

The Truth Be Told

Adrian Kosmaczewski

2008-01-22

Reg describes 99% of all available programming jobs with incredible sincerity:

You do a clerk's job, you settle for a clerk's working conditions and wages, but you take solace in the thought that you are somehow more than a clerk, because you have a university degree and the dental technician who cleans your teeth doesn't.

Only everyone knows it's a sham, especially the hiring manager who puts "University degree required" in the job advertisement. He wants to hire a clerk, someone who will work long hours doing as they're told in a top-down, hierarchal command structure. Does that job sound like there is any Science involved? Of course not, everyone knows that, it's why the industry is trying to weed all of the Science out of a Computer Science degree.

I do not have a university degree. Heck, I started university 4 times and finished none (Physics, Economics, Marketing and even Computer Science! :) I have been refused jobs because of this (particularly at the beginning), but I have been given jobs because of this too (particularly lately). Having some experience in your CV pays off; the hard thing is to start without that "paper".

As a matter of fact, I'm doing an online Master's degree right now, which I will finish this year, and I'm actually quite happy to have started. I've been able, in the past two years, to read books and papers that I had not heard about; I could understand some underlying issues in Software Engineering, both from technical and social points of view; I can understand more, I can learn more.

But, the truth be told, I'm also doing it to have that "paper" hanging on the wall. I know it's silly, but I want to take that step too, and that's why I've changed careers so many times. However, that is a secondary thing for me: what I am looking is something else altogether; a bit of guidance in my own learning path. I have followed an unusual way in my career, and looking backwards I'm happy to have done that (mind you, it was not at all consciously!). That's why the 6 books and the new programming language every year. It's all part of the same pattern.

Of course, this has worked out for me, and your mileage may vary. I know excel-

lent developers both with and without degrees, and also horrible professionals with and without them. Some people need a physical teacher in front of them, while I prefer to learn alone.

A degree, like any decision that you take in life, should mean something to us, and in that sense, I find Reg's arguments enlightening.