

# Chapter One: Introduction

## ABOUT ME

“**G**ood morning everyone! It's great to see you here. My name is Steven and I'm a dedicated software developer who would probably even code without getting paid, given that I wasn't starving. I love to share my experiences by talking about them and I'm happy to help you become a speaker. This step was tremendously important for my own self-development and for my career. I'm convinced that it will have similar effects for you as well.”

If the book you are holding in your hands right now was a talk, this would be my introduction. I figured, it would only be suitable to use it in this first chapter, too.

First, some more details about me. My name is Steven Schwenke. I was born in Germany in 1984 and have been a software engineer since 2010.

In terms of technology, I focus on Java-related enterprise projects, which means Spring, Hibernate and some relational databases like Oracle SQL or MySQL. Very much like the whole developer community did during the years around 2015, I focused more on deployment-related topics like Docker, Cloud and operations in general, using Cloudfoundry or AWS. My front-end expertise started from Swing (in the early years) over JavaFX and static websites to Angular. I'm interested in "architectural" and team-building topics like how to write good tests, how to structure a system well and how to assign individual humans to problems to get the best software solution. My technology background as well as my interest in social processes often lead me to be in the role of the technical team lead, lead developer or architect.

I have always enjoyed talking. I learn by explaining stuff to others and I am also interested in listening to other people's stories in order to understand how I can do

better myself. Plus, I love to share my experiences and my knowledge. Hence, I loved giving talks early on, in school and at university, where lectured on how to pass an exam for freshman students. Until today (2020), I have been involved in about 200 events as an organizer or speaker, mostly in user groups, meetups or conferences.

I believe that the IT community is an integral part when it comes to the success of the technology. This is the reason why I am chairman of IT Hub, a registered association that supports the IT community of Brunswick, Germany by creating a platform for events and by organizing a conference each year.

As stated above, I love sharing my knowledge and experience, especially for topics I'm passionate about. I was approached countless times by interested developers to help them develop their own talks and practice with them. I always gave my best to support them because more competent speakers will benefit the whole community. At some point in 2020, I decided to collect all those experiences in a book to bring more developers on stage.

This does NOT mean that you have to do all of the stuff I did! For your first talk, you need much less. Together, we will create your first IT-related talk rather quickly. Let's get started!

## ABOUT YOU

This book is written for you if you:

- are a software developer, architect, IT lead, IT senior, IT consultant, hacker, coding ninja, UX/UI designer, doing something with computers,
- which leads to some interesting stories or insights to share with other IT people and
- you do not have a lot of experience or none whatsoever in giving a talk, but
- you are interested in preparing your first talk.

This book will help you with your goal of:

- trying out being a speaker just for the fun of it or
- progressing your career by becoming a speaker or
- earning more money or
- having more job options due to the people you will get to know as a speaker or by raising your profile.

Things that are not important are:

- your age,
- your gender, and
- where you live, because
- almost everyone has an interesting story to tell and everyone can give a great talk with the proper preparation.

## ABOUT THIS BOOK

This book will provide:

- a step-by-step guide to creating your first talk and
- an overview of the most important aspects about your first IT related talk, including questions like what types of talks and conference there are, and what to do and not do in your talk.

This book describes what worked for me, based on my own experiences. These may differ from what other developers have experienced and what has worked for them. And that's absolutely fine because individual people need individual teaching and coaching in order to be successful. There may be ideas, concepts or whole topics missing in this book that others deem to be crucial. I invested a lot of time in

researching everything as best as I could in order to write a book that is as comprehensive as I could get it. Nevertheless, there may be things missing.

This means two things: First, please notify me about anything I missed or got wrong. Write me a short mail to [steven@stevenschenke.de](mailto:steven@stevenschenke.de), I'd love to hear from you!

Second, if an aspect you find important is missing in this book, this only means that I did not need it to become a successful speaker. Your own path could be similar to mine, but it may also be very different.

