Thoughts from the TechHire CodeSprint + Hackathon

Last month I participated in a Hackathon in Providence. It was really a great experience. It was a challenge to find enough time to commit to the event, since I have a wife and, then, eight month old daughter. But I have wanted to start meeting people in my new field for sometime now. And there wouldn’t be an event like this for at least a few months if I missed it. So I went, it was a two day event starting saturday and ending sunday.

Now I don’t want to give a false impression, so to be honest this didn’t seem like the most professional event ever, most of the people there were still starting out, and bar for what was acceptable was incredibly low, but it was still a great way to network and try out some new skills. And they had cash prizes for all the winners, which is pretty fantastic, and unexpected for my part.

The hackathon was a very interesting experience, it reminded me of summer camp. You don’t know anyone, but it’s okay because almost no one does. The few people who had even a weak connection were instantly glued to each other for better or worse. A great example was one person I had met at an earlier event and so naturally we needed to be on the same team. Now, I think this guy is actually very talented but, he’s also a bit of a loner and really felt like he needed to code on his own which left our team kind of split in two. See the other members were his friend, me, and two brothers. The brother were more experienced working with Android tech and the friends were comfortable with React.js. Now in any other circumstance I’m sure that this two worlds could be blended to some extent but with only two days to cobble s prototype together, what we ended up with was an app that looked like it could do what we wanted but really couldn’t, and a web site that had nothing to do with it.

All said and done I’m not super proud of the end result, but I did learn a ton and we did win second place! $400 for the team. But really we only did that well because one of the other three teams had even less than us. I would definitely participate in one again, though I would want to plan better for it. Really over the course of two day you have about 24 hours to actually code, and if you don’t have any kind of game plan it turns into more like 12 hours, and if you still have a life to run make 6 -8 hours. In other words preperation is key.

Though I suppose that is true of any project, take you scheduled timeline, and divide it by 4 if you aren’t working with a plan. Having a strategy in place and a system you can lean on for managing your time is the only way to make the most of a deadline.

So, if you are thinking about participating in a Hackathon or hack meetup or code spring, whatever, Commit, even if you don’t feel like you have the time. And if you really want to do it right make a game plan so you can get stuff done. And don’t be too distraught when it all goes to shit anyway, it’s only two days, what do you expect?