



## TenStep Supplemental Paper

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### IT Development Career Paths

In some industries, people start and end their careers without much thought to job titles or a career path. Maybe they get the prefix 'senior' attached to their title, as when a bank teller becomes a senior bank teller. That is about it. In the IT development world, however, young workers tend to expect a formal career path which takes them through a series of job titles as they gain more experience and take on more responsibility.

#### The Theoretical Career Path

There are as many unique career paths and titles as there are developers. Some people come into their first job and are thrust into the role of a Project Manager. Some business users transition into development analyst positions. However, a typical path consists of varying levels of programmer, programmer / analyst and analyst. Progression from there includes project management and/or functional people management. (Do not be too concerned about the titles. At your company these might translate to software engineer, web developer, etc.)

Most developers start out as programmers. It is here that they learn the fundamentals of technology and of the development culture. Job satisfaction is gained by creating or enhancing computer programs and seeing them work as you command. As programmers gain more maturity and experience, they do more of the higher-level design and analysis work that is required before programming can begin. The programmer / analyst title signifies the start of a progression to the more senior roles of designer, analyst, project manager, and team leader.

#### What Actually Happens

In many cases, programmers tend to mature into programmer / analysts and stay in that role for the rest of their careers. This is especially true for smaller development shops, where there are not enough people to have narrow specialty skills. The smaller the development shop, the more hats people wear. In one company with fifteen developers, almost everyone did some combination of analysis, design, programming, and project management. The junior people tended to perform a mix that was more heavily into programming, and the senior people tended to do more analysis and project management, but everyone chipped in where needed.

#### A Career Path is Critical For Younger Developers

All developers want a visible career step above the job rung they are at today. This is not always possible for senior developers, but it is absolutely critical for people early in their careers. The timeframe for moving developers up the career path is getting shorter. In the 1970's and early 1980's, it could easily take ten years to move completely from the programmer ranks to the more senior design and analysis roles. Today, entry-level programmers expect that they will be capable of managing projects or people within five years – maybe within two! Have the people become that much smarter? No, but



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technology and expectations have advanced to the point where sharp twenty-something's are asked to take on much more responsibility than in the past. In fact, if you do not make opportunities available to young programmers, they are likely to leave for a company that will.

### Summary

- There is a traditional career path for developers consisting of programmer, programmer / analyst, analyst and then project management and people management. There are many variations on the basic theme, depending on the company.
- Many developers find a niche in one part of the developer path, which often reflects where they find the most job satisfaction. Some make a career out of programming. Many end up as senior programmer / analysts. Do not ignore these people. They are the backbone of your development organization.
- Young developers expect to progress rapidly through the early stages of the career path. If your company does not provide the opportunities, other companies will.