



The Career Hacker's Guide To

Operations Careers

Are you the friend everyone looks to when making plans?

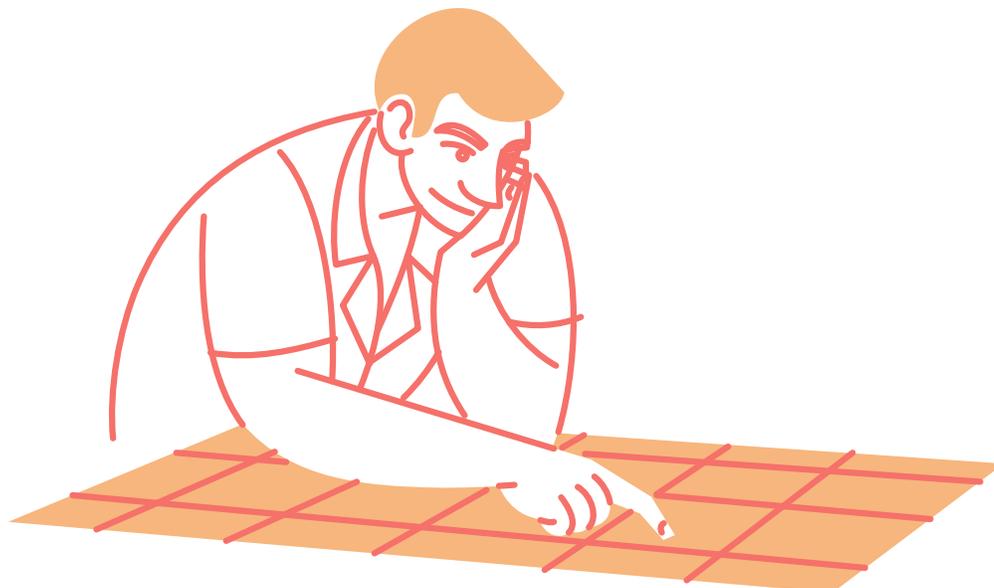
Do you enjoy a fresh new set of pens or playing around in Excel spreadsheets? Is everything in your workspace or apartment organized?

If you're Type A like me, then you've probably been the butt of a lot of jokes in your life for what your friends consider weird idiosyncrasies or nervous ticks—like organizing all of your dry-erase markers by color or the organization method of books on your bookshelf. Often, what others see as oddities are no more than

the result of an inner need to manage the chaos in your own personal universe.

The need to be and feel organized can be a superpower, properly leveraged. Just like it can be a major cause for distraction and procrastination if left unattended.

But if you consider yourself one of those always-prepared, plan-ahead types of people, well, operations just might be the perfect place to channel your energy and launch your career.



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So . . . what is operations, anyway?

Operations encompasses a broad range of activities within a business, varying by company. Shopify offers a [fantastic definition of operations](#):

Everything that happens within a company to keep it running and earning money.

One great advantage of launching a career in operations is the deep exposure to the ins and outs of how a business works.

At a company's earlier stages, it can also mean a lot of facetime with people who make decisions—like the CEO, CFO, and COO. And, as a function that focuses on efficiency, this department tends to run lean—which offers ample opportunity to wear different hats.

Operations can encompass everything from finance, accounting, human resources, and IT to system administration. In some organizations, support also lives in the operations organization. As companies grow, many of the departments that once lived in operations get split off into their own separate functions:

- **Business processes:** the way departments and teams function together
- **Human capital management:** staffing, recruitment, training and development, and more
- **Office management:** day-to-day operations at a headquarters, vendor management, etc.
- **Asset management:** choosing a company's technology, equipment, and more

Career paths in operations

Regardless of the specific department within operations, the foundational skill sets that apply to each of these functions are a great baseline for your career—even if you take a different path later in life.

There are a lot of different paths into operations—from working as an associate in IT or Human Resources to apprenticing or assisting executives.

If you look on a jobs board, you may find titles like Operations or Business *Associate*, Business *Analyst*, or Chief of Staff.

Regardless of the entry point, often entry level roles in operations are about finding ways to give the business—or a key higher-level employee—additional leverage. Think of roles in operations like a force multiplier for the business.

