

From MUIC Graduate to Global Tech Leader: The Inspiring Journey of a GitLab Vice President

A portrait of Srinyu Stittri, a man with dark hair, glasses, and a light beard, wearing a white button-down shirt. He is sitting at a desk with his hands resting on it. The background is a soft-focus, abstract design with light blue and white geometric patterns.

S RINYU STITTRI

MUIC Class of 2007

Major: Computer Science

Position: Vice President of Engineering at GitLab

October, 2024

Get to know “MEK”



Hi everyone, I am Mek. My real name is Srinyu Stittri (ศรัณยู สกิตตธัย).
I am the Vice President of Engineering at GitLab leading the Infrastructure and Quality teams that consists of around ~220 engineers.

Srinyu Stittri

VICE PRESIDENT OF ENGINEERING AT GITLAB

Could you elaborate on a specific project or initiative you're particularly proud of at GitLab?

I appreciate this question. There are many things that I am proud of working here at GitLab. It's really multifaceted with people leadership, technical architecture and the fact that GitLab is the world's first DevSecOps platform. I will start with the people leadership aspect, as someone who is responsible for the vision, execution and well-being of 220 engineers, you as a leader really need to embrace servant leadership and transparency at the core. I started at GitLab when we were only 200 people, a series B startup; now we have grown to 2,500 people. I care deeply about the people and am proud to say that we have led our teams through turbulent times (Covid-19, market correction) while still retaining our long-tenured engineers. I mentioned that GitLab is the world's first DevSecOps platform. We invented this category on the Gartner Magic Quadrant. My teams are responsible for the technical architecture of GitLab's entire platform. We make sure that our services are designed for global scale. We are always compared with GitHub and Microsoft and we are proud to be competing with the top companies in Tech on the global stage.



How do you see the importance of the role of software engineers evolving in the next decade?



I think this question is due to the recent rapid adoption of AI :). AI is here to stay but I think the impact of it is not fully understood yet and that has led to misinterpretation that AI will take jobs away from our software engineers. On the contrary, I think software engineers will be more important than ever. The jobs of software engineers will evolve from where it is today and you will see AI taking on the smaller, mundane, repetitive tasks. This will free up our engineers to focus on more strategic tasks.

Today, it takes the entire engineering team to design, develop and release one version of the software for the business. Disclaimer; I am talking about the SMBs and mid-size companies not behemoths like the FAANGs (Facebook, Apple, Google, etc.) As you start to see engineering speed-up, the rate of change will increase, parallelize, and the impact to customers simulated more in-house before releasing. You need your teams to be thinking how your organization would execute on a longer time horizon and how you would navigate the competitive landscape. I think it will be a world where strategic thinkers win.

I also think that English as a language will be even more important than ever. I was at a recent Google conference and there was a leadership panel talking about building AI capabilities. The key components of that is Prompt Engineering where engineers structure how the English language is segmented and compartmentalized as instructions to the underlying LLM (Large Language Model) engines. It turns out that the audience in that session agreed that building great AI features requires a deep understanding of human linguistics with English being the primary language we use to communicate with AI LLMs. And I personally think that bilingual and trilingual engineers who have an in-depth understanding of English will gain an upper-hand in the industry. If you understand the tone, depth and nuances between the different languages, you will be able to communicate more effectively to an international audience. This is a topic that I am engaging in deeply. I could go on more about AI but it would be too much for this article. Happy to do it at another time though :)

What are some challenges you've faced with remote work, and how have you overcome them?



Oh man, we have an entire handbook page for this at GitLab. I'll link it here for folks to read if they are interested.



I think you have to be really intentional in staying connected with your teams. In an on-site setting, you would be fed information either by process or happenstance within an environment that you are present with everyone. Company all-hands are meticulously orchestrated, in-person team meetings that broadcasts important announcements or the water-cooler talk on the latest news with your co-workers. With all-remote work it's different.

You need to be reaching out more and doing so very intentionally. This is really the key with people management because you only see your teams during Zoom calls. Personally catchup, coffee chats need to be scheduled; you won't run into that direct report accidentally at the company cafeteria. :)

When you notice someone's engagement is low, you as a leader have to follow up. It's hard to pick these up in meetings but if you are paying attention the signal is there. I care deeply about my teams so I will take mental notes on the team's level of engagement, mood, demeanor. I then make sure that either myself or one of my leaders follow up.

We also have a global workforce; the majority of my teams are outside of the US, heavily leaning to Europe. So I have more people working before most of the US team wakes up. Important meetings will have multiple sessions, they are recorded and with well-taken notes. We make sure that everyone in any location in the world can catch up on what was spoken and discussed. As I said, we are very intentional in structuring our meetings and communication for a remote workforce. There is much more to this, I encourage you to take a look at the guidebook. GitLab shares our remote work tools in the open, any organization can pick it up and use it for free.



What was the most challenging aspect of your journey to becoming a Vice President, and what did you learn from it?

I could write an entire series of articles about my career journey *laughs* :) I want to say with pride that I am still using my bachelor's degree from MUIC and I have not received any further education beyond our Computer Science bachelor's program. I was lucky enough to have a father that saw the importance of English and was raised bilingual (thank you Mr. Thavan). That was the foundation that I built on top of; in college at MUIC, after immigrating to California in 2007 and adapting to the culture of Silicon Valley.

