

Why Coupang hires Java developers without Java experience

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Have you heard of Coupang's "Rocket Career Transition Recruitment Program"? It is a program that helps IT developers switch careers.

There are thousands of IT developers working in Coupang, a global tech company. Developers learn programming languages to talk to machines. It's like how we use languages such as Korean or English to talk to people. These days, many developers use programming languages such as C, C++, Java, and Python. Each of them is used in different fields, and they have different grammar from each other.

But what if the programming language that I can write is different from the programming language that the company needs? What if you have more than five years of experience working with C++ at your previous job, and the company you want to go to only needs Java developers?

Of course, learning a new programming language or using multiple programming languages is not as difficult as speaking multiple human languages. It would be on the level of a French chef changing his/her career to an Italian chef. However, from the company's point of view, there would be no need to hire developers with experience in other languages over developers with experience in Java.

But Coupang is different. Coupang recruits developers with experience in languages other than Java, trains them in the Java language, and puts them into practice through the Rocket Career Transition Recruitment Program.

A recruitment program from the perspective of job seekers

Let's hear from the perspective of job seekers. We found two developers who joined Coupang six months ago through the Rocket Career Transition Recruitment Program.

Meet Shin Won-ho (Wani), who has been working as a backend developer in Coupang and started his career in operating system (OS) development, and Song Woo-seok (Peter), who has been working as a backend developer in Coupang for more than seven years after developing the credit card system.



Shin Won-ho (left) and Song Woo-seok (right) having a friendly interview

Reborn as Java developers through Rocket Career Transition Recruitment Program

(Wanny) "It was not easy to understand Coupang's framework as my domain changed completely. However, we relied on each other and studied with my colleagues who received the same education. There was a good education program and I was able to adapt easily because the company did well with on-boarding before the team put me into practice."

(Peter) “I joined the company two weeks before the training program began. During those two weeks, I tried to figure out the various areas such as frameworks, libraries, and relevant systems used in the team, but it was too difficult. Honestly, I couldn’t even get the hang of it. However, when I returned to the team after completing the training program, I knew how and where to start. The four-week education program has become a compass for adapting to work life. After completing the training, I thought that I became a leader worthy of Coupang’s leadership principles.”

Then, why did these two apply as backend developers at Coupang, which used a language they didn’t know well? Shouldn’t they have found jobs using programming languages that they had experience in, such as C++, C#, and Python?

Coupang, an attractive place for developers

(Wanny) “Regardless of whether you’re a Java developer or a non-Java developer, Coupang is a very attractive workplace for developers.”

(Peter) “Coupang is one of the companies that handle overwhelming data traffic in Korea. Let’s take Gangnam-daero as an example. You have to consider a lot to design roads with heavy traffic like Gangnam-daero. The design of the signal system is also important because there are many pedestrians crossing the road and many lanes are needed to prevent traffic jams. In order to prevent accidents, determining how to guide cars joining on other roads is also important. Coupang is similar to Gangnam-daero. It’s a system that processes huge amounts of traffic 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, so there’s a lot to consider. As such, developers can experience things that are difficult to experience in other companies. When designing a quiet road in the countryside, all you may have to do is pave the road enough for the car to roll through.”

(Wanny) “You can experience services that handle large traffic similar to Coupang if you are in charge of core services such as search and chat in other big tech companies. But if you are deployed to a team in charge of small services, it’s hard to experience handling large traffic in real time. From this point of view, Coupang is one of the largest e-commerce companies in Korea, so there was an expectation that no matter what development organization I would be deployed to in Coupang, I would have the chance to handle huge traffic.”



The reason Coupang employs developers who have no experience in developing Java

We asked Kim Hong-gyeom (HG), who works as a developer manager in Coupang, about this program. His team already has two developers who have joined the company through this recruitment program.



HG

“I was against it at first.”

This was an unexpected answer.

“If you hire an experienced Java backend engineer, no matter how quickly you adapt to the company, the adaptation period is considered to take two months, usually three months. So I didn’t expect new hires to show actual results during this period. However, a developer who didn’t know any Java at all joining the company for the task of using Java? I thought it would take longer to produce results.”

However, HG's thoughts completely changed after the Java education program for non-Java developers was conducted and after he saw the results they made using Java in the last week of the program. They created better results than expected.

"If there's an educational program and if you take it in well, you can adapt well. My team members, who have already joined this recruitment program, are also showing as strong a performance as other Java developers."

He also participates as an interviewer for the career transition recruitment program. When asked by interviewees, "Can I adapt well without Java experience?" he confidently answers, "Don't worry." He also adds that with this program, developers can not only successfully switch their careers to Java developer but also develop their core strengths as developers in Coupang.

"Why would Coupang hire developers with no Java experience? You could hire developers who are already experienced in the Java language." When asked this question, HG explains by comparing it to the building of a super car.

"For example, let's say you're given the task of making a supercar. Skilled Java developers produce results quickly as already set answers. This is also an important virtue. However, developers who joined through the career transition program ask questions about things existing members took for granted. 'Why do super cars only have two doors?' 'What benefits would it have from that?' These kind of questions allow us to look at the problem from a perspective that we never thought of before."

"It's in line with the reasons why many companies emphasize diversity such as gender and race in hiring. Rather than looking at the problem from one point of view, you can solve the problem in a more creative and superior way when looking at it from multiple points of view. Developers who know different programming languages can provide that new perspective."

If you're a developer, apply

Three months after completing the Rocket Career Education Program at Coupang, we surveyed the participants and their managers on their satisfaction. So far, the average satisfaction level is 4.82 out of 5.0 points.

What is a good company for developers? Is it a company with a billiard table or a colorful sofa that looks good? Is it a company that gives developers a chance to grow?

Coupang is breaking tradeoffs by taking a path that others have not taken. This is also what CTO Thuan Pham emphasizes. In order to find a completely different problem-solving method, we also need a recruitment program that thinks outside the box.

<https://www.youtube.com/embed/tr4HRmJAZxM>

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