

How to create a positive and co-operative, open-source learning environment.

Open source has proved many times to be the most successful way of developing code and applications. It is highly innovative and evolutionary, where new modifications are selected to meet the needs of the changing (virtual) environment. Open source is a means of collaborative group-think, where a project can take on a life of its own far beyond what its originators and contributors intended. Whilst breaking rules is an important aspect of open source development, collaboration is the key to open-source magic, and there are a few simple rules and behaviours which support successful collaboration and which help create a highly innovative environment.

1. This is not a competition (win/lose), we all do well when everyone does well (win/win). Let's be diverse and inclusive - synergy emerges out of diverse agents working together in different ways, and from different points of view, not out of similar agents all working in the same way. Embrace diversity as a strength.
2. Go out of your way to be inclusive and welcoming to new members.
Be generous and kind, invest time and effort into helping others in the group, help them find their way.
3. Be open about what you don't know, be generous with what you do know.
When you teach and assist others - you get to learn and understand the subject on a deeper level. When you empower others to find the answers to their own questions, the capacity of the whole group gets much stronger.
4. Everyone is learning - don't make anyone feel bad for what they do not yet know.
You don't have to answer every question, but it's a great service if you can be patient and direct people to find the resources to answer their own questions.
5. Everyone has something to bring to the project even if they don't know what it is yet.
Help your co-workers find their strengths, interest, passions, competencies. Assume that everyone is good at something, try to enable their strengths, not point out their weaknesses.
6. Disagreement is cool and passion is wonderful; but try not to personalise it when you disagree. Be respectful, don't make personal attacks, try to understand the others point of view. It's great to disagree, it can be highly creative, it's not ok to be combative, rude or dismissive, this leads to fragmentation and dissonance and slows the project down.
7. Be willing to change your opinion, or modify your idea in the light of new knowledge or information
8. Offer suggestions lightly, don't be too invested in pushing your idea, it won't go your way every time.
9. A good project has a life of its own, the group may not be ready for your suggestions and ideas, or it may not go the way you want it to - that's ok. Bide your time, or start out in a different direction with a new sub-group if you really think you have something.
10. Consensus means much more than everybody finding agreement, that can take forever. Consensus can accomodate disagreements, compromises, different motivations, intentions, goals and procedures, it can be frustrating at times - and amazing at others.
11. If you find yourself in a disagreement get curious, learn how to listen and to enquire as

well as to reframe your ideas so that they can be heard, these are great life skills to practise, beyond the coding environment.

12. Most complaints are unvoiced requests, learn how to ask for what you really need or want don't expect others to just read your mind.

This is a wonderful time to be alive, with the emergence of exponential technologies that can transform everything - for better or worse. Future humans may look back on this moment in history and marvel at how humanity suddenly learned to collaborate on a global scale, towards the common good. Conscious collaboration is an incredibly powerful and creative process, which can be both frustrating and exhilarating. The stereotype of coders, hackers and geeks is of lonely males, working alone in dirty rooms, aggressively competing for glory and respect. The reality is far, far more diverse (although it certainly includes such stereotypes !). Learning how to create a positive, truly inclusive and collaborative, globally dispersed, welcoming and creative environment, in order to achieve shared goals requires more than just coding and intellectual skills. Finding out how to participate and contribute is just as much a part of the process and is what will give any project its leading edge and lead to it's success.