

# Plato Member Spotlight Series: Meet Craig Kumick, VP of Engineering at Vendasta

*At Plato, we love highlighting the amazing members of our community. In our ongoing Spotlight Series, we are introducing you to some incredible engineering and product leaders who have managed to build strong and thriving teams.*

Meet [Craig Kumick](#), VP of Engineering at [Vendasta](#). He shares with us his path to computer software, his responsibilities as a VP of Engineering, and how Plato has made him thrive as a technical leader.



## First things first: How did you originally get into computer software?

I've always enjoyed computer software, with my first program written on the Commodore 64. It was clear to me since I was a kid that I wanted to study computer science. So, I attended the University of Regina to study computer science. After graduation, I started as a software developer. At my previous company, I was also traveling to customers and understood what they were going through which I enjoyed a lot. I joined Vendasta 3 years ago, looking for a change from the world of bespoke software development to SaaS Software world. With my previous experience and knowledge from developing at Vendasta I was able to move into the role of VP of Engineering, when the previous VP wanted to move back to an IC role. I've been the VP of Engineering there for a year and a half.

## What does your current company, Vendasta, do?

It's been an evolution. We starting by developing a product that helps small and medium businesses with their online reputation. From that, we learned that local businesses want to deal directly with agencies or companies that had a history and connection with their local markets. So, we developed a business model in where we sold our products exclusively to those locally savvy channel partners, like marketing agencies, broadcasters, media companies, and telecoms. The business strategy ensures that these professional partners are able to tailor to their clients' needs, armed with the intricate knowledge and details of a local environment.

We now offer a whole suite of digital solutions within our white-label platform that makes business easier for our partners as well as their customers. Our products include solutions for digital listing management, marketing automation, social marketing, website hosting, and more. On top of that, we have our own marketing strategists in-house who help our partners with white-label fulfillment, as well as a marketplace where we're bringing in third-party vendors who provide best-of-breed marketing and business solutions, like GSuite and Boostability.

## As a VP of engineering, what are your responsibilities?

I have a team of two engineering managers and 17 software teams. Each team has between three to five developers. Between the three of us, we're managing all those teams, making sure they're going on the right track, stepping in where necessary, and otherwise trying to keep process minimal where we can. To do so, I spent a lot of time in meetings and having one-on-ones with my direct reports to make sure that everyone knows where they're going with their career development and is progressing day-to-day in delivering great software. With 17 teams, it's easy to lose sight of what everyone's doing without defined processes.

Since we're growing a lot, I am also heavily involved in hiring and making sure we're bringing on the right talent. Lastly, I am trying to hit 10% of my time doing some sort of programming or coding activity as I don't want to lose touch of the work done by the people I am managing.

## What do you search for in a candidate?

We don't use the same tech stack as any other tech company in our area Go, Typescript, and Kubernetes. So, we prefer to find smart and driven people and we will teach them our stack. It's also important for us to hire passionate people and understand what they're passionate about. As a manager, the hope is always to translate that passionate drive to work.

## What made you consider [Plato](#) and join our community?

I spoke with Michelle Zatlyn from Cloudflare at a local event on the importance of coaching, especially at companies transitioning size since roles change. She got me thinking that we'd probably need someone to bounce ideas and coach us to get better.

Plato has been an obvious choice since this talk. We're not in a major center like San Francisco so the opportunities to have these conversations are fewer. Plato has provided regular conversations with other leaders in the industry which has been amazing.

## Could you tell us more about your experience with Plato?

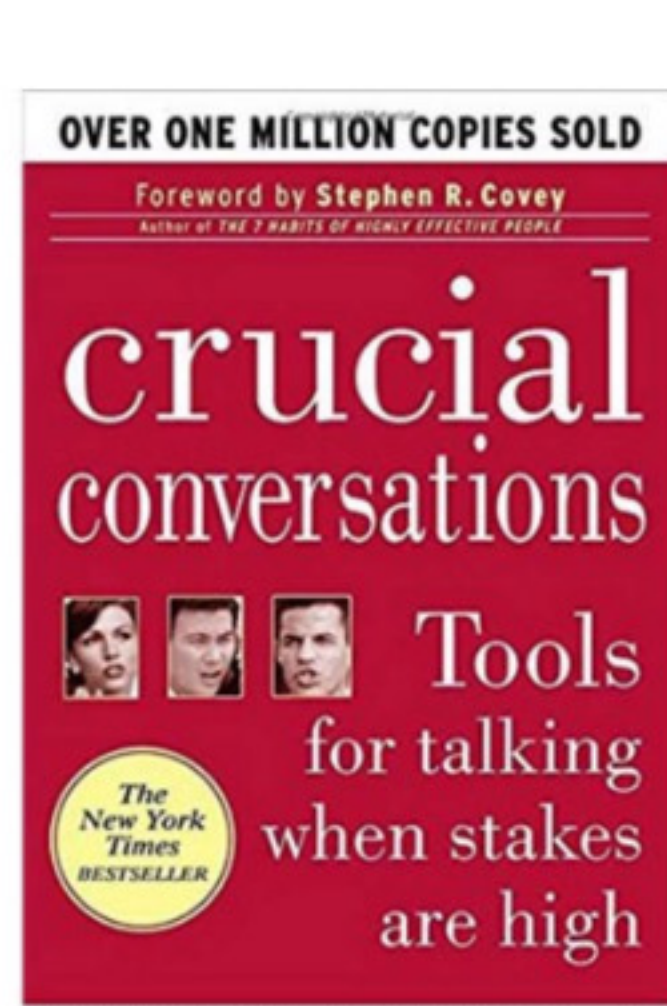
The fact that the mentor will put a half hour of time to think about your idea and talk to you directly on it is great. We've noticed that we ramp up more quickly on the new challenges we are facing. For example, for updating our Independent Contributor levels, we could understand quickly the caveats and the challenges associated. We would not have been as fast on these questions without Plato. Plato is also helping us develop skills useful for managers as they are not the same than skills used by developers.

