



Soft Skills

The software developer's life manual

John Z. Sonmez



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 Manning Publications Co.
20 Baldwin Road
PO Box 761
Shelter Island, NY 11964

Development editor: Cynthia Kane
Copyeditor: Jodie Allen
Proofreader: Melody Dolab
Illustrator: Višeslav Radović
Typesetter: Marija Tudor
Cover designer: Leslie Haimes

ISBN: 9781617292392

Printed in the United States of America

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 – EBM – 19 18 17 16 15 14

To all developers who strive for continuous
self-improvement...

Who are not satisfied with good enough

Who always seek every opportunity to expand their horizons
and explore the unknown

Whose thirst for knowledge is never fully quenched

Who believe that software development means more than just writing code

Who know that failure is not the end, but merely a step in the journey

Who struggle at times, and sometimes fall, but always get back up again

Who have the will and determination to seek the harder path in life

And, most importantly, who are willing to help others along the way

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Foreword

I've long been an advocate for soft skills. Coding is so harsh and cold. Everything is so easily measured in the hard world of code. How many lines of code can you write? How productive can you be? Did those tests pass? It's easy to get caught up in the measurement of it all and lose sight of the human aspect of technology.

Are you liked? Are you appreciated? Are you kind and welcoming? Do you inspire with your positivity and supportive demeanor, or just with your ruthless competence? Are you taking care of yourself, your back, your buns, and your brain? I've been coding for well over 25 years and, let me tell you, things break down if you don't take care of them.

Perhaps you're a consultant, as many of us are. Are you taking care of your finances? Money doesn't compile quite the same way as code, as much as you'd wish it did. All of these skills and so many more make up the so-called soft skills. What John has done for us with this book is to compile all of the things one needs to know to form, well, a well-rounded software professional! After many years of fail-fast, fail-often, John speaks from vast experience about what works and what doesn't. *Soft Skills* is a near complete brain dump from a successful engineer and it gives you useful, practical, and actionable advice on a wide array of topics.

I'd also recommend you check out my free video documentary, "Get Involved in Tech" at <http://www.getinvolvedintech.com> for a video discussion of what it means to be a social developer, just like John talks about in Section 2 of this very book! John and I think similarly about these things which is why I'm thrilled to be writing this foreword.

Enjoy this book. Take it a little at a time, jump around, absorb, and return to it. Continuous integration and continuous improvement work in wetware as well as software!

SCOTT HANSELMAN
SOFTWARE ARCHITECT, ENGINEER, AUTHOR, TEACHER

Foreword

Late in the evening of Friday, December 5, 2014 (my 62nd birthday), I received an email from John Sonmez, the author of this book. He wrote, asking me to write a foreword by Monday, December 8. In John's email was a zip file with several dozen Word files—I found this presentation of the manuscript to be inconvenient and annoying, and I didn't have time to generate a PDF of the whole book.

I wasn't pleased to get such a request. My wife had just had double knee replacements and was in rehab. I had a flying lesson Saturday morning and planned to spend the rest of the day with my wife. I was scheduled to board a plane to London Saturday evening and teach courses Monday through Friday. So there was no way, not by Monday. John hadn't given me enough time, and I told him so.

Just before driving to the airport, I found John had sent me a Christmas package of cheeses and ham. It included a card, thanking me for considering writing the foreword. Also, I received another email from John in which he had begged his publisher for another day, so he could give me until Tuesday. He sent me several other imploring emails, but I told him that there was no reasonable chance, and that he should expect nothing from me.

I drove to the airport, boarded the plane, slept through the flight, and took a taxi to my favorite London hotel. I was wiped out by the travel and played Minecraft in a stupor until I finally crashed. On Monday I taught a full day, and then had to do some work on the SMC Compiler for Episode 30 of my Clean Code video series on <http://cleancoders.com>.

Today is Tuesday, December 9. It's the second day of my class, and I just started the students working on a two-hour exercise. I checked my email and found that John had sent me another message with a simple PDF of the whole book. Okay, that would make things easier. I could just open that file and scroll up and down the book. Nice.

