

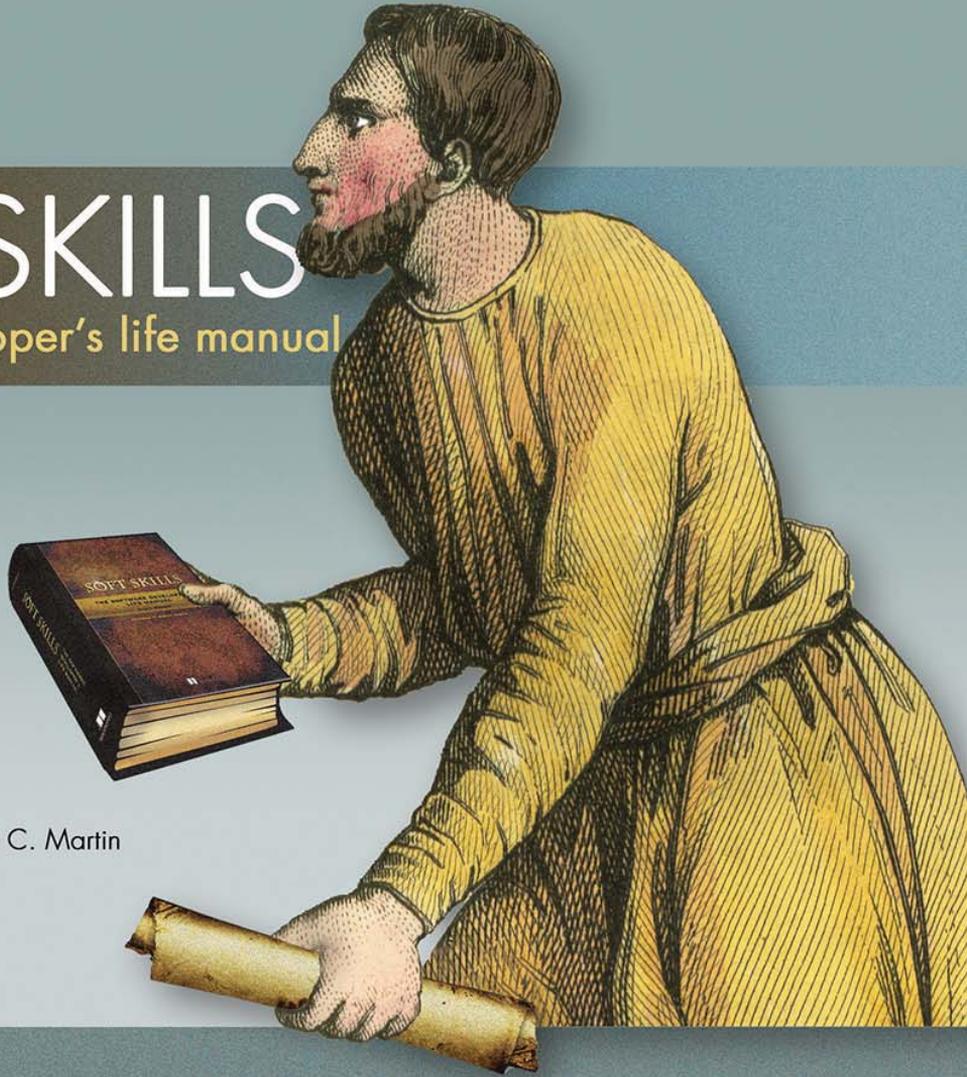
SAMPLE CHAPTER

# SOFT SKILLS

The software developer's life manual

John Z. Sonmez

Forewords by  
Scott Hanselman and Robert C. Martin





# *Soft Skills*

by John Z. Sonmez

## **Chapter 1**

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# Why this book is unlike any book you've ever read

Most software development books are about...software development—this one isn't. There are plenty of books out there about writing good code and using various technologies, but I've been hard-pressed to find a book that told me how to be a good software developer.

When I say “good software developer,” I'm not talking about being good at writing code, solving problems, or hacking out unit tests. Instead, I'm talking about being a good software developer in terms of managing your career, reaching your goals, and enjoying your life. Sure, all those other skills are important, but I'm going to assume that you can go elsewhere to figure out how to implement a good sorting algorithm in C++ or write the kind of code that doesn't make the next person who maintains it want to run you over with their car.

