INSPIRER

DevOps Apprenticeship to DevOps Engineer

Nadia Caunhye

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A bit about Nadia...

Nadia was the first person to complete a DevOps Apprenticeship at KPMG, achieving a distinction in the practical assessment. Having acquired the skills to transition from a non technical service delivery role, she now works as a DevOps Engineer in the client facing Tax Team. Loving this role in a high pressured environment working with large external clients, Nadia is keen to inspire others to pursue roles in technology.

You recently attended the BCS Apprenticeship Awards and spoke about your experiences – how was that? What did you think about the event?

It was a great opportunity to come together and celebrate success. Hearing about the positive impact apprenticeships have had on peoples' lives was just fascinating. I've had little interaction with apprentices in other technology areas - when I was doing mine, my group were all in DevOps so I found it really interesting to hear about other disciplines. And the event was great, full of energy and positivity. I loved it.

What has been your career journey to get where you are today?

I have a degree in Business and Management which was not technology focused at all but there was one module about cloud technology which piqued my interest. After graduating I went to work for Rackspace, the cloud computing company, but in a marketing role. I was there for a couple of years looking at client spend, assessing their financial goals and helping to facilitate the infrastructure to support those goals.

Realising I wanted to work in a technology role and preferring a more structured working environment, such as financial services, I moved onto KPMG in 2019. I was in a service delivery role initially but when the pandemic came along, it became very quiet so I decided to use the time to build my technology skills. I started my apprenticeship in

Development Operations and really enjoyed it – so much so that within 2 months I realised I wanted to be an engineer!

It was whilst doing my course and building my knowledge that I applied for a job within the cloud department. I went in at entry level and was rotating into different service teams to learn about various systems and gain new skills. I found I particularly liked the internal engineering team – the one that supported all the other client facing teams.

My EPA project was the restructuring of an internal tool to white list IP addresses if there was a problem with the VPN. I delivered the project on my own and it's now used in the business every day. And I got a distinction! After my assessment, I moved into the department where I now work which is client facing.

What's been the biggest challenge you've faced to get here?

Not coming from a technical background, there has been a very steep learning curve for me. It's not just about acquiring knowledge, but more importantly how to apply it.

I've also come up against the preconceived opinions of others who find it difficult to accept that you can acquire significant technical skills and successfully move into a devops role, from a non technical background.

My way of dealing with that resistance has been to believe in my own ability and not let others' opinions undermine me; by speaking with confidence and conviction to demonstrate I do have the knowledge and the skills.

Why did you choose to do an apprenticeship?

I knew I wanted to move into a technical role and had to improve my skills significantly so I researched apprenticeships. I understood that it was about professional training and giving me the tools to apply my newly acquired knowledge in real situations. I wanted to be hands on.

Also, KPMG are really supportive of ongoing training and there are internal networks to help you. I had a mentor at first to help me trouble shoot issues, which is an invaluable skill in devops.

There's also a Women in Engineering network and seeing women leading technology teams has definitely inspired me.

How has your training provider supported you during your apprenticeship?

Everyone was really helpful and really patient! There is so much reading material and some of it is quite hard to process, but they help you to assimilate it and you get allocated support time every week

Ok, talk us through a typical day at KPMG

My working day always starts with a stand up meeting with my team, even though we are all working remotely. We each talk about our plans for the day, looking at workflow and discussing priorities.

We catch up again at lunchtime on TEAMS and there's always lots of communication throughout the day. It's a very busy department, we're supporting lots of projects with quite demanding clients. But I love that pressure! I really thrive in an environment that's fast moving with tight deadlines.

What's your favourite part of the role?

I love working through technical issues and applying my knowledge to figure out the best solution. Seriously, it's just brilliant.

What's the best piece of advice you've been given, and what would yours be to someone else considering a career in this field?

Someone once said to me "don't rush your learning" – not that I listened at first because I definitely put too much pressure on myself and burnt out.

Now though, I can see the importance of letting everything naturally fall into place. There is so much to learn and the workload is massive. I studied every day after work and although KPMG give you one day a week study leave, for me it wasn't enough.

So to others I'd say, don't estimate the workload. You have to be committed and at times sacrifice your personal time, because there is a lot to learn.

How would you like your career to progress?

Through doing the DevOps apprenticeship, I really feel like I've found "my zone". I love my job!

I want to keep building my knowledge and using my skills to recommend solutions in a more hands on client role, eventually moving into more senior engineering roles.