

# Building Your Team to Last

## Successful Onboarding and Mentoring Practices

Sarah Withee

Have you had an onboarding experience  
that was bad?

Have you had an onboarding experience  
that was *horrible*?

Have ***you*** been that person in that awful onboarding experience?

# Outline

1. Misconceptions of Juniors
2. Benefits of Juniors and Interns
3. Benefits for Seniors and Teams
4. What Does Effective Mentoring Look Like?
5. Ensuring You're Ready for New Juniors

Why?

Kept hearing BAD experiences from  
interns and juniors

I had some good and bad experiences

# Who?

Juniors –

Fresh graduates of universities, code schools, boot-camps, or self-taught

Typically < 2 years experience



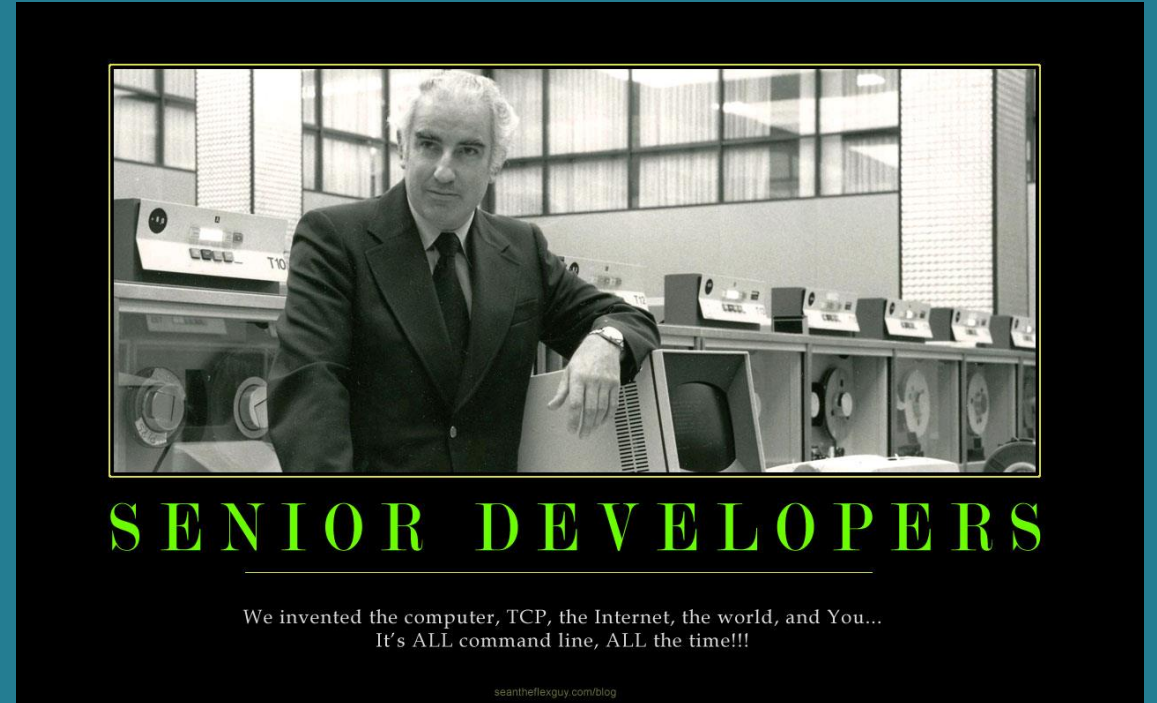
# Who?