Note what I'm telling you: John did what was necessary. He *thought* about what I might need and want. He followed his original request with inducements and helpful aids. He clearly spent a lot of time and effort working to make my job easier, on the off-chance that it would make it possible for me to write this foreword. Even after I'd declined and told him it was almost certainly impossible, he continued to find ways to induce and aid me. He didn't give up. He didn't back down. As long as there was a chance, he continued to search for a way.

And *that* is what this book is about. It's about getting to success. It's about the habits and strategies, procedures and mindsets, and tricks and hacks that you can use to push yourself ever closer to success. John's actions toward me, after his original request, are an example, and he is an exemplar, of what he has written in this book.

So, with two hours to kill while the students did their exercise, I cracked the PDF open and began to read. Whoa! Look at the topics! He talks about physical fitness. He talks about options trading. He talks about real estate. He talks about spiritual balance. He talks about quitting your job, starting a consulting business, joining a startup, building a product, climbing the corporate ladder, marketing yourself, and the list goes on...

Knowing I'd never be able to read the entire book in two hours, and that I wasn't going to write the foreword anyway, I read and skimmed, and read and skimmed again. But as I did, I started to get the feeling that John had a message and that it was a good one! It was a holistic message, one that every software developer (and everybody else, for that matter) ought to hear.

Do you know how to write a resume? Do you know how to negotiate your salary? Do you know how to set your rates as an independent consultant? Do you know how to weigh the risks of quitting your job

to become a contractor? Do you understand how to get funding for a startup? Do you understand the cost of watching TV? (Yes, you read that right.)

These are the things this book talks about, and can teach you. They're things you need to know. I haven't read the whole book, but I've read *in* the book and skimmed a lot of it, and that was enough, because here I am, writing this foreword, after all. My conclusion is that if you're a young software developer trying to find your way in this complex industry, then you're holding a book that will give you a lot of insight and good advice.

John figured out a way to get me to write this foreword, despite a bumpy beginning, an impossible schedule, and the overall difficulty of the situation. He applied the principles that he writes about in this book, and, once again, gained success!

ROBERT (UNCLE BOB) MARTIN

Preface

I'd love to be able to give you a fantastic story about how I came to write this book. I'd like to tell you that I was meditating in the desert when an eagle flew down, landed on my shoulder, and whispered in my ear, "You must write a book about soft skills for software developers." I'd like to tell you that the book came to me in a dream; that I was awakened by a vision of the outline of the book in the middle of the night and that I started frantically writing chapters, trying to capture what I had seen.

But the truth is that I wrote the book because I felt that I had to.

Throughout my life as a software developer, I've been on many different journeys. I've taken some right paths, some wrong paths, and some paths that I'm still not sure about. Along the way, I haven't had much help or guidance. I've never felt like there was someone who had cut a trail for me that I could follow. I've never felt like there was someone who could show me how to be the most successful software developer I could be—not just in writing code—but in life in general.

Sure, there have been plenty of people who have influenced my life, and plenty of people who've taught me all kinds of things about software development and more. I certainly owe what I've accomplished in life, in part, to those people. But I've never found a single person or guide that condensed all this information into one place. Things like

- Not only how to manage my career, but how to make the right choices about my career

- ❖ How to learn in a better and more efficient way and how to be as productive as possible, and what to do when I feel unmotivated and discouraged
- ❖ The basics of finance, physical and mental health, and how all those things affect me in my role as a software developer and as a person living on this planet.

I wrote this book because I wanted to provide that guide—or at least to do the best job I could of providing it with what I’ve learned from my personal experience and from the experiences of other successful software developers, financial experts, fitness gurus, and motivational speakers that I’ve had the pleasure of meeting and interacting with. I wrote this book because I felt that it would be a waste to not share what I have learned and what I have experienced.

I wrote this book, for you...

...to make your journey a little easier

...to help you become a better version of yourself

...and, most importantly, to help you not feel so alone in your journey through life as a software developer.

Did reading this make you feel inspired?

Good. Let’s begin the journey!

Acknowledgments

If I have seen further than others, it is by standing upon the shoulders of giants.

—Isaac Newton

Few books are written without the help of many people. Certainly, no books are published and distributed without the help of a whole lot of people. This book is no different, so I'd like to take a moment to thank the "giants" in my life.

