THE DEVELOPER'S CODE BY KA WAI CHEUNG

The Developer's Code
What Real Programmers Do
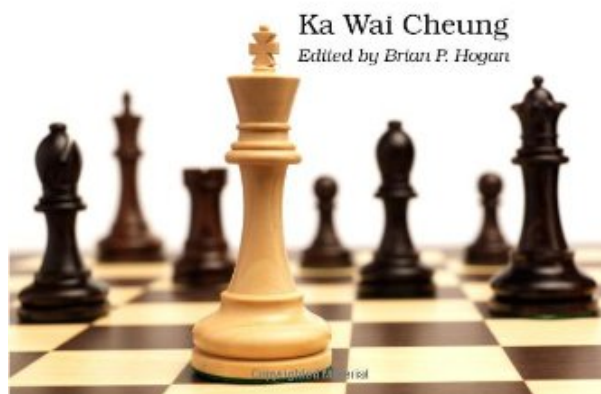
Ka Wai Cheung
Edited by Brian P. Hogan

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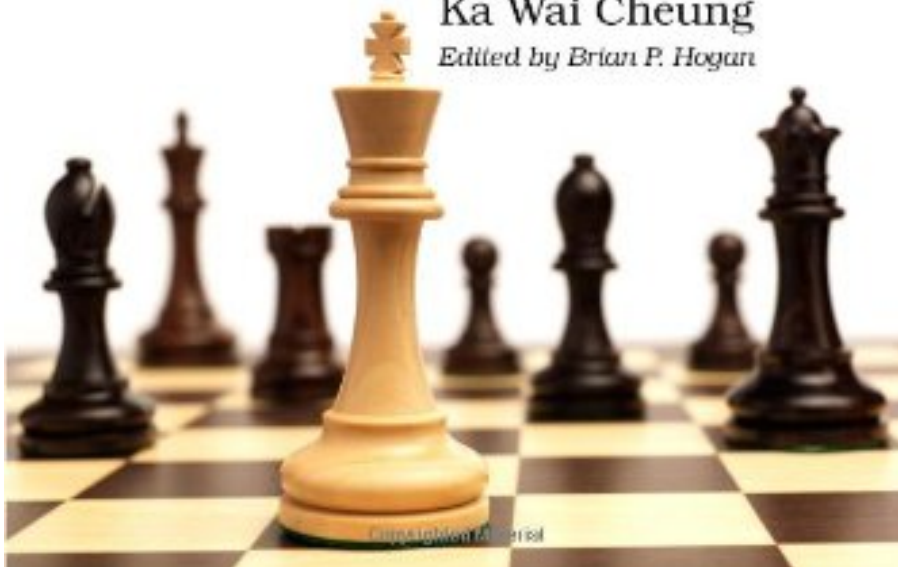
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Review

This is the next "Pragmatic Programmer"—a guide for the beginner, a reminder for the expert, and a wonderful chunk of wisdom about the craft (and life) of a developer.

—Derek Sivers Founder of CD Baby, sivers.org

Ka Wai Cheung has written a book for professional developers seeking a code they can live by. This is not a book replete with conventional, find-it- in-any-blog ideas but a very powerful, focused approach to the craft and realities of professional programming.

If you are looking for a rehash of stale, sterile rules for programming, this is not the book for you. But if you are seeking a perspective on what creating software is, or if you want a set of guidelines laden by real-world experience, this is a book you need.

—Bob Walsh Author and Founder of 47 Hats

Packed with delicious lessons yet consumable in bite (byte?) sized chunks —there's a lot to be learned in these pages. Take some time and learn from someone who's been there.

—Adam Hoffman Senior Development Lead

About the Author

Ka Wai Cheung is a developer, designer, and founding partner at We Are Mammoth, an award-winning team of web developers as passionate about approachability as they are about technology.

Ka Wai is also the co-author of Flash Application Design Solutions: The Flash Usability Handbook.

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You're already a great coder, but awesome coding chops aren't always enough to get you through your toughest projects. You need these 50+ nuggets of wisdom. Veteran programmers: reinvigorate your passion for developing web applications. New programmers: here's the guidance you need to get started. With this book, you'll think about your job in new and enlightened ways.

The Developer's Code isn't about the code you write, it's about the code you live by.

There are no trite superlatives here. Packed with lessons learned from more than a decade of software development experience, author Ka Wai Cheung takes you through the programming profession from nearly every angle to uncover ways of sustaining a healthy connection with your work.

You'll see how to stay productive even on the longest projects. You'll create a workflow that works with you, not against you. And you'll learn how to deal with clients whose goals don't align with your own. If you don't handle them just right, issues such as these can crush even the most seasoned, motivated developer. But with the right approach, you can transcend these common problems and become the professional developer you want to be.

In more than 50 nuggets of wisdom, you'll learn:

Why many traditional approaches to process and development roles in this industry are wrong - and how to sniff them out.

Why you must always say "no" to the software pet project and open-ended timelines.

How to incorporate code generation into your development process, and why its benefits go far beyond just faster code output.

What to do when your client or end user disagrees with an approach you believe in.

How to pay your knowledge forward to future generations of programmers through teaching and evangelism.

If you're in this industry for the long run, you'll be coming back to this book again and again.

