

# Dear Senior Developer,

@kristinabalaam



# Where to Find Me Online



@kristinabalaam



@kristinaelise



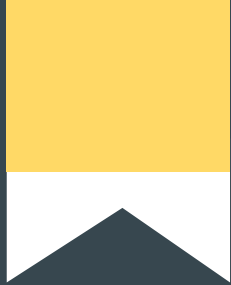
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# What's the Problem?

Poor communication and a lack of trust within teams hurts *everyone*.



**I'm not saying we  
shouldn't give  
feedback.**


A solid orange rectangle is positioned on the left side of the slide, partially overlapping the text area.

**It's about building trust and *how*  
we give feedback.**

A decorative border made of repeating pink triangles with white outlines, arranged in a larger triangular pattern.

# **Why Does This Matter To Me?**

*Story Time*



**Why Should This  
Matter to *You*?**



**Let's look at some data**



# Mentorship Helps Both Mentor & Mentee

A Sun Microsystems study<sup>7</sup> compared the careers of ~1000 employees over 5 years:

- Both mentors and mentees were ~20% more likely to get a raise than those not participating in mentorship
- 25% of mentees and 28% of mentors received a raise – versus only 5% of managers who were not mentors
- Mentees were promoted 5x more often than those without mentors
- Mentors were 6x more likely to have been promoted.

# Successful Communication Patterns & Trust

A study of call centre teams at a bank<sup>5</sup> (using some nifty tech) found:

- Best predictors of productivity were a team's energy and engagement outside formal meetings.
- “Average Hold Time” fell by more than 20% among lower-performing teams and decreased by 8% overall once coffee breaks were revised so that everyone took their break at the same time.
- Forecasted \$15 million a year in productivity increases.
- Employee satisfaction at call centers has risen, sometimes by more than 10%.

# Successful Communication Patterns & Trust

The data also revealed that successful teams share several defining characteristics<sup>5</sup>:

1. Everyone talks and listens equally; contributions are short and sweet.
2. Members face each other; conversations and gestures are energetic.
3. Members connect directly - not only with the team lead.
4. Members have side conversations with other teammates.
5. Members break, leave the team, and report back with outside information.

*“Social time turns out to be deeply critical to team performance, often accounting for more than 50% of positive changes in communication patterns, even in a setting as efficiency-focused as a call center.”<sup>5</sup>*

# Employees Leave if They Don't Like Their Managers

“Our research shows that managers account for at least **70% of variance** in employee engagement scores. Given the troubling state of employee engagement in the U.S. today, it makes sense that most managers are not creating environments in which employees feel motivated or even comfortable. A Gallup study of 7,272 U.S. adults revealed that one in two had left their job to get away from their manager to improve their overall life at some point in their career.” <sup>4</sup>