First, I want to thank all the people who've positively impacted my life and have helped me become the person I am today—and who have helped me realize that I still have a long way to go.

I'd like to thank my coworkers and bosses, throughout my career, who've challenged me, mentored me, given me enough rope to hang myself, and have helped me cut down the rope before something truly bad happened. There are too many of you to name, but you know who you are.

I'd like to thank the authors of the many books I've read who have made me a better person and given me new perspectives in life. Again, too many to name, but if I was hard pressed to name a few, Robert C. Martin (Uncle Bob), Steven Pressfield, and Dale Carnegie come to mind as some of the most influential authors I've read.

So I am especially grateful and honored that Robert C. Martin found the time in his busy schedule to contribute a foreword to my book, even though I asked him way too late. I am also thrilled that Scott Hanselman penned a second foreword, also at the last minute, and that he shares

many of my views on the soft skills developers need. My sincere thanks to both of them for endorsing my book.

I'd like to give a special thanks to my family—especially my wife Heather and my daughter Sophia—who had to deal with my mood swings, my over-commitment of time, and the overall craziness of writing a book. My wife was also my proofreader who read every chapter and corrected it before it was sent to the editor—making me look a lot smarter than I am.

I'd also like to thank my dad, Sahin, who taught me the value of hard work, without which this book would have never been written in the first place, and there'd be nothing to write about anyway!

And I can't forget my mom, Laura, who, more than anyone else, taught me to believe in myself, regardless of what anyone else says—an indispensable quality for an entrepreneur.

I'd also like to thank Derick Bailey, Josh Earl, and Charles Max Wood, also known as the Entreprgrammers (<http://entreprgrammers.com>), who are part of my weekly mastermind group and have encouraged, motivated, inspired, and challenged me at every step of writing this book.

Of course, I need to thank everyone at Manning Publications, without whom this book wouldn't have been published—or perhaps it would have been published in some completely unrecognizable form.

First, Marjan Bace, the publisher of Manning, who had the foresight to realize that a book of this kind was exactly what software developers needed.

Next, I'd like to thank my editor, Robin de Jongh, who brought me into the Manning fold, helped me come up with the concept for *Soft Skills*, and provided support and encouragement during the process of writing the book.

I'd like also like to thank my development editor, Cynthia Kane, who reviewed the earliest versions of the manuscript and provided invaluable feedback and advice in a way that made me feel more inspired to keep writing, rather than discouraged.

Thanks to Candace Gillhoolley, who did an excellent job of marketing the book and who taught me a few tricks about marketing that I'll be using in the future.

A big thanks to Jodie Allen and Mary Piergies, who had the difficult job of coordinating everything that went along with getting this book through production, and again to Jodie for copyediting the entire manuscript.

Another big thanks to Rebecca Rinehart for coordinating the MEAP (Manning Early Access Program) release of *Soft Skills* and for dealing with my extreme pickiness regarding the cover of the book, although in the end Manning conducted a survey of customers who had pre-ordered the book and let them choose the final cover, which you now see on the book.

Thanks also to graphic artist Višeslav Radović, who perfectly illustrated the visuals I tried to convey in the book. And a thank you to all the other staff at Manning who made this book possible.

Special thanks to the reviewers who read the manuscript in its early drafts and whose comments helped to improve the book: Heather Campbell, Ionel Condor, Luke Greenleaf, Robert Hanson, Rebecca Jones, Anita Lugomer, Matthew Margolis, Javier Muñoz Mellid, Edward G. Prentice, Alvin Scudder, Craig Smith, David Stanek, Lourens Steyn, and Jerry Tan.

Finally, I'd like to thank the Simple Programmer audience. Many of you have contributed by asking questions, providing feedback, and inspiring and encouraging me in everything I do.

About This Book

Hey, I'm glad you picked up this book, but you're probably wondering what it's about. What the heck is a "software developer's life manual" anyway? That's an excellent question, and I'll try to answer it here—briefly.

Think of it this way: there are a lot of good books out there that will teach you how to write better code, learn a new technology, or do things like work on a team or run a software project. You might even find some books that talk about your career and how to improve it, or simply how to pass interview questions. But have you ever found a book that told you how to become a better version of the software developer you already are?

