

# RODOLFO AND AMAZON

Diversifying the workplace and Engaging a New Generation



## A World of Opportunity

Rodolfo and his family first came to the United States from the Dominican Republic when he was in second grade. Little could he and his family know that a decade later, as a high school sophomore, Rodolfo would launch his professional career at one of the world's largest and most respected companies.

Today, in the third year of his CareerWise youth apprenticeship, Rodolfo rides the train from his home in the Bronx downtown to Amazon, where he's a software developer. He looks back on all he has gained from the experience of apprenticeship, acknowledges the professional expertise he's acquired from Amazon — and also looks eagerly ahead to his future, which includes attending college at SUNY New Paltz to earn a degree in computer science.

“Rodolfo came to us with no formal computer science background, but he was learning to code on his own,” said Scott Stone, Rodolfo’s supervisor “He was very ambitious and fearless — and the type of person who invited the opportunity to learn at every turn.” While the apprenticeship began with core technical software and support tasks, often served up in bite-sized projects from Scott, Rodolfo’s role has now evolved from updating wikis and simpler coding language to working on more complex projects utilizing both the Java and Python.

“I definitely felt timid when I started — I knew I was just scratching the surface of software development and coding,” noted Rodolfo. But in working closely with his supervisor and mentors, not only has Rodolfo’s coding expertise progressed, but the essential soft skills — skills that are so vital to success—have been developed as well. The ability to navigate professional relationships, engage in meetings and collaborate effectively aren’t the kind of things students can learn in school, but they are coveted in the workplace, and a key component of apprenticeship.

“Amazon is a very team-oriented workplace and you need to be able to communicate with everyone,” said Rodolfo. “When I first started, I wasn’t even sure how often to send emails or the best ways to ask questions.” With CareerWise’s work-ready training and his supervisor Scott’s help, he is now very comfortable creating weekly reports and emails, and interacting with colleagues.

“I really appreciate that my supervisor and mentors have taught me so much about software development and engineering, but also about professional development and email etiquette, too,” says Rodolfo.

## Amazon's Approach to Apprenticeship

“Amazon supports and invests in developing the next generation of leaders through our youth apprenticeship program. We believe in exposing emerging talents to various technical and non-technical career paths through experiences and on the job skills building,” said JoJo Conlan, Resources Leader at Amazon. “The more traditional post-secondary recruiting is highly competitive. With youth apprenticeships, we see talent early and have the opportunity to shape, develop and cultivate high performing young professionals.”

As the first CareerWise apprentice in the program at Amazon, Rodolfo has had a strong impact on how Amazon approaches having apprentices. According to Scott, “This program was still new when Rodolfo came on board. We had the opportunity to be the pioneering department, but now Amazon has dozens of CareerWise youth apprentices. Rodolfo was the first — and helped us really establish a great foundation.”

*“This segment of talent allows us to instill and practice a growth mindset where if you can see it, you can be it. The ability to learn from and be developed by seasoned talent is the precise point we look to double down on.”*

*~ JoJo Conlan, Amazon Resources Leader*

And while the team has made significant contributions to Rodolfo's career growth, Scott notes that he would encourage others not be intimidated by the time commitment of serving as a supervisor or a mentor; the investment pays dividends in professional and personal rewards. “With a CareerWise apprentice, the team gets a significant amount of time with one individual. In the full three-year program, you really have an opportunity to invest in someone and see the fruits of your labor.”

The opportunity to be a supervisor and mentor to a young person also holds significant value to other Amazon employees. “This has definitely been an opportunity for our team to grow our own managerial and mentoring skills,” said Scott. “It is very motivating for people to be identified as a mentor — and of course, one of the best ways to learn is to teach.” Rodolfo himself has taken this valuable lesson about teaching to heart, and now spends his off days serving as a peer mentor to other apprentices and young professionals.

Youth apprenticeship ties into many of Amazon's broader goals, too, including bringing the company's brand to a younger and more diverse generation of customers and potential employees, something Rodolfo has flagged. “I think I bring a unique perspective as a young person — and Amazon now has someone who really knows the core values of the company out there in the world, too. So many people know Amazon as one thing, but I have seen how AWS and other parts of the company work now and have a better understanding of all the company does.”

## A Global Brand and A Bright Future

According to Rodolfo, while it seemed like a risk to apply for the program, he looks back now and is so glad it was a risk he was willing to take. “I visited the Dominican Republic the other year — and of course everyone knows Amazon. They were so excited for me — and so impressed that I was working for this big, global company.”

At the conclusion of his apprenticeship Rodolfo is taking the perspective and career focus he gained and applying it to furthering his education; in the fall he'll begin studying computer science at SUNY New Paltz. “CareerWise apprenticeship really pays off. From the knowledge you gain, the experience in a true work environment and with the opportunity to make so many professional connections, it is definitely worth it!”

Scott agrees. “Rodolfo is definitely way ahead of the game as he enters his freshman year of studies.”