# Employees Want to Work With People They Like

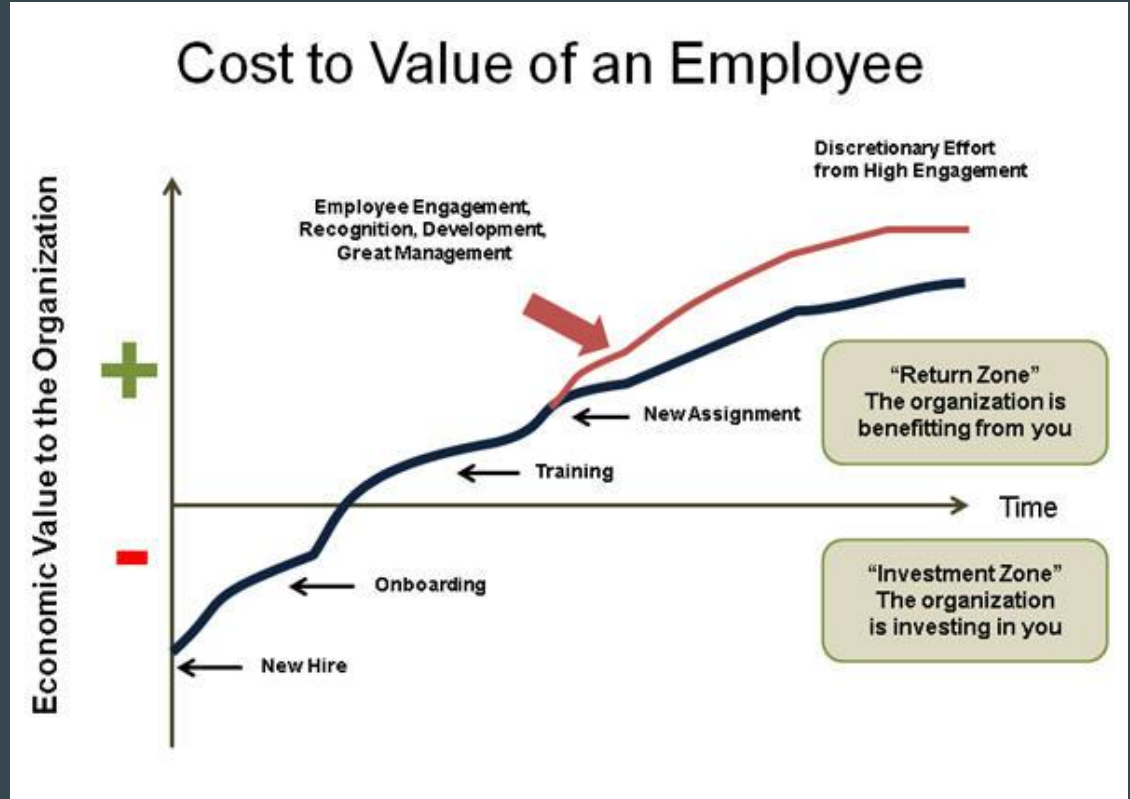
- 70% say friends at work is the most crucial element to a happy working life<sup>1</sup>
- 50% of employees with a 'best friend' at work report they feel a strong connection with their company<sup>1</sup>
- 58% of men and 74% of women would refuse a high paying job if it meant not getting along with coworkers<sup>1</sup>

# When Employees Leave, It Costs (A Lot Of) Money

Center for American Progress study<sup>3</sup> found the average cost to replace an employee:

- 16.1% of annual salary for high-turnover, low-paying jobs (earning under \$30,000 a year). For example, the cost to replace a \$10/hour retail employee would be \$3,328.
- 19.7% of annual salary for mid-range positions (earning \$30,000 to \$50,000 a year). For example, the cost to replace a \$40k manager would be \$8,000.
- Average of 20.4% of annual salary for positions earning \$75,000 per year or less
- Up to 213% of annual salary for highly educated executive positions. For example, the cost to replace a \$100k CEO is \$213,000.

# When Employees Leave, It Costs (A Lot Of) Money



# Challenges

1. Sometimes -- and often in smaller companies -- developers are promoted to a 'senior' role without any actual management experience
2. Mentorship doesn't come naturally to some people. They can either avoid giving feedback, or be too harsh.
3. Tight deadlines can make it difficult to take time for teaching and team building
4. Answering questions while working on your task can interrupt your train of thought
5. Convincing management that team building or mentoring is worthwhile can be tricky.





***How Are These Challenges  
Handled?***

# Onboarding

“Onboarding, also known as organizational socialization, refers to the mechanism through which new employees acquire the necessary knowledge, skills, and behaviors to become effective organizational members and insiders.”<sup>8</sup>

# At Shopify:

## Self-Guided Tutorials

A Slack channel *just* for onboarding help

Presentations from other leads walking new employees through crucial information like:

- How to make a PR
- Coding standards
- How to ship code

Full docs on tool set-up and best practices

Recorded presentations on topics ranging from HR/benefits, to R&D to design and UX

# Why You Should Care About Onboarding

Studies have shown that the positive effects of implementing an onboarding process far outweigh the negatives<sup>1</sup>

- 35% of companies spend nothing on onboarding
- It takes 8-12 months for new employees to gain proficiency comparable to their tenured coworkers
- Lost productivity due to new hire learning curves can cost between 1% - 2.5% of total business revenues
- Organizations with standard onboarding processes experience a 54% greater new hire productivity
- Longer onboarding programs produce employees who gain full proficiency 34% faster than the shorter onboarding programs
- Manager satisfaction increases by 20% when employees have formal on boarding training
- Organizations with standard onboarding experience 50% greater new hire retention

# Mentorship

“It’s about sharing your expertise, knowledge, and experience with younger developers so they can become better programmers.” <sup>6</sup>

# Mentoring Within a Team

**Formal mentoring:** required regular coaching of junior developers by seniors OR scheduled mentorship between two parties.<sup>6</sup>

**Natural mentoring:** part of the daily workflow, often during code reviews.<sup>6</sup>

# Mentoring Within a Team

- **Code reviews** not only ensure solid code quality within a project, they also help facilitate informal mentorship since they *should* occur frequently and consistently.
- They allow employees at every level to learn about the existing state of the project - juniors often have a fresh perspective, seniors can help navigate more complicated tasks.
- Reviewing code often leaves a sort of “paper trail” of changes, mistakes and lessons.

