Larson, Will

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chosen the "technical leadership" career path,

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managers just don't always know how to support their most senior engineers.

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going from Senior to Staff, followed by Principal, and then Distinguished.

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but career ladders are a tool that applies better against populations than people.

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The Tech Lead guides the approach and execution of a particular team.

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partner closely with a single manager,

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The Architect is responsible for the direction, quality, and approach within a critical area.

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Solver digs deep into arbitrarily complex problems and finds an appropriate path forward. Some focus on a given area for long periods. Others bounce from hotspot to hotspot as guided by

organizational leadership.

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Right Hand extends an executive's attention, borrowing their scope and authority to operate particularly complex organizations. They provide additional leadership bandwidth to leaders of large-scale organizations.

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Tech Leads are the most common Staff archetype and lead one team or a cluster of teams in their approach and execution.

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the day-to-day work of a Tech Lead is most similar to the work you'd already be doing as a Senior engineer,

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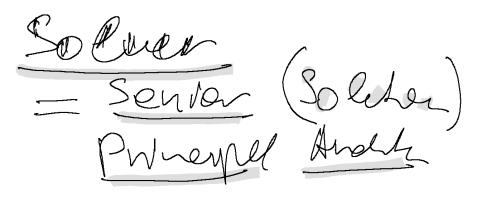an organization needs roughly one Tech Lead for every eight engineers,

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Architects are responsible for the success of a specific technical domain within their company, for example, the company's API design, frontend stack, storage strategy, or cloud infrastructure. For a domain to merit an Architect, it must be both complex and enduringly central to the company's success.

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Influential architects dedicate their energy to maintaining an intimate understanding of the business' needs, their users' goals, and the relevant technical constraints.

Solver
= Senior (Solver)
Principal Architect

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The Solver is a trusted agent of the organization who goes deep into knotty problems, continuing to work on them until they're resolved.

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The Solver is most common in companies that think of individuals, rather than teams, as the atomic unit of planning and ownership

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The Right Hand is the least common of the archetypes, showing up as an organization reaches hundreds of engineers and is akin to operating as a senior organizational leader without direct managerial responsibilities.

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borrowing authority comes with the obligation of remaining deeply aligned with that leader's approach, beliefs, and values.

Problems addressed at this level are never purely technical and instead involve the intersection of the business, technology, people, culture, and process.

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the Architect and Right Hand roles have generally emerged as the organizations reached one hundred and one thousand engineers, respectively, and simply don't exist beforehand.

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The most straightforward answer is that Staff engineers keep doing much of what made them successful as Senior engineers: building relationships, writing software, coordinating projects. However, that's a misleading answer. Staff engineers do those same tasks, but whereas previously they were the core of their work, now they're auxiliary tasks.

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setting and editing technical direction, providing sponsorship and mentorship, injecting engineering context into organizational decisions, exploration, and what Tanya Reilly calls being glue

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Folks who successfully advance technology are pragmatic, deliberate, and focus more on the long-term trend of progress than viewing each individual decision as a make-or-break crisis. It can be helpful to think of this as being a part-time product manager for technology.

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understanding and solving the real needs of the organization around you and far less about prioritizing technology and approaches that you personally are excited to learn about.

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in senior positions, you're accountable to the business and organization first and yourself second.

> You're far more likely to change your company's long-term trajectory by growing the engineers around you than through personal heroics.

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> Effective organizations streamline routine decision making.

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> the process of reviewing contracts for potential enterprise customers.

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> gives them the opportunity to inject the engineering context and perspective into a decision while it's still possible to change the outcome.

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> Staff engineer working behind the scenes expediting the most important work and ensuring it gets finished.

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> higher you get, the more your job becomes about mentoring and growing the people around you (and more broadly), building your team through building your company's public tech brand, noticing larger technical trends that can be improved upon or corrected, helping to set the tech vision for your team or the company and advocating for resourcing for tech debt projects."

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> the timeframes are longer.