Seniors –

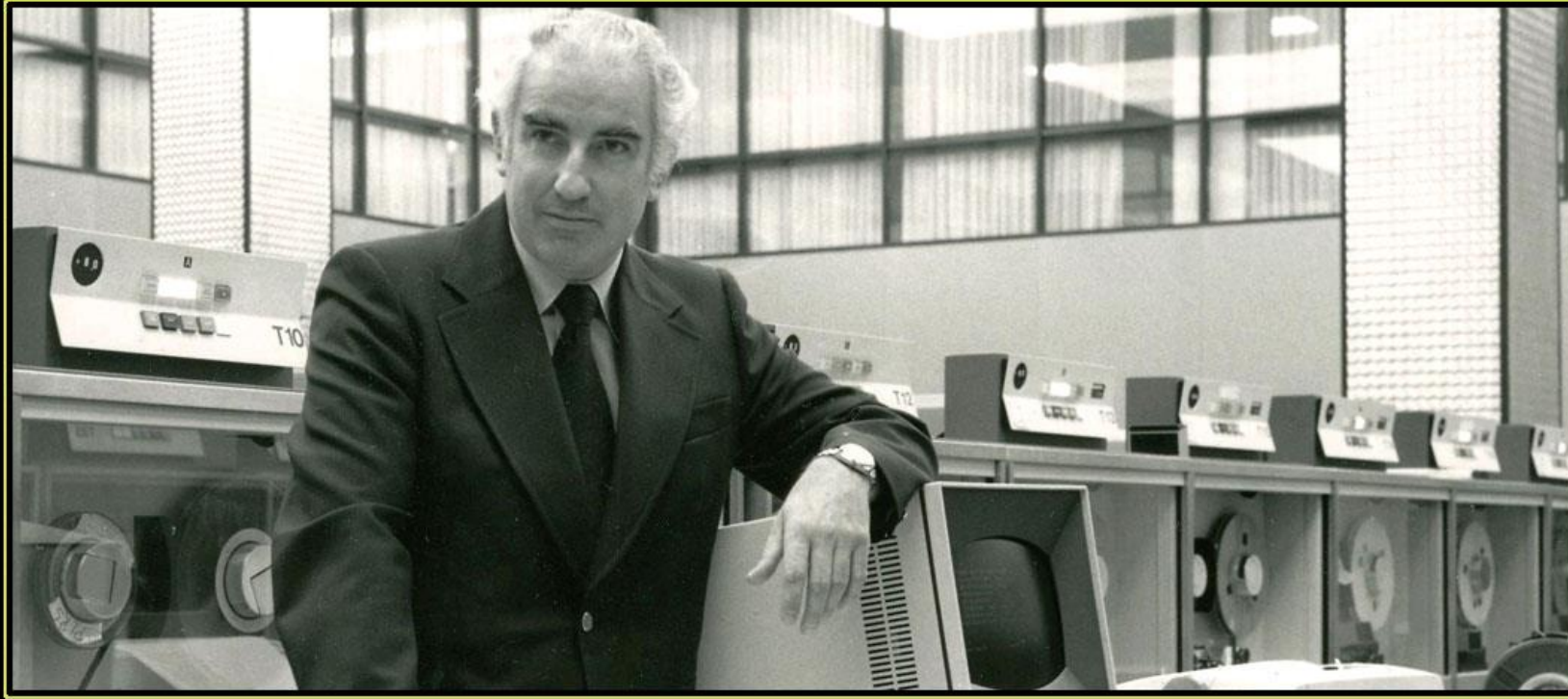
People with many years  
experience

Often some form of  
team lead

The one ***stuck*** with that  
junior







# SENIOR DEVELOPERS

We invented the computer, TCP, the Internet, the world, and You...  
It's ALL command line, ALL the time!!!

