Applying the Toolkit Approach to Career Development

Building Your I.T. Career: A Complete Toolkit for a Dynamic Career in Any Economy is a comprehensive IT career planning and development resource that has become increasingly popular within college and university IT/MIS/CIS programs. Instructors have found that the book provides a structured format for their students to build the necessary soft skills and effectively navigate the technology career marketplace. To facilitate the use of the *Toolkit* book in their classrooms, instructors requested that the author develop this discussion guide.

The guide is meant to prompt the application of strategies and techniques covered in the book that make up the "Toolkit Approach" to career development. Key concepts covered in each chapter of the Toolkit are highlighted within a set of questions in this guide. The questions encourage discussion for further understanding and sharing of ideas among the students (the notion of personal networking is therefore beginning to be developed and practiced in the classroom environment.)

Whether you are teaching programming, a general CIS course, networking, systems management, or other IT related disciplines, the lessons taught in the book and discussion guide will be a valuable addition to your student's knowledgebase. Each section of the book and the discussion guide adds to your student's personal "toolkit" of skills, increasing their overall employability.

You will find that the questions provide excellent material for classroom discussions as well as individual student reflection. The responses may also be integrated into a student's portfolio. The questions are presented in such a manner that students will learn about themselves and others as they prepare their answers. The discussion questions will help instructors convey to their students the importance of career development and planning. This, in turn, will effectively help the school increase student job placement.

Whether your school wishes to increase student internship participation, school-to-work program success, or better meet federal and state placement requirements, *Building Your I.T. Career* and discussion guide can help. Achieving these objectives also helps in positioning and marketing the value of your school's IT/CIS/MIS programs.

How to Use This Discussion Guide

The discussion guide is provided as a Word document and the questions are also provided to you as a PowerPoint presentation. These formats allow you to modify and customize to fit your particular course and to best meet the needs of your students and program goals.

Building Your I.T. Career is a five-section book covering various career development ideas, strategies, and techniques. This discussion guide breaks up the questions and activities similarly into 5 sections.

The material can be covered over five days or five weeks. You can assign some questions or sections for student self-assessment and concentrate on others in the classroom.

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If time is a critical factor, we recommend focusing on Parts I, II, and III. In particular, the following concepts and chapters are critical for student career preparation:

- Chapter 2, "Career Building Defined"

- Chapter 7, "Communication Skills"

- Chapter 8, "Technical Skills"

- Chapter 11, "Breaking into IT"

- Chapter 12, "Building an Active Contact List"

- Chapter 14, "The Interview"

- Chapter 17, "Your Career And Social Media"

- Chapter 22, "Concept Over Process"

As the instructor, you can choose which topics are most critical for your students and the time to spend on each section and question. Additionally, you can determine how best to integrate these discussions into your current curriculum and class syllabus. To assist you with this, here are two possible scenarios:

- **Career Workshops—**In the career workshop, you would cover the information in either one or two class sessions. The students would be assigned to read the book, or the chapters you have deemed most critical, prior to the workshop.

- **Weekly Discussion—**The other method for covering the discussion material is as a short (15–30 minute) discussion that takes place at the end of the last class of the week. Students would be assigned any reading materials or necessary prep at the prior week's discussion.

The discussion guide can also be used as a syllabus for an entire capstone IT career course. This effectively allows you to use *Building Your I.T. Career* as more than a supplemental text. It can be used as the core text for such a course focused on employability.

Of course, your utilization of *Building Your I.T. Career* and this discussion guide will be dictated by the goals of your class and available time. Do not feel that each question must be discussed in detail. In fact, the discussion guide was developed with a high-degree of flexibility to allow you, the instructor, to pick and choose the questions and sections most pertinent to your students.

Instructor Feedback

Every effort has been made to provide you with a comprehensive discussion guide to help you guide your students into rewarding IT careers. However, you are the best gauge of what works with your students. If you find a particular topic has been well received or if there is a topic that is not thoroughly addressed, please let us know so that we can add the ideas into future discussion guides.

To facilitate this sharing of information, the author of *Building Your I.T. Career,* Matthew Moran, has established a special instructor feedback forum at http://itcareertoolkit.com/forum

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where you can post your ideas and see what other instructors are doing. You may also send your ideas to guide@itcareertoolkit.com.

Preparing for Your Class

To help you plan for your discussion, *Building Your I.T. Career* book has two valuable components: "Chapter Overview" and "Actions & Ideas." They provide a way for you to gain a quick familiarity with the material in each chapter.

> **Chapter Overview—**Every chapter includes a one to two paragraph introduction to key concepts

> **Actions & Ideas—**Every chapter concludes with an "Actions & Ideas" section. These are questions or activities students can do on their own if they choose (or you assign).