And if you're just starting out your career and looking for a role to get a crash course in the way businesses operate, this resource page highlights different tools and benefits of launching a career in operations.

Positions

Entry-Level Positions	Mid-Level Positions	Director Positions	VP Positions	C-Suite Positions
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Common Roles

Entry-Level Positions	Mid-Level Positions	Director Positions	VP Positions	C-Suite Positions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Operations Accounts Receivable Accounts Payable Accounting Finance Billing Business Operations Sales Operations Marketing Operations Revenue Operations Human Resources Information Technology Recruiting Office Manager Executive Assistant Administrative Assistant Billing Clerk 	←	←	←	←

Title Variations

Entry-Level Positions	Mid-Level Positions	Director Positions	VP Positions	C-Suite Positions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intern Associate Analyst Specialist Coordinator Assistant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Manager Supervisor General Manager Senior Branch Manager 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Director Supervisor General Manager Regional Manager 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chief of Staff Head of Operations Lead VP of Operations SVP of Operations People Management Strategic Planning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chief Operating Officer Chief Financial Officer Chief People Officer Chief Administrative Officer

Average Years of Experience

Entry-Level Positions	Mid-Level Positions	Director Positions	VP Positions	C-Suite Positions
0-3+	3-7+	5-10+	10+	10-20+

How much money can you make?

Your income potential in an operations career path will largely depend on the niche you choose, the stage and size of the company, the industry, and the technical nature of the role.

Keep in mind, some paths within business operations may require more extensive training—and even special types of certifications. For instance, to become a Chief Financial Officer, you

would most likely need to have a background in accounting and finance, and quite possibly even hold a CPA designation.

Regardless, a career in operations offers a reliable earning trajectory.

To highlight a few of the common ranges, here's a breakdown by experience level, courtesy of Payscale.

Average Income

Entry	Manager	Director	VP	C-Suite
Office Manager \$33k-\$68k Mean: \$47k	\$41k-\$102k Mean: \$64k	\$51k-\$150k Mean: \$91k	\$73k-\$199k Mean: \$127k	\$71k-\$246k Mean: \$142k
Operations Analyst \$40k-\$77k Mean: \$55k				

See more details on the Payscale reports for [entry/analyst](#), [manager](#), [director](#), [vice president](#), and [C-suite](#) operations salaries.

How to get started in operations

If you're not already sure what kind of work makes you come alive, then the nearly limitless options of a career path in operations might have you feeling serious option paralysis.

But don't get too worked up—the best way to figure it out is to start experimenting. If you don't enjoy a certain type of work, you can always do something else later.

For operations, even though there are so many different options, there's remarkable consistency in the types of skills that will set you up for success. Understanding how a business works, figuring out how to improve processes, making things work more efficiently—all of these are valuable concepts for a career in operations.

So, if you're interested in trying out operations as a potential career path, I suggest trying to plug yourself into a business owner's mindset.

One good place to start might be finding a small business owner or entrepreneur to shadow for a couple weeks. Offer to help out for free for a period of time in exchange for gaining some valuable exposure to the inner workings of the business.

When you're early in your career, your lack of experience can be a strong bargaining chip—most people are eager to help young people. So, use that to your advantage, but also be sure you put your best foot forward.

If someone gives you a chance, don't abuse it. Show up early.

Stay late. Give extra effort and take initiative to help with any project you can take on.

If you can't find someone to shadow locally, then go pick a business online—any business. Do some research about the company. Demo their product or service if you can. Take note of the experience. Ask questions about the process and document anything you think might need improvement. Then, if you're feeling extra bold, reach out to someone on that company's team and let them know your suggestion. Offer to buy them coffee in exchange for fifteen minutes of

conversation about what a day in the life is like in their role. Then, repeat this step for other businesses, too.

You don't have to have a job yet to get started experimenting with operations. Sure, it helps. But if you can't find an opportunity fast, just try to start thinking creatively about the way businesses work and can improve. Document the things you learn as you go through that exercise, and any chance you can create to learn from someone who's already working in a role that interests you, take it.

“ Operations empowers a business to operate more effectively. If you want a crash course in business, enjoy improving processes or systems or finding better ways to solve problems, operations provides a great career path. The skills you'll cultivate in operations will prepare you to manage projects, teams, or even establish a great baseline of business acumen if you want to start your own business some day.