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Most helpful customer reviews

12 of 13 people found the following review helpful.
Pleasant but lightweight
By A. Ali
I bought this book knowing it would be lightweight -- yet I hoped there might be some nuggets of insight. There are a few but I can't help feeling disappointed in this 140-page book (it's not 250 pages, as Amazon indicates). The book I'm comparing it to is Joel Spolsky's dense and meaty 360-page "Joel on Software." There's no comparison. Not complaining -- "The Developer's Code" is a pleasant read on the commute home but still .... Maybe in a few years a second edition will roll out and be more substantial in content.

The book is divided into 52 sections (the last two of which haven't been numbered), with titles like "Lie to Simplify," "Invest in a Good Work Environment," "Work Outside the Bedroom," and "Teach with Obvious Examples." It can't be said there are earth-shattering insights in these sections.

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful.
Its The Book I Wish I Wrote
By Mark Orlando
While the author has been in the IT field for 15 years, I've been in this profession for 30 years. If I had to write down what I've learned over the last 30 years, this books collection of essays would have been it! Its an easy read that allows you to spend 10-15 minutes here and there reading bite by bite. I liked how the topics

were laid out as it made the book easier to read.

Chapter 4 on productivity presented a great idea on how to take "Ta-Da", the free to-do list progam from 37 Signals one step higher. The author's simple technique in Essay 22 has already helped me to better track my accomplishments. Chapter 9, entitled "Pride" was a real pleasure to read. I liked how he explained the phenomena of the cooking-show industry, how its changed over the years, and how software development should use this as a marketing idea. The chapter also talked about "The Healing Power of Construction Work" and how developers fall into the same boat as construction workers, namely, that software development is therapeutic.

In summary, it was a great book to read on my Kindle and reminded me of things I learned in the past but have forgotten.

7 of 8 people found the following review helpful.
A few of these essays will change the way I do my work...
By Thomas Duff
I like books that gather a number of essays and thoughts about technology (in this case, software development) and bundle them in a single volume so I can contemplate what it is I do as a profession. The Developer's Code - What Real Programmers Do by Ka Wai Cheung (published by Pragmatic Bookshelf) fits that description perfectly. I've often said that one or two gems from a book like this can make it an excellent buy. For me, this one met and surpassed that criteria.

None of the essays here (52 in total) are technical in nature. You won't learn a new way to code algorithms or do systems architecture. Instead, they delve into mind-sets and concepts on how to think about the work and how it's done. An example would be the first two essays in the section on metaphors in software development. Since we've equated software construction to building construction, we tend to over-plan a system and nail everything down before we write a single line of code. But in reality, code is flexible and changeable, whereas bricks and mortar can't be easily "fixed" once it's put down. The metaphor of "construction" means that we may over-plan before writing code (think waterfall vs. agile), thereby limiting our productivity. Metaphors aren't bad, but you do need to be careful that it doesn't inadvertently create boundaries that don't exist.

I personally found the section on teaching fascinating. Specifically, "Lie to Simplify" put words behind a problem I fall prey to on far too many occasions. When trying to teach someone a new skill or feature, I want to tell them absolutely everything... all the edge cases, the minor oddities, and the obscure errors where things don't work as advertised. The problem is that the student doesn't even understand the basic concepts, much less the esoterica. Rather than dump everything on them at once, just lie. Tell them how things work in 95% of the situations. Don't even mention the exceptions... until they've mastered the basics. Once they know that knowledge, you can fill in the blanks. That single essay right there will change the way I convey information to others.

Since everyone comes from different backgrounds and experience levels, everyone will have different reactions to The Developer's Code. But I think I'm safe in saying it's well worth reading, and you should easily find the two or three gems that will make your purchase a wise investment in yourself.

Contents:
Introduction: Who Is the 21st-Century Programmer?; Discovering the Lessons Firsthand; This Book Is About Us
Metaphor: Follow Metaphors with Care; Plan Enough, Then Build; Launch Is Just the First Release; The

"Ivory Tower" Architect Is a Myth; Throw Away Your Old Code; Diversification Over Specialization; Metaphors Hide Better Ways of Working

Motivation: The Perks Are in the Work; Begin Where You Love to Begin; Be Imperfect; Stop Programming; Test Your Work First Thing in the Morning; Work Outside the Bedroom; First Impressions Are Just That; The Emotional Value of Launch; Find an Argument

Productivity: Just Say "No" to the Pet Project; Constrain All of Your Parameters; Cut the Detail Out of the Timeline; Improve Your Product in Two Ways Daily; Invest in a Good Work Environment; Keep a Personal To-Do List; Create "Off-Time" with Your Team; Work in Small, Autonomous Teams; Eliminate the "We" in Productivity

Complexity: Sniff Out Bad Complexity; The Simplicity Paradox; Complexity as a Game of Pickup Sticks; Keep Complexity Under the Surface; "Hard to Code" Might Mean "Hard to Use"; Know When to Refactor; Develop a Programming Cadence

Teaching: Teaching Is Unlike Coding; Beware the "Curse of Knowledge"; Teach with Obvious Examples; Lie to Simplify; Encourage Autonomous Thought

Clients: The Tough Client Is Ubiquitous; Demystify the Black Magic of Software; Define the Goals of Your Application; Be Enthusiastic and Opinionated; Be Forgiving and Personable; Value Is Much More Than Time; Respect Your Project Manager

Code: Write Code As a Last Resort; A Plug-in Happy Culture; Code Is the Ultimate Junior Developer; Separate Robot Work from Human Work; Generating Code at Its Core; The Case for Rolling Your Own

Pride: We Have a Marketing Problem; Lessons from the Cooking Industry

Bibliography

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