# At Shopify:

In R&D, changes need to be made through PRs - or 'Pull Requests'.

Each PR need to get a 👍 from at least 2 members of your team.

Team leads often give presentations to the rest of R&D (and anyone interested) about code changes, feature updates, challenges, etc.

Intranet has a doc listing employees at every office (and their department) who are offering themselves as mentors.

PRs are almost always reviewed with team leads; pair programming is commonplace.



# **Team Building Morale Boosting**



# Team Building Morale Boosting

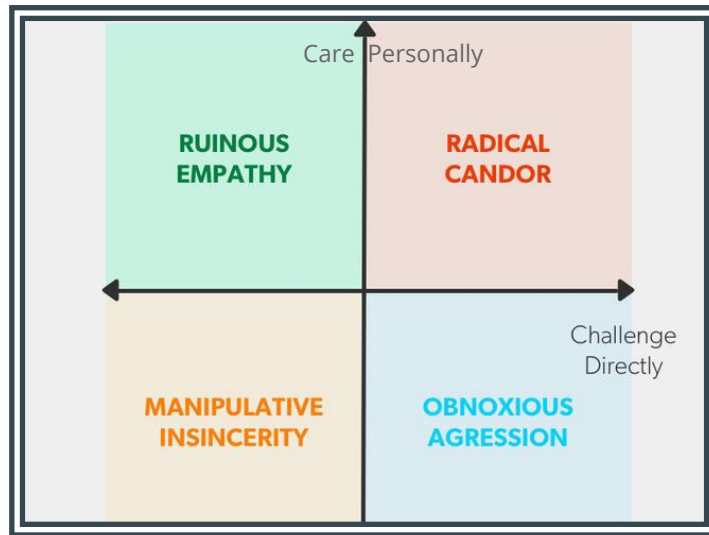
- Quarterly outings should be possible for every size of organization - doesn't have to be fancy.
- Feedback from employees on engagement - Shopify uses Gallup
- Allowing for side discussion between employees
- Discussing appropriate feedback techniques for those in leadership positions: *Radical Candor*
- Provide tools that facilitate communication (Slack, Github, etc.)

# “Radical Candor”

What is “Radical Candor”?

Developed by Kim Scott - a former Google employee and advisor for Twitter, *Radical Candor* is a tool for giving feedback (or guidance).

It’s what team leads are taught at Shopify, too.



# Team Building Morale Boosting

*“**HHIPP**: Radical candor is humble, it’s helpful, it’s immediate, it’s in person — in private if it’s criticism and in public if it’s praise — and it doesn’t personalize.”<sup>9</sup>*

*“That last P makes a key distinction: ‘My boss didn’t say, ‘You’re stupid.’ She said, ‘You sounded stupid when you said um.’ There’s a big difference between the two.*

*From inviting recent New York transplant Scott to join her book group, to encouraging her to take time off to care for a sick relative, Sandberg didn’t just invest in her professionally, but showed she truly cared about her. And she did that for everyone on her team. “Caring personally makes it much easier to do the next thing you have to do as a good boss, which is being willing to piss people off.”<sup>9</sup>*



**TL;DR - What Do I Do?**

# As a Jr./Int. Developer or Intern

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- ❖ Don't be afraid to ask questions.
- ❖ Do some Googling/SO-ing beforehand.
- ❖ Remember that (except in unfortunate circumstances), criticism isn't personal.
- ❖ Look at code reviews and feedback as the best possible way to hone your 'craft'

# As a Senior Developer

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- ❖ Focus on constructive advice - not criticism
- ❖ Be accessible
- ❖ Frequent code reviews
- ❖ Offer examples
- ❖ R&D “office hours”
- ❖ Don’t ignore questions; a simple: “I can pair with you later” is helpful

# As a Manager

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- ❖ Lunch & Learns
- ❖ Implement code reviews for the team
- ❖ Allocate time for pair programming
- ❖ Having a solid onboarding process helps *everyone*
- ❖ Team-building days - outings, lunches together, etc.





**THANK YOU!  
QUESTIONS?**

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