



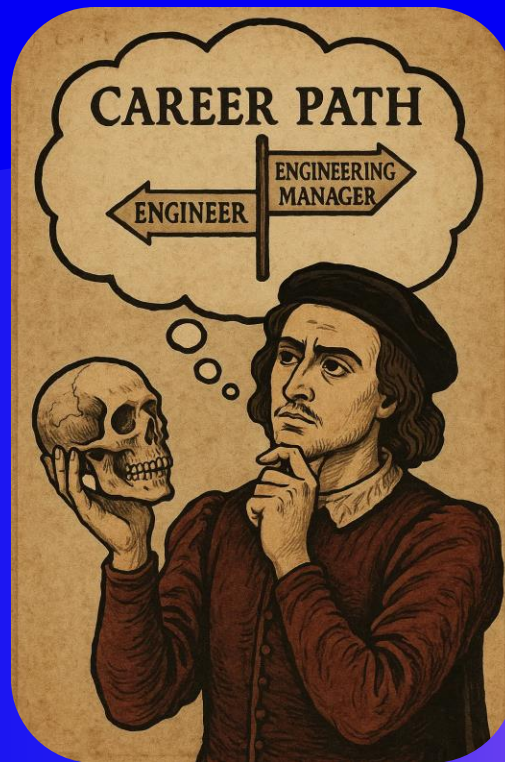
To Manage or Not To Manage? That Is the Question...

7th Gen Development Conference

2025-06-05

Petr Zemek

<https://petrzemek.net>

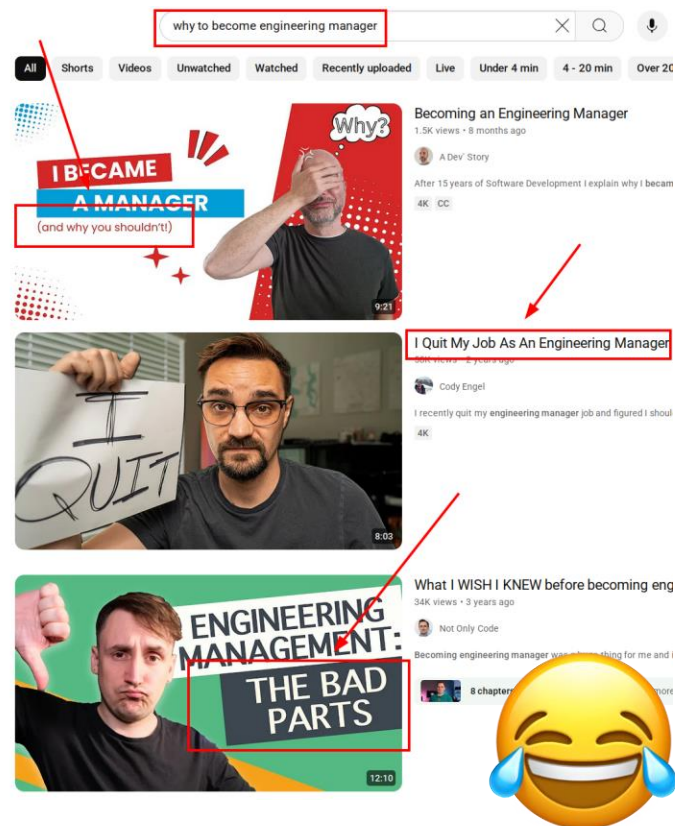


ChatGPT (2025-06-03): "Generate the Hamlet character from Shakespeare thinking whether to become an engineering manager or not"

