

10 Things

10 drawbacks to working in IT

By [Brien Posey](#) (/search?q=brien+posey) November 22, 2011, 1:21 PM PST**Takeaway: People who are trying to break into IT don't always know what they're getting into. This list paints a realistic picture of what may lie ahead.**

Like most IT pros I know, I occasionally have friends or family ask me to get them a job in IT. For some reason, a lot of the people who ask me this have a perception that everyone who works in IT is a millionaire or a billionaire. Aside from having an incorrect perception about IT salaries, few people outside IT seem to understand just how tough working in IT really is.

I realize that TechRepublic is frequented by IT pros, so you probably know all too well that there are both advantages and disadvantages to the job. My reason for writing this article is to give you something you can send to your friends the next time that they approach you with unrealistic expectations of working in IT.

1: The hours are long

There are all sorts of IT jobs, but most of them have one thing in common: They involve working long hours. If you want to work in IT, you better be prepared to work nights and weekends.

2: Your personal time will be interrupted

If you handle a critical support role within your organization, you will likely be tied to a cell phone. And that means you could be called upon to deal with an emergency at any given time. When I first started dating my wife, we were watching a movie at about two o'clock in the morning on a Friday night when I got called to deal with a system problem. Thankfully, she was a lot more understanding than some of the other women I had dated. I also once got a call in the middle of Christmas dinner. Working in IT can be almost like being a firefighter or a paramedic, in that you never know when an emergency will occur and you'll have to drop everything you're doing to deal with it.

3: You have to deal with a lot of angry people

One of the worst things about working in IT (especially for helpdesk roles) is that you encounter a lot of angry people. Almost everyone who calls you is upset because they have a problem and they expect you to fix it right now. Often, there is a great deal of hostility behind these calls. Those who are calling are under pressure to get a job done — and the problem your system caused is preventing them from doing it.

4: Work tends to be deadline driven

Most IT jobs are deadline driven. For example, developers are under constant pressure to deliver code on time. Likewise, network administrators may be called upon to create user accounts or deploy and test new systems by a certain date. Oftentimes, the deadline is completely unreasonable for the amount of work that is involved in the task, but you are expected to meet the deadline anyway.

5: People expect you to fix their home computers

Another thing you are almost certain to run into is that your coworkers will expect you to fix problems with their personal electronics. Don't get me wrong — I try to help as many people as I can. However, sometimes, you may simply be too busy to help somebody or they may not understand the implications of what they're asking. For example, I once had a user approach me about upgrading his Tandy 1000 (which was manufactured in 1988) so that it could run Windows XP. Oh yeah, and he wanted to keep the budget for the project under \$200.

6: People lie to you all the time

When I first started working in IT, I had a pretty good idea what I was getting myself into. One thing that really surprised me, however, was how many people lie to you on a daily basis. I found out quickly that end users constantly lie about the nature of the problems they are having. After all, nobody wants to get in trouble, so end users try to cover up self-inflicted problems.

You can also expect to be lied to by vendors' technical support departments. I have lost count of the number of support technicians over the years who have told me that a problem is not related to their software, but rather to the computer's hardware or to the operating system. And of course I won't even begin to talk about the number of vendors who have lied to me in an effort to make a sale.

7: You have to keep your education current

The IT industry is constantly evolving. IT pros have to learn a tremendous amount of information so they can do their jobs, and that information becomes outdated quickly. The only way to keep your knowledge relevant is to make sure that you keep your education current.

This can be surprisingly difficult to do. Never mind all the complicated technical material you have to learn. The things that most often stand in the way of keeping your education current are the long hours you are already working and the ever-shrinking IT training budgets.

8: Things don't always work the way they're supposed to

Earlier, I mentioned that projects can be deadline driven and that the deadlines tend to be unreasonable. Believe me when I say that there is nothing worse than trying to complete a project by the deadline you have been given only to have things come to a grinding halt as a result of technical problems.

Computer systems are complicated, and sometimes in spite of your best efforts things just do not work the way they're supposed to. Something as simple as an inconsistent chip version on a series of system boards can derail an entire project. Naturally, it's up to you to find the problem and fix it.

9: You may have to deal with a lot of bureaucracy

In the 20 years or so I have worked in IT, there has always been a certain amount of office politics and corporate bureaucracy to deal with. Of course, that is the case with most jobs. However, in the last several years, the bureaucracy has been taken to a whole new level. Corporate scandals such as the Enron incident have led to IT professionals being forced to comply with numerous federal regulations. These regulations almost always make IT projects more difficult, time consuming, and expensive.

10: Your job is to make yourself obsolete

When I first started working as a network administrator, a longtime friend told me something I will never forget. He said that my job was to make myself obsolete. I didn't really understand what he meant at the time, but he was absolutely right. An IT pro's job is to make everything work perfectly. However, if everything did work perfectly, IT pros would not be needed.

Over the years, I have had plenty of people tell me that as long as you work in IT, you never have to worry about being out of work. However, some of the latest generation of management products make it practical for small numbers of people to manage huge numbers of systems. Likewise, a lot of IT positions are going away as systems are being outsourced to the cloud. Even though the IT industry itself probably isn't going away anytime soon, having IT knowledge is by no means a guarantee of employment.

Additional reading

- [10 reasons to stay in IT](http://www.techrepublic.com/blog/10things/10-reasons-to-stay-in-it/2572)(<http://www.techrepublic.com/blog/10things/10-reasons-to-stay-in-it/2572>)
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- [10 alternative careers for burned-out IT workers](http://www.techrepublic.com/blog/10things/10-alternative-careers-for-burned-out-it-workers/2345?tag=rbxcnbt1)(<http://www.techrepublic.com/blog/10things/10-alternative-careers-for-burned-out-it-workers/2345?tag=rbxcnbt1>)
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- [10 IT positions ranked by prestige](http://www.techrepublic.com/blog/10things/10-it-positions-ranked-by-prestige/2347)(<http://www.techrepublic.com/blog/10things/10-it-positions-ranked-by-prestige/2347>)
- [10 things I love about IT](http://www.techrepublic.com/blog/10things/10-things-i-love-about-it/306)(<http://www.techrepublic.com/blog/10things/10-things-i-love-about-it/306>)



About Brien Posey

Brien Posey is a seven-time Microsoft MVP. He has written thousands of articles and written or contributed to dozens of books on a variety of IT subjects.

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