IT Career Roadmap

How to get started in IT, land the first role, build real evidence, and move toward networking.

Your first goal is not a dream title. Your first goal is getting close to real systems, proving you can troubleshoot, and turning that proof into better roles.

Where To Start

Start where you can touch tickets, users, devices, cables, identity, apps, and outages. The first role does not need to be your final specialty. It needs to put you near real problems.

- Service desk or help desk.
- Desktop support or field tech.
- MSP support.
- School district, local government, or small business IT.
- NOC tier 1, ISP support, data center tech.

What Employers Need First

Entry-level hiring is about trust. Can you show up, communicate clearly, follow process, protect production, and learn without creating more work for everyone else?

- Clear notes and escalation details.
- Basic troubleshooting discipline.
- Customer communication.
- Honest skill level.
- Proof that you have touched the tools.

FIRST JOB TARGETS

ROLE	WHAT YOU LEARN	HOW TO STAND OUT
Help desk	Tickets, users, identity, endpoints, escalation, business impact.	Show clean notes, customer service, M365 or Google Workspace basics.
Desktop support	Hardware, imaging, printers, Wi-Fi, VPN, hands-on troubleshooting.	Show repair examples, checklists, and before/after documentation.
MSP support	Many environments, pressure, remote tools, backups, firewall and DNS exposure.	Show organization, calm communication, and fast learning.
NOC or ISP support	Monitoring, circuits, routing symptoms, outages, escalation evidence.	Show subnetting, traceroute, ping, DNS, and ticket quality.
Data center tech	Cabling, optics, rack work, remote hands, console access, inventory.	Show physical-layer care, labeling, diagrams, and change discipline.

Resume Strategy

Your resume should make the hiring manager confident you can handle the next realistic role. Do not lead with a giant keyword wall. Lead with evidence.

- One page is fine for early career.
- Put certs and active study near the top.
- Use a short skills section grouped by category.
- Put lab work under Projects, not employment.
- Every bullet should prove behavior, not just list tools.

Resume Bullet Formula

Use: action, environment, result, evidence. If you do not have a business result yet, use what you built, verified, documented, or improved.

- Weak: Knowledge of DNS and DHCP.
- Better: Built a two-VLAN lab with DHCP relay, verified leases, gateway reachability, and DNS resolution.
- Better: Documented troubleshooting steps for VPN login failures, including user impact, logs checked, and escalation criteria.

WHAT TO PUT ON THE RESUME

SECTION	GOOD CONTENT	AVOID
Summary	One or two lines: target role, strongest proof, current study.	Generic passion statements and inflated titles.
Skills	Networking, OS, cloud, tools, ticketing, scripting, security basics.	Every technology you watched once.
Projects	Home lab, diagrams, verification commands, packet captures, writeups.	Listing lab work as a fake job.
Experience	Customer service, process, documentation, troubleshooting, ownership.	Only task lists with no evidence.

Proof Projects

Build small projects you can explain in an interview. The point is not to impress people with complexity. The point is to prove you can set up, break, observe, fix, and document.

- Two VLANs with DHCP and DNS.
- Wireshark capture of DNS failure and fix.
- Windows user login or VPN troubleshooting checklist.
- Basic firewall rule test with allowed and blocked traffic.
- Switchport documentation and cable labeling sample.

Certs Without Hiding

Certs help, but do not use studying as a way to avoid applying. Apply while you study once you can explain the basics honestly.

- A+: good for support roles.
- Network+: broad networking vocabulary.
- CCNA: stronger for network support, NOC, and junior network roles.
- Do not collect random certs with no target job.

FIRST 30 DAYS OF JOB SEARCH

WEEK	ACTION	OUTPUT
1	Pick two target role types and collect 20 job posts.	Common skill list and resume keywords grounded in real postings.
2	Build or clean up one proof project.	One diagram, one paragraph summary, commands or screenshots.
3	Apply to 20 to 30 realistic roles and track every response.	Application tracker with role, company, requirements, result.
4	Rewrite resume bullets based on weak spots and interview questions.	Better resume, better project explanation.

How To Apply

- Apply when you meet about 60 percent of the role.
- Prioritize recent postings, local roles, MSPs, schools, hospitals, ISPs, and smaller companies.
- Use the job description language, but only for skills you can discuss.
- Message people politely, ask about the team and work, not for a shortcut.
- Track rejections without taking them personally. Use them as data.

Interview Prep

- Practice explaining DNS, DHCP, IP addressing, Wi-Fi, VPN, and basic security.
- Have two customer-service stories.
- Have one troubleshooting story using scope, evidence, fix, and prevention.
- Be honest when you do not know. Then explain how you would find out safely.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS TO BE READY FOR

QUESTION	WHAT THEY ARE TESTING
A user says the internet is down. What do you check?	Scope, calm process, IP, DNS, Wi-Fi, gateway, known outage.
What happens when you visit a website?	DNS, TCP or QUIC, TLS, HTTP, routing, NAT, firewall basics.
Tell me about a time you dealt with an upset person.	Communication and ownership.
What have you built in your lab?	Proof, curiosity, and whether you understand what you copied.

First 90 Days On The Job

1. Learn the ticket system and escalation rules.
2. Take notes like someone else will need them later.
3. Ask what good looks like for your role.
4. Write down recurring issues and their fixes.
5. Shadow stronger techs and copy their troubleshooting process.
6. Do not make production changes without approval.

How To Move Toward Networking

- Volunteer for switchport, Wi-Fi, cabling, VPN, DHCP, DNS, and firewall-adjacent tickets.
- Ask to observe maintenance windows.
- Document the network pieces you are allowed to see.
- Build labs that mirror issues you saw at work.
- Turn repeated support issues into better runbooks.

GROWTH PATH

STAGE	WHAT TO LEARN	MOVE WHEN
Entry support	Tickets, users, endpoints, identity, VPN, DNS, DHCP, documentation.	You can solve common issues and escalate with clean evidence.
NOC or network support	Monitoring, circuits, switchports, routing symptoms, outages.	You can diagnose scope and explain network evidence clearly.
Junior network role	Switching, routing, firewalls, wireless, change process, backups.	You can make small changes safely and own the documentation.
Specialist path	Wireless, security, cloud networking, automation, data center, service provider.	You know the fundamentals and can choose based on real interest and market demand.

Weekly Operating Loop

1. Apply to roles that match your current level and next step.
2. Build one small proof item each week.
3. Rewrite one resume bullet with evidence.
4. Track rejections, interviews, and weak spots.
5. Study the topic that showed up in the last interview or ticket.

Keep It Honest

You do not need to collect every cert before applying. You also do not need to stay in a role after it stops teaching you useful work. Learn fundamentals, show evidence, get close to production, document what you did, and use each role to earn the next level of responsibility.

SIMPLE RESUME EXAMPLES

BAD	BETTER
Responsible for troubleshooting computers.	Troubleshot Windows login, printer, VPN, and Wi-Fi issues while documenting symptoms, attempted fixes, and escalation notes.
Knowledge of networking.	Built a small lab with VLANs, DHCP, DNS testing, and packet captures to verify client connectivity.
Great customer service.	Handled customer issues in a high-volume environment, clarified the problem, set expectations, and followed up until resolved.