

# Life of An SRE with Dave Reisner



**MP ENGLISH:** Hello, and welcome to Episode 6 of Season 2 of the Google SRE Podcast-- or as we affectionately refer to it, the "Prodcast." I'm your host, MP. And here with me again as co-host is Chris.

**CHRIS WOJNO:** Hello.

**MP:** And today we have with us a staff level SRE here at Google who has had quite the interesting professional journey. I'm very looking forward to hearing more about his experiences. So I'm going to turn things over to him, and let him introduce himself.

**DAVE REISNER:** Hey. Thanks for having me here. I'm Dave Reisner. As mentioned, I'm a staff SRE at Google. I've been here a little over 11 years, spending about nine of those working on Maps. I got started with computers at a really early age. Do we want to go into this kind of detail at this point?

**MP:** Really superficial, because then we're going to follow up to get more into the nitty gritty.

**DAVE:** Of all the things I wrote down, I did not think of an intro. [LAUGHS]

**MP:** Well, you can follow up with "as a kid, you got into computers."

**DAVE:** So as a kid, I got into computers. And I learned at an early age that this was really something that was a lot of fun for me. I look at it largely as problem solving. But also, it was an interesting way to spend time and make my brain work. So I think the first thing I did was I learned how to type load and run so I could play games on my family's Commodore 64.

**CHRIS:** Cool. Do you want to just touch briefly on what they do, or should we just keep going?

**DAVE:** Touch briefly on?

**CHRIS:** It was kind of an old interview. Do you want to touch on something more recent, or should we save that for the rest of the interview?

**DAVE:** I'm sorry. I'm having a little trouble hearing you today, Chris.

**CHRIS:** Is it better?

**MP:** Yes.

**CHRIS:** OK, sorry. I just got to get super friendly with it. OK, should we keep going with another short part of the introduction, or should we just jump straight in and make that part of the interview?

**DAVE:** I say jump straight in.

**CHRIS:** OK, cool. Big pleasure to meet you, Dave. Thanks for joining us today. So you started as a Linux developer. Can you give me, somebody who is not super familiar with that world, an idea of what that was like?

**DAVE:** Yeah. So I got involved with Arch Linux a while back. This was the result of me installing Linux as a replacement for Windows, just to tinker and play around with it. I had tried it for years and failed, working with multiple installation CDs for RedHat, or Debian, or whatever the flavor of the month was.

I eventually came around to Arch Linux, which really was kind of bare bones. You got what you saw. And it was really easy to dig into and modify. There were a bunch of projects that they had. And I eventually ended up as a developer working on the package manager known as pacman.

Most of my contributions there were around working on the downloader. So that would be the piece of the package manager that fetched the actual tarballs, the software from the

repositories. I'd replaced an old implementation based on what was called LibFetch, taken from one of the BSDs. And used libcurl instead, which is far more widespread, much more featureful, and actually made things faster in the process.

In addition to the work on the package manager, I was also dealing with the everyday responsibilities of package management. So I was taking care of a number of packages for the distribution, and curating them for users to download and install.

**CHRIS:** So you were in the belly of the beast, and you even became a sponsored developer. What's that about?

**DAVE:** So in Arch, there's two kinds of roles. In Arch Linux, there's trusted users, and then there's also developers. I had started as a trusted user, but it's not super interesting for this conversation.

**CHRIS:** Sure. So how'd you go from working on Arch Linux, and you made it with Zagat, the restaurant?

**DAVE:** Yeah, Zagat.

**CHRIS:** Zagat. Sorry.

**DAVE:** "Zag-gat," like the cat.

**CHRIS:** So I'll redo that one. So how do you go from Linux to working with Zagat, the restaurant review site?

**DAVE:** It's funny. At some point a Google recruiter actually had reached out to everybody on the Arch Linux developer list and said, hey, do you want to interview as an SRE at Google? And I said, sure, why not? What could possibly go wrong? It's worth the opportunity.

I made it through the phone screen. I got my first phone interview. I said some things that were absolutely not correct, and I knew it as soon as I hung up the phone. I never heard back from them again.

