
✦ Introduction

Everyone sees the six-figure salaries in tech, but not everyone sees the *path* to get there.

From the outside, it can look like those people must have had connections, been born into money, or had computer science degrees from fancy schools. That wasn't me.

I didn't come from money, and I didn't walk into a six-figure job. My first jobs barely paid the bills — \$48K in sales, IT dispatch where I just transferred calls all day, and low-level school tech support swapping out Chromebooks. None of it felt like a career. I felt stuck, frustrated, and honestly questioned if I'd ever break through.

But I remember one moment clearly: sitting at my IT dispatch desk, staring at the phone, waiting for the next ticket to come in. I thought, *is this really it? Is this all I worked for?* I was in debt, I was underpaid, and I didn't see a future. That's when it hit me — if I kept doing the same thing, nothing in my life would change.

The only thing I had going for me was persistence. And that persistence eventually led me to discover **ServiceNow** — a platform that quietly powers some of the biggest companies and government agencies in the world. It wasn't flashy like app development or cybersecurity, but it was in demand, and very few people were talking about it. That combination became my unfair advantage.

This guide is my blueprint: the certifications I earned, the job offers I accepted, the setbacks I had to push through, and the exact steps I used to go from being broke and in debt... to making over \$200K a year in tech.

I want you to see the *real* path — not the highlight reel. Because if I can do it, starting from where I started, then you can too.



Section 1: My Early Struggles

When people hear “six figures in tech,” they imagine someone who always had it figured out — the straight-A student, the computer science grad, the Silicon Valley prodigy. That wasn’t me.

My career started in frustration, confusion, and honestly, survival mode. I wasn’t learning anything that would actually move me forward. Here’s what that looked like:

Helient — My First Job (\$48K)

My first job out of college was at Helient, a managed services company that catered to the legal industry. But I wasn’t doing anything technical. I worked as an assistant to the Director of Sales — taking people to dinner, cold calling, doing research, and basically whatever the Director told me to do.

At the time, I convinced myself I was “figuring things out,” but deep down, I knew I wasn’t learning skills that would take me to the next level. When COVID hit, my usefulness expired, and I was laid off.

Philadelphia School District Apprenticeship (~\$30K)

My next move was a tech apprenticeship with the Philadelphia School District. It sounded promising at first — “technology” was in the title — but the reality was brutal. I was driving to work every day, spending more on gas than I made fixing broken Chromebooks and showing students how to use them.

👉 **Lesson:** Not every job with the word “tech” in the title is a true career path.

Entara IT Dispatch (\$30/hr → \$50K offer)

Next, I worked IT dispatch for Entara. Imagine sitting in a chair for nine hours straight, answering phones, and routing tickets. That was my life. Grueling.

After a while, they offered me a \$50K salary. Most people would've jumped on it. But I said no. I knew \$50K wasn't going to change my life. Instead, I booked a ticket to Nigeria and spent five weeks clearing my head, figuring out what I really wanted.

👉 **Lesson:** Sometimes you need to step back, reflect, and realign before moving forward.

Houston Reset: J.P. Morgan & Empire Today (\$18/hr → commission only)

When I got back, I moved to Houston and tried to reset my career. First at J.P. Morgan Chase as a phone rep for \$18/hour. Then at Empire Today selling carpets — I thought the commissions would be lucrative, but it turned into another dud.

By the end of 2021, I was tired, broke, and out of options. I had debt, no real technical experience, and no path forward. That's when I drew a line in the sand: **2022 had to be different.**

👉 **Why this matters to you:**

I want you to see this because a lot of people think they're "too far behind" to start a tech career. They believe you need a CS degree, perfect grades, or a strong technical background.

I had none of that. I had rejection after rejection, low-paying jobs, and false starts. But persistence — not talent — is what eventually got me into tech.

Section 2: The Turning Point — Revature & ServiceNow

By the time 2022 rolled around, I was exhausted. I had tried sales, dispatch, apprenticeships, and phone support. Nothing was sticking. Nothing felt like a career.

I knew one thing: if I didn't make a drastic change, I'd be stuck in that same cycle forever.

That's when I found **Revature**.

Revature Training — My First Real Taste of Tech

In January 2022, I joined Revature and for the first time in my career, I felt like I was learning skills that actually mattered. Every morning, I spent four hours in structured training learning **ServiceNow** — workflows, tables, forms, automation, and the basics of building applications.