[seanthelexguy.com/blog](http://seanthelexguy.com/blog)

# Who?

Note:

This is based from developer  
perspectives

Principles can apply to any type of team

# Sarah's Background

Loved programming on my  
Commodore 64

Went to college, dropped  
out, went back to finish

Taught C++ labs, later  
lecture, as undergrad



# Sarah's Career

Two internships

“Real World Job™” with  
onboarding program



# Sarah's Career

Total onboarding  
experiences:

8



# Misconceptions about Juniors

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Juniors are effective mind readers

# Misconceptions about Juniors

Juniors understand exactly what's  
expected of their code

... as they walk in the door



# Misconceptions about Juniors

Juniors understand the nature of working on production code on a team

Juniors will get it right on the first try

# Misconceptions about Juniors

Juniors are 20-year-olds fresh out of college/internships

# Misconceptions about Juniors

Juniors all have the same knowledge  
from their education

# Misconceptions about Juniors

- Juniors are effective mind readers
- Juniors understand what's expected of their code as soon as they walk in the door
- Juniors understand the nature of working on production code on a team
- Juniors will get it right on the first try
- Juniors are 20-year-olds fresh out of college/internships
- Juniors all have the same knowledge out of their education

# Misconceptions (Paraphrased)

**Lack of experience != Lack of ability**

**Being new != Being stupid**



# Benefits for Juniors and Interns

Growth for the juniors

# Benefits for Juniors and Interns

Put their energy to good use



# Benefits for Juniors and Interns

Juniors discover their interests

# Benefits for Juniors and Interns

Build good relationships with seniors

(or anyone with more experience)

# Benefits for Juniors and Interns

Juniors are cheaper and easier to hire

# Benefits for Juniors and Interns

They get involved in the workplace and community

## Benefits for Juniors and Interns

- Improve growth
- Put their energy to good use
- Discovering their interests
- Build good relationships with seniors/experienced people
- Cheaper/easier to hire
- They get involved in the workplace and community



# Benefits for Seniors and Teams

Time away from regular work

# Benefits for Seniors and Teams

Reevaluating your/your team's processes



# Benefits for Seniors and Teams

A little more time in the beginning saves  
you MORE time down the road

# Benefits for Seniors and Teams

See new ideas and technology

# Benefits for Seniors and Teams

Break out of homogeneity

# Benefits for Seniors and Teams

Investing in the future of your team

# Benefits for Seniors and Teams

Get more side work done

## Benefits for Seniors and Teams

- Time away from regular work
- Reevaluating how you do things
- More time spent in the beginning saves you MORE time down the road
- See new ideas and technologies
- Break out of homogeneity
- Investing in the future of your team
- Get more side work done

# What Does Effective Mentoring Look Like?

- Good Process
- Good Communication
- Guidance/Visioning

# Effective Mentoring - Process

Good onboarding



# Effective Mentoring - Process

Consistent standards

# Effective Mentoring - Process

Not relying on junior to know what they need to know

# Effective Mentoring - Process

Leaving opportunity to discover

# Effective Mentoring – Communication

Schedule 1-on-1 meetings

# Effective Mentoring – Communication

## What do I ask?

- “What’s going on?”
- “What’s going well?”
- “What’s not going well?”
- “What can you use help on?”
- “What can we help you with?”

# Effective Mentoring – Communication

Reiterating that learning company procedures takes time

# Effective Mentoring – Communication

Check on confused looks

# Effective Mentoring – Guidance/Visioning

Make sure they have a project that's doable



# Effective Mentoring – Guidance/Visioning

## Pairing

# Effective Mentoring – Guidance/Visioning

Guidance on how to solve problems

# Effective Mentoring – Guidance/Visioning

Get juniors' advice

# Effective Mentoring – Guidance/Visioning

Ensure junior understands what is going on, not just saying it

# What Does Effective Mentoring Look Like?

## Process:

- Good onboarding
- Consistent standards
- Not relying on junior to know what they need to know
- Leaving opportunity to discover

## Communication

- Schedule 1:1 meetings
  - “What’s going on?”
  - “What’s going well?”
  - “What’s not going well?”
  - “What can they use help on?”
  - “What can we help them on?”
- Reiterating that learning processes/procedures of the company takes time
- Check on confused looks

# What Does Effective Mentoring Look Like?

## Guidance/Visioning

- Make sure they have a project that's doable
- Pairing
- Guidance on how to solve problems
- Get juniors' advice
- Ensure junior understand what is going on and not just saying it