**[LAUGHTER]**

So I ended up working for Zagat through a friend of mine who I went to school with at the time. He had gotten a job as a developer there. They were working on relaunching their website. They had completely burned down and restaffed their development team, and they wanted someone to do automated QA.

So they were writing selenium tests against the new side to prove the functionality. And this

friend of mine, who actually didn't know me very well, spoke up and said, hey, I know this guy. He'd be great for the job. You should hire him.

So I got an interview with Zagat. Before they even posted the job publicly, I took it on. As part of that interview, one of the developers who I talked to actually said, hey, you can hire this guy. But you need to find him something new to do, because in six months he's going to be bored.

So from there, we launched the new site. And I started asking questions about who's going to be running this thing? Who's going to be watching it? Do we have anyone carrying a pager?

Got a resounding silence from this. I at that point piped up and said, happy to do it. I'm pretty familiar with these systems at this point. I can absolutely do that for you.

**CHRIS:** So you started their SRE program at Zagat?

**DAVE:** Yeah, they actually gave me the title of DevOps at some point. But if you want to think of it as SRE, it was sort of that. I had the coding background that I had taught myself. And I feel like I came at it from more of an SRE angle than a DevOps angle.

**CHRIS:** So what made you think that they needed somebody to hold a pager?

**[LAUGHS]**

**DAVE:** I guess it was just a matter of thinking this is a production site that was serving hundreds of users. And they were going to want to know if the site was unresponsive, if it was down. It was really there to provide value for users, and we wanted to have it available as much as possible.

**CHRIS:** So what struggles did you grapple with when trying to move from something like Arch Linux to a company like Zagat?

**DAVE:** Interesting. I actually feel like a lot of it was transferable. Zagat gave me the opportunity to provide whatever operating system I wanted on my workstation, so I very quickly went to Linux.

A lot of what I was dealing with initially was just working in Selenium and the WebDriver tests. So I think a lot of what I learned from Arch was immediately transferable to Zagat. And over time, I had built up more of an arsenal working with other colleagues there to understand more about the ecosystem, and more about the production environment that they were deploying to.

**CHRIS:** So I guess my question is more on a personal/professional kind of phrase. Let me see if I can rephrase it. Were there any career struggles that you had when moving from Arch Linux to Zagat?

**DAVE:** I think it was more of a cultural shift, if that's what you're getting at. Zagat was a company that was very much not tech first. They were a company that happened to employ some developers. And so there was a big push-pull between products and development in terms of understanding what could be done and using the very small developer team as a tool for solving a problem, and not asking them how can we best approach this.

Whereas with Arch Linux, it was very much the wild west. Very loose knit collaboration between a bunch of people in very different time zones, very different priorities. We were all volunteers, and no one really held us accountable.

**CHRIS:** Speaking of having very little structure to much more structure ...

**DAVE:** Yeah, I think that's a good way of putting it.

**CHRIS:** So what were your strategies for overcoming some of these struggles? Was there mentorship? Was it friends from outside the company? How did you build up support?

**DAVE:** I think it was a matter of working with my fellow developers. I pretty quickly made friends with them. It definitely fit in terms of age and interests, there was some after work events. I think much like most of my career, I've been driven enough to teach myself. And I generally learn by doing, and curiosity, and hacking on things until they break and then fixing them.

**CHRIS:** Sure. Cool. Speaking of culture shifts, can you tell us how you then found yourself at Google?

**DAVE:** Sure. So about a week short of a year, I'm at Zagat. And suddenly there's a lot of people in the office who I don't recognize. One of them looks a lot like Marissa Mayer, who was running Search at the time.

Very quietly, they gathered everybody together. And they said, hey, by the way, Zagat has been acquired. Your new overlords are Google. You might have heard of them. Which was just this crazy shock to everybody in the room.

We went from going out for lunch every day as a team, to find some sandwich shop or bibimbap on the street, to having catered lunch brought in every day, and the typical TGIF wine and beer brought in on Friday evenings. So that was quite the change.

