Lessons Learned

From Running
an Open Source Project
for more than a decade.

Dirk Deimeke

May, 23rd 2017

Taskwarrior Academy @ LinuxERFA

Prolog

Taskwarrior – taskwarrior.org

Taskwarrior Philosophy

- Openness
- Low Friction
- No Penalty
- Methodology Agnostic
- Toolkit
- Extension Friendly
- Community
- Focus

taskwarrior.org/docs/philosophy.html

Lessons learned

What Have We Learned From This Open Source Project?

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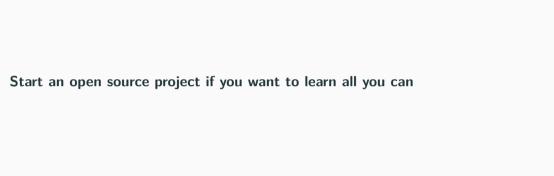It has been **rewarding**, **enjoyable**, and sometimes **frustrating**.

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It has been **rewarding**, **enjoyable**, and sometimes **frustrating**.

We learned a lot about users and Open Source expectations.

I will speak about our experiences
and would like to hear yours.

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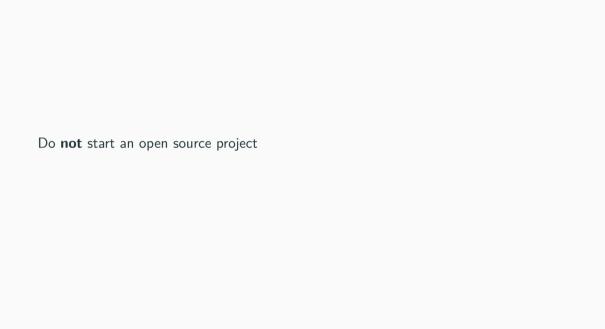Start an open source project if you want to learn all you can enjoy technical challenges be satisfied hoping that someone out there is benefitting from your work.

Start an open source project if you want to learn all you can about software design, development, planning, testing, documenting, and delivery; **enjoy technical challenges**, administrative challenges, compromise, and will **be satisfied hoping that someone out there is benefitting from your work**.

Do **not** start an open source project

Do **not** start an open source project if you need praise, warmth and love from your fellow human beings.

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Bold changes originate elsewhere.

People will get excited about something a project doesn't yet support.

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If a feature works well, you'll never hear about it again.

There is a fine line between *richly-featured* and *bloated*.

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There may not be a line at all.

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Visual demonstrations have far greater impact.

Every change will ruin someone's day.

They will be sure to tell you about it.

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They will be sure to tell you about it.

The same change will improve someone's day.

You will not hear of this.

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People will disguise feature requests as bugs,
which means either they consider difference of opinion a defect,
or believe that calling it a flaw will force implementation,
but hopefully they just forgot to set the issue type to *enhancement*.

Some people find it very difficult to articulate what they want.

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It's worth being patient and finding out what they need.

What you keep out of a project

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is just as important as what you allow in to a project.
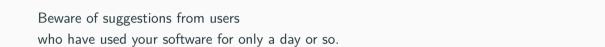
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They don't really want that feature, it's a form of positive feedback.

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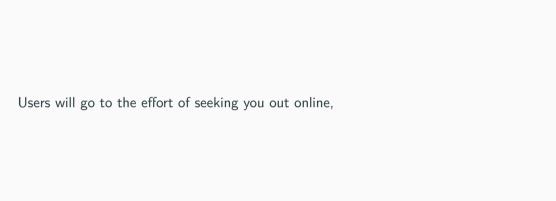
Be equally aware of suggestions from users
who have used your software for a long, long time.

People will threaten to not use open source software because it lacks a feature,

People will threaten to not use open source software because it lacks a feature, thereby mistaking themselves for paying customers.

Many believe that if a change is small, it deserves to be in the project,

Many believe that if a change is small, it deserves to be in the project, regardless of whether it makes sense for it to be there.

Users will go to the effort of seeking you out online,

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to directly ask you a question

Users will go to the effort of seeking you out online,
to directly ask you a question
that is answered two clicks from the front page of a website.

A looping, animated GIF will be watched over and over, scrutinized and understood.

A looping, animated GIF will be watched over and over, scrutinized and understood.
A paragraph of text will be ignored.

Man pages are too densely crammed with information, and too lengthy, for most modern humans to ingest.