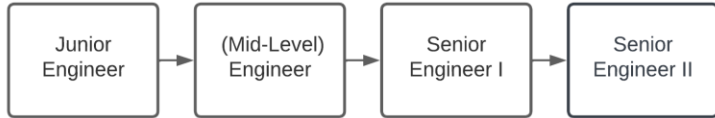


About Me & Why This Talk

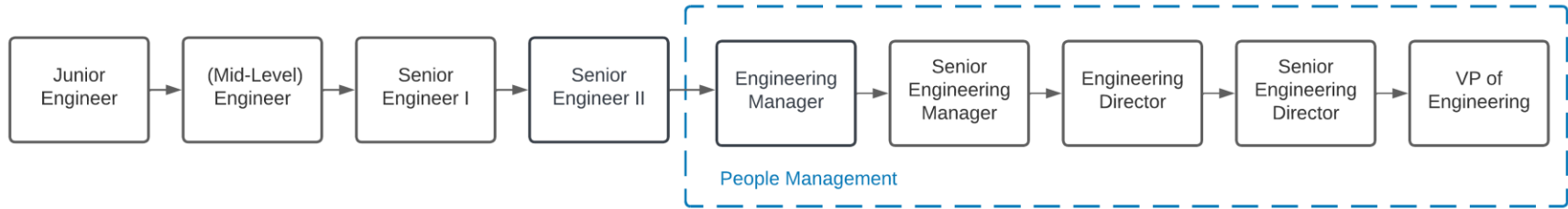
- Lead Software Engineer (CTO)
- 14+ years with the company (ex-AVG, ex-Avast)
- Engineer turned Manager turned Engineer
- I enjoy career ladder/path discussions
- Management sometimes gets a bad rep
- People are sometimes confused as to what does a manager do
- People sometimes do not realize that management is a different job
- Motivation: Get you thinking about your career ;-)
- Disclaimer: The talk is general, not specific to Gen



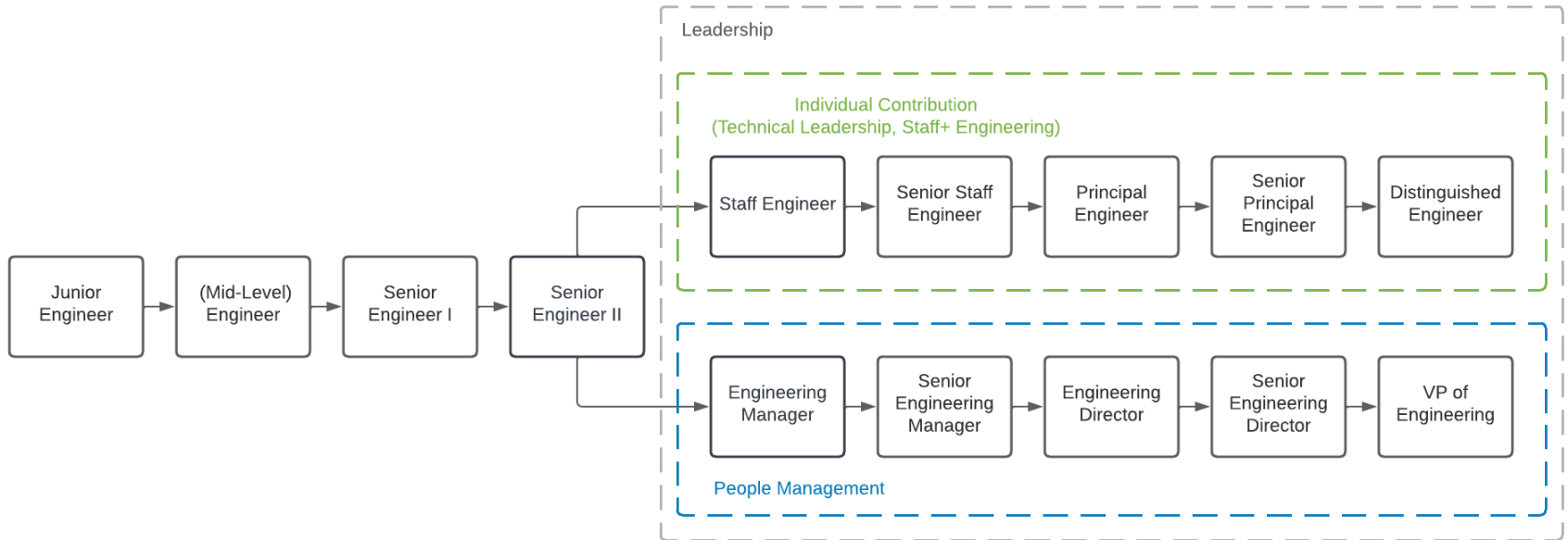
An Example Career Ladder – "Starter Pack"



An Example Career Ladder – People Management Track



An Example Career Ladder – Technical Leadership Track



Petr Zemek: Staff+ Engineering – GDC 6 (2025-01)

What Do Engineering Managers Do

- (Disclaimer: No two managers are the same)
- Gist: They turn a group of individuals into a team
- They manage a team of people and work through them
- They care for the well-being of team members, foster a healthy team culture
- They focus on growing team members, improving motivation and morale
- They plan the team's work, prioritize, ensure the team hits their targets, ...
- They manage performance of team members
- They handle various administrative tasks
- They maintain budgets, head counts, and handle salary increases
- They hire, promote, and fire people
- They represent the team in external communications
- They (should) shield the team from what is going on in the organization
- They delegate a lot of tasks to team members



