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Ten Reasons You're a Software Developer
by Donna Davis

If we're totally honest, many of us consider quitting our jobs as developers, and even leaving the industry—sometimes on a daily basis. Pressure to meet aggressive deadlines, produce dispensable documentation, keep up with slippery technology, and deal with messy internal politics takes it's toll.

Usually no single event precipitates the nagging feeling of discontent. It's the cumulative affect of the daily grind—feeling as if our souls are being chipped away bit by bit. Matthew Gilbert describes the sentiment nicely in *Take This Job and Love It*: "Angels, we are certain, flee from the tedious details of our day-to-day routines."

I still remember the welcoming speech a computer science professor (who looked a lot like Coleridge's ancient mariner) gave his class of eager freshmen almost 20 years ago. It culminated in the ominous warning: "Find a another profession where you won't constantly beat your head against the wall."

The IT industry isn't unique in experiencing career frustration. Some professions, such as social work, are considered so stressful that burnout is expected within three years. Others present ethical dilemmas and confrontation with personal failure on a daily basis.

In early episodes of the television series *The Practice*, after a long day in court, when her efforts all seem to be in vain, District Attorney Helen Gamble regularly asks her coworker to give her The Speech. Her physical exhaustion and drained spirit are palpable. The coworker gives her The Speech. The camera pans out slowly as background music gradually overtakes the monotone voice reciting the noble but naïve reasons they were inspired to choose their difficult profession. The scene is a poignant reminder that we all struggle with professional frustration that cannot help but bleed over into our personal lives.

For all of the software developers out there, here is your speech—a reminder of ten reasons you chose to be a software developer.

1. After hours and sometimes days of slogging through a putrid mire of code, that moment of startling clarity—when all the pieces fall into place like a well ordered universe, and our programs work like they should—is the ultimate endorphin.
2. The experience of transforming a lifeless, dust-colored form into a working application—and proclaiming it good—may just be God's hand extended into the world of technological creation.
3. Re-engineering a business function—hopelessly clogged by reams of unnecessary paper and inefficient handling—is the sort of delicate, highly skilled

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surgery that restores blood flow to companies dying on the table of myopic convention.

4. Software developers are artists, using crude tools to render images, text, and logic on electronic palettes that transcend aesthetic appeal.
5. While we may never qualify for an Oscar, writing an application is like directing an epic film—with all it's scheduling, financial, and artistic drama.
6. Software developers provide the link between reality and science fiction—sending men to the moon and Mars—and back home again.
7. Often through sacrificial drudgery, software developers automate mindless, repetitive tasks for millions of workforce members, freeing them to make distinctly human contributions.
8. Software developers span the divide between supply and demand, scaling barriers of distance and culture to provide life-changing services.
9. With few exceptions, software developers are financially compensated for the professional static that comes with the territory. While money isn't everything, it's something—and many professionals (teachers, for instance) endure a lot for a little.
10. Amidst the throngs of miserable, disgruntled, you-can-never-do-enough-for-them users, there is that one smiling client whose face shines with genuine appreciation, letting us know that we make a difference.

When it comes to "pep talks," it's easy to listen (or read, as the case may be) with cynicism. We all have our share of professional scars. We can either dwell on them and let them destroy us or learn and grow stronger. While it has its share of flaws, the software development profession offers a brilliant glimpse of that place where logic and art—left brain and right brain—converge. As practitioners, we do ourselves a service by dwelling not on the negatives, but on the rare privileges of an extraordinary profession.

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