**CHRIS:** Can you talk more about the acquisition process? How did your responsibilities and expectations change?

**DAVE:** So the first job I had for Google was essentially to close down the Zagat office. My part of that was we had a couple of servers on site up at Columbus Circle, and we need to get those

off of the hardware onto Google Colos in order to close down the office, give up the real estate, and save some money. So that was my first six months.

So after that, I spent a few more months working with the Zagat group, continuing to develop the Zagat product under Geo within Google. And my manager at the time pulled me aside at some point and said, hey, I need to get you in contact with someone else in Geo, because you need to move on. There's better opportunities out there for you. You're squandering your abilities here.

And so she got me in touch with the manager of a team called Map Facts, which was working on the canonical data store for all of the data that you see today on Maps. And after a quick lunch interview, he had offered me a position as a software developer in their team. At the time, I was acquired with a title of systems administrator, and so I was pretty curious about how this was going to work out.

It turns out that it's entirely possible to get promoted doing software engineering work on the systems administrator ladder, and that's not a problem. **[LAUGHS]** But I eventually did go through the ladder transfer process, and became a proper software engineer. So despite my failures as a external interviewee, interviewing internally and getting recommendations from co-workers was a much more fruitful path.

**CHRIS:** Now, when you moved on to the SWE ladder, were you in a SWE role? Or have you been with SRE from the moment you came off of the system administrator ladder?

**DAVE:** No. I was actually a developer in the Geo organization for about a year and a half before I made the jump over to SRE.

**CHRIS:** So you said there was a person that suggested that you need to get out. That was your manager?

**DAVE:** That was my manager from Zagat who had moved over to Google.

**CHRIS:** And so this manager just randomly one day pulled you aside, was like, you need to be doing something different? What prompted that conversation?

**DAVE:** I think it was her recognition that I was probably bored in that role, and she was right. I was writing Java, and I wasn't terribly interested in the language or the actual work. But she was always looking out for me.

She was the one who interviewed me initially for Zagat. She was the one who gave me the opportunity to hop into the DevOps role. She saw that I had abilities that were not being well spent in my current position, and she wanted to help me out.

**CHRIS:** Did you realize you were bored at that time?

**DAVE:** Absolutely.

**CHRIS:** That sounds like you had a great manager.

**DAVE:** I did. I've had a lot of great managers at Google. I've been very fortunate.

**CHRIS:** So then, how did you end up in SRE from the SWE role?

**DAVE:** So while working on a SWE, I realized that I had a very big interest in, not just writing the code, but how is it deployed? How is it run? We use a system called Borg that does all of our scheduling for us. And it was very complicated, very much a black box when I started.

I wanted to know more, because I realized that it was going to be a very key part of my job. I think this is, again, just the way my brain works. I see something that I don't understand, I want to learn more about it. I want to be able to debug it.

And that turns out to be the SRE mindset. A number of people along the way kind of hinted at me, like hey, you should probably be an SRE. It seems like you're pretty cut out for it.

About a year after I joined software engineering, I got wind of a new GEO data SRE team starting in New York City. This was going to be third site of GEO SRE. They previously had sites in Zurich and Sydney, and they wanted to expand to a third site focused on some of the data ingest systems in Maps.

**CHRIS:** You mentioned just wanting to dive in and learn all about all the systems. I'm fairly new to Google. I started just a few months ago.

How do you avoid getting stuck in all these rabbit holes? Because you could just sit there and read for hours and days and days and days and days. How do you avoid that?

**DAVE:** It's difficult to figure out where to quit. I think early on I realized that the more time I could spend learning, the more I was going to help myself in the future. It was like I wanted to bootstrap myself. This gets into work/life balance a bit. What's a good way of figuring out when you know enough? **[LAUGHS]**

**CHRIS:** I'm still looking for that answer myself.

**DAVE:** Yeah.

**CHRIS:** Well, I think that is the answer and the challenge at the same time, isn't it? You have a new task that you're not really sure how to accomplish. You have to learn almost just enough,

maybe slightly more than necessary to learn the task, but not go further than that. Because then you're going to have a new task, and you're going to have to learn a new set of things.

**DAVE:** Right. I think the challenge is learning enough, and maybe a little more than that. And figuring out what's the fine line between being confident with what you've learned, since you might be learning on your own and don't have someone else to bounce those ideas off of, and spending all of your time going down that rabbit hole.

