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The Code Review Mindset



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Code review is an important and widely adopted practice, and there are numerous how-to guides that teach best practices. They're all valuable, but what's most important, I think, is the *mindset*. If a team shares a positive approach to code reviews, a lot of the benefits of best practice automatically apply. It fundamentally changes how you experience code review, and its effectiveness.

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Let's compare two different ways of approaching a code review.

A story of negative mindset

Author: I've done a lot of coding, and I'm proud of it. I really want to merge, but I need to ask someone to check my work.

Reviewer: I'm busy with my own code, but now I've got yet another task to do.

Author: This may take a long time...

Reviewer: Someone is touching my code, and I'd better make sure they don't mess it up.

Author: hmm... I don't think the reviewer even understands what I'm trying to do.

A story of positive mindset

Author: I've written some awesome code, but I know it's not perfect and I want to improve, so I want feedback from someone I trust. They're busy, so I should make the review as easy as possible.

Reviewer: Someone trusts me enough to ask me to take a look at the work she spent hours on. I should do my best to give constructive feedback as soon as I can.

Author: The reviewer is probably confused. Let me make my code clearer.

Reviewer: Some part of the change is great, especially given that she just joined the team. I should let her know.

Author: I appreciate their effort and time. The feedback is helpful.

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When authors think in a positive way, they will *naturally*:

- be conscientious and do their best to write good code;
- be cautious and double check their work;
- write thoughtful commit messages to explain the changes;
- break big change into smaller pieces to make reviewers' job easier;

- not feel bad when the reviewers point out mistakes or improvements;
- learn from the feedback instead of defending themselves.

When reviewers think in a positive way, they will *naturally*:

- respond to review requests promptly;
- try their best to review the code thoroughly;
- actively give constructive feedback in addition to pointing out potential mistakes and improvements;
- be nice, patient, and use a lot of ☺;
- empathize with the author's situation — maybe they're new teammates who are not yet familiar with the code base; maybe they're under the pressure to ship features soon; or maybe the existing code is confusing;
- *learn* from the changes instead of criticizing them.

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Build the culture first, the rest will follow, as always.

Thanks to Wanmin Wu, Dan Pupius, and Jean Hsu.

Code Review

Culture

Values

Medium

About Help Legal