

SPOTLIGHT ON MASON CRAWFORD

SENIOR CONSULTANT
AT EMPIRED LTD.



Perth-born software development rising star, Mason Crawford, has sky-rocketed since launching his career as a graduate at Empired, reaching senior consultant level in less than four years. But working hard to get his technical skills to stellar level is only half his story. Mason landed his first job with almost no soft skills, grabbed every opportunity to develop his communication, teamwork and leadership capabilities and now he's leading the team and even has his sights on his boss's job.

“ Programming is a team sport in a very fast-moving field... What I really thrive on are those opportunities to pull everyone into a room and get them talking through a problem to find the solution. ”

Give us your bbq pitch. What do you do?

Although my job title is Senior Consultant, I'd still describe myself as a software engineer or developer. Most of my time is spent writing code for websites and applications. But they're not the kind that everyday people see or interact with in their day-to-day lives. They're enterprise-level, internal-facing software solutions that help organisations visualise and interact with their data to measure, track, report and run their business more effectively and efficiently. Often that involves working collaboratively with people within the organisation. And sometimes the solution isn't code at all. Sometimes it's about changing business processes.

Did you always plan to work in this industry?

I'm very lucky in the sense that I knew what I wanted to do by grade 6. When I was very young, I wanted to be a draughtsman or architect. I really liked the logical thinking involved in drawing house plans. But that required some level of artistic talent, and I soon realised I didn't have that. Then I caught a segment on TV about smart home technology back in the early noughties and I thought wow, that's really cool, software development is what I want to do. What I've ended up doing isn't a practical implementation of code like smart home tech, but it's like architecture in the digital space.

So, how did you get into software development?

My pathway had a bit of a hiccup. I started off OK, winning the Book award in grade 10 for computing and studying hard, but two months before my mid-term exams I had a motorcycle accident. I missed four weeks of class while recovering and ended up not being able to sit my maths, English and physics exams. That meant I didn't have the prerequisites to get into uni, so I did two and a half years at TAFE instead.

I had the skill set to get a job straight from TAFE, but back then I found employers were looking for uni graduates. So I enrolled at ECU, got my degree, and then applied to enter the graduate program at Empired. They're really open and focused on your technical skills rather than your study pathway, and more companies are starting to take that approach too now.

My first three weeks were full-on, but I loved it and management were impressed. After six months, I was working at associate consultant level and got promoted eight months later. I've really pushed to build on my experience, get more exposure and take on greater responsibility. So, my time in the role was never a factor in whether I got promoted and I've progressed really quickly.

How would you describe yourself?

You need to like solving problems to be a software developer. So that's a given. But career progression is self-paced. You can force your way forward

or take your time. And you can choose to move into a more specific technical role or a team leadership role. I'm definitely a force-my-way-forward-and-lead-the-team kind of person. When I came into the role as a graduate, I'd worked hard to develop good solid technical skills and I'd done a lot of self-learning, but I had practically no soft skills. Now I'd say my communication, teamwork and leadership skills have outpaced my technical skills and what I really thrive on are those opportunities to pull everyone into a room and get them talking through a problem to find the solution.

What do you love most about the industry?

I get to work with some really smart individuals every day. Programming is a team sport in a very fast-moving field. It's a lot of talking to others, getting their opinion on what you've done, how you could do it differently or better, and giving your opinion too. When I first started, I had more experience and knowledge of a brand new technology than the people I was working with who had 10-15 years' experience in consulting. But they listened to what I had to say. We all learn from and support each other.

What's the best part of your job?

The scope of the problems and the solutions to those problems are different every day. It might be implementing code. It might be talking with the client and convincing them that the solution is in changing business practices and processes rather than developing new software. And every time I land on the solution, no matter what it is, I get this rush in the ah-ha moment and exclaim out loud!

What's your best advice for anyone starting out?

Building a project is the best way to get your foot in the door. Find a problem in your life and solve it with code. Like tracking your workouts to see how fast you're building muscle tone. Or writing a program to give you an advantage in Dungeons & Dragons. It doesn't need to be a perfect solution – to an employer it speaks volumes about your desire to work in the industry. And once you're in the door, take every opportunity to ask questions and make suggestions. You won't always be right, but when you're wrong someone will always explain why and that's a valuable learning experience. There's no downside to speaking up.

And what's next for you?

I only just last month got promoted to senior developer and jokingly I said, right, how long till Practice Lead? That's my boss's role! So that's what I've got my sights on.

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