So it's a matter of, let's get the task done. Let's learn just enough, and a little more, and then move on to the next thing. But maybe also make a note of it for some kind of rainy day when you might have some free time to go back to that thing.

**CHRIS:** What are the differences between an SWE and just an SE? We should probably cover your transition back. Have we done that already-- your transition back to a systems engineer?

**DAVE:** SRE-SWE and SRE-SE?

**CHRIS:** Yeah. I think we can cover your transition back, and then we can switch over to that question.

**DAVE:** I'm not sure we want to cover that. Because the SRE role does exist. I don't know if we hire into it anymore.

**CHRIS:** Which one?

**DAVE:** SRE SE.

**CHRIS:** I think we still have the two hiring tracks.

**DAVE:** OK.

**CHRIS:** My understanding the distinction is mostly around recruitment. That once you're here, you can do either work. But that the SWE SREs have complete freedom to transfer into full time to pure SWE roles, while SE SREs would have to re-interview internally to transfer to the SWE ladder. I know this as an SE SRE.

**[LAUGHTER]**

**DAVE:** Right. So I guess I had both sides of it. My experience is that the differences are so strange. Is this something we want to get into? It's a matter of who reviews your promo packet over a certain level. The work that you do is totally the same, the ladders are written the same.

**CHRIS:** I just assumed there was a difference. I didn't know there was no distinction.



**DAVE:** It's so bizarre. I don't know why they exist. But yeah, I was an SRE SWE. And as part of my five to six promo was asked, we will give you the five to six if you want to take the SRE SE role-- which was like, yeah, duh. **[LAUGHS]**

**CHRIS:** I think it's really subtle differences in the nature of the work you're doing. The performance expectations don't change, but you're expected to be doing more systems-y problems, or more software-y problems.

**DAVE:** And that also varies by team even.

**CHRIS:** Yeah, I don't think it's great context for here. I'm actually going to do a lead in to an actual question that we'll want to keep-- tangent done. How has your career progressed since you landed in the Geodata SRE team?

**DAVE:** I think that over time there's a few things that I've noticed. The scope and complexity of the projects that I'm working on has increased. The length of the arc of work has increased. As an example, I've started off solving problems that were just given to me. That's kind of like the level three expectation.

**CHRIS:** I just want to add for folks outside of Google, just to make the conversation a little easier for everyone. When we say "level three," we're usually talking about traditional junior level. It's the entry level SRE role. I think actually we should reset and avoid the level numbers, and instead use--

**DAVE:** I'll say junior.

**CHRIS:** Yeah, junior, mid-level, senior-- use those terms. Because those will translate outside of Google.

**DAVE:** Cool. That's fine. So there's a few patterns that I've noticed about my work over the past eight or so years. The first is that the scope and complexity have generally increased over time, and that the length of the arc of work has increased.

So I started off as a junior engineer, solving problems that were given to me. And this maybe takes a quarter or two to solve each of these problems. And over time, I've moved towards defining these problems in a given area, writing designs, delegating, working beyond just myself. And maybe we're looking at two to four quarters per project.

Whereas now, I'm looking at more ambiguous areas with broader problems, writing roadmaps to propose project work, and solving those problems with a team of maybe three to four people. And that's probably a span of a year or more. I think my latest work is going on now 12, 18 months.

**CHRIS:** Can you speak a little bit to leadership and team management, but not people management, as an individual contributor? Because I think that's a really important distinction, is that individual contributors do lead and manage, but they're not people managers. Can you share a little bit about that distinction?

**DAVE:** Yeah, that's a great point. I think as an individual contributor, there is absolutely still room for technical leadership. So that may be a matter of bringing some problem to the table and being able to dissect it down to multiple individual problems which you can then delegate to other folks, help guide them through that process.

And so you end up with something of a pyramid scheme going on here, where you're at the top. Maybe you have all of the ideas, and you delegate down some of those larger problems to folks who are below you. And they may be delegate even smaller problems down to folks below them. And so you kind of all work as a team towards the end goal. But that goes back to what I was talking about with scope and complexity, whereas you have these small problems at the bottom that kind of build up to something larger over time.

