



# TECH CAREER & INTERVIEW TIPS

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NEVER STOP BUYING LOTTERY TICKETS,  
NO MATTER WHAT ANYONE TELLS YOU.

I FAILED AGAIN AND AGAIN, BUT I NEVER  
GAVE UP. I TOOK EXTRA JOBS AND  
POURED THE MONEY INTO TICKETS.

AND HERE I AM, PROOF THAT IF YOU  
PUT IN THE TIME, IT PAYS OFF!



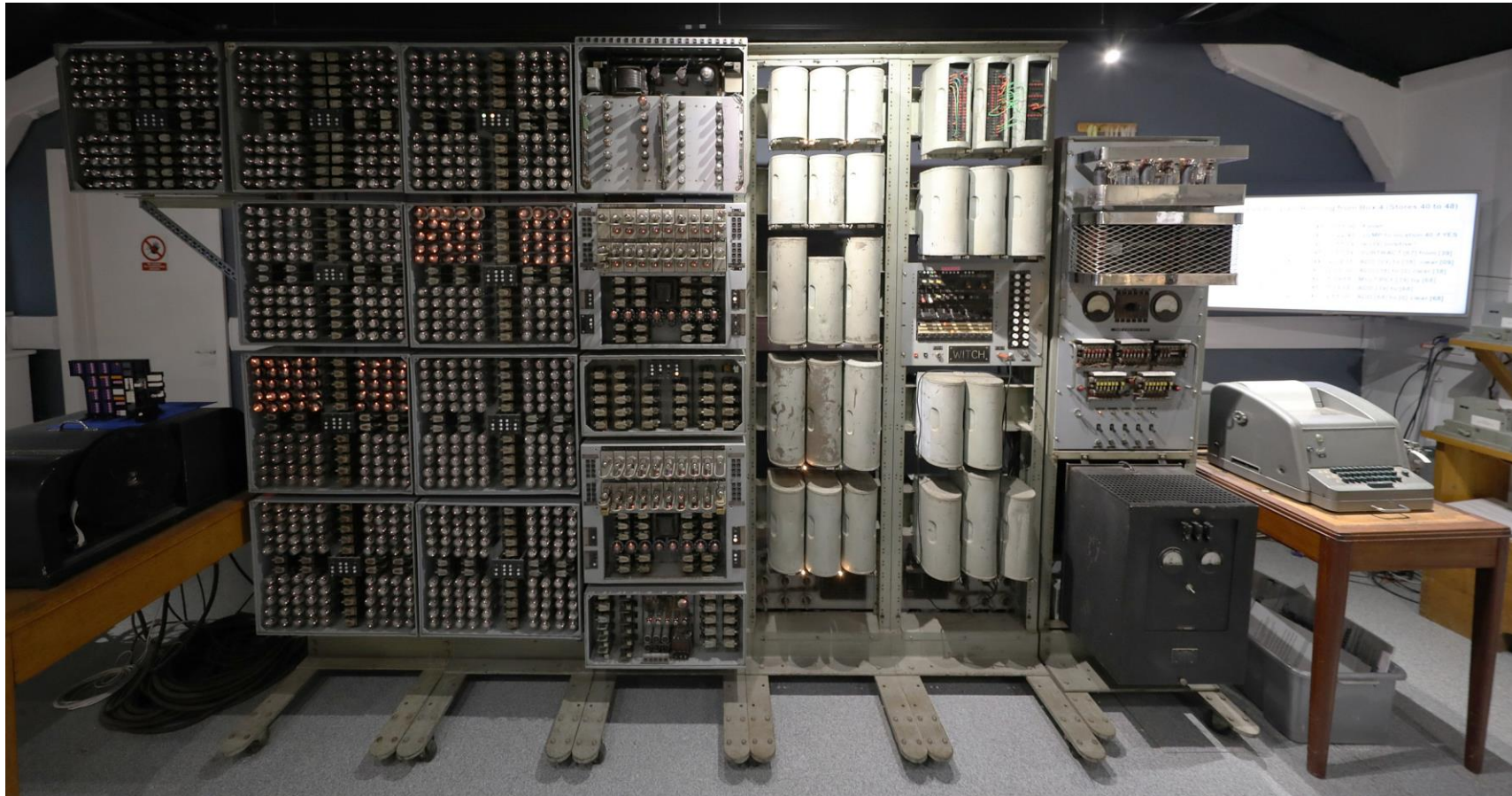
EVERY INSPIRATIONAL SPEECH BY SOMEONE  
SUCCESSFUL SHOULD HAVE TO START WITH  
A DISCLAIMER ABOUT SURVIVORSHIP BIAS.