This might not come as a surprise. I think the most challenging part of becoming a Vice President is overcoming your impostor syndrome. I can assure you that every leader has some level of self-doubt and every time we screw up we all go back to that place. The opportunity here is having self-awareness and realizing that if you don't make mistakes you are not growing.

Every mistake is an opportunity to improve and every feedback whether good or bad is a blessing. Once you overcome that you will start to build confidence. That really helped ground me in execution, honing my leadership presence and delivering results.

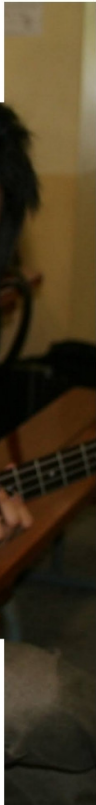
Having impostor syndrome also means that you often "think" that you are not "good-enough." I think it's important to have self-empathy and know that everyone has untapped potential. I truly believe that the human mind can do anything if it chooses to. This is how I changed my internal dialog from "I wish I could do that.." to "Why not me?" to "Yeah, I can do it." Having a good coach and mentor also helps.





How did your experience at MUIC prepare you for your career in tech?

Oh gosh, I would not trade my experience at MUIC for anything else in this world. MUIC is a special place. My fondest memories are during the time I spent at MUIC. I have made lifelong friendships and memories that will last a lifetime. I felt that the environment at MUIC is primed for learning with a close-knit community and people with internationally diverse backgrounds. During my time, our college was not known for being the biggest nor fanciest nor located in the city center but we had a very high bar on accepting students with strong English skills.



I think we are the top international college that teaches the full curriculum in English. We had to do all of our research in English (thank you Google) and that exposed me to the latest developments in computer science published online. I enjoyed our practical coding projects and hands-on algorithmic design. My computer science senior project probably had the most positive impact on my career preparation. We built an autonomous mini-car that automatically navigated the campus streets based on GPS satellite triangulation. Note that this was in 2006, way before all these autonomous vehicles entered the market. The project taught me important lessons in project management, people skills, delegation and networking with industry experts.

We also had great instructors. I want to pay my respects and gratitude to Aj. Pornchai and Aj. Poramin, I won't be where I am today without their guidance. I was also part of the Student Association—it taught me practical real-world project management. We also had a wide array of clubs and activities; I was very active in our Music and Photography clubs.



Are there any particular skills you believe are essential for success in the tech industry today?

I think many have touched on this topic. I think there are fundamental skills, e.g. time & stress management, discipline, medication and all the usual. I will touch on the 3 that I think are the most critical: curiosity, empathy and having a growth mindset.



- **Curiosity** – I have seen many projects fail due to a lack of curiosity from the team. Operating strategically means getting close to all the details as much as you can. Never assume that things are a certain way because of the obvious majority. You would be surprised at what a sprinkle of curiosity and an initiative to follow up would uncover.
- **Empathy** – We talk about this a lot in the media but applying it practically takes a lot of effort. Building a successful product means that you need to really understand your customers and their day-to-day workflow. The best solutions are invented to solve problems and if you can do it at scale you unlock massive revenue.
- **Growth mindset** – Every day is an opportunity to improve and be better than yesterday. It takes a touch of humility to admit your and your team's flaws. Success comes when you are continuously improving everyday and are consistently leading by example to your direct reports and your teams.

Jitta Wealth

ASSET MANAGEMENT



Drawing from your own experiences, what advice would you give to the younger generation interested in software engineering?

Software engineering is the language of the future. We have seen this in ancient times with reading and writing. Back then it was the church and priests that had the ability to write and publish books and materials. Fast-forward to today, building software is the language that connects world economies and improves lives. Every industry will be disrupted and then augmented by software engineering. I personally think that it is already a fundamental skill that will take you to any industry. We are already seeing many Thai startups in health tech, agriculture tech, food tech and more. The speed of innovation is not slowing down and software engineering is here to stay. You are authoring the systems of the future.

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TRANSFORMING THAILAND

SPEAKER SESSION

01 LEARNING FROM GLOBAL MINDSET

MEK STITTRI
VICE PRESIDENT
OF INFRASTRUCTURE & QUALITY AT GITLAB

13:20 - 13:50

03 MAKE OVER NEW PAOTANG Paotang เฒ่าใหม่ Contest

P. KOON
DIRECTOR OF DIGITAL STRATEGY AND PLATFORM
INFINITAS BY KRUNGTHAI

13:50 - 14:30



FRI 28/06/2024
10 AM - 4 PM
THE PARQ 5TH FL
TOWNHALL ROOM

ASTER SUPPORT CORNER
ASTER CAFE
PHOTOBOOTH & BACKDROP
TATTOO STATION
PRIDE QUIZ
TALENT PLAYGROUND
BOARD GAME STATION
BEAD STATION
POST & TAG
LIVE MUSIC AND MORE

THIS ARISE IN PRIDE IS A TEAM GATHERING EVENT WITH FOOD, DRINKS AND GAMES ON THE HOUSE. JOIN ALL ACTIVITIES TO GET 300 ASTB.

SCAN TO REGISTER





MOTTO:

“It’s pointless to compare against others. The only real competition is against you yourself from yesterday.”

Mek Stittri

VICE PRESIDENT OF ENGINEERING AT GITLAB

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