The skillset for a career in operations

Most operations functions of a business ask questions like, “How could we make this more efficient?” or “How do we solve this problem?” So a natural curiosity or interest in tinkering are useful traits.

Soft skills like time and task management, organization, clear

- Strong organization
- Attention to detail
- Administrative skills
- Accounting & budgeting
- Financial management
- Basic understanding of business systems
- General business acumen
- Industry knowledge
- Product knowledge

communication, and the ability to organize and present data will also serve you well. Additionally, the ability to learn different softwares and use tools to solve problems is also a huge plus.

Here are some common skills you'll want to consider for a career in operations:

- An understanding of the different business departments
- Staffing
- Training and development
- Project management
- Time management
- Reporting
- Analytical skills
- Strong written and verbal communication skills

The operations toolkit

To dive deeper into what that looks like in tangible terms, we've highlighted some of the most popular softwares and tools operations teams at startups use to make their businesses run more smoothly and effectively.

Click on the categories to see more!

Support & ticketing



Analytics



Task management



HR



Relationship management



Finance and accounting



Resources for learning more about a career in operations

To help you kickstart your learning on how to launch your career in operations, we curated some of the best content, thought leaders, and companies from around the web to help point you in the right direction. Enjoy!

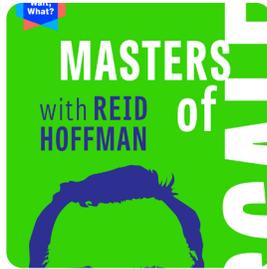
[Podcasts](#) • [Books](#) • [Leaders](#)



The best operations podcasts to start your career

Here are some excellent podcasts ranging from business operations to how startups work. While not all of these are specific

to operations, we recommend them all as great resources to gain a deeper understanding of business as a whole.



