

# A CTO that still codes: My tortuous path to the Staff-Plus Engineer role

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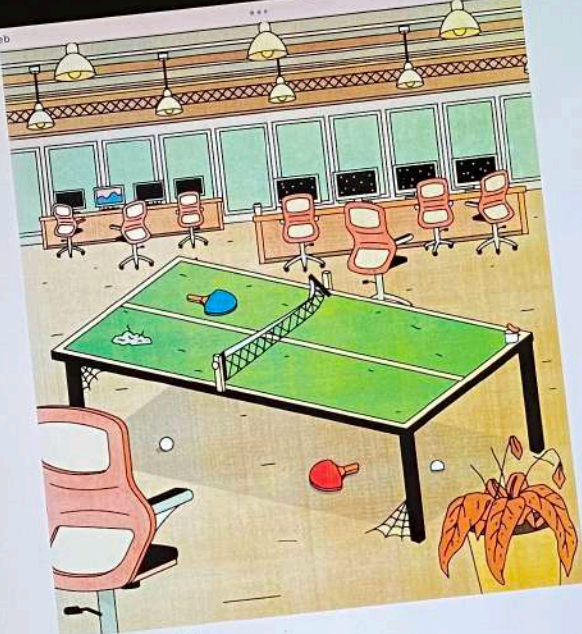


Illustration by George Wylesol

THE FUTURE OF WORK ISSUE

# Tech Companies Face a Fresh Crisis: Hiring

Recruiters in tech are desperate for workers. But candidates are the ones who hold all the power.

By Susan Dominus  
Feb. 16, 2022

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**67%**

**of digital leaders report that**

**the skills shortage**

**prevent their companies from keeping up with the pace of change**

**Why aren't  
companies  
encouraging people  
to stay on the  
technical path?**

MANAGER







**Not everyone  
will find  
happiness in  
management**



Lessons learned  
as a manager  
that made me a  
better technical  
leader






A close-up photograph of a Zen garden. The garden is contained within a dark wooden tray. The base is covered in fine, light-colored sand. Several smooth, rounded stones are scattered across the sand. One stone is a light greyish-blue, another is a darker grey, and a third is a dark, almost black stone. The background is softly blurred, showing more of the garden and some wooden elements.

Be patient with people that  
need to explain their problem





Make people feel the  
solution was their idea  
too



# The sandwich approach





A photograph of a modern architectural interior. The space features large, white, curved walls and ceiling elements that create a sense of depth and movement. A prominent yellow stripe runs along the edge of one of the curved walls. The lighting is soft and even, highlighting the smooth surfaces. In the background, a spiral staircase with white railings and a yellow accent is visible. The overall atmosphere is clean, bright, and contemporary.

Explaining technical stuff to non-technical people helped me to explain more effectively complex architectures to my peers