This book isn't about what you can do. This book is about...you. That's right. It's about your career, your life, your body, your mind, and—if you believe there is such a thing—your soul. Now, I don't want you to think I'm some kind of lunatic. I'm not a transcendentalist monk sitting on the floor meditating while smoking Peyote leaves, trying to help you ascend to a higher state of consciousness. On the contrary, I think you'll find I'm a pretty down-to-earth kind of guy who just happens to think that being a software developer is about a whole lot more than writing code.

I embrace a holistic approach to software development. This means that I think that if you want to be a better software developer—a better

anything, really—you need to focus on the entire person, not just one or two areas of your life.

That's both where this book came from and what it's designed to do. Now, obviously I can't cover everything there is to cover about life in this short book—nor would I have the experience or wisdom to tackle such a broad subject—but what I can do with this book is focus on the main areas of a software developer's life that I have some experience and expertise in and that will probably benefit you the most.

In the pages of this book you'll find quite a few seemingly unrelated topics strung together, but there is some semblance of reasoning behind this madness. This book is divided into seven sections, each focusing on a different aspect of your life as a software developer. If you wanted to categorize and group these sections it would be easiest to look at them as career, mind, body, and spirit.

We'll start off by talking about your career, because I feel that this is one of the most important areas to focus on for most software developers. I've found that very few software developers really give much thought to actively managing their career. In section 1, "Career," I'm going to help remedy that problem—at least in your case—as I teach you exactly how you can actively manage your career to reach the outcome you're looking for, whether that may be climbing the corporate ladder, starting your own consulting business, or even becoming an entrepreneur and creating your own product. I've done all three, and I've interviewed countless software developers who have as well, so you'll learn from our collective mistakes and avoiding some of the black eyes we got along the way. I'll also cover some important skills you need to have regardless of your career goal, like creating an eye-catching resume, mastering interviews, working remotely, and getting those good ol' people skills everyone is talking about these days.

In section 2, "Marketing yourself", we'll touch on a topic that's near and dear to my own heart—selling yourself. "Marketing"—how does that word make you feel? Most software developers get uncomfortable and possibly a bit queasy when I mention the word, but by the end of this section, you'll get a whole new appreciation for the word and

understand why it's so important. Everyone is a salesperson; some of us just do a lousy job of selling. In this section, I'll help you learn how to become a better salesperson and to know exactly what it is you're selling. This won't involve any slimy tactic or sending spam mail offering get-rich-quick schemes. Instead, it will contain practical advice about how to build a personal brand, how to create a successful blog, and how to get your name out there by speaking, teaching, writing, and a whole bunch of other ways you've probably never even considered. With these skills in place, you'll be able to take what you learned from section 1 and multiply it to achieve an even greater result.

With the career stuff out of the way, it will be time to transition into the realm of your mind, when we get to section 3, "Learning." Learning is a critical part of any software developer's life. I probably don't need to tell you that one of the most common things a software developer or any IT professional does is learn. Learning how to learn, or rather how to teach yourself, is one of the most valuable skills you can acquire, because the skill of self-teaching is a skill that literally enables you to do just about anything you can imagine. Unfortunately, most of the educational systems we've had forced upon us while growing up are broken, because they rely on a false premise that says you must have a teacher to learn and that learning only flows in one direction. I'm not saying teachers or mentors aren't important, but in this section, I'll show you how to first rely on your own abilities and common sense mixed with a little courage and curiosity to achieve a greater result than you can by listening to a boring lecture and furiously scribbling down notes. I'll take you through the 10-step self-learning process I developed over my career and the same process that helped me learn everything I needed to know in record time to produce over 50 complete online developer training courses in just over two years for an online training company, Pluralsight. I'll also cover some critical topics like finding a good mentor, being a mentor, and whether or not you need a traditional education and degree to be successful.

Continuing with the theme of mind, section 4, "Productivity," is all about—you guessed it—being more productive. This section is designed to kick you in the behind and put your butt in gear. Productivity is a

great struggle for many software developers and it's one of the single biggest things that hold you back from being as successful as you can be. You can have everything else fine-tuned in your life, but if you don't know how to overcome the hurdles of procrastination, disorganization, and just plain laziness, you'll have a hard time getting out of first gear. I've done my fair share of gear-grinding, but I eventually figured out a system that has me cruising down the highway at top speed. In this section, I'll share that system with you. I'll also tackle some difficult topics like burnout, watching too much TV, and finding motivation to dig in and do some plain old-fashioned hard work.