**CHRIS:** In what ways do you provide support to people you delegate your tasks to?

**DAVE:** I think there's a couple of things here. I think one of them is obviously code reviews. I think another one is debugging.

Based on my tenure in Geo, I have a lot of knowledge about a lot of the systems that we depend on-- not just the generic Google infrastructure bits, but a lot of the Geo infrastructure bits. I understand how they're wired. I know how they work together. I know how they break. And so navigating those is a huge help to folks who don't necessarily have that experience.

**CHRIS:** So on the flip side, who helps you when you need help? Who is your rock in SRE?

**DAVE:** [LAUGHS] I wish I had one.

[LAUGHTER]

Slightly rocky interview. [LAUGHS] Let's see, who do I go to for help?

**CHRIS:** I mean, how has that changed over time even?

**DAVE:** This goes into the mentorship thing a little bit. I think over the years there's been a couple of people that I've admired who have had skill sets similar to mine who have been able to dig into things at a really low level, usually in the realm of performance debugging, and really found the right tool and inserted it in the right place to be able to figure out, ha, that's why that's slow. That's why that's throwing errors.

Not to say that I don't think I do this well. But I think there's been a number of times when colleagues have just shown themselves to be extremely clever and just had the foresight to figure out where to thread the needle.

**CHRIS:** So I'm hoping we can get more into-- I don't want to say personal struggles-- but if you've had any moments where you're just unsure of yourself and/or maybe things are a bit of a struggle emotionally. How have you gotten yourself help, or how have people reached out to you and helped you when they've noticed that you've needed it?

**DAVE:** Should we talk about the pandemic? **[LAUGHS]**

**CHRIS:** Sure.

**DAVE:** Holy crap. So where do we start? I can definitely tell you about a time where I've struggled.

It was about March 2020 when the pandemic hit New York City. Me and my wife are living in a small Manhattan apartment. She is a nurse working in the emergency department in Queens, which happened to be very close to the epicenter of the COVID-19 pandemic in Manhattan.

**CHRIS:** So you were dealing with COVID quarantine restrictions, and trying to make sure that your wife is safe, and you're safe.

**DAVE:** Yep, and suddenly I'm working 24/7 hours a day from a tiny Manhattan apartment. Lockdown restrictions were very difficult. It was eerie to walk around on the streets. You never knew if you were safe. There was very much a feeling of doom and gloom all around.

I think during that time I favored comforting my wife and helping her through her day, because I didn't feel like there was anything better that I could do with my time. At the same time, work was kind of a mess. We were all struggling to figure out, not just how do we continue to work from home during this pandemic, but how do we best leverage Maps to help other people?

Just before the pandemic, I had taken on a role as the area tech lead for Geo SRE. In hindsight, I'm not sure it was the best decision for me. Not just because of timing, but because I felt like it was something that I needed to do without really understanding what the role was.

Long story short, I got myself out of that role. That was the second best thing that I could have done for myself at that time. The first best thing I could have done for myself at that time was moving out of Manhattan to the suburbs, where we had a lot more room and we were much more comfortable. And have a real office now.

**CHRIS:** Was there anyone that helped you along with that at Google, or maybe outside of

Google?

**DAVE:** Yeah. I think one mistake that I made was I under communicated all of this. Once I opened up to my manager, he was really supportive. There were things that I could have done in hindsight that would have been helpful to me. But he helped me through what I see as a very rocky part in my career.

**CHRIS:** So if you could go back in time and tell yourself those things, what would you tell yourself before taking that position?

**DAVE:** It's not where I thought you were going with that question. I think it's a matter of being realistic about what you think your strengths are. So I took over the area tech lead role from someone who had written a document describing their time as the area tech lead. They essentially concluded that Geo SRE, at the time, was not really set up organizationally to have that kind of role. And I took on that role not really having an answer for that.

I think that was my mistake. I didn't see how to fill that role in the organization as it currently was. And so when I stepped down from that role, I essentially wrote the same doc reiterating a lot of the same points that he made. The organization needs to change. It's not just that it's a difficult role with a lot of complexities.

