

BUILDING HEALTHY ON- CALL COVER



@EMANUIL_TOLEV



@emanuil_tolev

Community engineer at Elastic.
^ It makes high quality tools
that make ops less painful.
Many are completely free for
company and personal use
without hooks or trial periods.

THIS IS A TALK ABOUT NEGOTIATION.

AND A LITTLE BIT OF OPS.



@emanuil_tolev

AGENCY LIFE @ COTTAGE LABS LLP



@emanuil_tolev

university, open science (open
access)

^ freelancing

^ started helping run in May
2014

TWO CLIENTS. 4 YEARS. 24/7 ON-CALL



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On-call for 4 years at a non-profit and 3 years 3 months at a startup. They overlapped completely.

NON-PROFIT



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THE SETUP

- PYTHON APP BACKED BY ELASTICSEARCH
 - AT FIRST ONLY OPS PERSON, LATER 2.
- DOCS, ARCH DIAGRAMS, DECISION CONTEXT. PLAYBOOKS FOR INCIDENTS.



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I should tell you about the basics since this is a talk on how to build on-call. But let me tell you now – it's not about the tools.

^ 24/7 cover. Python app. 1 app server, 1 bg jobs server, 3-6 Elasticsearch nodes at different times. Newrelic Lite (Free) to monitor in-depth.

^ Only person on call until a junior (at the time) employee joined.

^ Documentation for the system like arch diagrams and docs explaining the setup and context behind old decisions.

^ Playbooks for incidents.

24/7 – I FELT LIKE
£1,100/MO WAS ENOUGH
FOR ANYTHING.



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I felt like £1,100 per month was a lot of money. It's not. Depends on case, but time on call is work time. Charge for it appropriately. If they can't afford it, they don't need it – nothing wrong with that.
^ I wanted to give them as much as possible.
^ There's no upper limit on "as much as possible".

PAID TO SIT AROUND UNLESS PHONE RINGS! (OR IS IT?)



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I thought of it as being paid to sit around and not do much.

^ Can't get on a plane

^ Can't go into a cinema

^ Can't drink beyond 1 light beer

^ Have to stop mid-dinner or in the middle of having a good time and fix site.

SEPT 2017. BRICK WALL.



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**EMPLOYEE TAKING OVER.
CONSCIENTIOUS. SOMETIMES ANXIOUS
ABOUT WORK QUALITY.
I HAD TO DO SOMETHING.**

FACE TO FACE CLIENT MEETING.



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**'THIS IS A BIT OF A THORNY TOPIC. DO
YOU REALLY NEED 24/7 COVER?'**

'IT'S NOT SUSTAINABLE FOR US.'

**'IT'S NOT THE RATE, ALTHOUGH THAT IS BELOW MARKET. WE WOULD RATHER PROVIDE OFFICE HOURS
SUPPORT IF THAT'S OK WITH YOU.'**



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BACK AND FORTH

- > WHAT WOULD IT MEAN IN PRACTICE?
- > WILL THE SITE BE DOWN FOR MANY HOURS?
- > WE'RE GETTING LESS COVER AT THE SAME PRICE POINT. CAN YOU HELP US UNDERSTAND THAT?



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Not much changes in practice, just when we respond.

^ Down for many hours? Possibly, but everything is a risk trade-off. What does the trade-off cost in this case?

^ The rub: We're not willing to do this anymore.

**'THAT MAKES SENSE. WE WANT THIS
WORK RELATIONSHIP TO BE
SUSTAINABLE AND GOOD FOR
EVERYONE. WE'RE OK WITH THE
ELEVATED RISK OF LONG DOWNTIME
OUTSIDE UK OFFICE HOURS.'**

'WE WANT TO THANK COTTAGE LABS FOR YOUR DEDICATION THE PAST FEW YEARS.'



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And I want to thank Infrastructure Services For Open Access, stewards of doaj.org , for understanding.

^ As far as I understand the agreement is still in place.

These were text-heavy slides. Generally a no-no, I want you and anyone who reads this to know that this kind of work relationship is healthy, good, but most of all – possible.

^ If you're not being treated like this, seek new clients or a new workplace ASAP. Much more remote work and healthy culture is available nowadays than a few years ago.

LESSONS

THE APPROACH TOWARDS A HEALTHY CULTURE

- REFLECT ON HOW THINGS FEEL. REGULARLY (1 OR 3 MONTHS). READ PREVIOUS REFLECTIONS AFTER PRODUCING A NEW ONE.
 - KEEP TEAM MATES IN THE LOOP ABOUT HOW YOU FEEL.
 - TAKE DECISIONS ON ACTIONS AS EARLY AS REASONABLY POSSIBLE. WHEN?



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Team mates: other ppl doing dev

^ When? When you feel certain things should change and can't go on as they have.

**THIS HAS BEEN A TALK
ABOUT NEGOTIATION.
LET'S TALK ABOUT YOU.**



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WHAT ARE YOUR VALUES?



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THINK OF ASKING YOUR BOSS FOR TEMPORARILY REDUCED HOURS DUE TO TENSION AND STRESS.



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Raise your hand if you thought 'hahah, lol'.

^ It's often thought of as a not serious enough reason. You're not physically injured.

^ But this makes no sense in a knowledge work environment. The impact of those things *on your work* and on you is very real and immediate.

NOW THINK OF ASKING FOR A RAISE.



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You deliver value and this value goes up with time and experience.
^ Try to separate 'am I valuable as a person' from 'the value the company receives under this particular labour agreement'.

TRUST YOURSELF.



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You have to learn to do this, including any mistakes and times when you will accidentally deliver less value to your employer than you're being paid for.

^ This is both so you can stay well and so you can deliver far more value than your salary on many more days than your bad ones.

YOU ARE NOT YOUR WORK.



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You've got worth beyond a given situation, position, company and career.

^ This helps stay calm when negotiating.

THE PERSONAL COST OF EXCELLENCE AT WORK



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Burnout, lower lifetime earnings due to not negotiating a raise or better title will be yours to keep. Your company, your boss and your colleagues won't be affected at all.

**MANY WAYS TO ACHIEVE
EXCELLENCE.**

SOME ARE SUSTAINABLE.

NEGOTIATE TOWARDS THOSE PATHS.



@emanuil_tolev

THANK YOU!

@EMANUIL_TOLEV
ETOLEV@ELASTIC.CO



@emanuil_tolev