Al Newkirk

Results-Oriented Senior Engineering Leader specializing in SaaS, APIs, Distributed Systems, and High-Performing Engineering Teams

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SUMMARY

An engineering leader with 30 years of experience building and scaling SaaS platforms, distributed systems, and service-oriented architectures. I have led multi-team engineering organizations of up to 13 engineers across multiple teams at companies like Klaviyo, ActiveCampaign, and Linode, driving platform modernization, operational reliability, and measurable business outcomes at scale. Strong background in API architecture, distributed systems, and people leadership.

EXPERIENCE

Senior Software Engineering Manager
Klaviyo, Boston, MA – Nov 2022 to Aug 2025

(AWS, JavaScript, MySQL, Python, Go, Kubernetes)

Led 2 teams (9 engineers) owning the Artifact Pipeline (2+ billion events/day) and Deliverability/Compliance systems for a marketing automation platform processing 20 billion messages per day. Mentored 1 manager and 3 junior managers across the organization.

- Delivered a 30% improvement in content rendering pipeline latency, improving time-to-inbox for millions of daily messages.
- Reduced PagerDuty incidents from roughly 3 to 4 per week to about 1 to 2 per month by redesigning on-call rotations, introducing daily support rotations, and running incident-focused retrospectives.
- Shipped a hosted DNS feature for non-technical customers; 20% of the platform's userbase adopted it within one month.
- Designed a planet-scale autoscaling queuing architecture to eliminate head-of-line blocking in Kafka-based event processing. Wrote the RFC; approved by the architecture review board.
- Led migration of the Artifact Pipeline from Python monolith to Go-based architecture with safe, iterative rollout strategy.

- Stepped in to restructure a stalled backend data pipeline migration: rewrote the RFC, clarified scope, and authored core data models (Python). Delivered within the next sprint.

Senior Software Engineering Manager

ActiveCampaign, Chicago, IL – Oct 2021 to Nov 2022

(AWS, JavaScript, MySQL, PHP, Java, Kubernetes)

Led 2 teams (7 senior engineers) owning the WYSIWYG email editor and the end-to-end email sending pipeline.

- Launched a new WYSIWYG email editor with 70% customer adoption within one quarter, maintaining strict 100% backward compatibility with all legacy editor versions.
- Drove development of a new event-driven sending pipeline (Java, Spring Boot, Kafka, CDC), replacing the legacy (PHP, MySQL, RabbitMQ) stack.
- Introduced lightweight Agile sprint processes that replaced inconsistent Kanban practices, improving delivery consistency and performance visibility across both teams.
- Established SLAs for bug triage and resolution, reframing bugs as broken commitments to paying customers.
- Earned trust from teams that had operated without management for nearly a year; mentored managers and ICs through consistent feedback loops and performance coaching.
- Partnered directly with third-party editor framework developers, providing integration feedback that improved both the framework and our implementation.

Senior Software Engineering Manager

Linode, Philadelphia, PA – Jul 2020 to Oct 2021

(HTML, CSS, JavaScript, Perl, Python, Kubernetes)

Directed 3 engineering teams (API, LKE, Developer Experience) spanning senior and mid-level engineers building cloud infrastructure products.

- Launched LKE (Kubernetes-as-a-service), achieving 15% month-over-month adoption among new users and exceeding early revenue forecasts. Managed pricing, rollout strategy, and deprecation policies.
- Transformed the API team from specification-last to API-first development practices, integrating OpenAPI validation into CI/CD pipelines.

- Delivered customer-facing and internal systems including CI/CD pipelines, deployment automation, and Kubernetes orchestration tooling.
- Established clear team ownership boundaries, preventing the DX team from becoming a catch-all for loosely defined work.
- Championed developer experience improvements, reducing friction in local development, testing workflows, and production operations.
- Defined SLIs, SLOs, and on-call boundaries for LKE, separating platform issues from upstream Kubernetes behavior to protect engineering focus.

Senior Software Engineering Manager / Principal Consultant
Al Newkirk, Rogue Studios, Philadelphia, PA – Aug 2018 to Mar 2020

(HTML, CSS, JavaScript, Go, Ruby, Perl, PostgreSQL)

Co-founded a startup studio; managed end-to-end business operations, client relationships, and engineering delivery across multiple greenfield SaaS products.

