hiring and mentoring junior developers ✨ remotely ✨
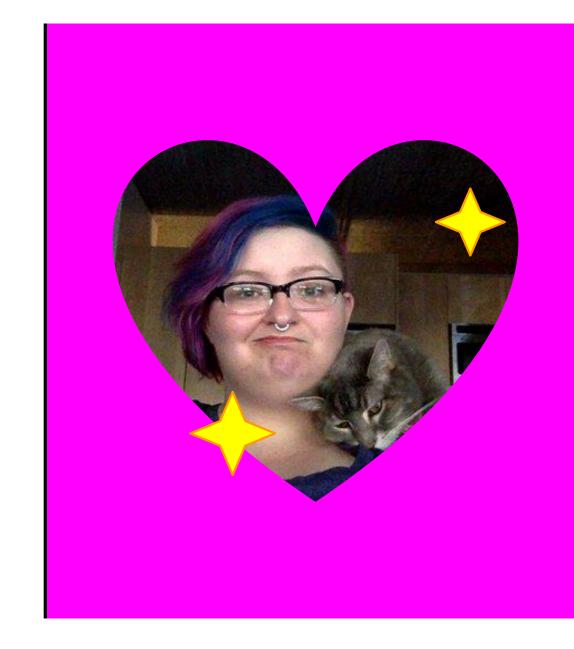
about me

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background

🌈

background

- Not a junior dev anymore, but I used to be!

- Not a remote worker anymore, but I used to be!

background

- Went to a coding bootcamp in Summer 2013

- Decided to do functional programming and distributed systems!

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- Spent ~2 of my first ~2.5 years working remotely full-time

what This Talk Will not discuss

- Converting your onsite junior dev job to a remote job

  - I have never done this!

  - See "Working Remotely as a Junior Developer" by Laura Eck, instead

what This Talk will discuss

- How to structure interviews for remote junior devs

- Onboarding junior devs

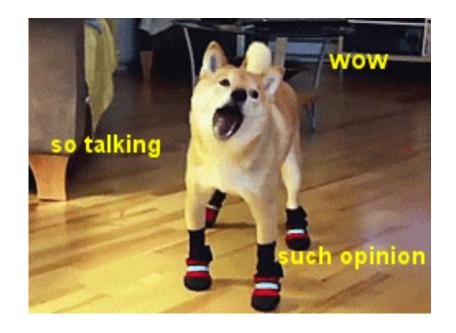- Turning remote junior devs into remote devs vaguely!

interviewing

Skills to focus on:

- Communication skills

- Organizing work

- "Computering"

- Coding vaguely

communication skills

Theory:

- Talking to people is hard!

- Talking to people online is harder.

- Cultivating online relationships is harder.

communication skills

- Moishe Lettvin [posted on Twitter and asked for the hardest thing about working remote](#).

- Got ~450 responses!

- The hardest things:

  - communication, 41

  - loneliness, 32

  - isolation, 26

  - timezones, 15

  - discipline, 8

communication skills

- How do you check for communication skills?

- It depends how your team is distributed!

communication skills

- Spread across timezones? Prioritize writing skills!

- Timezones result in less overlap time than you think.

communication skills

- Spread across timezones? Prioritize writing skills!

  - Timezones result in less overlap time than you think.

- Same timezone-ish?

  - Pair a lot? Prioritize speaking skills!

  - Don't pair very much? Prioritize writing skills!

communication skills

- Checking for writing skills:

  - Do they keep a blog?

  - Ask them to write a summary of one of their past projects!

communication skills

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  - Do they keep a blog?

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- Checking for speaking skills:

  - Pair with them!

organization skills

- Given a pre-scoped task and an hour or two of mentorship, can they stay productive for a few hours on their own?

organization skills

- Given a pre-scoped task and an hour or two of mentorship, can they stay productive for a few hours on their own?

- Way to check for this:

  - Break up your interview process

  - Have one of the earlier sessions be pair programming

  - Let them keep working on it for a few hours on their own

  - Have one of the later sessions be a review of their work

computering

- Can they maintain their dev environment?

computering

- Can they maintain their dev environment?

- How to check for this:

  - Have them give a tour of their dev environment!

coding vaguely

- Can they actually, y'know… code things?

- Ways to check for this:
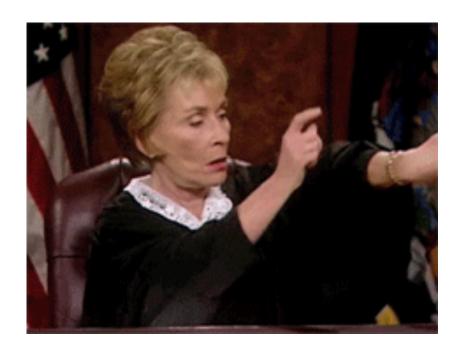
  - Pairing!

  - Take-home assignments!

onboarding

- Scheduling

- Meeting in person

- Video chats

- Time scoping

scheduling

- How much overlap do you *actually* have?

scheduling across timezones

Time	West Coast	East Coast
6am / 9am	💤	💻
7am / 10am	💤	💻
8am / 11am	💤	💻
9am / 12pm	💤	🍕
10am / 1pm	❓	🍕
11am / 2pm	💻	💻
12pm / 3pm	💻	💻
1pm / 4pm	💻	💻
2pm / 5pm	💻	💤
3pm / 6pm	🍕	💤
4pm / 7pm	💻	💤
5pm / 8pm	💻	💤
6pm / 9pm	💤	💤

scheduling

- Talk about scheduling as soon as possible!

- Probably even mention scheduling as part of the interview process, depending on how significant the time difference is.

meeting ♡in ♡person

meeting in person

- How soon do you want to meet in person?

- How frequently do you want to meet in person?

  - Primarily distributed: once per quarter

  - Largely onsite: every ~2 months

video chats

- Build rapport!

- Chat about nothing!

video chats

- Daily standup

- Weekly 1:1s with manager

- Weekly 1:1s with teammates (rotating)

time scoping

- How long should a junior dev struggle with a problem before asking for help?

- If no one's around, how long should a junior dev struggle before working on something else?

time scoping

time scoping

✨The Hilary Duff Rule✨

career progression 💪

Career Progression

- Things you should do, whenever possible:

  - Provide a conference budget

  - Let people leave early to attend user groups

  - Give 10% time

  - Organize internal workshops and reading groups

conference budget

- Junior developers probably won't have a solid support network

- If your junior dev is working when the rest of you are offline, they won't have many people to ask questions of

- Conferences will help them find those people!

user groups

- Junior developers working remotely will probably overwork themselves

- Explicitly telling them it's okay to leave work early will encourage healthy work habits long-term

- Junior developers should understand that attending conferences and user groups *is actually work*

10% time

- Again: remote junior developers tend to overwork themselves!

- Explicitly offering 10% time lets them explore the stuff they need to know to become senior—without burning themselves out

- It also gives them something to do when they get stuck!

workshops and reading groups

- Lunch 'n' Learn

- #lunchconf

- Friday Paper Club

the end 💕