# How to know if a manager career is not for you:

1. You keep finding excuses to code
2. You try to automate everything
3. You secretly hate business meetings

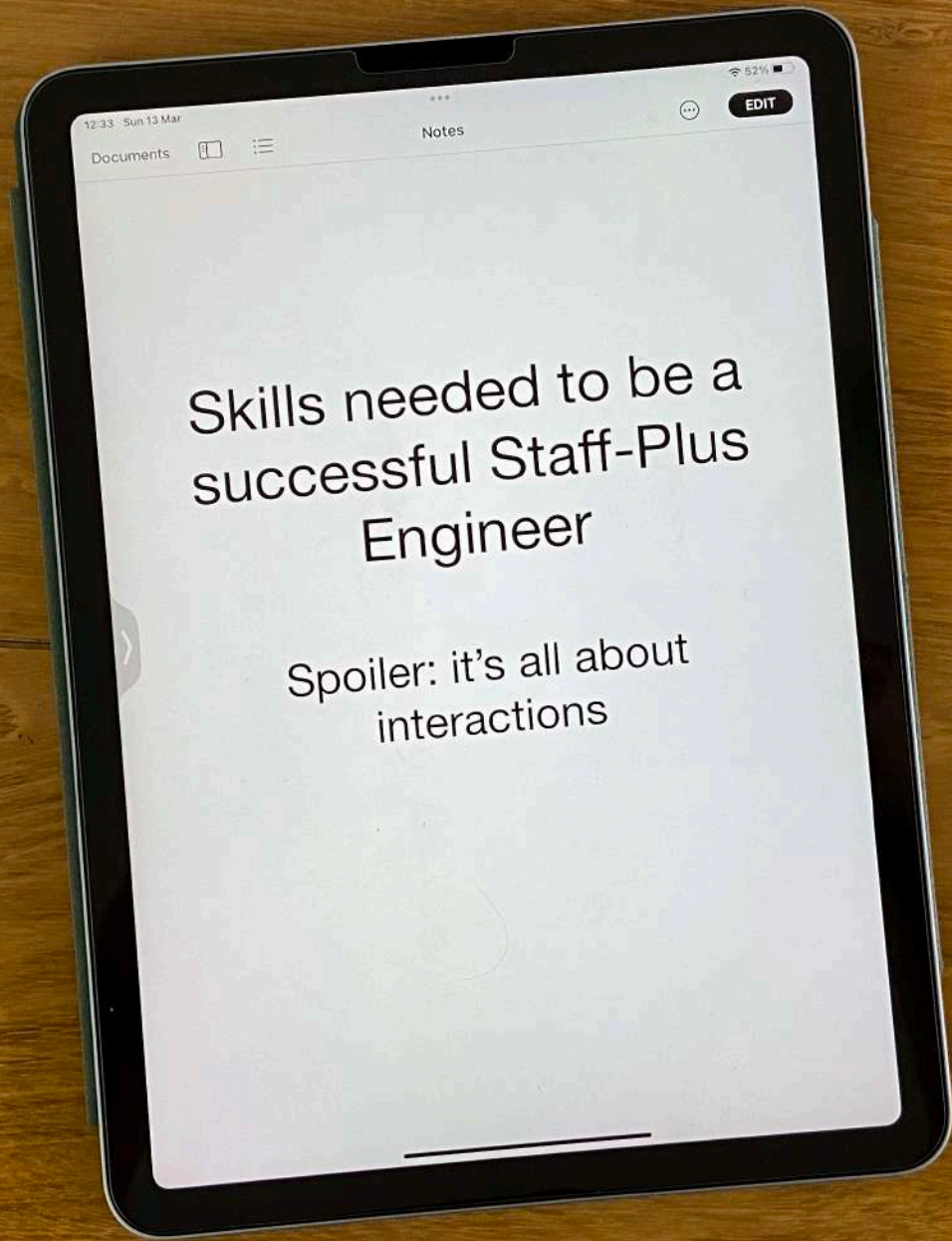




Back to the  
technical  
path







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# Skills needed to be a successful Staff-Plus Engineer

Spoiler: it's all about  
interactions



Great technical  
skills

Understand  
business needs

Make the team  
better

Interdepartmental  
communication

A chalkboard with a wooden frame containing handwritten text and a large arrow pointing from the bottom-left to the top-right. The text is arranged in a staircase pattern, with each step higher and further to the right than the previous one. The arrow starts at the bottom-left and points towards the top-right, following the general direction of the text.





Coding solo  
does not  
generate as  
much impact  
as making the  
team code  
excellent