MS Copilot (2025-06-03): "Generate an image of an Engineering Manager at work at a technological company"

What Do Engineering Managers Do (Continued)

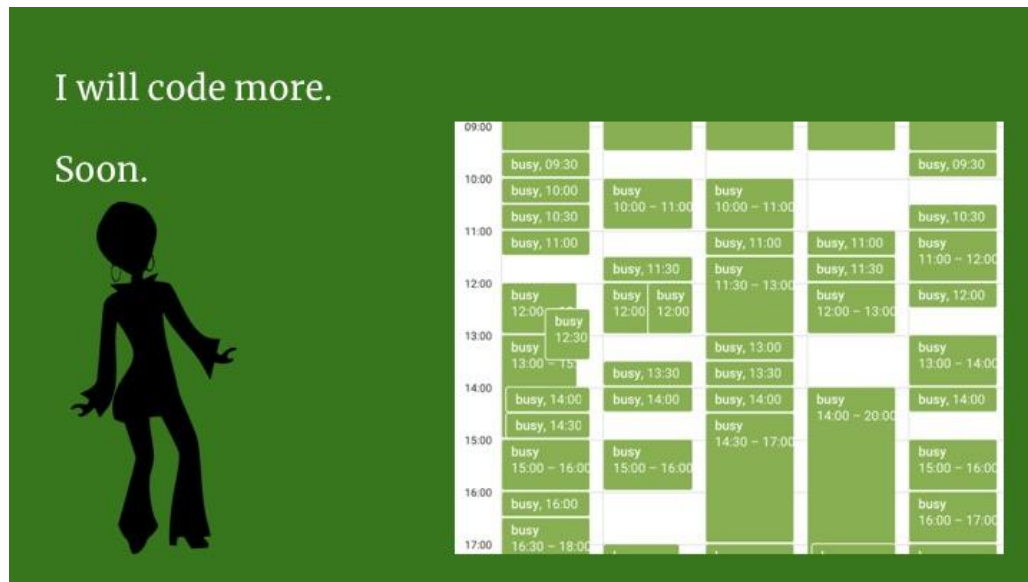
- They attend a lot of meetings ;-)
- They do a lot of reactive work and context switching
- They have difficult conversations
- They are the company's spokespeople
- They have more responsibility, more visibility, have more strategic conversations and influence
- They generally step into any role the team is currently lacking



([source](#))

But I Will Still Write Code... Right?

- Aspect 1: Will you have the time?
- Aspect 2: Will you be able to focus?
- Aspect 3: Will you maximize your impact?
- Aspect 4: Will you be in a proper role?



(from Tanya Reilly's talk on glue work)

How to Decide: A Bad Approach (What Are You Good At)

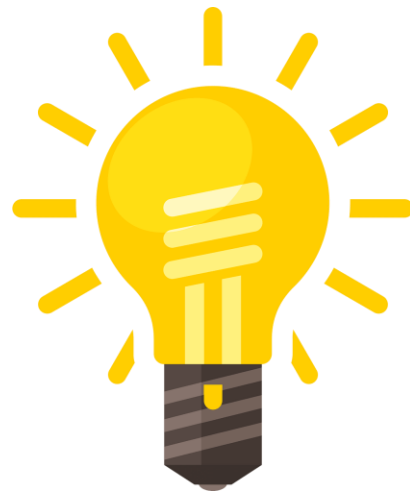


(based on [Tanya Reilly's talk on glue work](#), [image source](#))

How to Decide: A Better Approach

- What do you want to get better at?
- What does energize you?
- What do you enjoy and will make you happy?

(based on [Tanya Reilly's talk on glue work](#))



([source](#))

Some of the Reasons for Going Into Management

- You enjoy the people side of engineering
- You enjoy growing people and taking care of people in your team
- You want to focus on people issues rather than on technical issues
- You want to be able to build bigger projects
- You want to have a more strategic role, more responsibility and influence
- You want to get better at soft skills
- You enjoy (or do not mind) the tasks that managers do
- You enjoy (or do not mind) having a lot of meetings
- You either do not want to code anymore or do not mind coding only sporadically



([source](#))

Some of the Reasons for NOT Going Into Management

- Loving what you do
- Thinking you will be a good manager because you are a good developer
- Outside pressure
- A need of having a clear-cut job description and a fast feedback loop
- Just to climb up the corporate ladder / having a fancy job title
- No interest in moving into leadership
- Enjoying technical leadership more than people management
- Want to primarily sharpen hard skills rather than soft skills



([source](#))

And What About Money?



