

Best Practices Are Best ...Except When They're Not

Nolan Erck

South of Shasta Consulting

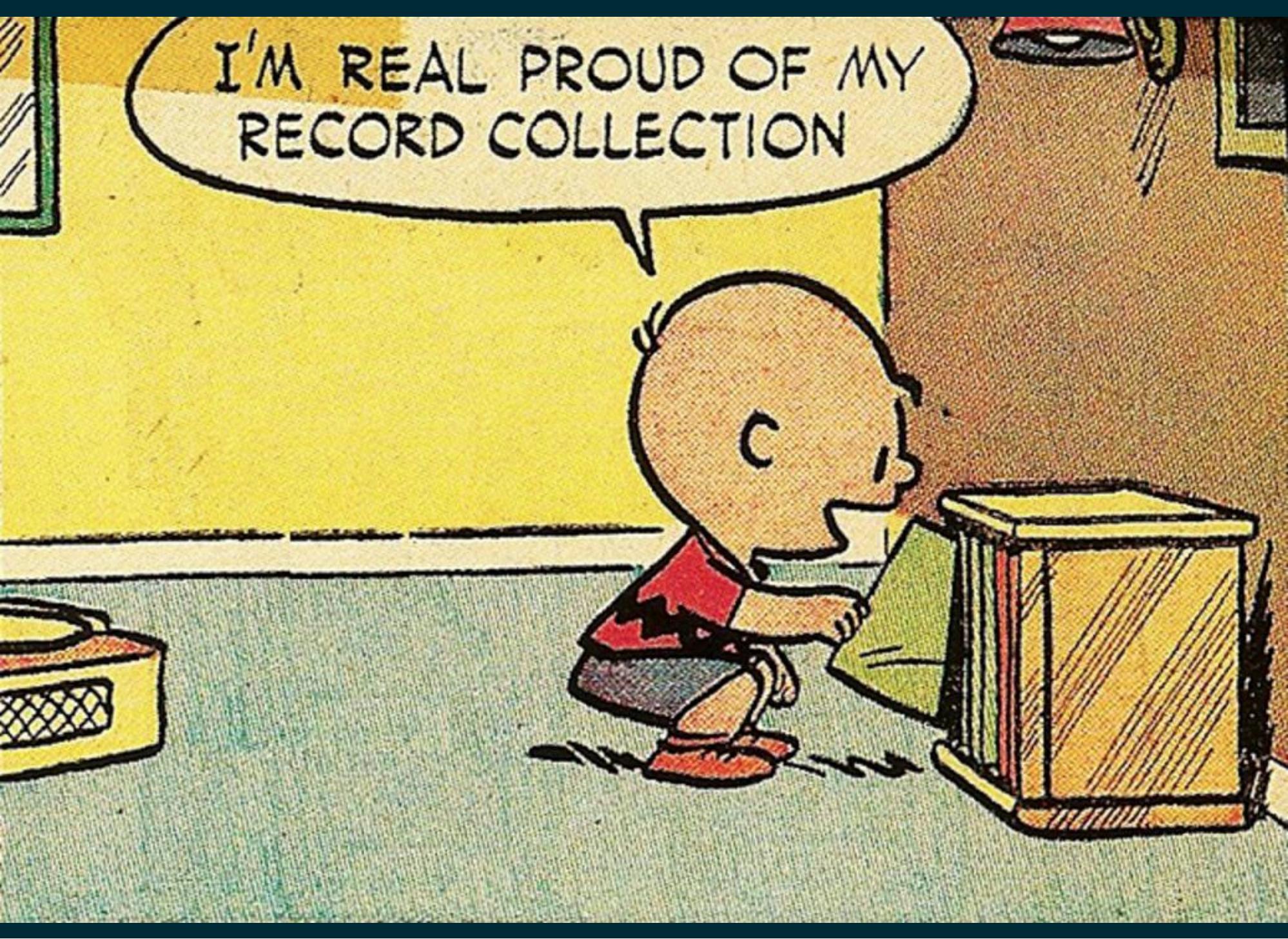
Obligatory “About Me” Stuff

- Owner, Chief Consultant at South of Shasta
 - Software Development, Training
- ColdFusion, C++, Java, jQuery, PHP, .NET, HTML5, Android, SQL, etc...
- Manager, SacInteractive User Group
- Reformed Video Game Developer (Grim Fandango, SimPark, StarWars Rogue Squadron, etc)
- Music Junkie





I'M REAL PROUD OF MY
RECORD COLLECTION



Slide deck is here

github.com/nolanerck/best-practices-are-best-preso

Today's Agenda

- Problems in software development are real things.
- What is a “Best Practice”?
- An Explanation of “Technical Debt”.
- Sometimes I've Had to Break The Rules.
- How To Fix Things Later.
- Other Resources.

