



Sloan Career Cornerstone Center

Profiles of Computer Scientists



Joseph DeCuir

**Program Manager - Modems
Microsoft Corporation
Redmond, WA**

Education:

B.S. - Electrical Engineering/Computer Science, UC Berkeley
M.S. - Electrical Engineering/Computer Science, UC Berkeley

Job Description:

Program Manager who plans and drives modem support in the Windows family operating system.

Advice to Students:

"Figure out what you like to do and find a way to get paid for it. If you like it, it won't be so hard to put in the effort it does take to get good at it and stay good at it."

Video Transcript 1:

"Microsoft looks for people who are self-starters and team players because like I say business is a team sport. Everybody works on a team. There are very few people here who are lone guns. And self-starters. If we have to spend a lot of time in your face figuring out what to do and telling you what to do, we've hired poorly."

Video Transcript 2:

"And she offered me a job. And I went to the hotel and tossed and turned all night because I was really excited about the job but it was geographically undesirable. I lived in the Bay Area. I was up to my neck in my community. I was a cub scout leader for two dens. I was organizing earthquake preparedness in my neighborhood. I had lots of friends; lots of infrastructure. And to take this wonderful job I was going to have to pull up stakes and move. But, the choice was to either pull up stakes and move here, or take a job in the Santa Clara valley that would mean driving for an hour and a half, working 10-12 hours a day, then driving an hour and a half. I wouldn't have my community anyway -- it would be hard to hang on to my wife and kids -- let alone my community with a commute like that, so I live a mile and a half from here."

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Prepared as part of the Sloan Career Cornerstone Center (www.careercornerstone.org)
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Interview:

Joe Decuir is program manager for Microsoft in Redmond, Washington. Joseph serves as Chair of the IEEE Communication Society, Seattle Section and is author or editor of 12 national and 4 international communications standards and ten patents. He studied electrical engineering/computer science at Berkeley, graduating in 1972. In the last twenty-five years, he has seen a lot of changes in the field. "When I graduated in '72, the microprocessor was a year old, the 4004 did 60,000 instructions per second on four byte numbers. . . ."

Decuir believes that lifelong learning is necessary, not only for his company, but for the industry. "I'm trying to learn stuff that I don't already know because I'm going to need it a year or two from now." And that includes writing and people skills. "I figure out what needs to get done. . . . Get people to do the work. . . . It's sort of like herding cats, and I depend completely on my ability to listen and understand and persuade."

Decuir reminds young engineers that there is more to life than work. "Many of us had lives before we were engineers and continue to want to have lives after -- and some of us don't want to wait till retirement to do so." Part of living is making accommodations. Decuir is a single father of three and has to juggle family and work responsibilities every day. "I carry this cell phone on my hip. If one of my kids needs some help, I can scramble. My job is flexible enough that I can usually do that." His schedule is largely dictated by family life: "I work. I go home. I feed them. I do activities with them. I bring work home on a floppy disk in my pocket or on my notebook, and, when I put the kids to bed, I finish up all the writing that I didn't get to do during the day. And that's what life is like."

Finally, Decuir passes on his father's advice to him as the secret to a happy life. "Figure out what you like to do and find a way to get paid for it. If you like it, it won't be so hard to put in the effort it does take to get good at it and stay good at it. You'll get positive strokes from your job, even when times are tough."

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