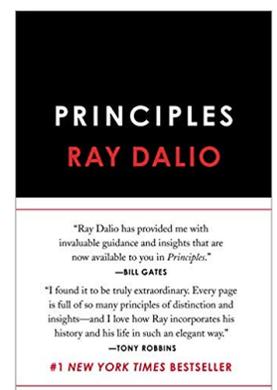
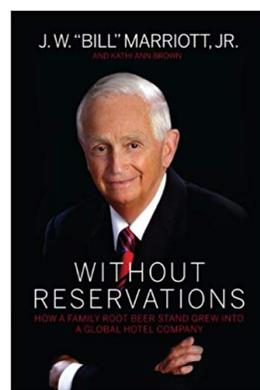
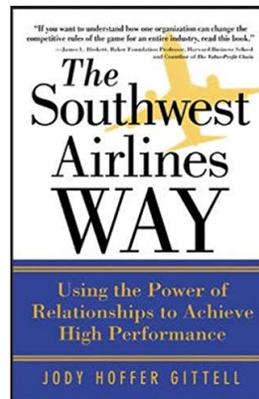
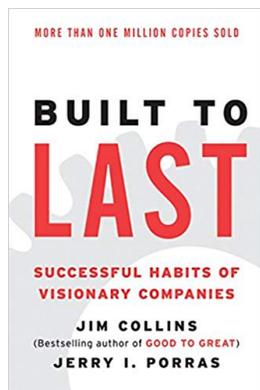
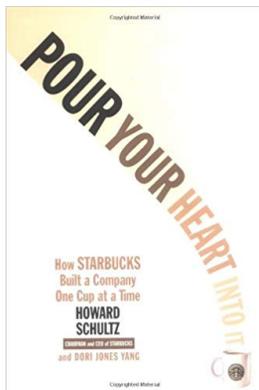
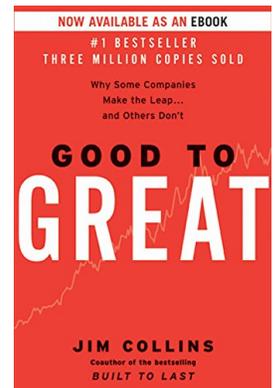
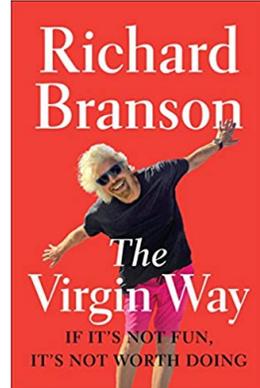
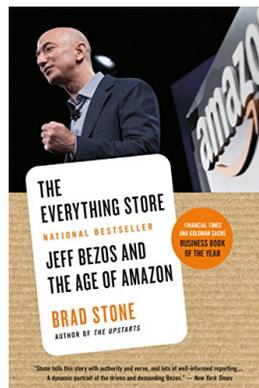
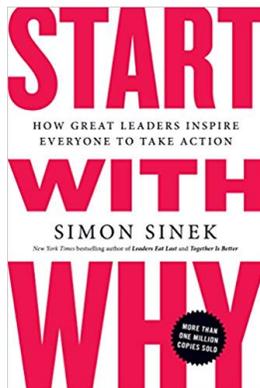
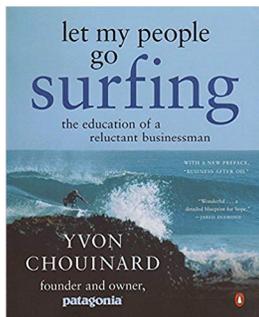
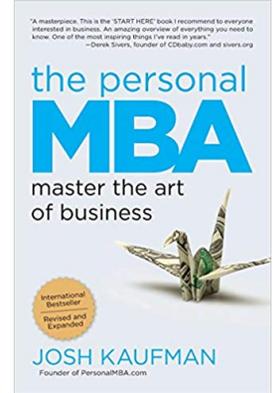
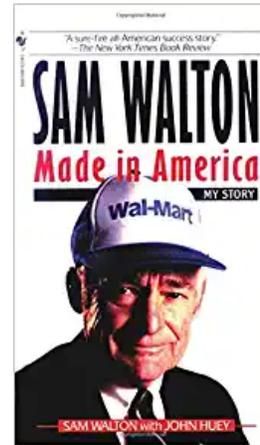
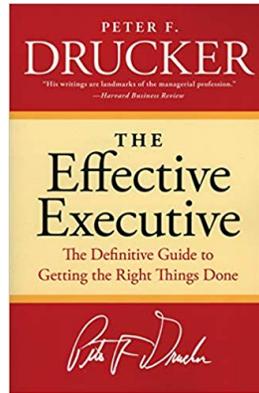
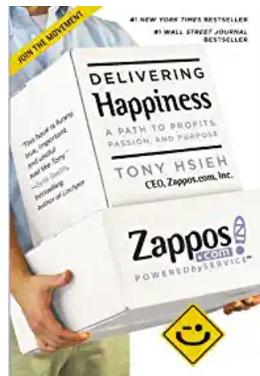
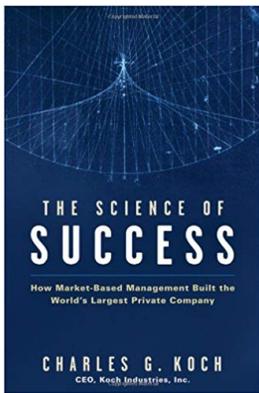
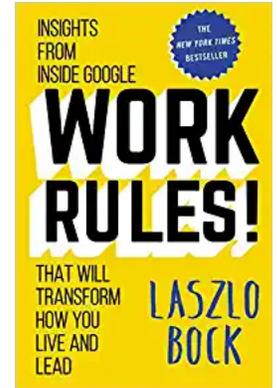
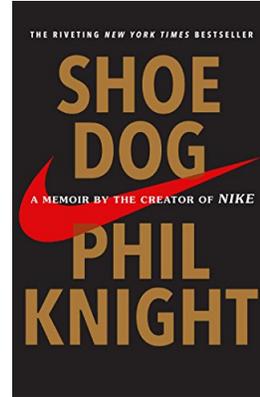
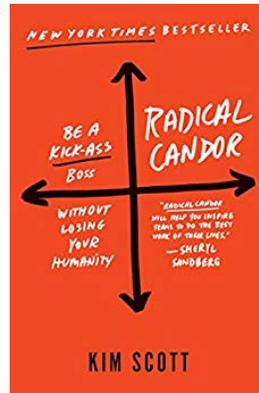
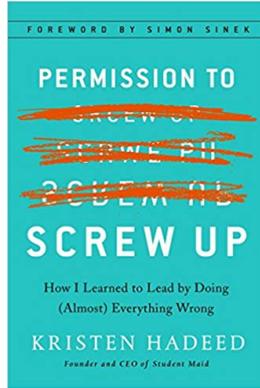
The best operations books to start your career

Want to learn how to run a business, manage a team, or grow your organization better? Well, this is a category that is rich with insight from across the entire spectrum—including coaching legends, Silicon Valley entre-

preneurs, and tell-all memoirs. If you're looking to level up, then this list is a great starting point.