Follow the process you  
created for the team

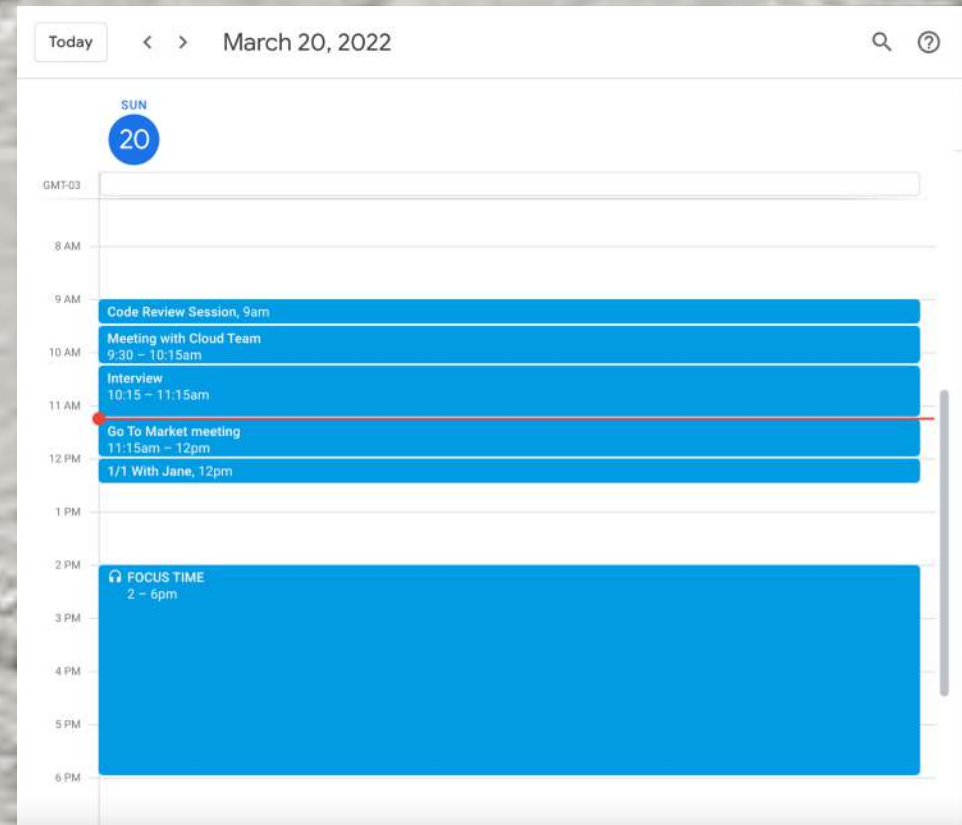
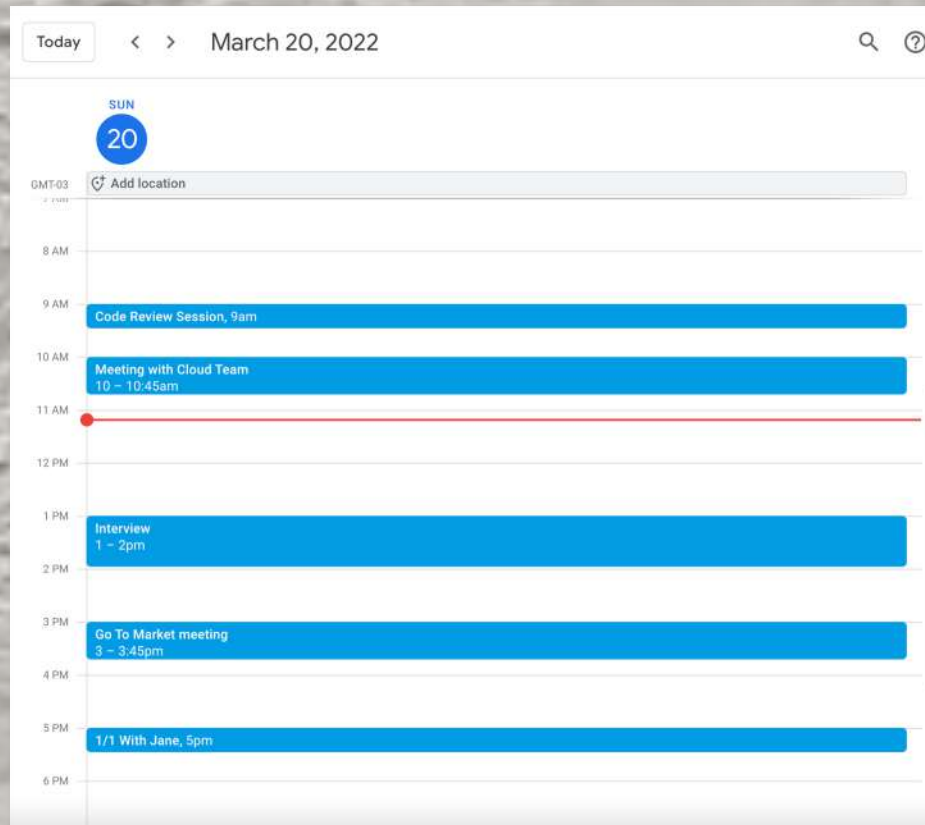
FOLLOW ME

Where to?

Why?