**CHRIS:** That's fair. And so you've got your house. You've expanded out into the suburbs. You've got something a little bit bigger.

What other ways have you tried to maintain a healthy work/life balance? How do you close the laptop lid at the end of the day, so to speak?

**DAVE:** So I think over time this has evolved for me. When I lived in the city, there were always a lot of things to do. There was always parks nearby. It was easy to go out and just take a walk.

I think that there were definitely times when I was young and motivated, and maybe I spent a little bit too much time at work. But I was motivated, and I was having fun, and I was ambitious and wanted to move through the ladder. I think lately it's more about hanging out with neighbors, finding time to go to the gym, taking walks, hanging out with my cat.

**CHRIS:** It's super healthy and important to recharge. Any tips or tricks for how to make sure that you're not overdoing it?

**DAVE:** A chess clock. **[LAUGHS]** 40 hours a week.

**CHRIS:** Literally a chess clock? That's kind of cool, actually.

**DAVE:** I think especially in the world of work from home, it's really easy to fall into a heavy work

balance. Setting hours for yourself just the same as you would say, I'm going to the office from 9:00 to 5:00, I think it's super important to wake up, go through all the motions, take a shower, put on real clothes, start work at some time, and sign off at some time. I think keeping that rhythm, that rotation, is super important.

**CHRIS:** Yeah, I completely second that. I remember when the pandemic started, I used to take the train into a previous gig. And once the pandemic started, we started working from home, I started losing track of time because I didn't have my commute. I wasn't going in, I wasn't leaving.

So I ended up taking walks during lunch every day and at the end of the day. It really helped me set a pace. Is there anything that you fell into that was kind of like? Did you remake a new routine?

**DAVE:** I kind of carried over my old routine. I've continued to go to the gym every morning. I feel like that's really helpful not just to have that kind of physical activity, but also to have some kind of shift that's the furthest thing possible from sitting at a desk. Lifting weights is amazing compared to writing code. It's just such a great brain flush.

**CHRIS:** That's cool. Any other direction y'all want to take this, MP?

**MP:** There was psychological safety.

**CHRIS:** Yeah, and I have the beginnings of a question bubbling up in my brain.

**MP:** I was thinking about this in terms of imposter syndrome.

**CHRIS:** Yeah. I was going to frame it around mistakes and failures, and being comfortable overcoming--

**MP:** I mean, we could talk more about how you overcame that change you just mentioned, that you got into that position and then needed to bounce. That's also a good touch-off point.

**CHRIS:** Yeah.

**MP:** The imposter syndrome also is a good one to touch on, if that's a framing that lines up well with your experiences.

**DAVE:** Yeah, particularly as an acqui hire, I feel like it was super relevant-- fake it till you make it. **[LAUGHS]**

**MP:** What are some other struggles you've overcome during your time at Google and your time as an SRE?

**DAVE:** So imposter syndrome was a big one for me, being in acquisition. I really felt like I didn't belong, like I didn't deserve to be at Google. It was always this dream of mine to work at Google, and I never really thought I'd be there. But once I was there, it's kind of like do I actually deserve this?

And so being faced with this huge mound of I need to learn this, and this, and this, and this just to get my day job done was super hard for me. It took me a long time to get over that. At the same time, I had this Cinderella period with Google that lasted a couple of years at least. I feel like during that time I figured out what I was good at, what I could lean on, and what would get people to have trust and confidence in my abilities.

That really gave me a lot of comfort in what I was doing on the day-to-day. So as an example, I was told that an SRE has to be on call and has to respond to outages and has to be able to, not necessarily solve the problem, but come up with some kind of defect report of this is roughly what's happening, and be able to pass that off if you can't solve that yourself.

So my crutch there, understanding that that was what was going to be in front of me, was I'm going to learn to read a lot of code. I'm going to read so much code for every system that I'm involved in. I'm going to know exactly how it works. I'm going to know exactly where it fails. If I see a log statement, I'm going to know exactly where it comes from and why it happens.