## A DISCLAIMER ABOUT SURVIVORSHIP BIAS

- I'm nice-house-and-new-car successful, but not megacorporation-CEO successful
- I've mostly stuck to being an employee. My tips are about employed work.
- I did run my own company for a couple of years. I didn't make a loss. I learned that sales people and sales leads are very valuable, and that I am not good at finding sales leads.
- Be honest with yourself about what level of risk you can afford to take, at different stages of your career.
- Employed work might be your fallback plan if your startup fails

# ABOUT ANDREW

Born 1971. Grew up in Shropshire. Father was a maths professor. First computer I used was the Harwell Dekatron, built in 1951 for atomic research, later given to Wolverhampton University where I “used” it as a toddler in 1973.



# HAVE A TECH HOBBY

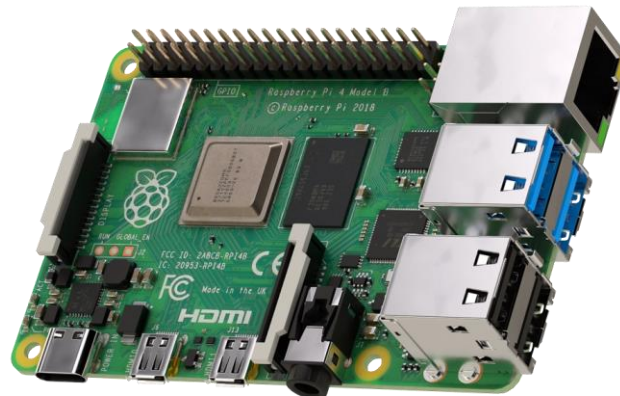
You don't need a maths professor dad, but it helps **a lot** if you have an interest in technology as a hobby.



Maybe write web pages, repair laptops, build PCs or fiddle with Linux

```
mysql_connect(localhost);
mysql_select_db('mysqlproj');
$result=mysql_query("select * from articlepage order by pagdate desc");
for ( $i=0; $i<mysql_numrows($result); $i++) {
    if ( $i%8 ) { print "\n"; }
    if(mysql_result($result,$i,'pagdate'))::: cA_HREF="/articles/?mysql_result($result,$i,'pagefile'))">mysql_result($result,$i,'pagefile'))</cA_HREF>";
}
$result=mysql_query("select * from articlesubject where pagefile=""mysql_result($result,$i,'pagefile');" order by pagesubject");
print "[ ]";
for ( $i=0; $i<mysql_numrows($result); $i++) {
    if ( $i%8 ) { print "\n"; }
    print mysql_result($result,$i,'pagesubject');
}
print "\n";
}
}

Maybe write web pages, repair laptops, build PCs or fiddle with Linux
<!--A_HREF="/articles?All articles(A) - including by subject and date
<!--A_HREF="/articles/articles?RSS feeds(A) - subscribe to a feed of new articles using your RSS2.0 compliant feed
</A_HREF>
<!--A_HREF="/articles/Articles(A) - archive of older projects, no longer maintained
</A_HREF>
</include $_SERVER["DOCUMENT_ROOT"]"/inc/footer.php; >
</pre>
```



## THE TOP TWO THINGS RECRUITERS ARE LOOKING FOR

- Qualifications
- Experience
- BOTH not just one!
- Early in your career, you may have qualifications, but it's difficult to get experience.
- This is where HOBBIES, VOLUNTEERING, COURSEWORK and PROJECTS help.
- Ideally, have something you can show or demonstrate. Bring your laptop, tablet, photos, handouts – keep in your bag until asked, but when asked – SHOW!
- Even just having something to talk about, helps enormously
- Quick courses such as Amazon AWS Practitioner can be worthwhile – but research whether they're sufficiently well-recognised compared to the cost