In this discussion guide, each section includes

- Pre-class preparation instructions for both you and for your students.

- A series of questions per chapter to prompt classroom discussion of the topics.

- Page references to definitions or concepts or reference to the supplemental material available on the companion website are included so you can easily turn to that material in the book.

It is important to understand that these questions or ideas are prompts for further discussion. They are not meant to curtail additional discussion topics but instead to guide and direct discussion activities for the sake of maximum productivity. You can choose how deeply to cover each section or paragraph.

Classroom Discussion Guide

Part I: An Introduction to Career Building

> **Instructor prep for class:** Read Part I, Chapters 1–4 of *Building Your I.T. Career* and review the discussion questions below, highlighting the ones you want to use for class discussion.

> **Student prep for class:** Have your students read Part I, Chapters 1–4 of *Building Your I.T. Career* and complete the "Action & Ideas" section at the end of each chapter. Also have them review the PowerPoint presentation, "The Value-Added Technologist," on the companion website.

> **In class:** Read the section titled, "What Is the Toolkit Approach to Career Development," from the Introduction (pages: xxi–xxii). Introduce your first selected discussion question.

Chapter 1 – The Toolkit Approach to Career Development

- Most of the ideas covered in *The Toolkit* are simple but often overlooked. Many professionals look for secret strategies to help them grow their careers? How does the knowledge that well executed planning, not secret strategies, encourage you?

- While we cannot control luck, we can control preparedness. What "lucky" situations might arise during a career that proper preparation allows you take advantage of?

- IT as an industry is maturing. How does this affect your career planning?

- What does a "career toolkit" look like to you? What tools do you currently have? Which ones are missing or need maintenance?

Chapter 2 – Career Building Defined

- Read the definition of a career (page 11): Does that broaden your understanding or idea of a career? How does this understanding help you build your career?

- How does the builder analogy (pages 11–12) help you understand the idea of a career toolkit?

- What is your idea of a career plan or career planning?

- Why do the highly-specialized areas of IT (pages 13–14) help create a "tool-driven mindset?"

- Why is it important to *not* be defined by the title you hold or your current role/position? (page 14)

- Careers are non-linear (page 15). Discuss what this means and why it is important to career development?

- A working plan makes tedious and unrewarding jobs bearable (pages 15-16). What does this mean and how does it help you grow your career?

Chapter 3 – Information Technology: A Great Career

- How did past industry excesses (pages 19-20) lead to a more negative perspective on IT careers?

- Of the options listed that make IT a great career, which is most appealing to you? (page 22)

- What additional factors make IT a great career choice for you?

- How critical a factor is outsourcing for those pursuing an IT career? (page 27)

Chapter 4 – Defining Yourself: Aptitudes and Desires

- How important are personal satisfaction and interest to you when selecting IT as a career choice?

- As you look at the factors for selecting a particular job, which is most important to you? Which is least important? Are there others you have or would consider important?

- *The Toolkit* warns against *analysis paralysis*—the inability to make a choice between two competing jobs—how can you avoid this situation? (page 43)

Part II: Filling Your Toolkit

Instructor prep for class: Read Part II, Chapters 5–10 of *Building Your I.T. Career* and review the discussion questions, highlighting the ones you want to use for class discussion.

Student prep for class: Have your students read Part II, Chapters 5–10 and complete the "Action & Ideas" section at the end of each chapter. Have each student prepare a resume and a cover letter for use in the discussions and based on the respective chapters in this section. Have the students look at the sample cover letters and resumes provided on the companion website.

In class: Introduce your first selected discussion question. For Chapters 9 and 10, have students pair up or organize small groups to trade and review their cover-letters and resumes.

Chapter 5 –Self-Assessment

- Review the four self-assessment questions (pages 50-51). If you are a full-time student, apply them to your studies and your instructors.

- Do you feel your answers reflect a positive self-assessment? If not, what can you do to change that?

- Are the questions valuable as a self-assessment tool? What might you add to your self-assessment?

Chapter 6 - Attitude

- How important do you view a positive and proactive attitude in long-term career development?

- How do you maintain a positive attitude?

- Have you ever held an "us versus them" attitude toward management where you worked? Do you believe that it is warranted? Have you met other employees with such an attitude? How does it hinder career advancement? (page 58)

- What is an attitude of "personal value?" (page 60) What is your current strongest value? What do you think will be your strongest value in 5 years? In 10 years?

- What does career "ownership" mean? (pages 61-62)

Chapter 7 – Communication Skills

- How strong do you rank your combined (written and verbal) communication skills? What about written alone? Verbal?