In the afternoons, I worked on group projects with about 25 other people in my cohort. We weren't just reading about tech, we were actually building things, breaking things, and fixing them. For once, I wasn't just "supporting" technology — I was learning how to create it.

👉 **Lesson:** ServiceNow was in massive demand, but hardly anyone I knew was talking about it. That meant opportunity.

The Breakthrough Mindset

The difference this time wasn't just the training — it was my mindset.

- At Helient, I learned how to sell myself.
- At Entara, I learned how to handle high-volume pressure.
- At Empire Today, I learned what failure felt like.

All of those "useless" jobs gave me skills I didn't know I'd need: persistence, confidence, and the ability to talk to people. Now, paired with ServiceNow's technical power, I finally had both the **soft skills** and **hard skills** that employers valued.

The First Big Opportunity

After three months at Revature, I landed an interview with Deloitte for a ServiceNow position.

I didn't have years of experience. I didn't have a perfect résumé. But I had enough hands-on practice, enough persistence, and enough confidence to get in the door.

👉 **Lesson:** The turning point in your career isn't your first job offer — it's the moment you decide to bet on yourself and commit to learning a high-leverage skill.

⚡ Next up: **Section 3 — Certifications & Timeline** — where we break down exactly which certifications I took, in what order, and how each one directly boosted my salary.

Section 3: Certifications & Timeline

A lot of people think certifications are just résumé fluff. For me, each one was a **door-opener**. The timing mattered as much as the credential itself — and each step directly influenced my salary growth.

Here's how it actually played out:

1. Certified System Administrator (CSA) — Deloitte

- **When I earned it:** While sitting on the bench at Deloitte.
 - **Why it mattered:** Deloitte required the CSA before placing me on a Homeland Security project. It proved I had the foundation to work with ServiceNow in a professional setting.
 - **Career impact:** Got me off the bench and onto my first real ServiceNow project.
 - **Salary leverage:** My first true six-figure role — **\$100K with benefits**.
-

2. CompTIA Security+ — Leidos

- **When I earned it:** As part of the hiring process at Leidos.
- **Why it mattered:** Leidos made it clear: *“Pass Security+, and you're in.”* Security+ was the ticket into federal contracts, DoD work, and higher-level ServiceNow projects.
- **Career impact:** Passed the exam → immediately jumped into a defense project.
- **Salary leverage:** Salary jumped to **\$180K with benefits**.

3. Certified Application Developer (CAD) — Peraton

- **When I earned it:** While working on Federal Reserve Bank projects at Peraton.
 - **Why it mattered:** The CAD proved I could **build apps, not just configure them**. It separated me from admins and positioned me as a developer/consultant.
 - **Career impact:** Elevated me into more specialized, higher-paying consulting roles.
 - **Salary leverage:** Helped secure **\$180K+ consulting roles** (with benefits).
-

4. Renewals & AI Focus — Today

- **Where I am now:** Renewing Security+ to keep my clearance eligibility current. At the same time, I'm expanding into **AI + ServiceNow**, since the future is moving toward automation and intelligence within the platform.
 - **Career impact:** Keeps me competitive in federal spaces *and* positions me for next-gen opportunities.
 - **Salary leverage:** Future-proofing — staying in the **\$200K+ club**.
-

👉 Key Lesson for You:

Don't chase *every* certification at once. Time them strategically:

- **CSA** gets you in the door.
- **Security+** gets you into federal work + higher pay.
- **CAD** moves you into builder/developer roles.
- **Renewals & niche certs (CIS, AI, SecOps)** keep you competitive long-term.

Certifications aren't about the paper. They're about **leverage**. Each one can literally add tens of thousands to your annual income if you earn it at the right time.



Section 4: The Job Offers & Salary Growth

When you zoom out, my career looks like a straight climb — but living it was anything but. There were layoffs, pay cuts, and long months of uncertainty. The numbers, however, don't lie: every move leveled me up in skills, experience, and leverage.