# JOB APPLICATION PROCESS

- Write a really good CV. Search for “EUROPASS” which is an excellent CV template. Use Microsoft Word .docx format – job hunting is not the time to be an open source purist (unless you’re sure it’s a Linux company)
- List all the technologies you know. Every. Single. One. You are trying to get “hits” based on word matching algorithms.
- Highlight anything for which you have 6 months, 1 year, 3 years or more experience.
- List your qualifications, and consider adding notes about particular topics or coursework – word “hits” again
- Upload your CV to every job website going. When creating a profile, **be honest about your location and commute range** unless you really are prepared to relocate.
- Also email your CV to noted regional tech recruitment agencies, e.g. Modis Bristol, Sandersons Bristol, Red Recruitment Bristol – but avoid temping agencies, you’re not looking for maternity cover for a secretary, nor are you looking to drive a fork-lift in a warehouse.
- At the very start of your career, it’s tempting to do interviews for jobs you have no intention of taking, just for the interview experience. I could not possibly comment on the morality of that.
- English matters. If you don’t have at least a C / grade 4 GCSE English Language, get help. It really stands out if you can’t write in proper paragraphs or don’t know how to use apostrophes. Proof-read everything. You need to demonstrate that you can communicate well with other staff and customers, both in audio and text.

# PRESENTING YOURSELF AT INTERVIEW

- Shirt or blouse with a proper collar
- Nobody has cared about ties since the mid 1990s. Wear one if you like them, if they make you comfortable and confident. Don't if you don't.
- Smart trousers or long skirt. Clean your shoes. If you absolutely must wear trainers, make sure they're tidy and not flashy.
- Try not to sweat! Think **LAYERS**. The time to switch layers is when waiting for the interview, not during the interview (but it's better than sweating). Offices are notorious for being too hot or too cold; the temperature in the waiting area will probably be the same as the interview room. Consider a jacket / smart coat / smart jumper / smart fleece. **NOT** an anorak nor a hoodie – if rain is forecast, take an umbrella instead.
- Your goal is to show that you can fit in. Interviews are not the time to express your individuality. Hide your tattoos.
- The exception to the rule is graphic designers. You folk can be a bit more flashy, but you need to keep a professional attitude.
- Talk clearly. If you're shy or tend to mumble, sorry but you need to get over that. Practice conversations with friends-of-friends that you don't usually talk to. "Fake it 'til you make it"
- Nobody cares about your sexuality, ethnicity, religion, gender identification, social class, politics or whatnot – it will not come up in the interview (it might come up in follow-up vetting for security work – don't worry, relax, be honest)

# EXPECT THE EXPECTED

- You will be asked about:
  - Your qualifications – be prepared to talk about coursework, projects and topics covered
  - Your experience – especially **“tell me about things you’ve done that are relevant to this role”**
  - How you’d handle a hypothetical scenario, e.g:
    - Difficult customer
    - Technical challenge
    - Handling an impossible-to-win situation / Under what circumstances would you ask for help?
  - How will you commute to the location?
    - **Do not underestimate the importance of this question**
    - “The train” will be very unconvincing unless you and the job are both in a very big city
    - “I’m prepared to relocate after the probation period” is a good answer
    - “I drive a car” or “I’m taking driving lessons” are the most reassuring answers, whether you like it or not
    - **“I’ll get a lift with someone” is the absolute worst answer.** They’re hiring you, they’re not hiring your friend.
    - “I’ll work from home” – check whether that’s actually an option, before you use this one
  - **It’s okay to bring notes! I often bring a print-out of my own CV.**



## SOMETIMES, YOU'RE INTERVIEWING THEM

- There are more tech vacancies than there are suitable people to fill them
- Don't be picky about your first tech job
- Don't be picky about your next job if your current employer is going bust – going bust happens A LOT in tech, it's all part of companies trying new things
- Otherwise, YOU CAN BE PICKY, so long as you're also realistic.
- “Interview the interviewer” – prepare some questions; they're not just there to fill an awkward silence, they can tell you whether this job might be better than another job
  - How long has the company been going?
  - How big is the company? Rough number of employees?
  - Who are the typical customers?
  - What new technologies are they looking towards in the future?
  - What is the typical career path for this role?

