Extracted from:

Land the Tech Job You Love

LAND the TECH JOB
YOU LOVE

ANDY LESTER

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Introduction

This book is about your happiness.

You spend half your waking hours at your job. That's more time than you spend with your kids or your spouse and even more than time spent playing World of Warcraft. You can't be happy with your life when you're spending so much time doing something you don't love.

This book is here first to help you be happy with your life by helping you understand what you want in a job and then to help you find and land that job. My goal in writing this book is to help you find a job that you love as much as Ed Coughlin loved his.

The Fireman Who Loved His Job

Ed Coughlin loved his job. He was a fireman for the city of Chicago for twenty-eight years and loved every minute of it. It's certainly not something that everyone is cut out for, but he excelled at it, making the rank of captain. After retiring from the Chicago Fire Department to the suburbs, he couldn't leave the life. He was a volunteer fireman for a number of small towns in the area and never lost touch with the friends he made.

In the too-short time that I knew Ed in his fading years, nothing would bring a glint to his eye like recalling the time he spent as a fireman. He'd tell stories of the fire calls as if they'd happened yesterday and have everyone laughing with the tales of firehouse antics. I know it was important to him that he made a difference in countless lives, but I think that even more than that he just loved the work, loved the people, and loved *being a fireman*.

Many of us in the tech fields are like Ed the fireman. Whether programmer, system administrator, web designer, or some other

technical specialist, we live similar lives. We have jobs that many others would never want to do, and yet we thrive at them. Those we serve are often highly appreciative. Our subculture is tightly knit but misunderstood by the outside world. Most of all, we love the work we do so much we sometimes volunteer to do it just so that we can do more. Many of us see being professional geeks as a calling—what we were meant to do. It's just what we *are.*

How This Book Was Born

This book started on January 14, 2004, after a Perl Mongers meeting in St. Louis, Missouri.[1] After the meeting, twenty of us made our way to dinner. We sat at a long table, about ten geeks to a side. Across from me sat fellow techie Bill Odom, and we got to discussing the trouble we were having hiring qualified people for our respective companies. We traded stories of bad résumés and bad interviews. Someone asked for advice on how he could do better on his résumé. Then someone else asked how he could tell whether he should leave his job. Within ten minutes, we had the entire table clustered around us, interested in job issues. Bill said, "We ought to take our act on the road."

Later, Bill and I discussed how we'd tapped into something. People in the group were unhappy with their jobs and looking to change their situations. Conversely, Bill and I were dismayed by how many otherwise qualified candidates come through our offices screwing up their chances at getting something better. Worse, we had people who interviewed with us who had no idea whether the job for which they were applying was one they'd enjoy. They were setting themselves up for failure.

As I drove back home from St. Louis that night, Ed Coughlin, my wife's father and the fireman who loved his job so much, passed away. At the wake, dozens of friends from his years in fire protection paid their respects and shared their stories of how much Ed loved being a fireman.

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1. Perl Mongers is the worldwide collection of Perl user groups. Visit http://www.pm.org to find one near you.

In the weeks following that meeting, Bill and I put together a talk for O'Reilly's Open Source Conference. It was a hit, and I gave the talk many times afterward at user groups around the country. The success of those talks led to this book.

My wish is for everyone to love their jobs as much as Ed loved his. I'm well on my way, having been a professional geek for more than twenty-one years, and I wouldn't trade it for anything else. I hope that you can find and keep the kind of happiness I get from my working life and that Ed got from his.

A Disclaimer of Sorts

Books of career advice can't be exactly about your situation. As the author, I don't know anything about you. I don't know your job situation, your history, your background, the type of job you're looking for, or what is important to you in life.

> **Don't blindly follow the directions in a book.**

You'll have to adjust some advice to your given situation or your given location. If you live outside the United States, some advice may not apply. In some European countries, it's standard to include a photo with a résumé, where in the United States it's likely to get your résumé thrown away. Even within the United States, behavior at an interview in the Bay Area is likely to be very different from at a company in Chicago.

And don't forget what I hear at least once every time I give a presentation about this topic: "I like how you approach this, but you're not like other managers! Most managers are clueless!"

So as the author, I don't know you, I don't know where you live, and the hiring process in many companies is fundamentally suboptimal.

And yet...

And yet, the principles apply. These techniques do work. The stories that illustrate the chapters underline the basic applicability of the ideas and practices.