- Why are communication skills so critical for career success? (page 68)

- Discuss the "well-crafted paragraph"—how does this idea simplify the written communication process? (page 71)

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- Of the rules listed in conversation, which do you find most critical? Are there others you could add to this list? (pages 73-74)

- If you had to give an important presentation to management, would you feel comfortable? If not, what might you do over the next two years to make you feel more comfortable?

Chapter 8 – Technical Skills

- Prior to this chapter did you believe recognizing the "next hot technology" was critical for career success? How did that change after reading the chapter?

- What is meant by *transcendent skills*? Why are they important? (page 81)

- What are some important ideas you can use to help reduce the time and anxiety in learning new technical skills? (pages 82-85)

Chapter 9 – The Cover Letter

- Does your cover letter include a significant accomplishment? (page 91) If not, what can you add so that it does?

- Is your cover letter clear and to the point?

- Review a peer's cover letter and provide feedback based on the previous two questions.

- Tell them one thing you like about his or her cover letter. Tell them one thing you would change about his or her cover letter.

Chapter 10 – The Résumé

- Does your résumé demonstrate how you provide value with your skills?

- How long is your résumé? How long do you believe it should be?

- Review a peer's résumé and provide feedback based on the previous two questions.

- Tell them one thing you like about their résumé. Tell them one thing you would change about their résumé.

- How important do you feel your résumé is in your overall career development plan? (pages 95-97)

Part III: Putting Your Toolkit to Use

Instructor prep for class: Read Part III, Chapters 11–17 of *Building Your I.T. Career* and review the discussion questions, highlighting the ones you want to use for class discussion.

Student prep for class: Have your students read Part III, Chapters 11–17 and complete the "Action & Ideas" section at the end of each chapter. Have the students print out the "Networking and Opportunity Tracking Form" from the companion website.

In class: Introduce your first selected discussion question.

Chapter 11 – Breaking into IT

- Have you ever run into the "need experience to get experience dilemma?" Did you overcome it? If so, how? If not, how might this chapter's strategies on seeking "opportunity over position" change that? (page 109)

- What are some ways to build your IT career outside of a "traditional" IT department or role? (pages 110-113)

- How do the non-traditional avenues into IT open possibilities you were not aware of before? (pages 113-115)

Chapter 12 – Building an Active Contact List

- How important do you view your professional network?

- How strong is your professional network?

- Are your professional contacts spread between IT and in other industries?

- What are some techniques you need to master to strengthen your professional network?

- How do you currently track your contacts?

- How does sharing opportunity help build your professional network?

- Discuss how you might use the "Networking and Opportunity Tracking Form" you've printed out (from the companion website). How will this form help you build your network of contacts?

Chapter 13 – The Job Search

- Prior to reading this chapter, what were your primary or planned sources for finding available jobs or opportunities?

- What affect does a directed and proactive career search have on your attitude? (page 136)

- Discuss the differences between the standard "passive" job search and the proactive job search? (page 142)

Chapter 14 – The Interview

- What are your biggest fears or challenges with the interview process? How do the Toolkit ideas alleviate those fears or challenges?

- Of the interviewer styles listed, which do you feel is most difficult? Which do you prefer? (page 151)

- Questions about self-assessment and weaknesses pose serious problems for interviewees; how can you best answer these? What other difficult questions might you face?

- Why should you follow up before you are selected? Why should you follow up if you are not selected? (pages 157-158)

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Chapter 15 – Salary Negotiations and Employment Agreements

- When should pay/salary negotiations start? (page 161)

- What are *your* minimum requirements or considerations (refer to the list in Chapter 4 – page 35, for ideas) when you start negotiating with a potential employer?

Chapter 16 – On-the-Job Promotion

- What do you consider the most important factor(s) for on-the-job promotion?

- What is your first step when dealing with a difficult boss? (page 175)

- Of the types of bosses discussed which is the most desirable? The least desirable? (pages 175-176)

- How does *The Toolkit* recommend dealing with difficult coworkers or managers? (pages 177–180)

Chapter 17 – Your Career and Social Media

- Do you currently use social media professionally, personally, or both?

- What are your thoughts on employers researching candidates by viewing their social media profiles?

- Discuss "The Seven People You Cannot Be Online" (pages 186-189). Do you recognize these personalities? Have you been one of them?

- What are ways you currently (or could in the future) share knowledge and opportunity across your social networks? (pages 189-190) How does this help your career?

Part IV: More Options to Build Your Career

Instructor prep for class: Read Part IV, Chapters 18–20 of *Building Your I.T. Career* and review the discussion questions, highlighting the ones you want to use for class discussion.

Student prep for class: Have your students read Part IV, Chapters 18–20 and complete the "Action & Ideas" section at the end of each chapter. If you will be discussing consulting, have your students print the document "Tips on Winning Your Client" from the companion website.

In class: Introduce your first selected discussion question.