Here's how it played out:

Deloitte — The First Breakthrough (\$100K, Homeland Security)

- My first true ServiceNow role.
 - Started on the bench for months until I passed the **CSA certification**, which got me placed on a Homeland Security project.
 - **Lesson:** The first big win might not feel glamorous. Passing CSA was the key that unlocked my career.
-

Leidos — The Security+ Pay Jump (\$180K, DoD)

- Interviewed with Leidos while still at Deloitte. They told me: *“If you pass Security+, you're in.”*
 - Passing Security+ immediately doubled my earning power and placed me on a Department of Defense project.
 - **Lesson:** The right certification at the right time can change your life overnight.
-

Millennium Corporation — Navy Project (\$190K, Laid Off)

- Took a role supporting the Navy, which bumped me to \$190K.
 - Great pay, but the project ended abruptly, and I was laid off.
 - **Lesson:** High pay isn't permanent. Contracts end. Always prepare for the next move.
-

Peraton — A Strategic Reset (\$145K, Federal Reserve Bank of New York)

- On paper, this looked like a pay cut. But it gave me **CAD certification experience** and credibility working with the Federal Reserve.
- **Lesson:** Not every step is about salary. Sometimes stability and résumé weight matter more.

Softact Solutions — Consultant Mode (\$175K, Army Project)

- Supported the U.S. Army on a ServiceNow project.
 - By now, I had CSA + Security+ + CAD + clearance — the full package.
 - **Lesson:** Once you're proven, companies don't just hire you — they compete for you.
-

Current Role — The \$200K Club (Government)

- My current role pays **\$200K+** working on government projects.
 - At this level, the conversation isn't about "breaking in" anymore — it's about maximizing opportunities and building long-term wealth.
 - **Lesson:** Six figures isn't the finish line — it's just the starting point for what comes next.
-



Career Ladder (Numbers Don't Lie)

Deloitte (Homeland Security)	\$100K
Leidos (DoD Project)	\$180K
Millennium Corp (Navy Project)	\$190K
Peraton (Federal Reserve Bank)	\$145K
Softact Solutions (Army Project)	\$175K
Current Role (Government)	\$200K+

👉 **Key Lesson:** Once you're proven, companies compete for you. Even a "step back" — like Peraton at \$145K — can be strategic if it adds certifications, security, or clearance. The overall trajectory is what matters, not any single paycheck.

Section 5: The Game Changer — Government Clearance

One thing that completely changed my career trajectory wasn't just ServiceNow. It was getting a **government security clearance**.

That clearance opened doors to projects at Homeland Security, the Department of Defense, the Navy, the Army, and beyond. It gave me access to high-paying jobs that most people can't even apply for.

But here's the truth: my path to clearance wasn't perfectly planned. I was lucky. Deloitte happened to put me in for one, and then Leidos, Millennium, and others followed suit because I already had that clearance in process.

👉 **What I've learned since:** Luck is great, but you can't build a strategy on luck. What you *can* do is put yourself in the best possible position for a company to sponsor your clearance.

How Clearance Really Works

- **You can't apply yourself.** Only companies with government contracts can sponsor you.
 - **Companies won't do it "just in case."** They'll only sponsor you if they need your skills for a government project.
 - **Clearance + ServiceNow = rare combo.** That's why once I had it, my pay and opportunities skyrocketed.
-

The Smarter Path (What I'd Do If I Started Over)

If I were starting today, I wouldn't wait on luck. I'd be intentional:

1. **Search for jobs that say “ability to obtain clearance.”**
 - These companies *already have clearance sponsorship pipelines*.
 - They're signaling they'll put you in if you bring the right skills.
2. **Build the skills those jobs demand.**
 - For ServiceNow, that means: **CSA, CAD, ITSM/HRSD basics, and Security+**.
 - With these, you become attractive to clearance-heavy companies.
3. **Get your foot in the door.**
 - Even if the first offer isn't your dream salary, take it.
 - The clearance itself is worth six figures in future leverage.
4. **Play the long game.**
 - Once cleared, you're in rare air. Contractors and consulting firms fight for cleared talent.
 - That's when the **\$150K → \$200K jumps** start happening.

👉 Key Takeaway for You:

Clearance isn't magic. It's leverage. The path isn't about chasing clearance directly — it's about becoming the kind of candidate a clearance company *has to sponsor*.

✓ Section 6: Action Steps for You

Here's the exact playbook I wish I had when I started. Follow this order, and you'll avoid the wasted years I went through.

