

# The IT Developer's Life Cycle

---

Author: Anthony R. Reed, CPA, PMP

Originally published in *ComputerWorld* as a Special Report

Developers, like systems, go through a life cycle. It begins during college and ends with retirement. The shape and direction of a system changes during development, stabilizes during maintenance, and becomes obsolete during retirement, and so does a developer during this 11-phase life cycle:

**1. The Great Expectation Phase.** This phase occurs during a college student's senior year. He dreams of owning a sports car, living in a singles-only apartment complex, going to all the happy hours, and travelling around the world on a three-week vacation during the first year of employment. Expectations grow with each interview and job offer, and the student can't wait to graduate to that high-paying, secure technical job.

**2. The Rookie Phase.** The student graduates from college and is prepared for some real partying and working. However, he soon realizes that partying is difficult between 60-hour work weeks and 24-hour production support. But the company encourages the long hours by promising a promotion, pay increases, and an offsite user meeting or conference in an exotic location. A year – and no vacations – later, the promotion from trainee to developer and a raise are approved.

**3. The JINK (Joint Income, No Kids) Phase.** Somehow, the developer finds time to get married. As the long hours continue, the spouse becomes a “computer widow(er).” At first, as the developer learns that over time pay is nonexistent, he feels pressure to change jobs. However, he feels that another promotion is around the corner, so he decides to stay a little longer.

**4. The Bunny Phase.** After a couple of years and several hundred unsolicited calls and emails from recruiters, the developer becomes a job hopper. He wants enough “hush money” to keep the spouse quiet. Since there are relatively few financial responsibilities, he might even change cities or buy that expensive sports car. If he's lucky – or unlucky depending on the point of view – he'll go through the next phase without any problems.

**5. The Baby Phase.** As you guess from the title, there's now another mouth to feed. The singles apartment and sports car quickly become overcrowded. The developer pays to break the apartment lease, buys a house and furnishings, and trades the sports car for an SUV or four-door sedan. He manages to reduce his work hours, so he can spend more time at home. However, the peacefulness is short-lived as users, spouse, and baby scream for more attention. Thanks to modern technology, such as cell phones and “crackberries”, the developer is able to keep everyone happy.

**6. The PC-AT-Home Phase.** The developer buys a laptop and obtains high-speed internet at home. It allows him to watch the baby, play lullabies, and execute scripts at the same time. If the spouse can tolerate the developer working from home on their laptop, the developer will go to the next phase. If not, they go through the Divorce Phase. (That's too messy to describe in this column, so just ask the person in the next office to tell you about his or hers.)

**7. The Reality Phase.** Somehow, the developer has changed companies three or four times and gets promoted. He realizes that becoming vested in a pension plan is a dream and his job isn't very stable. He worries about company mergers, hostile takeovers, work force reductions, foreign competitors, outsourcing, and bankruptcies. Priorities change from more money to better benefits and job security. He wants a 401K plan, IRA account, five-year vesting program, employee stock options, employer matching contributions, better health, dental, and vision insurances, a credit union, and longer vacations.

Now there are two children (after accidentally going through the Baby Phase again), a spouse, a mortgage company, finance companies, credit cards companies, and the government to financially support. Plus, the developer has to save for retirement and the children's college educations. In this phase, he hoards money and tries not to “rock the boat” at work. If he's lucky, he'll get promoted to project manager.

## The IT Developer's Life Cycle

---

**8. The "Chill Out" Phase.** During this phase, the project manager decides to stay with the company until fully vested in all its pension and savings plans. Work is rather uneventful, so he "chills out" and "plays it cool." The emphasis is on saving money, attending high school football games, paying for braces, and staying one second ahead of the one-minute manager. He's learned enough about interoffice politics to keep his nose clean and get promoted to director.

**9. The Old Head/New Generation Phase.** The children are in college, the mortgage is paid off, and life's beginning to stabilize. Unfortunately, the "New Generation" of analysts and technology threatens to replace the company's "Old Heads." Since those of the New Generation are workaholics (see the Rookie Phase for a quick reminder), they pressure the Old Heads to quit. But the Old Heads make too much money to easily change jobs and are a few years short of being fully vested. So they band together and fight the New Generation.

**10. The Consultant Phase.** The Old Head director now has the look of a well-respected, experienced consultant. He's slightly gray, a little wrinkled, and slightly overweight. But most important, he's fully vested in the corporation's programs and is financially stable. So, he retires and becomes a consultant. He finds that consulting provides an opportunity to set a work schedule and pay scale that meets his personal needs. He becomes a conference speaker, author, and full- or part-time college instructor. When he gets tired of the travelling and teaching, he moves to the final phase.

**11. The Retirement Phase.** Now he lives happily ever after while writing magazine articles and playing lullabies on his laptop for the New Generation grandchildren.

871102