The best question to identify time wasters:

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What have you tried so far?

People will pick a fight with you about all your incidental choices.

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Your issue tracker,
your branching strategy,
your version numbers,
the text editor you use,
and so on.

You can choose the most permissive software license,
and people will still argue with you about your choice.

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It says a lot.

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Prioritize the complaints.

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Sometimes, what looks like an expedient shortcut is perfectly good.

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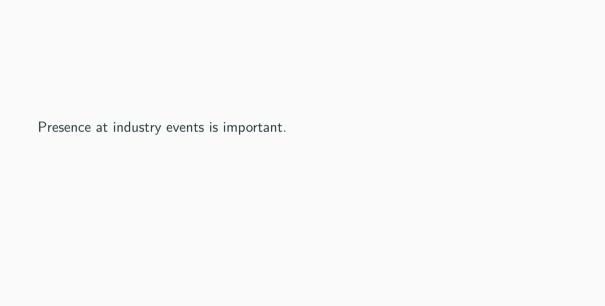To go through and read it all would have taken at least an hour.

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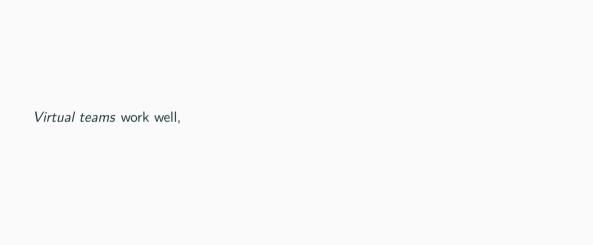To go through and read it all would have taken at least an hour.

At the very bottom, was a video of a band playing the Mexican Hat Dance using only hand-fart noises.

No one ever mentioned this.

Keep your tutorials short.

Presence at industry events is important.

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Offering talks and workshops helps make people aware of your project.

Virtual teams work well,

Virtual teams work well,
but it gets even better after meeting in real life.

It is good if the members of your team share the same sense of humor.

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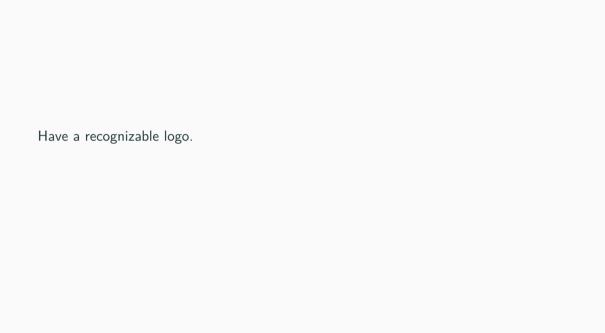
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Dependencies and tools are often far behind the latest versions.
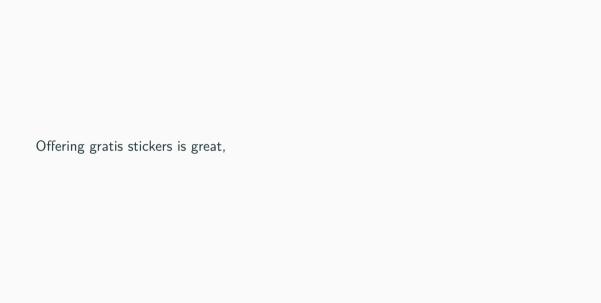
Respond to every means of communication.

It is worth it.

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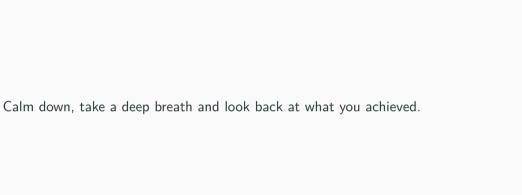
Do not make the logo yourself, if you are not a designer.

If you have no budget, ask a designer to judge your work.

Offering gratis stickers is great,

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having SWAG – Souvenirs, Wearables And Gifts – users can choose from is even better.

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Very few contributors want to work on the thing.

Calm down, take a deep breath and look back at what you achieved.

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Details, mistakes, compromises, incomplete plans and unfulfilled wishes are only visible from inside the project. Be proud, and make new plans.

Create a website containing the philosophy behind your project to help people understand what your project is about.

Epilog

That's all!

Dirk Deimeke, Taskwarrior-Team, 2017, CC-BY

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