And that has been my go-to. That's something that I continue to carry on with. It's part of my curiosity, and I think it served me well in not just being more confident in doing my job, but I think it's also netted me what I wanted, which was other people come to me when they have questions about how systems work and how things are wired together.

I also find that working regularly with the same co-workers in a group is super useful. You gather a rapport with them. You all understand everyone's quirks, what everyone's strengths and weaknesses are. And I think that kind of bounces off each other. The last thing I would say is that I got some really good advice from an old manager of mine, which is you're either legitimately good at your job, or you've convinced everyone around you that you're good at your job, and both of these are valid skill sets.

**CHRIS:** And hopefully you have a little from both columns.

**MP:** I think so. So I was really impressed with your story. I've always been a self-learner. In my own career and my own history, I love-- just like you-- you crack something open, you just dive straight in and get to all the nitty gritty.

So let's say there's somebody out there that's very similar to that. They don't have a college degree, and they're working in a similar industry as a systems admin. What would you say to somebody considering becoming an SRE? How should they approach that?

**DAVE:** That's a good question. Get acquired.

**[LAUGHTER]**

**MP:** You weren't just sitting on your laurels.

**DAVE** I got lucky. I really want to say that I got lucky. I was in the right place at the right time.

I did not graduate college. I dropped out twice. I had enough credits to get an associate's in computer science, and I just never filled out the paperwork.

I was in the right place and the right time and talked to the right people to get my job at Zagat. I feel like I busted my ass once I was at Google, and not before that. Which is maybe the wrong message to send. **[LAUGHS]** How can I frame that?

I think the advice that I would give is just be infinitely curious. I think it's about finding something that you enjoy doing, and just going really deep. I think if I've learned anything from working at Google, it's that everybody has some kind of skill that they're just ludicrously good at. Everyone is broadly good at everything they're doing, but everyone has some thing that really drives them.

And so maybe for some people it's databases, maybe for some people it's Maps. But having that one thing is just amazing. And so developing some kind of core skill that you really love and you can really talk about, I think that's a great way to get into SRE. Because at the core of what we're doing, it's really about breaking things down and rebuilding them better.

**MP:** I love that advice. Thanks so much. So given all that you've experienced, all that today, are there any either mental health, or other support resources that you would like to see exist? Like, what would have helped you during your journey?

**DAVE:** I think I really lacked having a good mentor that I could reach out to. But I think that's also somewhat my own failing. I think if anything, I would say I've not communicated enough. And I think that there is definitely an opportunity to say, let's overcommunicate until someone tells you it's too much. Because I think people tend to be a little bit less on the social side of things, especially in SRE and SWE.

And maybe you don't feel confident enough to speak up when you need help. But really the opposite is true. If you have some coherent thoughts in your head, write them down on paper, circulate them, get feedback-- the sooner the better.

- What would have helped you do that in the past? What could we be doing to help encourage people to adopt that behavior?

**DAVE:** Self-confidence. **[LAUGHS]** Is there an Adulting 101 course? **[LAUGHS]** What would do that?

It's funny, because it's all over the ladder. It's write more design docs, get your name down on things, promote yourself. I think it's easier in the US culture. I think Europeans have a harder time with it. There's an infamous internal slide deck called "Promo for Europeans."

Giving people the tools they need to be confident in their self, doing more to burn down imposter syndrome. I think we need to help people realize that they're here because we believe in them. That they have valuable contributions to make, and we need to support that as much as we can.

**CHRIS:** 100%. I love that. Well, I'm at the end of my list. Anything else you want to wrap up?

**MP:** Well, thank you so much for your time today, Dave. It has been absolutely wonderful chatting with you and hearing from you. Chris, do you have any final thoughts?

**CHRIS:** This has been amazing. I'm so glad you're here at Google. Thanks for getting acquired with us.

**DAVE:** Thanks for having me.

**MP:** Thank you all.

**VOICEOVER:** "Prodcast," the Google SRE production podcast is hosted by MP English and Chris Wojno, and produced by Salim Virji. The podcast is edited by Jordan Greenberg. Engineering by Paul Guglielmo and Jordan Greenberg. Javi Beltran composed the musical theme. Special thanks to Steve McGhee and Pamela Vong.