([source](#))

Caveats

- Engineering management is a different job
- Switching tracks, or the engineer/manager pendulum
- Technical leadership and people management are two sides of the same coin
- Same job title can mean different things

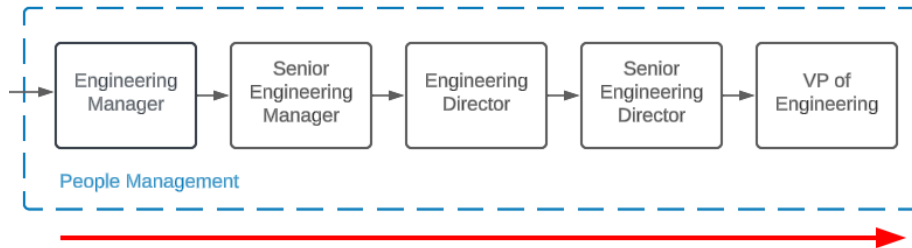


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What Lies Beyond

Usually, the higher up you go:

- The bigger your team is
- The broader your scope and area of impact are
- The more power you have to influence things
- The more responsibility you have
- The more strategically you have to think
- The higher your compensation package is
- The more you have to deal with people
- The more meetings you have
- The fewer people on that position there are



([source](#))

Other Options

- Senior Engineer ("the true IC")
- Staff+ Engineer (technical-leadership track), Tech Lead, Architect, etc.
- Project Manager
- Product Manager
- Program Manager



([source](#))

Related Reading and Watching

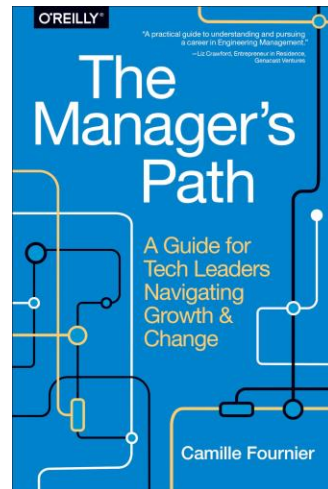
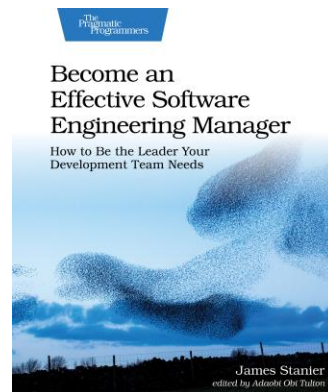
- My blog posts:
 - [My Career So Far](#) (2023-12)
 - [Choosing a Software-Engineering Career Path](#) (2022-04)
 - [Not All Developers Want to Be Managers, and That's OK](#) (2019-09)
- My talks:
 - [Staff+ Engineering at GDC6](#) (2025-01)
 - [A Look at Software-Engineering Career Ladders](#) (2021-04)
- And, of course, a myriad of available books, articles, videos, ... ;-)



ChatGPT (2025-06-03): *'Generate an image suitable for a presentation slide titled "Related Reading and Watching"'*

Recommended Books

- People management
 - James Stainer: Become an Effective Software Engineering Manager (2020)
 - Camile Fournier: The Manager's Path (2017)
- General:
 - Daniel Heller: Building a Career in Software (2020)
 - Gergely Orosz: The Software Engineer's Guidebook (2023)
- Staff+ Engineering:
 - Tanya Reilly: The Staff Engineer's Path (2022)
 - Will Larson: Staff Engineer: Leadership beyond the management track (2021)



Summary and Q&A

- In companies having a dual-track career ladder, there are generally **three career options**:
 - Staying as a **Senior Engineer**
 - Moving into **technical leadership** (staff+ engineering)
 - Moving into **people management** <- this talk ;-)
- People management is **all about** building a team, team culture, setting people up for success, etc.
- Engineering management is a **different job** (not a promotion)
- Engineering managers have a **lot of things on their plate** and may wear different "hats"
- You can sometimes **switch tracks** (the engineer/manager pendulum)
- **The higher up you go**, the larger team you have, the more responsibility you have, ...
- Do not decide based on the skills you have – **decide based on the skills you want to have!**
- What type of work **energizes you**? What do you want to get **better at**?
- There are both reasons **for going** into management as well as **against** that
- There are also **other options**, e.g. Project Manager, Product Manager, or Program Manager