Bring IT On News

International Women's Day

Dearbhail Ervine - DevOps Engineer - First Derivatives

Ironically, I didn't enjoy the IT classes because they only focused on basic skills in Microsoft Word and Excel, so they were not challenging enough.

What has been your favourite job to date and why?
I can't pick a favourite job because I have enjoyed them all and have learned something different from each of them.

Best piece of advice you have received?
"Measure twice, cut once" or "Failure to plan is planning to fail".
The best piece of advice I received was at the start of my coding career and it was about the importance of quality and attention to detail. At that time I was trying to work quickly and as long as the solution "worked" I was happy with it. When my mentor reviewed my code he gave me feedback on scenarios that I had not considered which my solution could not handle and he helped me redesign a better more robust solution.

Planning is an area which is so vital to the success of a project. Throughout my career I have dealt with issues in systems that have occurred because a particular scenario was overlooked in the design or testing of the solution. An issue takes significantly more time and effort to resolve whenever it is in a live system.

Tell us a bit about your current job role?
At the moment I am part of a team that supports several live systems in a European bank. I am leading a big project to migrate a software system to a new environment which has a different operating system. This is challenging because the software is quite complex and needs to send and receive information to a number of different environments both internally within the bank and externally to 3rd party systems.

My team has to ensure that the systems that we support are working correctly and maintained. This involves carrying out daily status checks, reacting to automatic alerts and creating new automatic alerts to monitor processes in case they have problems. We work closely with a team that is based in the customer office to resolve issues and add additional functionality to the software where required.

What does a normal day look like in your job?
Most mornings start off with emails and a daily phone call with the team in the customer office, but the tasks that I carry out each day can vary quite a lot. When I first started in this role, I had to investigate and document all the component parts of the system and how they all fit together. I then created a plan and a structure for the tasks that needed to be completed and how the work could be broken down into smaller more manageable parts which I could delegate to other members of the team. Certain tasks require me to engage with other teams in the bank to help achieve them. A large part of the project will be testing that everything works as expected for different scenarios.

The rest of my team monitors and manages the majority of the incoming incidents for the systems which we support. I mentor and give advice on how to fix the more complicated issues or things that the team hasn't experienced before. Sometimes I help manage the workload if several urgent items need to be resolved.

What was your first job?
My first job was as a part-time sales associate for a high street jeweller when I was 16 and I worked there while I went through school and university. It was great to build my confidence with talking to new people, commercial awareness and learning sales and leadership skills which have come in extremely useful for my career in IT.

What was your favourite subject at school?
In school, physics and maths were my favourites.

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What are your top tips for getting into the IT industry?
Lots of people start to develop their IT skills through setting up their own computers, Wi-Fi routers, printers, phones, tablets etc and providing IT help to their friends and family.

I think the introduction of teaching coding in schools is fantastic provides a great opportunity to learn real skills that are applicable in a software developer role. There are also some amazing online resources out there for people who want to teach themselves how to code such as w3schools. Once you have the skillset, you can start creating your own programs and websites.

If coding isn't for you, there is a huge variety of other jobs in IT, ranging from graphic design, software testing, database administration, IT support, software sales etc. There are so many different routes into IT now too, because there is such a demand for skilled people in this industry and especially in Northern Ireland. I have worked with many people who started off on different career paths who ended up transitioning into IT.

IT is such a fast moving industry, are there any jobs/ roles that don't exist now that you are excited to see in the future?
I believe that evolution of artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning will have a huge impact on society in the future. Possibly similar to how the internet has changed our lives so much over the last 30 years. It will be interesting to see what new jobs and opportunities that will open up whenever the more tedious tasks can be taken over by machines.

Who is your role model and why?
I have been very fortunate in that I have worked closely with lots of amazing colleagues and mentors and have learned something different from each. The one that had the biggest impact that shaped me would probably be my first manager. She was an inspirational leader who wouldn't ask you to do something that she wouldn't do herself and she was honest, fair and open in her dealings with the entire team and with customers. She genuinely cared about her team and wanted to help and support them in their professional development and give them opportunities to grow.

What would you say to a young female who is contemplating pursuing a career in IT?
IT has an application in all sectors both public and private so it is a career where there is no shortage of jobs and room for advancement and promotion. It was definitely the right career for me, I find it so interesting and love the fact that there is such variety in the work that you can do and that it will evolve over time as the technologies advance and new ways to do things are discovered. There can also be a large amount of flexibility available once you get established depending on your employer and your role. This flexibility can be around working remotely and/or the hours that you work.

I think sometimes women can be put off a pursuing a career in an industry where there is a low ratio of females to males. I have to say that I have never felt that I have been treated differently or unfairly based on my gender. I believe that having a better mix of male and females on a team brings a bit more diversity in terms of experience and outlook which ultimately improves the team. Even though I have sometimes been the only female in an IT team, that team never operates in isolation and works closely with a business team which has a higher ratio of female to male team members. When looked as a larger group the gender ratio becomes more balanced.

I would also say that companies are valuing diversity more and more each day and are implementing programmes to support women in IT, so young females shouldn't be too worried about feeling excluded. For example, First Derivatives have launched a global FD Women's Network to connect with and support our female staff globally. They hold events regularly across our global offices to network and bring in inspiring guests.