## Based on your experience, what advice do you have for other leaders such as yourself?

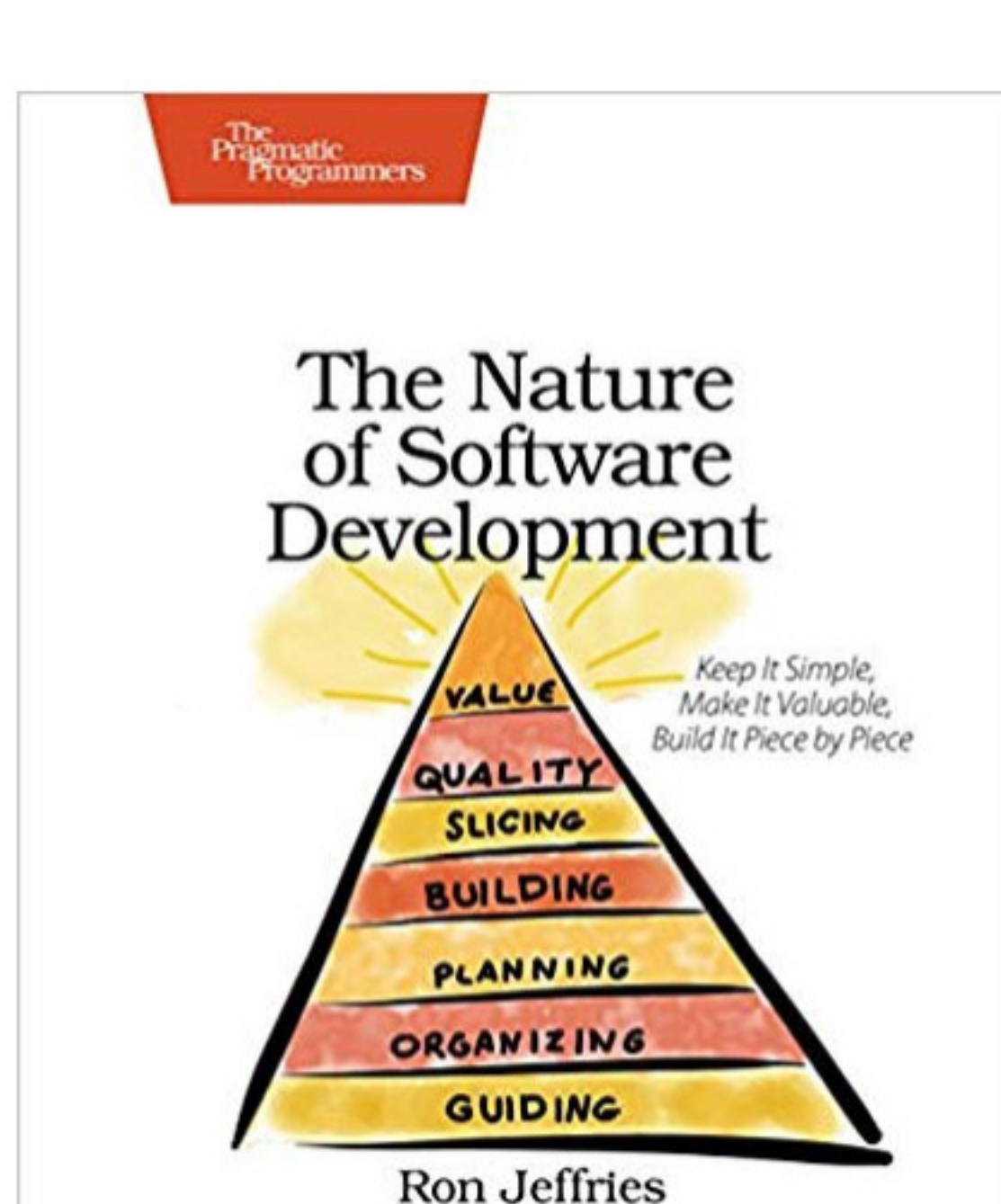
*Watch your words.* When you are transitioning from software developer to manager, people are watching your words a lot more closely than before. For example, be careful when you give feedback as it is in some cases very critical.

## What leadership books would you suggest to leaders that had a profound impact on you?

[Crucial Conversations](#) by Patterson, Grenny, McMillan and Switzler. It helps you prepare for tough situations where, as I previously said, you must watch your words closely. Crucial Conversations feels like the perfect follow up to Radical Candor by Kim Scott which teaches you the importance of giving the tough feedback.



I've also particularly enjoyed [The Nature of Software Development](#) by Ron Jeffries as it presents the simple core of ideas that make up effective software development.



## Curious about Plato? Here's a bit more about us:

*Plato is on a mission to help engineering + product leaders develop soft skills and build better teams. Plato does this through a powerful mentoring platform, where new leaders connect with seasoned professionals for 1–1 sessions, AMAs, and a comprehensive knowledge base.*

*Plato Mentors have extensive experience in management, and come from top tech companies like Google, Facebook, Lyft, Slack, Netflix, and Spotify—among others.*

*Founded in 2017 by two French entrepreneurs, Quang Hoang, and Jean-Baptiste Coger who met while attending the prestigious ISAE-Supaero school of engineering, Plato is one of the fastest growing engineering + product mentoring platforms in the world.*