

Hi, my name is Harsha Srikara and today I will be talking about "Why hacking shouldn't stop when hackers become organizers"

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As an organizer, illustrated based on observed statistics from our event, I've noticed that the proportion of younger hackers is consistently greater than senior attendees. Freshman and sophomore outnumber all upperclassmen. This trend is even more so prevalent within the organizer community. Most students tend to attend just their own school's hackathon prior to becoming an organizer and after that their attendance typically drops to just "being present" for a hackathon that they themselves organized.

Today, I want to convince you that as organizers, the journey you've had in becoming a leader does not mean that your days attending hackathons have to end. There is yet more to be gained from hackathons as an organizer and I hope to delve into that in this lightning talk.

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To understand the root reason for why organizers should continue to attend hackathons we should think about who our organizers are. And where do we come from?

Understanding our origin comes with by taking a deeper look into our hearts. Finding the similarities between all organizers can help cast light on the next set of actions we can take to continue becoming better leaders.

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The wonderful thing when attempting to answer this question is that nearly all of us have one thing in common. One collective experience that has shaped our motivation, drive and passion to end up as organizers.

And that experience is that we all started out as hackers.

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Once upon a time we were only hackers. It was our curiosity to learn, meet new people and build cool projects that drove us to attend hackathons. To be in an environment that promotes growth & collaboration.

A simple google search for hackers & hackathons yields this result. We are proud to call ourselves as hackers. To be innovating on the cutting edge of technology, to be putting ourselves out there learning how to design apps, meet recruiters, and showcase demos to judges.

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Should this excitement around hackathons vanish after becoming an organizer? After all the primary motivation for being an organizer is because our experiences as a hacker were positive enough to drive us in this direction.

When asking fellow organizers why they may not attend other hackathons there are several reasons they list and the first and foremost is this one

"But I'm an organizer"

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So what changes when we become an organizer?

3 things really. Firstly we assume a leadership role. We are responsible for managing teams, communicating with companies, pitching our hackathon, marketing our hackathon and delivering on an amazing final product.

Secondly, we are busy. We commit to our hackathon and that takes up time. We dedicate our energy, resources and strength towards finding solutions to the complex problems that we face in organizing a big event.

Thirdly, we want to empower hackers. We want to give back to the community that empowered us to reach where we are. We want to create a shared space that allows for growth and collaboration.

If you notice, the roots for all these points originated within our own initial hackathon experience. We learned to manage teams by building projects. We learned to communicate by pitching our demos. We learned to commit by pulling all-nighters. We learned to empower because we felt empowered ourselves at a hackathon.

So why barricade ourselves from not being in the same nurturing environment that has helped us out so much? Hackathons can be a much more enriching experience as an organizer. it lets us view the event through a New Lens.

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Being an organizer means you can learn more from the same environment. We can view our time at an event with an enlightened awareness. We can understand new innovative ways in which other organizers engage their community and carry those lessons back home. What once

seemed like magic in how the event was organized is now demystified with our knowledge of what happens behind the scenes.

We are often awed by how each hackathon has their own unique style in marketing and logistically conducts their hackathon. Its like conducting a symphony, many many people working together to deliver an amazing whole. Learning how to effectively market can ensure that all hackathons grow in their diversity and empower a greater audience.

One of the last things we can learn is understanding how to make the hackathon a seamless experience. Starting from months before a hackathon when a student registers all the way through their demo, we can learn how to make the process effortless. These observations and techniques can ensure that we deliver the most pleasant experience within our community.

However, I urge you to go one step beyond just attending hackathons. Here are the actions we can take to grow our leadership skills and make it a more enriching experience for organizers who attend our hackathon.

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Create organizer meetups. Some of the best tips and suggestions that I've heard come when we all get together to share ideas. The experience we have at hackcon is not just a once-a-year feeling. We can create it at every hackathon. This is where you can discuss your shared experiences, collect feedback from experts and provide suggestions for the next event.

Share resources with your fellow organizers. Industry contacts, the process for managing the logistics for a hackathon and the techniques to maximize the marketing effect of our events are just a few items. Many hackathon organizers have open-sourced their platforms for registration and event management, work with them to collaborate on creating that seamless experience for hackers.

Lastly, collaborate beyond the hackathon. At times when there isn't an event around the corner, keep in touch and build a more empowered hacker community together.

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Thank you and this concludes my lightning talk!