively little effort to pursue what you are passionate about, but it does take a bunch of courage.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Citrin, James M.; Smith, Richard A. (2004). *The 5 Patterns of Extraordinary Careers: The Guide for Achieving Success and Satisfaction.* Crown Business.

Coyle, Daniel. (2009). *The Talent Code: Greatness Isn't Born, It's Grown. Here's How.* Bantam Dell.

Fowler, Chad. (2009). *The Passionate Programmer: Creating a Remarkable Career in Software Development.* Pragmatic Life.

Goleman, Daniel. (2001). *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ* [Audio CD]. Macmillan Audio.

Maxwell, John C. (2000). *Fail Forward: Turning Mistakes into Stepping Stones for Success.* Thomas Nelson.

Schmitt, Bernd H. (2008). *Big Think Strategy: How to Leverage Bold Ideas and Leave Small Thinking Behind (Your Coach in a Box)* [Audio CD]. Your Coach Digital.

Ziglar, Zig (1994). *Over the Top: Moving from Survival to Stability, from Stability to Success, from Success to Significance.* Thomas Nelson.

INDEX

This page intentionally left blank