# ANDREW'S CAREER PATH

- Home computing as a hobby in the 1970s and 1980s
- Mid 1980s teenager - Summer job preparing master copies for home computer games at a cassette tape duplication plant (today you might consider contributing supporting material to someone else's project – e.g. documentation, website)
- Late 80s / early 90s sixth form & university - Wrote articles and “cover disk” games for computer magazines (today you might consider keeping a blog or writing small apps)
- 1992 University sandwich placement, year out at IBM Warwick, mostly in the finance department.
- 1993 IBM sponsored me to do my final year project, and gave me a tower PC
- 1994-2000 worked as a database / C programmer for finance industry in Cheltenham
- Y2K bought me a nice new 4x4
- 2000-2005 switched to web coding, back-end database integration, Tewkesbury & Cheltenham – including 2 years running my own small software development firm
- 2005 onwards switched to management as head of anti-spam at MessageLabs / Symantec, Gloucester
- 2010 software development project management at Higher Education Statistics Agency, Cheltenham
- 2015 project management then Head of Support / DevOps / SIRO at Blueberry, Stroud

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## ANDREW'S CURRENT ROLE

- Support manager
  - Managing 1st line support analysts
  - Handling problem issues; issue escalation and prioritisation
  - Managing offshore coders
- DevOps manager
  - Managing DevOps staff
  - Planning ecosystem / infrastructure – AWS, Gitlab
- Senior Information Risk Officer
  - GDPR
  - Ensuring we are compliant with regulations and best practice, particularly in the healthcare sector

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## ANDREW'S OUTSIDE INTERESTS

- I run (ran?) Cotswold Jam, a Raspberry Pi enthusiast group focussing on teaching junior-age children to code. Approximately 120 attendees, five times a year at Gloucestershire University, from 2015-2020.
- During the pandemic, I refurbished laptops for lockdown pupils. Lots of people donated old laptops, I tidied them up, upgraded RAM, put in a small donated new SSD, and installed Debian with Raspberry Pi Desktop.
- Music is quite mathematical, it helps you think logically and in sequence. In theory I'm a qualified piano teacher, in reality I mess about with synthesisers.
- Married with 3 children, 15 year old daughter, 11 year old mixed twins. This colours my view of risk.

# BLUEBERRY

- Around 200 staff around the world, of which about 50 in the UK
- Blueberry Systems
  - One-off “bespoke” business-to-business websites and what used to be called “intranets” – users are usually existing staff, not the public
  - Approx. 20 project managers, support and DevOps staff, based in Stonehouse near Stroud
  - Usually offshore software developers but we have started onshoring in 2021
  - Usually C#.NET and Angular.js – we also have our own templating libraries
  - Usually Microsoft Windows Server & IIS, sometimes Linux & Nginx, sometimes serverless
  - Usually with a database, MS SQL Server or MySQL / MariaDB
  - Usually integrated with one or more APIs – factory production line, management reports, stock control, forecasting, torque measurement of safety bolts on cars, IoT sensors, adjusting the chemical formula of asphalt...
- Blueberry Healthcare
  - A new company we’re setting up ; separate from Systems to handle the more restrictive regulations and needs of the health sector
- Blueberry Consultants / Blueberry Software
  - Sister company in Birmingham focussing more on non-web software, e.g. desktop, embedded

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## LET ME REASSURE YOU ABOUT OFFSHORING

- GDPR and similar regulations mean that fewer and fewer software development roles are suited to offshoring
- Russian and Asian offshoring is getting more expensive
- Brexit means that even offshoring to the EU is fraught with uncertainty (although GDPR “adequacy” announcement of 29 June 2021 may reduce this uncertainty)
- In 2021, Blueberry has hired its first UK-based onshore software developers in many years
- This is a good time to start a UK software development career

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