So without further ado, check out our Essential Reading List for Every Operations Professional in 2020. It begins on the next page.

Click any book to open a preview online.



The best operations leaders to follow as you start your career

Operations is not just about building a better company—it's also about understanding people and figuring out how to help individual contributors achieve their maximum potential, while keeping an entire team moving forward.

To that end, we've put together a list of awesome operations lead-

ers who are worth studying. Not everyone on this list is a regular content creator, but the list is jam-packed with a wide variety of legendary operations leaders.

Know someone who should be on this list? Tweet their name and why you like them to us @[HackingCareers](#), and we just might add them.



David Cancel



Elon Musk



Eric Schmidt



Jeff Bezos



Julian Shapiro



Max Levchin



Stewart Butterfield



Paul Graham



Patrick Collison



Sheryl Sandberg



Warren Buffett



Brian Halligan



Dan T. Cathy



Peter Thiel



Reid Hoffman



Tim Cook



David Grow



Brock Blake

The best companies to work full-time in customer success

What does it even mean to be good at operations? Wouldn't that just mean finding the most profitable companies and trying to get hired? Well, maybe.

To give some tangible examples, we want to highlight a few spe-

cific companies who are creating awesome tools to tackle making operations more efficient. Their products and services are helping professionals the world over better manage their jobs and companies.



Airtable's mission is making big waves in the #NoCode movement, with a mission to “democratize software creation by enabling anyone to build the tools that meet their needs.”



Notion has created a note-taking app + project management + collaboration tool on steroids. Plus, they've got a personable and approachable brand story and point of view that feels very human, conversational, and like it'd be a great team to be part of. From their About page, they “want to break away from today's tools—and bring back some of the ideas of those early pioneers.”



Asana's built a beautiful, user-friendly project management platform – that combines calendars, projects, deadlines, communication, lists... basically, you name it, all in one easy-to-use interface.



Basecamp's career page boldly reads: “Do the best work of your career.” And this is a team that means it. It's an awesome company with a unique philosophy on work, culture, and what it means to build a business.

doist

Doist is an organization focused on bringing balance to the universe and the future of work by building better tools for the workplace and living. They launched in 2007 with their flagship product, Todoist, and have continued building and growing ever since—without raising a cent in venture capital.



Trello created an easy and flexible kanban-style project management and collaboration tool that makes it easy to stay on top of any task, project, or more.



Zapier's built a world-class platform that allows you to connect all your favorite apps and create workflows to make those softwares talk to one another easily. We use this to save countless hours every month on a wide variety of tasks. And the best part? The entirely-remote team seems as cool as the product they've built.

Operations success stories

So how have people actually gone about making their start and building a legendary career in operations?

It's a great question. And to highlight some stories—both inspirational and informative—we've curated a couple real-world stories from people who've done it.

Bailey Heldfond

Bailey knew she wanted to go into operations. But she opted to disregard the advice to apply to hundreds of openings and, instead, started creating a digital body of work. And it got her noticed by a startup in Silicon Valley. [Read her full story.](#)

Emony Anderson

After working in a popcorn shop, Emony got hired at a startup—and she got to help keep a business operating smoothly and learn the ins and outs of business. [Here's a bit of her story](#) and her take on why operations is the amazing thing that keeps operations, well, operating.

Final resources

Congrats on making it this far!

Subscribe to the Daily Job Hunt newsletter. Join 200,000+ readers and get a kick in the inbox every morning.

Read the Career Hackers Manifesto: The core principles of discovering and doing what makes you come alive.

THE DAILY JOB HUNT

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And check out the other career-hacking guides in this series:

