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## Team Morale

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# Content

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- Goals and meeting those goals
- Has this happened to you?
- Work environment
- Summary

# Goals

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- Keep valued, skilled employees on the project and in the company
- Maintain or improve productivity
- Reduce turnover and the cost of re-training
- Cultivate good communication & rapport
- Create 'good' work environment

# This Can Happen To You

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- We started with 10 skilled software engineers, exactly what we needed. After six months, the team is working 55 hours per week but has built a good rapport
- After 9 months and 60 hour weeks two people have quit. Rapport has dropped and the fun is gone. Management notices, but is too busy putting out fires
- At 18 months, team members are getting surly. Three more team members have quit so consultants are hired
- At 24 months, the project reaches it's due date and gets shipped but it's really not ready. No one is proud of the work they have done
- People are burned out and less productive. Some are looking for new jobs. Who is going to do the maintenance?

# Example - Problems

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- Long hours due to aggressive schedule
- Stress increases, morale dips
- Some SW engineers resign or move to other projects, some personnel changes
- Management may only work on team morale after it has reached a low point
- After initial completion of a project team members are not given a clear view of their future

# Work Environment

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- Every company says they hire the top 10%
  - This isn't possible
- What happens if you put a good employee in a bad environment?
- What happens if you put an average employee in a good environment?
- Martin's Workplace Theory: "The key is to avoid hiring from the bottom ~40%, and have a good environment"

# What is a Good Environment?

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- Physical Environment
- Systems, Tools and Processes
- Emotional Environment
- Motivation
- Management

# Is This a Good Environment?

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# Physical Environment

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- Quiet, so workers can focus
- Enables communication and collaboration
- Safety
- Health
  - Ergonomics

# Systems, Tools & Processes

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- Engineers have the right systems and tools
  - Development environment
  - Continuous integration
  - Automated test tools
  - Communication tools
- Processes are not too bureaucratic, not too light and not cast in stone
  - No processes just for process sake
  - No deliverables just for process sake

# Emotional Environment

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- Trust and respect are earned
  - “There can be no communication without rapport”
- No “assholes”
  - *Robert Sutton, The No Asshole Rule: Building a Civilized Workplace and Surviving One That Isn't*
  - Stanford PhD
  - Initially published as an article in Harvard Business Review

# Identifying Assholes

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- Personal insults
- Invading one's personal territory
- Uninvited personal contact
- Threats and intimidation, both verbal and non-verbal
- Sarcastic jokes and teasing used as insult delivery systems
- Withering email flames
- Status slaps intended to humiliate their victims
- Public shaming or status degradation rituals
- Rude interruptions
- Two-faced attacks
- Dirty looks
- Treating people as if they are invisible

# How to Avoid Being an Asshole

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- **Face your past.** The past is a very good predictor of future behavior. For example, were you a bully in school? If your parents and siblings were assholes, you may have caught the disease. Knowing that you're an asshole is the first step towards change
- **Do not make people feel oppressed, humiliated, de-energized, or belittled.** If you find yourself having these effects, it's time to change your behavior no matter what you think of yourself
- **Do not mistreat people who are less powerful than you.** One of the sure signs of an asshole is treating people like clerks, flight attendants, and waiters in a degrading manner
- **Resist assholeholics from the start.** The easiest time to avoid becoming an asshole is at the very beginning. Don't think that you can do "what you have to" to fit in and can change later. It won't happen
- **Walk away and stay away.** Don't be afraid to leave a bad situation. It's unlikely you'll change the assholes into good people; it's much more likely that you'll descend to their level

# How to Avoid Being an Asshole

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- **View acting like an asshole as a communicable disease.** If you have any sense of decency, when you're sick, you avoid contact to prevent spreading the disease. So if you act like an asshole, you're not just impacting yourself; you're also teaching other people that it's okay to be an asshole
- **Focus on win-win.** Children (young and old) think that the world is a zero-sum game. If another kid is playing with the fire truck, you can't. As people get older they should realize that life doesn't have to be a win-lose proposition--unless, that is, you're an asshole
- **Focus on ways you are no better or even worse than others.** Thinking that you're smarter, faster, better looking, funnier, whatever than others turns people into assholes. Thinking that you're no better or even worse keeps you humble
- **Focus on ways you are similar to people, not different.** If you concentrate on how you and others have similar goals, desires, and passions, you're bound to be less of an asshole. How can you treat people that are similar to you with disdain?
- **Tell yourself, "I have enough stuff (money, toys, friends, cars, whatever)."** Discontentment and envy is a major factor in becoming an asshole. If you're happy, there's no reason to stomp on others

# How to Deal With Assholes

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- **Hope for the best, but expect the worst.** One of the most frustrating aspects of dealing with assholes is that they disappoint you--making you wonder the very value of humans. Lowering your expectations can help reduce disappointment. Don't solely lower your expectations, though, or you will slip into cynicism (and possibly turn into an asshole too.) Continue to hope for the best
- **Develop indifference and emotional detachment.** Sutton may be the only author who has the insight and courage to recommend that being indifferent and detached may be a good thing in work environments. If it permits you to survive, then it is. In other words, don't let the jerks get to you
- **Look for small wins.** Small victories can keep you going. Most assholes pride themselves in total control and absolute domination. Any victory, no matter how small, can keep you going. Rest assured that small victories can lead to winning the war

# How to Deal With Assholes

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- **Limit your exposure.** You can do what you can to avoid meetings and interactions with assholes. This involves finding or building pockets of “safety, support, and sanity,” to use Sutton’s words. He cites an example of a nurse’s lounge as a refuge from an asshole doctor
- **Expose them.** If you are safe in your position, then calling assholes out is a good way to deal with them



# How to Deal With Assholes

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- **De-escalate and re-educate.** This strategy requires that the asshole you're dealing with isn't a "chronic," "certified," and "flagrant" asshole. It means meeting asshole behavior with calmness (instead of either similar behavior or fear) and trying to re-educate the person about how he's behaving
- **Stand up to them.** Don't be scared of standing up to them

# Motivation

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- Motivation is what makes people persist when they run into almost insurmountable roadblocks
- What motivates you?
  - Money?
  - Recognition?
  - Team spirit?
  - The sense of accomplishment?
  - Chance to learn new things?
  - Change to work on state-of-the-art project?

# How to Motivate Professionals

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- Focus on the output
  - Reward the team for good performance
  - Show enthusiasm for good work
- Continuous communications
  - Hold frequent meetings
  - Remove inhibitors to progress, clear the way
- Learn
  - Seek excellence – how are we learning?
  - Share best practices
- Things
  - Tuition reimbursement, seminar attendance
  - A role on the next cool project
  - Some financial incentives – be careful

# 9 Things Developers Want

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1. Being Set Up to Succeed
2. Having Excellent Management
3. Learning New Things
4. Exercising Creativity and Solving the Right Kind of Problems
5. Having a Voice
6. Being Recognized for Hard Work
7. Building Something that Matters
8. Building Software without an Act of Congress
9. Having Few Legacy Constraints

Source: (6)

# Management

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- Compensation
- Assignments
- Rewards & Sanctions
  - Individual
  - Team
- Opportunities for Growth
- Relationships & Mentoring
- Establish Self-Directed, High Performance Teams
- Training
- Fun

# Measuring Team Morale

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- Surveys, similar to Customer Satisfaction
- Turnover
- Total Cost of Assholes (TCA)
  - Time spent appeasing, calming, counseling or appeasing assholes
  - Time spent “cooling out” employees who are victimized
  - Time spent reorganizing departments and teams so that assholes do less damage
  - Anger management and other training to reform assholes
  - Legal costs for inside and outside counsel
  - Settlement fees and successful litigation by victims
  - Settlement fees and successful litigation by alleged assholes (especially wrongful-termination cases)
  - Compensation for internal and external consultants, executive coaches, and therapists
  - Health insurance costs

# Summary

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- Hire good employees into a good work environment
- Motivation is different for different people
- Rapport is based on trust and respect
- Measure your team environment
- Weed out assholes

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