And yet, I do know a bit about you, because I've talked to many technical professionals who are unhappy with their careers or working to move to a better place.

And yet, most of this book *does* apply to you. Most of the ideas are universal, crossing cultural boundaries. The guiding principles of matching yourself to the right job, of putting yourself in the shoes of the hiring manager, and of demonstrating your value to the interviewer all form a bedrock base from which your chances of getting a job and being happy with it are increased one-thousandfold.

Read this book, and the other books you read on getting hired, and consider how their advice apply to you. Take with you what makes sense, and leave the rest.

What's Inside?

This book is an interconnected network of ideas, all building on each other. The first two chapters lay the foundation of your search and your happiness. Chapter 1, *The Foundation of Your Job Search*, on page 23 discusses basic building blocks of how to be successful in the job hunt and in finding the job you want. The idea of "what you want" is so important, and so often ignored by hiring books, that it gets its own chapter, Chapter 2, *What Do You Want in a Job?*, on page 38. Even if you think you know what you're looking for in a job, you may be surprised at aspects of your working life you haven't considered.

The next two chapters discuss creating a stock résumé on which you'll base the custom résumés you send to companies. Résumé writing is a two-step process, so is discussed in two distinct chapters. The first—Chapter 3, *Résumé Content: Getting the Words Down*, on page 53—discusses only the words that you'll put on your résumés. This is to help steer you away from the temptation of making the résumé look good and giving the content inadequate attention. After you have the words down, you'll use the ideas in Chapter 4, *Building Your Résumé Documents*, on page 82 to build effective documents.

With a plan of what you want and a stock résumé, you can then look to finding a job, Chapter 5, *Finding Your Job*, on page 96.

Having found a job and company to pursue, you'll move on to Chapter 6, *Applying for the Job*, on page 126, finding the best way to make your introduction to the company.

Once you've been called in for an interview, your approach changes radically. You'll change from seeking a job to working to show the interviewer and company that you're the right person for the job and to find out for yourself that it's the right job for you. In Chapter 7, *Preparing for the Interview*, on page 138, you'll learn how to put together your plan and materials to make the run your way. Then, in Chapter 8, *The Interview*, on page 154, you'll learn how to work the interview and to make sure it's an opportunity to sell yourself as the best candidate, rather than a simple question-and-answer session.

The next two chapters discuss what to say, what not to say, and how best to say it. First, Chapter 9, *Handling the Tough Interview Questions*, on page 178 gives solid advice on how to answer those dreaded stumpers like "Where do you want to be in five years?" Then, Chapter 10, *Too Much Information*, on page 198 gives rules on what you should not say at an interview.

Chapter 11, *After the Interview: The Job Offer and Beyond*, on page 207 covers how to handle a job offer and how to make the most of a rejection. And, since your next job is probably not going to be your last, Chapter 12, *Staying Hirable*, on page 228 discusses how to make the most of your skills and career and how they're seen in the world so that the next time you need a job the process won't be so painful.

Finally, the appendixes give summaries of tips to make the most of your job hunt and present traps to avoid. You may want to skim them now to get a feel for what's coming up. Have a look at the inside front cover, too, for a list of rules to keep in mind during your job search.

Throughout the book, callouts give you important ideas to remember as your move forward. You'll also see this icon of an *F* on a report card. These mark potential failure points in the process. Don't repeat these mistakes others have made.

Land the Tech Job You Love Online

Follow up your reading of the book by participating online. The home page for the book is online at http://www.pragprog.com/titles/algh/land-the-tech-job-you-love. You can submit errata from that page, and you can also participate in the *Land The Tech Job You Love* forum at http://forums.pragprog.com/forums/81.

I welcome your comments, suggestions, and stories about hiring, either in the book forum or privately in email. I'd love to know whether this book helped you and how I could have done better.

Go Love Your Job

I know that many of you may be incredulous at the idea of loving your job. Maybe you liked working with computers, but your job has sucked the fun out. Your artistic side isn't satisfied designing boring websites. Your co-workers are obnoxious boors you dread. I know the feeling. You're not alone.

You're not stuck. Other opportunities are available for you, if you know where to look and can work the hiring process to your advantage and to the advantage of the company that hires you.

Life is too short for a job you don't love.

This book will help you get that job you love.

Andy Lester
May 2009
andy@theworkinggeek.com

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