# Ensuring You're Ready for New Juniors

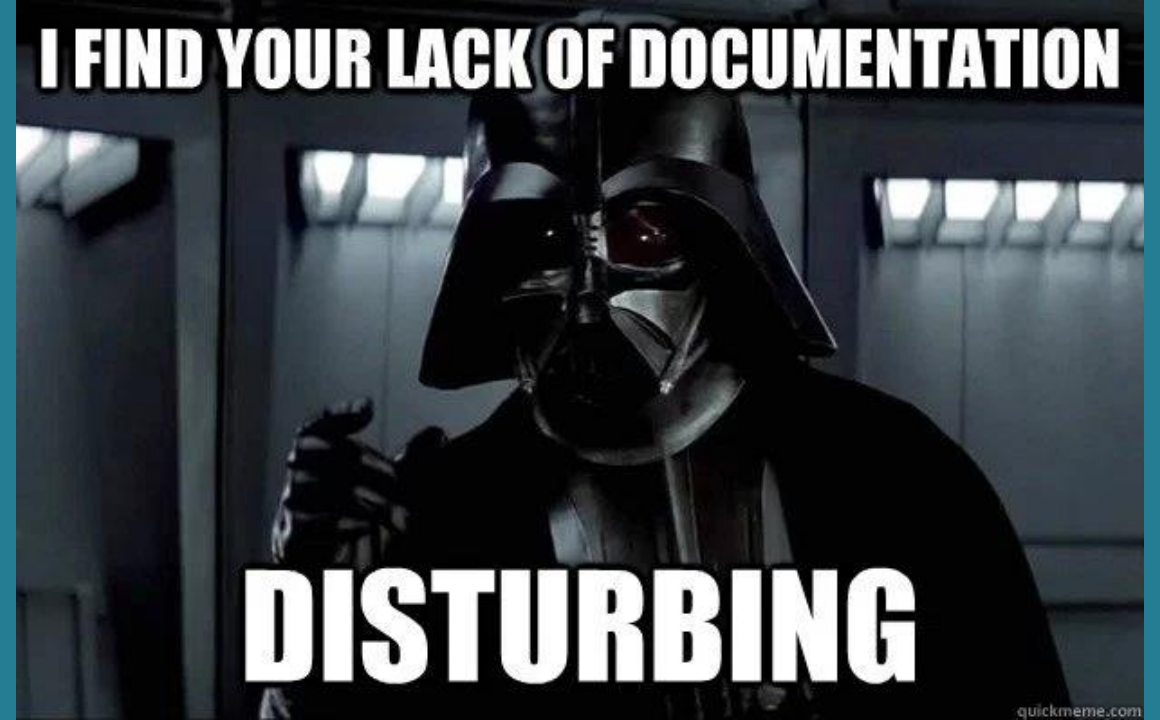
Do you have a senior that can spend time answering questions?

(Preferably at least once a week for chatting)



# Ensuring You're Ready for New Juniors

Are there  
adequate training  
resources?



# Ensuring You're Ready for New Juniors

Will they be given time to learn from them?

# Ensuring You're Ready for New Juniors

Will they be able to grow from these experiences?

(Even if they don't stay at the company?)

# Ensuring You're Ready for New Juniors

## The 3 P's:

- Planning
- Projects
- Pairing

# Ensuring You're Ready for New Juniors

- Do you have a senior that can spend time answering questions?
- Are there adequate training resources?
- Will they be given time to learn from them?
- The 3 P's:
  - Planning
  - Projects
  - Pairing

# Conclusion

Juniors and interns are GREAT people to have on teams

# Conclusion

They come with a cost of extra time and energy from the team...

# Conclusion

They provide work, energy, enthusiasm,  
and new ideas



# Conclusion

They get great experience

# Conclusion

Everyone benefits by working together to onboard and mentor the new teammate

Thank You!

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I love hearing about what works and doesn't. Please share your experiences!