- Co-founded Rogue Studios with a fellow veteran technologist; sourced clients, onboarded customers, and managed delivery end-to-end.
- Managed remote engineering partners and freelancers across multiple projects, driving planning, execution, code quality, and delivery.
- Shipped a legal contract negotiation platform MVP requiring multi-layered backend architecture.
- Designed and delivered production-grade APIs and backend services using Ruby on Rails, React, and Perl.
- Advocated for contract-driven, API-first development practices across client organizations.
- Held regular one-on-ones with engineering partners to provide feedback, align on priorities, and support professional growth.

SKILLS

- **(AI) Artificial Intelligence:** OpenAI (ChatGPT, Codex), Anthropic (Claude, Claude Code)
- **Leadership:** Agile, OKRs, KPIs, Scrum, SLOs/SLIs/SLAs, Product Management, Project Management, UML, ERD, Roadmap Ownership, Hiring, Mentoring, Stakeholder Communication, Cross-Functional Collaboration, Performance Management, Talent Development
- **Architectures:** Service-Oriented Architecture, Microservices, REST, HTTP, Hypermedia, OpenAPI, GraphQL, Event-Driven Architecture, FP, OOP
- **PaaS:** AWS, GCP, Kubernetes, Docker, Linux
- **Databases:** PostgreSQL, MySQL, Redis, MongoDB, Couchbase, ElasticSearch, Memcached, Neo4j, Kafka, RabbitMQ, SQL Server, SQLite

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- **Languages:** Go, PHP, Perl, JavaScript (TypeScript), Python, Ruby
- **Frameworks:** Rails, Laravel, Django, Spring Boot, Mojolicious, Catalyst, React, Vue, Angular, Ember
- **CI/CD:** Terraform, GitHub Actions, GitLab Pipelines, Jenkins
- **Metrics:** Grafana, Splunk, PagerDuty
- **Management:** Jira, Confluence

EDUCATION

Overbrook High School, Philadelphia, PA

Graduated 1997

PHILOSOPHY

My leadership centers on removing ambiguity: defining success upfront, aligning teams on measurable outcomes, and ensuring every partnership operates with explicit agreements on responsibilities and deliverables. This creates high-trust, high-ownership teams that move with autonomy and purpose. I focus on enabling engineers and managers to execute confidently, make better decisions, and deliver meaningful results that scale with the organization.

ENDORSEMENTS

"Al is a strong engineering manager of real technical depth. He understands the work at a level that lets him ask the right questions about approach, timeline, and resources. He gave me projects that pushed my skills and stayed involved just enough; technical enough to guide when needed, but trusting enough to let me own it. I got promoted to senior software engineer under him and took on projects of increasing scope. When I wanted to move to another team to learn a new technology, he backed it fully and made sure it worked for my career. He's steady, technically sharp, and creates room for his people to do their best work and grow. I would absolutely work with Al again and am happy to recommend him for any engineering manager role!"

– **Dillon Jones** (Direct Report)

"Al was my direct manager for several months at Klaviyo. I was moved onto his team during an org restructure, and he wasted no time getting me up to speed. I really enjoyed the team culture Al drove - one of direct ownership and trust. Every team member was empowered and given responsibilities and trust to execute in their areas of ownership. He also did not shy away from giving great technical insight, but never strong-armed his engineers and deferred to their judgment. Al did a great job at keeping things clear and communication lines open - He was a joy to work with and a very skilled leader who knows how to get the most out of his team members."

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– **Jacob Jensen** (Direct Report)

"I had the opportunity to work with Al both as a peer and in a manager–subordinate relationship, and he was always a great partner to work with. Al shows empathy for his team and provides the autonomy people need to grow. He helped strengthen team foundations and guided us through complex product areas, from platform compliance and anti-abuse to high-volume event processing. Al leads by example, holding himself accountable, moving with high velocity, and ensuring his team has the resources to succeed."

– **Xiaobo Sheng** (Direct Report)