Step 1: Get Your Foundation (CSA)

- **Action:** Set up your free ServiceNow Personal Developer Instance (PDI). Study daily and pass the **Certified System Administrator (CSA)** exam.
 - **Why:** CSA is the baseline. Without it, most companies won't even look at you.
 - **Expected Result:** Eligible for entry-level ServiceNow roles at **\$80K–\$100K**.
-

Step 2: Apply Early (Even If You're Not "Ready")

- **Action:** Start applying for ServiceNow jobs once you've got CSA, even while you're still learning.
 - **Why:** Interviews = free practice. Confidence comes from experience, not waiting until you're perfect.
 - **Expected Result:** Land interviews faster than expected, possibly secure your first **\$100K+ offer**.
-

Step 3: Target Clearance-Ready Companies

- **Action:** Search job boards for roles that say "**ability to obtain government clearance.**"
 - **Why:** These are the companies positioned to sponsor you.
 - **Expected Result:** Once sponsored, your clearance becomes an asset worth **\$30K–\$50K more per year**.
-

Step 4: Add Security+

- **Action:** Pass **CompTIA Security+**.
- **Why:** It's the minimum requirement for federal contracts and shows you understand cybersecurity fundamentals.
- **Expected Result:** Opens DoD and government consulting roles in the **\$150K–\$180K range**.

Step 5: Level Up with CAD

- **Action:** Earn the **Certified Application Developer (CAD)**.
- **Why:** CAD separates you from admins and proves you can build apps.
- **Expected Result:** Positions you for developer/consultant roles at **\$170K–\$200K+**.

Step 6: Play the Long Game with CIS & Niche Certs

- **Action:** Pursue CIS specializations (e.g., ITSM, HRSD, SecOps).
- **Why:** Deep expertise = senior-level credibility.
- **Expected Result:** Consistently earning in the **\$180K–\$220K range with clearance**.

Step 7: Keep Renewals & Future-Proof Your Skills

- **Action:** Renew certs (especially Security+) and learn new trends like **AI + ServiceNow**.
 - **Why:** Tech evolves. Staying ahead = staying paid.
 - **Expected Result:** Remain in the **\$200K+ club** long term, with options for consulting or leadership roles.
-



The Blueprint at a Glance

CSA → Entry role \$80K–\$100K
Clearance + CSA \$100K–\$120K
Security+ + Clearance \$150K–\$180K
CAD (Developer/Consultant) \$170K–\$200K
CIS/Niche + Clearance \$180K–\$220K+

👉 Final Takeaway:

You don't need to be "born technical." You don't need perfect timing or luck. What you need is persistence + the right sequence:

CSA → clearance-ready company → Security+ → CAD → specialization.

That's the formula that took me from debt to \$200K+ in a few years. And it can do the same for you.

🚩 Conclusion: From Debt to \$200K+ — And Now It's Your Turn

When I look back, the path seems obvious:

- CSA at Deloitte → Homeland Security project → first six figures.
- Security+ at Leidos → DoD project → \$180K.
- CAD at Peraton → Federal Reserve work → consultant leverage.
- Clearance + persistence → Softact Solutions, Army projects, and now \$200K+.

But in the moment, none of it felt obvious. It felt messy. I was broke, laid off, underpaid, and unsure if I'd ever break through.

The only thing that kept me moving was **persistence**. I wasn't the smartest. I didn't have connections. I didn't come from money. I just refused to quit.

And that's why this blueprint matters: it's not theory. It's proof that with the right steps, anyone can create a high-paying tech career — even starting from debt, dead-end jobs, or no technical background.

Your Next Move

Don't overthink. Don't wait until you feel "ready."

- Start with **CSA** — it's your ticket in.
- Apply to **clearance-ready companies**.
- Stack **Security+** and **CAD** as you go.
- Stay consistent. Even 1 hour a day compounds.

In a few years, you won't just have a job — you'll have options, leverage, and income most people only dream about.

👉 **Remember this:** Six figures isn't the finish line. It's just the starting point.

Your blueprint is in front of you. The only thing left is to take the first step.

What's Next

This guide shows you my path. The next step for you is action.

👉 In the next guide, I'll show you how to build your **first ServiceNow project** inside your PDI so you can walk into interviews with something to show.
