

Week 6 Lecture 17

Business

Helpful Resources

- <http://37signals.com/svn/posts/1785-working-at-37signals>

What's in this lecture?

- Distributed Best Practices

The Problem

- Physical presence reduces power of communication and negotiation
- Collaboration is limited by individuals' ability to share ideas and code
- Overlap is necessary, but may feel tedious
- More time is spent on communication

Structure of the Day

- Rule 1: Consistently arrive and clock out at the same time
- Pros:
 - Sets the team's expectations availability
 - Sets **your** boundaries of availability
- Cons:
 - You need stretches of uninterrupted time
 - Set schedules are monotonous

Structure of the Day

- Rule II: Front-load all communication
- Pros:
 - Write for responses needed by tomorrow
 - People accumulate a daily backlog: getting in early puts you higher up on their queue
- Cons:
 - Responses sprinkled throughout the day

Structure of Day

- Rule III: Share your schedule
- Even if you have set arrival and clock-out times, let team know:
 - When you are signing off email
 - When you will be back
 - If you need overlap, get their schedule first and set a time
 - Bad: ‘Do you have 5 minutes?’
 - Good: ‘Can we speak at 1:30 PM on Skype to go over X?’

Discussing a Problem

- Rule 1: You need three things
 - the offending code
 - steps to reproduce
 - their hypothesis
- I prefer email for technical problems for the record, and ability to comment on particular points

Discussing a Problem

- Rule II: If you don't know, you don't know.
 - Be up front about what you know
 - Do share steps you would take to narrow down the solution
 - Ask if they want you to help them find a solution or discuss it further

Warning!

- If I'm asked a question I don't know the answer for, I will:
 - drop everything I'm doing
 - try to find the answer as soon as I can
 - answer as if I knew it from the start
- This is **bad**

Discussing a Problem

- Rule III: Share code whenever possible
 - Create a private gist at gist.github.com
 - Push a feature branch and ask for eyes
 - email code
 - Try to reproduce the errors

Discussing a Problem

- Rules IV: Take meticulous notes, and send annotated version after discussion
 - This keeps people on the same page
 - Shares your understanding
 - Confirms mutual agreement with parties

Meeting in Person (work)

- Never underestimate the power of a good whiteboard session
- Maximize high contact work
- Don't slip on rules for interruptions

Meeting in Person (outside of work)

- Get the group together every few weeks
- Do something that doesn't involve work
- Reinforces team bond!

Some Pitfalls

- Avoid 1-on-1 communication talking about the team, especially if tensions are high
- Always remember to cc the people above
- One form of communication isn't always enough: email, chat, and discuss
- If you use Skype for personal chat, setting boundaries is hard