# Block your calendar for focus time








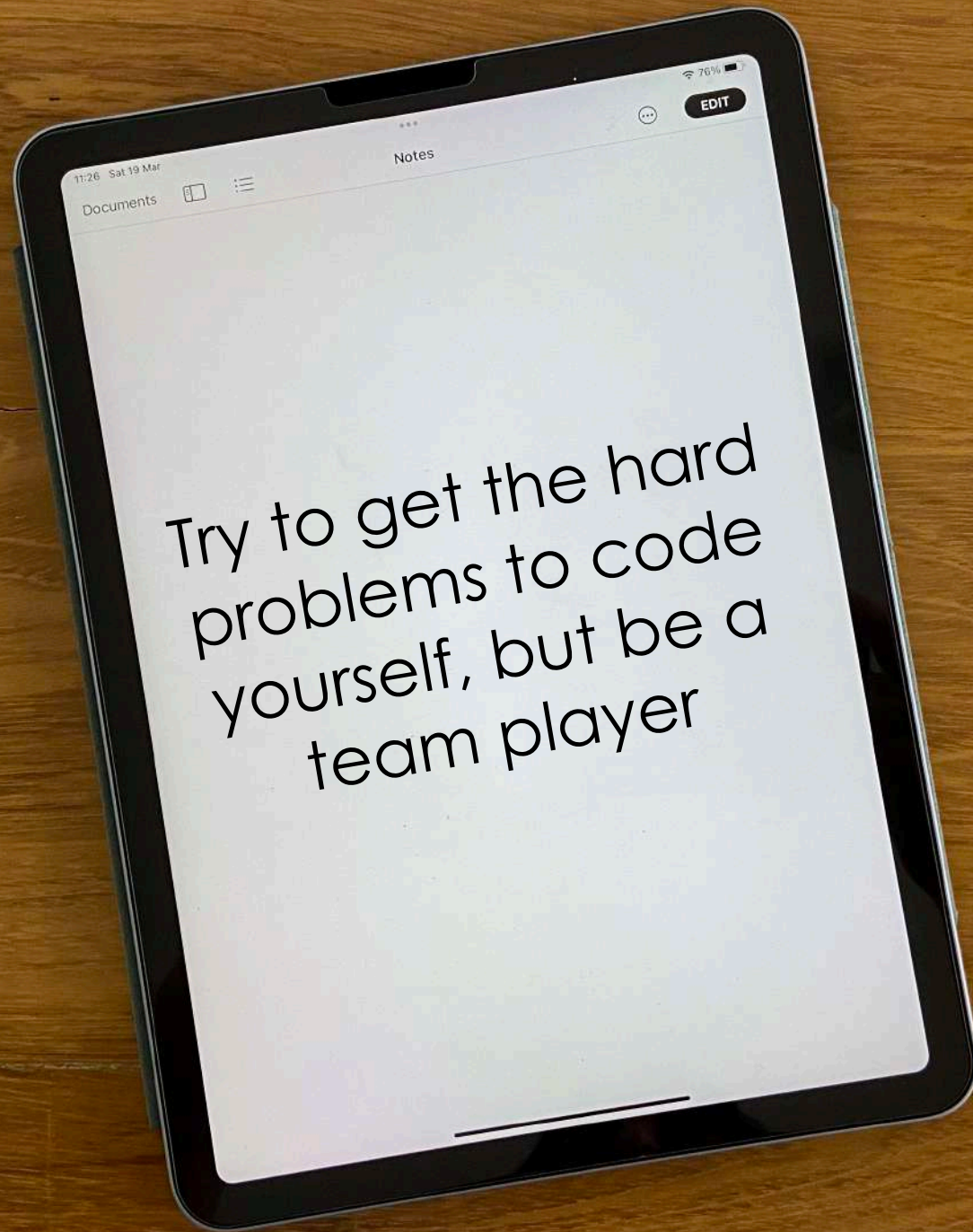
Be sincere and  
direct, but be  
gentle



A black and white photograph showing the silhouette of a person sitting on a ledge or window sill at night. The person is holding a cup and looking out towards a cityscape with many lights. The scene is dimly lit, with the primary light source being the city lights outside, which create a bokeh effect. A semi-transparent grey box is overlaid on the right side of the image, containing white text.

Deal with the Leader  
Loneliness: try to have a  
pair to talk about  
frustrations, problems  
and achievements





Try to get the hard  
problems to code  
yourself, but be a  
team player



# Be predictable and reduce the team stress

I need to talk to you. Can we talk Monday 9am?



VS



I need to talk to you about that bug you found. I had an idea. Can we talk Monday 9am?