For the sake of readability, I refrain from gendering. For example, when talking about "software engineers", I explicitly refer to ALL beings producing software, may they be male, female or diverse. Sometimes I use the pronoun "he" and sometimes I use "she". There are some designations implicating a gender, for example in the term "software craftsmen". There has been a huge debate about this wording. Again, when using these or other designations, I address all human beings that have something to do with software engineering.

## DEMYSTIFYING SPEAKERS

**B**eing a speaker demonstrates a high level of seniority in your career. In the eyes of many, a speaker is a person with great knowledge and experience. Why else would he or she be up there on that stage? In this chapter, I will demystify speakers and show you how to become one and why.

A speaker is a person like you and me. The only difference is that someone allowed him to go up on that stage. This is the (very) short answer, here's a slightly longer one: A speaker is someone who invested time to learn something. Then he structured his knowledge in order to transfer it to others orally. After that he managed to find a setting like a user group or an internal workshop where he knows slightly more about his topic than **about 80% of the present people**. This is all it takes to become a speaker.

Of course, there are renowned speakers who know more than 99% of all people and who are the most excellent speakers in terms of rhetoric, esprit and charisma. They deliver impressive performances on a regular basis. When beginning to speak in front of an audience however, it's better to compare yourself with the group mentioned first. If you realize for yourself that giving talks is your thing, nothing will stop you from becoming a great international public and paid speaker!

## WHY YOU SHOULD SPEAK

**I**t's the **ultimate learning hack**. If you can explain something to others, it means that you've really understood it. This may even only be true if you can explain it. I've made it a habit to prepare a talk for everything I learn, even for the small insights.

Speaking lets you meet other speakers who will **build a network** that you can use for all sorts of things. Looking for a new job? Just ask your fellow speakers what their company is like. You have a question about a specific technology? Just ask your acquaintance who gave a talk about it at that conference last year. Want to proof your seniority to get a raise? Just mention the number of talks you've given and how many other developers you've reached. Want to learn something new, quickly? Just attend the talk of a speaker you know and ask him questions afterwards. For all of those, I know at least one person who benefitted from doing this. In general, being a speaker opens doors you cannot even plan for. It's a **huge career boost** with a long-lasting positive effect.

Being a speaker necessarily makes you **go to conferences, where you can listen to other talks** and learn a lot in a short time. I often choose to visit talks with titles I cannot even make sense of. And though the speaker might lose me right after the introduction, I'm at least able to learn the basics of that topic. Sometimes I leave the talk after that, sometimes I open my laptop and prepare my own talk. This is opportunistic learning. The best thing about it: A lot of conferences let their speakers join for free, so you **don't have to pay entrance fees!** The remaining costs like

travel expenses and accommodation can be paid by your employer. Having employees out there to show the expertise in the company and have the company logo displayed on the first or last slide of the talk is worth a lot! It raises the exposure of the company in a relevant target group and cannot be bought except for having an employee speak at events. Because the conference ticket doesn't cost anything for speakers, the company saves a huge part of the overall cost. This is a great incentive for your employer to pay your hotel and travel expenses. And if your employer does not cover your bills, you should pay them yourself and consider it an investment: Speaking lets you visit conferences and user groups in other cities for a relatively cheap price which will raise your degree of popularity. This will lead to more invitations and close the self-strengthening loop of being a famous speaker.

Although it may sound intimidating to be on stage for the first time, giving a well-prepared talk greatly **builds self-confidence**. Many developers mention they are too afraid even to speak in front of their colleagues, although they have something important to say. If you have never given a talk, it is hard to imagine what it would be like to do so. I know there are many developers who would be great speakers and should try it at least once. I know some people who have only given one talk and most likely it will have been their last. That's great, they left their comfort zones and tried something new. However, if you notice (or have already noticed) that speaking could be something for you in the long term: Being asked to speak is great, for example being hired to give a talk about a specific topic at a local conference. It will take some time to build a reputation like this, but it will happen eventually if you continuously develop your speaking skills.

Being on stage, meeting all these great software engineers, answering questions and thus really helping people is just great fun. Yes, **having fun** is not the best reason to do something in the professional world. This is why I only mention it now, after stating the "real" reasons why you should be a speaker. But don't dismiss this aspect! Life is too short not to have fun.