In section 5, "Financial," we'll handle one more mental topic that often gets completely ignored, personal finance. You can be the most successful software developer in the world, but if you can't effectively manage all that money you're making, some day you might end up on a street corner holding up a sign that says "Will code for food." In this section, I'll take you on a wild ride through the world of economics and personal finance and give you the basics you need to know to be able to make smart financial decisions and actually start planning out your financial future. I'm not a financial planner or professional stock trader, but in addition to being a software developer, I've been a professional real estate investor since I was 18, so I have a pretty good idea of what I'm talking about. We won't go too far into this topic, because the topic is deep enough to fill volumes of books, but I'll teach you the basics of managing your income, how the stock market really works, how to do real estate investing, and avoiding debt. As an additional bonus, I'll share with you my story and how I used these principles to effectively retire at the age of 33 without hitting it big selling a startup. (It's really not that hard and just about anyone can do it.)

Now we get to the fun part and work on your body. Are you ready for boot camp? In section 6, "Fitness," I'll teach you everything you need to know about how to lose fat, gain muscle, and get in shape. Most software developers I know are overweight, have poor health, and feel powerless to do anything about it. Well, knowledge is power, and as a software developer who has competed in bodybuilding competitions and hosted a podcast about fitness for programmers, I'm excited to

share what I've learned to equip you with the knowledge you need to finally take control of your life. In this section, I'll take you through the basics of diet and nutrition and explain how what you eat affects your body. I'll also show you how to set up a successful fitness plan and diet to lose weight, gain muscle, or do both. I'll even cover some tech-specific topics like standing desks and fitness gear for geeks.

Finally, in section 7, "Spirit," we'll head into the metaphysical world and look for the illusive "ghost in the machine." Even though the title is "Spirit," don't let this section fool you; I'll give you some real, practical advice about topics that affect your emotional state and attitude. I suppose you could call this the self-help section of the book—although I'm not particularly fond of that phrase. In this section, I'll focus mainly on helping you rewire your brain to create the positive attitude necessary for success. We'll also briefly cover love and relationships, because this area is a difficult one for many of those who excel in technology. I'll also give you my personal success book list: a list of books I've compiled over the years by simply asking every famous or hypersuccessful person I've ever met to tell me the one book they'd recommend everyone read.

So go ahead and make yourself comfortable, give your analytical mind the day off for a change, and get ready to dive into a quite different book about software development.

# SOFT SKILLS

## The software developer's life manual

John Z. Sonmez

For most software developers, coding is the fun part. The hard bits are dealing with clients, peers, and managers, staying productive, achieving financial security, keeping yourself in shape, and finding true love. This book is here to help.

*Soft Skills: The software developer's life manual* is a guide to a well-rounded, satisfying life as a technology professional. In it, developer and life coach John Sonmez offers advice to developers on important "soft" subjects like career and productivity, personal finance and investing, and even fitness and relationships.

Arranged as a collection of 71 short chapters, this fun-to-read book invites you to dip in wherever you like. A Taking Action section at the end of each chapter shows you how to get quick results. *Soft Skills* will help make you a better programmer, a more valuable employee, and a happier, healthier person.

### WHAT'S INSIDE

- Boost your career by building a personal brand
- John's secret ten-step process for learning quickly
- Fitness advice to turn your geekiness to your advantage
- Unique strategies for investment and early retirement

*John Sonmez* is a developer, teacher, and life coach who helps technical professionals boost their careers and live a more fulfilled life.



"Useful, practical, and actionable advice on a wide array of topics."

—From the Foreword  
by Scott Hanselman

"Conveys a message that every software developer (and everybody else, for that matter) ought to hear."

—From the Foreword by  
Robert C. Martin (Uncle Bob)

"Stop coding for a few hours and read this book! Your code—and your life—will be much better."

—lonel Condor, SDL

"A pragmatic and holistic view of software development."

—Javier Muñoz Mellid, Igalia

"A career coach in a book."

—Heather Campbell, Kainos

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