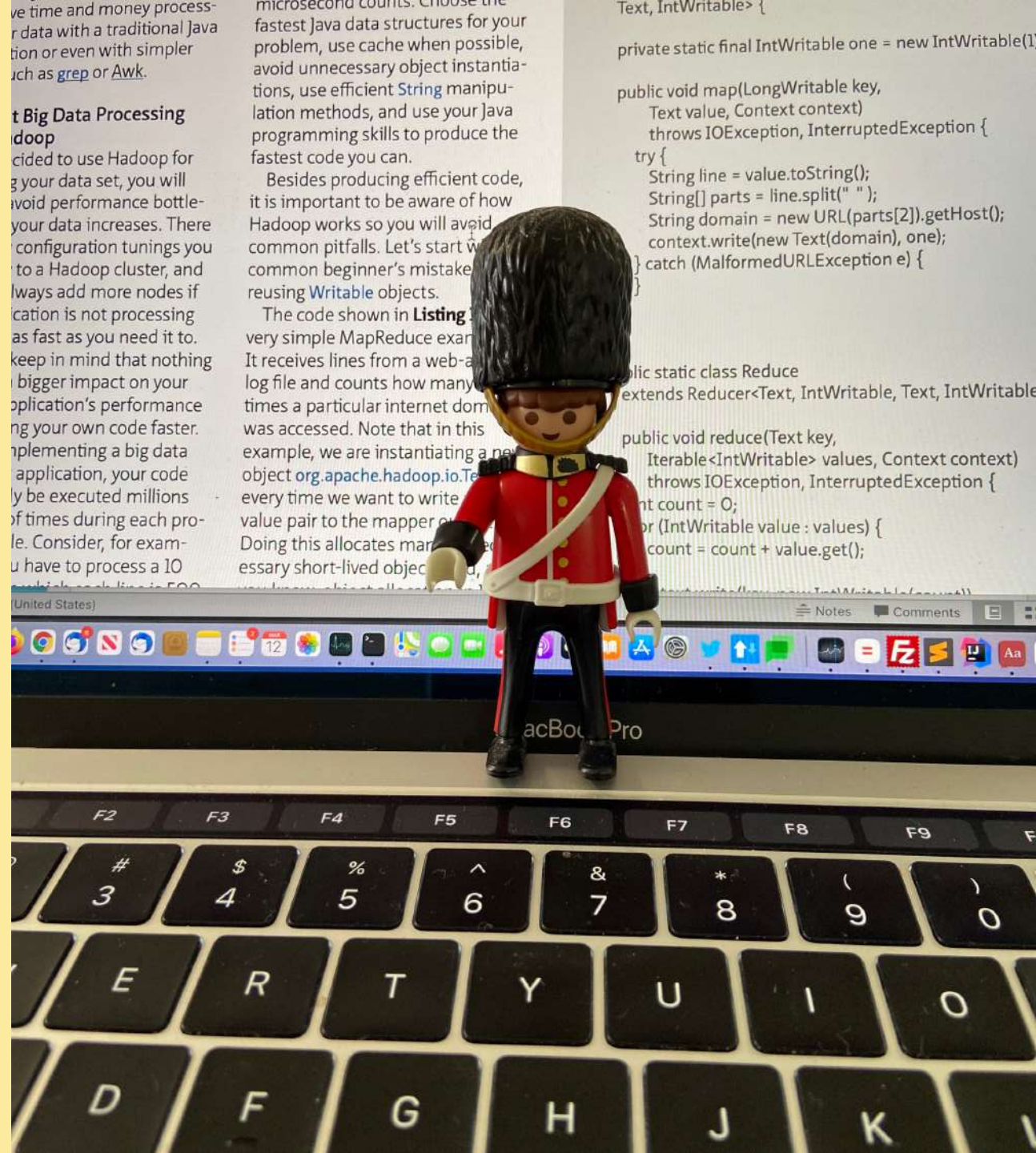




Experience and  
time will teach  
you how to deal  
with difficult  
situations



# Creating a Staff-Plus Engineer-friendly company





Incentivise people  
to stay in the  
technical path,  
providing adequate  
compensation and  
status





Provide leadership  
and  
communication  
training





Understand what really matters to technical professionals and value that

Code quality

Conferences

Creativity







Let people know  
your company  
values technical  
careers



- We are living the biggest skills shortage in history
- We have huge technical challenges ahead
- We can't afford to lose our most experienced engineers





The future of our industry depends on how we find and foster our technical leadership





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