Chapter 18 – Telecommuting

- Is working at home something you would enjoy? Have you done any telecommuting in the past?

- What do you consider the single biggest drawback to working from home? The single biggest benefit?

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Chapter 19 – Consulting

- Have you ever considered consulting? If so, what about consulting interests you? If not, explain why?

- After reading the chapter, do you consider consulting a more viable career option? Less viable? Explain.

- Understanding that sales and marketing is critical, discuss the "Tips on Winning Your Client" document (found on the companion website.) What do you consider the three most important tips for winning clients?

Chapter 20 – Management

- Would you like to have a career in management?

- What would you consider to be the most important management idea or skill presented in this chapter?

Part V: The Value-Added Technologist

Instructor prep for class: Read Part V, Chapters 21–28 of *Building Your I.T. Career* and review the discussion questions, highlighting the ones you want to use for class discussion.

Student prep for class: Have your students read Part V, Chapters 21–28 and complete the "Action & Ideas" section at the end of each chapter. Have them create a sample budget and income plan using the worksheets on the companion website. Instruct them that the data can be real or made-up but that it will be discussed in class.

In class: Introduce your first selected discussion question.

Chapter 21 – Make Yourself Indispensable

- *The Toolkit* places a premium on the value you bring the organization(s) you serve; how do you define value?

- Where can you better apply standards in your computing practices, in your studies, in your career—and how will they enhance your career development?

- What is a peer knowledge network? How do they help your career? (page 235)

Chapter 22 – Concept Over Process

- Explain the difference between process-driven and concept-driven? Are there strengths in each? (page 246)

- Do you agree with the stated role of technology? If not, what additional roles would you add? (pages 247-248)

- What is the most valuable idea in "Concept Over Process"? How will it help your career?

Chapter 23 – The Role of Mentoring

- Do you have mentors who are not IT professionals? (page 262) How often do you correspond with them? Why are these "cross-industry" mentors important?

- Do you mentor anyone? What advice or insight do you have to offer?

- Describe the ideal mentor? (page 262)

Chapter 24 – Career Coaching

- If you had a personal career coach, what are the 1 or 2 most pressing concerns or questions you would like them to answer?

- Of the listed career coaching topics, which areas are you strong in and which areas could use some improvement? (page 267)

- Have you ever coached a peer at a job you've held? What made you effective in that role? (page 267)

- Could you see coaching as a part of your job or a future career goal? Why? Why not?

Chapter 25 – Financial Control

- Do you have a budget that allows you flexibility in your career choices?

- Have you identified salary objectives?

- Review the "Budget and the Income Planning Worksheet" on the companion website. How can their use help your career?

Chapter 26 – A Professional Blog

- Do you follow any blogs? If so, what makes them appealing to you?

- Do you have a blog or would you consider starting one? What topics would you blog about?

- Which of the concepts in the section, "Why You Should Blog," appeals to you? (pages 293-295)

- Have you ever used Wordpress?

- Discuss the differences between service-hosted or self-hosted Wordpress installs? (pages 298-299)

Chapter 27 – 12 Weeks to Profitable Consulting

- Profitable Consulting: What does the phrase mean to you? Do you have an income goals for your career?

- What type of content would you put into your first newsletter as a consultant? Why? (page 313)

- Outline a case-study as suggested in the chapter? Select a technical solution you've worked on as a student or one you've read about?
  (pages 317-318)

- How important is an established routine? Do you have a weekly routine? (page 321)

Chapter 28 – Be Proactive! Be Positive! Add Value! Share Opportunity!

- No Job Makes a Career, No Job Breaks a Career. What does this phrase mean to you? (page 332)

- "Staying Engaged With Your Career" lists several ideas to help you stay focused and motivated. Which of the items listed is most interesting to you? (pages 334-335)

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General Questions

- What is the single-most valuable idea or strategy you discovered in *The Toolkit*? How will it change your career for the better?

- What additional information might help you reach your professional/career goals?

- Where are you in your career development plans? Are you entry-level or a seasoned pro? Do you have a demarcation point—a time when you switched from one to the other?

- What does the term *career ownership* mean to you? Do you feel as though you own your career? If not, how can you change that?

- The Introduction presents the idea of you as the primary commodity of your career. What does that mean to you? How can this perspective help you in your career development efforts?

Additional Resources

Career/Job Sites		Training/Community
www.careerbuilder.com www.computerjobs.com www.craigslist.org www.dice.com www.guru.com www.hotjobs.com	www.jobmarketonline.com www.jobsahead.com www.jobsdb.com.ph www.jobsearch.org www.jobstreet.com www.monster.com www.timesjobs.com	www.cbtoolkit.com/forums www.tek-tips.com www.experts-exchange.com www.techrepublic.com www.securelyspeaking.com