Have you ever found a book that told you not only how to get a better job and make more money, but what to do with that money and how to eventually leave that job to become an entrepreneur—if you so desire?

Have you ever found a book that told you the steps to successfully build a reputation for yourself in the software development industry and at the same time taught you how to become stronger and healthier physically, mentally, and spiritually?

I haven't either, so that's why I decided to write a book about all that ...and more.

Regardless of who you are, this book is written for *you*. And I don't say that lightly. There are chapters in this book that cover everything from hacking the interview process and crafting a killer resume, to creating a wildly successful blog and building your own personal brand, to being extremely productive and learning how to deal with burnout, and even investing in real estate and losing weight.

And you'll also find an entire section dedicated to my special technique for learning things quickly—the same one I used to create over 55 online courses in less than two years for the online training company Pluralsight.

Seriously, no matter who you are, or where you are in your software development career, there's something in this book for you. There is even a chapter devoted to meeting that special person—you know what I mean!

Chapter 1 will tell you more about what you'll find in the book and how it's organized, but before you get into it, I want to point to a few online resources that might be helpful to you as you read the book. You'll find links to useful websites sprinkled throughout the chapters, but below are a few staples you're sure to find useful.

Online Resources

- The Simple Programmer Blog: <http://simpleprogrammer.com>

Here you'll find a huge collection of blog posts that have to do with many of the topics in this book. It's also the best way to get in contact with me and find other valuable information that I post for free on a weekly basis. (While you're there, make sure you sign up for my email list and you'll get all kinds of freebies and other good stuff that I produce each week.)

- My YouTube channel: <http://youtube.com/jsonmez>

Here I post videos about many of the topics you'll find in this book—and it's all for free. If you're interested in learning about a topic I cover in this book, try doing a search on my YouTube channel—there's a good chance you'll find a video I did on it.

- How to Market Yourself as a Software Developer Course: <http://devcareerboost.com/m>

If you're interested in the section in this book on marketing yourself, go to this site to buy the full course that goes into detail about building a personal brand and making a name for yourself in the software development industry. This is the most popular thing I've ever produced, by far.

I'll even give you a special discount because you purchased this book. Use the code SOFTSKILLS to get \$100 off the complete package.

✦ 10 Steps to Learn Anything Quickly Course: <http://simpleprogrammer.com/ss-10steps>

This is another in-depth course that goes into detail about what I teach you in the Learning section of this book. If you enjoy that section and want a little more in-depth treatment of the subject, check out the course to find out more.

✦ Entreprgrammers: <http://entreprgrammers.com>

If you're interested in becoming an entrepreneur or starting your own business, check out this free, weekly podcast that I prepare with three other developers/entrepreneurs (developerneurs).

✦ Get Up and CODE: <http://getupandcode.com>

Finally, if the Fitness section appeals to you, you'll probably enjoy this free podcast I produced about fitness for software developers and IT professionals.

Author Online

Purchase of *Soft Skills* includes free access to a private web forum run by Manning Publications where you can make comments about the book, ask questions, and receive help and feedback from the author and other users. To access the forum and subscribe to it, point your web browser to www.manning.com/SoftSkills.

This page provides information on how to get on the forum once you're registered, what kind of help is available, and the rules of conduct on the forum. The Author Online forum and the archives of previous discussions will be accessible from the publisher's website as long as the book is in print.

About the Author

John Sonmez is the founder of Simple Programmer (<http://simpleprogrammer.com>), where he tirelessly pursues his vision of transforming complex issues into simple solutions. He has published over 50 courses on topics such as iOS, Android, .NET, Java, and game development for the online developer training resource Pluralsight. He also hosts the Get Up and CODE podcast, where he talks about fitness for programmers (<http://getupandcode.com>), and the Entre-programmers podcast, where he and three other developers/entrepreneurs share their real stories of building their online businesses (<http://entreprogrammers.com>).



John is a life coach for software developers, and helps software engineers, programmers, and other technical professionals boost their careers and live a more fulfilled life. He empowers them to accomplish their goals by making the complex simple.