Questions? Ask'em!

- This might turn into a “round table” discussion.
- That's okay.
- I'll “moderate” if need be.

I run a consulting business

- Often includes taking over legacy projects.
- Can't always rebuild from scratch.
- Have to make decisions.
- Developers are paid to solve problems.
- Does the client care how I solve it?.
- What can I fix, given the resource constraints?

I run a consulting business

- Some factors to consider:
 - Being able to draw a line in the sand.
 - Good. Cheap. Quick.
Pick two.
 - The 80/20 Rule.

I run a consulting business

- Do customers care *how* you did it? Or just *that* you did it?
- Make it *work* now and make it elegant in version 2 if need be.
- (Ever install a mobile app update and see "general bug fixes" in the change log?)

What is a “Best Practice”?

*Commercial or professional procedures
that are accepted or prescribed as being
correct or most effective.*

What is a “Best Practice”?

- But it is still a practice.
- The practice of medicine.
- Because sometimes...it's wrong.

What is a “Best Practice”?

- Today's “Best Practice” is tomorrow's “Bad Idea”.
- Best Practices sometimes come and go quickly.
- Good Practices might be better than Best Practices sometimes.

What is a “Best Practice”?

- Your mileage may vary – deadlines are real.
- Client doesn't care what's recommended
Just want it how they want it.
- StackOverflow: “Well I would never do it THAT way!”
- Reality: sometimes you HAVE to do it THAT way.

Clients sometimes try to be hands-on,
outside of their skill level.

The client shows you their current website.

You both laugh at how terrible it is.

The website features a black background with numerous small, glowing yellow stars. In the upper left and right corners, there are large, partially visible pieces of toast with lightning bolts drawn on them. The main title "Boyd's Toast Store!" is written in a large, blue, stylized font with a starburst effect behind it. Below the title is a yellow banner with the text "We sell GREAT toast - best on the world wide web!!!". A red navigation bar contains the links "Home", "Toast", "About Us", and "Contact". The "About Us" section contains the following text:
Boyd's has been in business since 2003 selling toast which pretty much kicks your skull in it's so awesome. When you eat our toast, your mouth is taken on an enchanting journey of awe and wonder. If Godzilla shot flaming farts onto your bread - it wouldn't even come close to matching the awesomeness of our toast.
In the bottom left corner, there is a speech bubble containing the text: "HAHA WHAT A PIECE OF CRAP! OUR LAST DESIGNER WAS AN IDIOT". In the bottom right corner, another speech bubble contains the text: "For real! How did this happen?! This site is a crime against humanity". To the left of the first speech bubble is a cartoon-style eye, and to the right of the second is a speaker icon with a large number 9 inside.

Boyd's Toast Store!

We sell GREAT toast - best on the world wide web!!!

[Home](#) [Toast](#) [About Us](#) [Contact](#)

Boyd's has been in business since 2003 selling toast which pretty much kicks your skull in it's so awesome. When you eat our toast, your mouth is taken on an enchanting journey of awe and wonder. If Godzilla shot flaming farts onto your bread - it wouldn't even come close to matching the awesomeness of our toast.

HAHA WHAT A PIECE OF CRAP! OUR LAST DESIGNER WAS AN IDIOT

For real! How did this happen?! This site is a crime against humanity



You re-design the website.

It looks nice and works well. This is the high point of the design.

Boyd's
Toast
It's better than Godzilla farts!

Home Our Toast Who We Are Contact
1-888-TOAST-UR-BUTT

The Toast

Boyd's has been in business since 2003 selling toast which pretty much changed the world. When you eat our toast, your mouth is taken on an enchanting journey of awe and wonder.
Go ahead, [take a bite.](#)

A Little History

Matthew Boyd Inman was sitting in his kitchen one day eating bread. He thought to himself "This is super lame! I want this bread to be crunchy and delightful." From there Boyd's toast was born, starting a revolution that would change the world forever.
[Read More](#)

The Experience

Imagine Godzilla unleashing a flaming fart onto some bread. Now imagine what the resulting toast would taste like, but ten thousand times better. That pretty much sums up the experience of having your mouth enchanted by our delicious toast. [View our flavors](#), you know you want to.

The Flavors

Burnt to Perfection
Some of us like our toast a little black.

Bacon Toast
Bacon plus anything equals amazing.

Wasabi Toast
Ask for a side of Ginger.

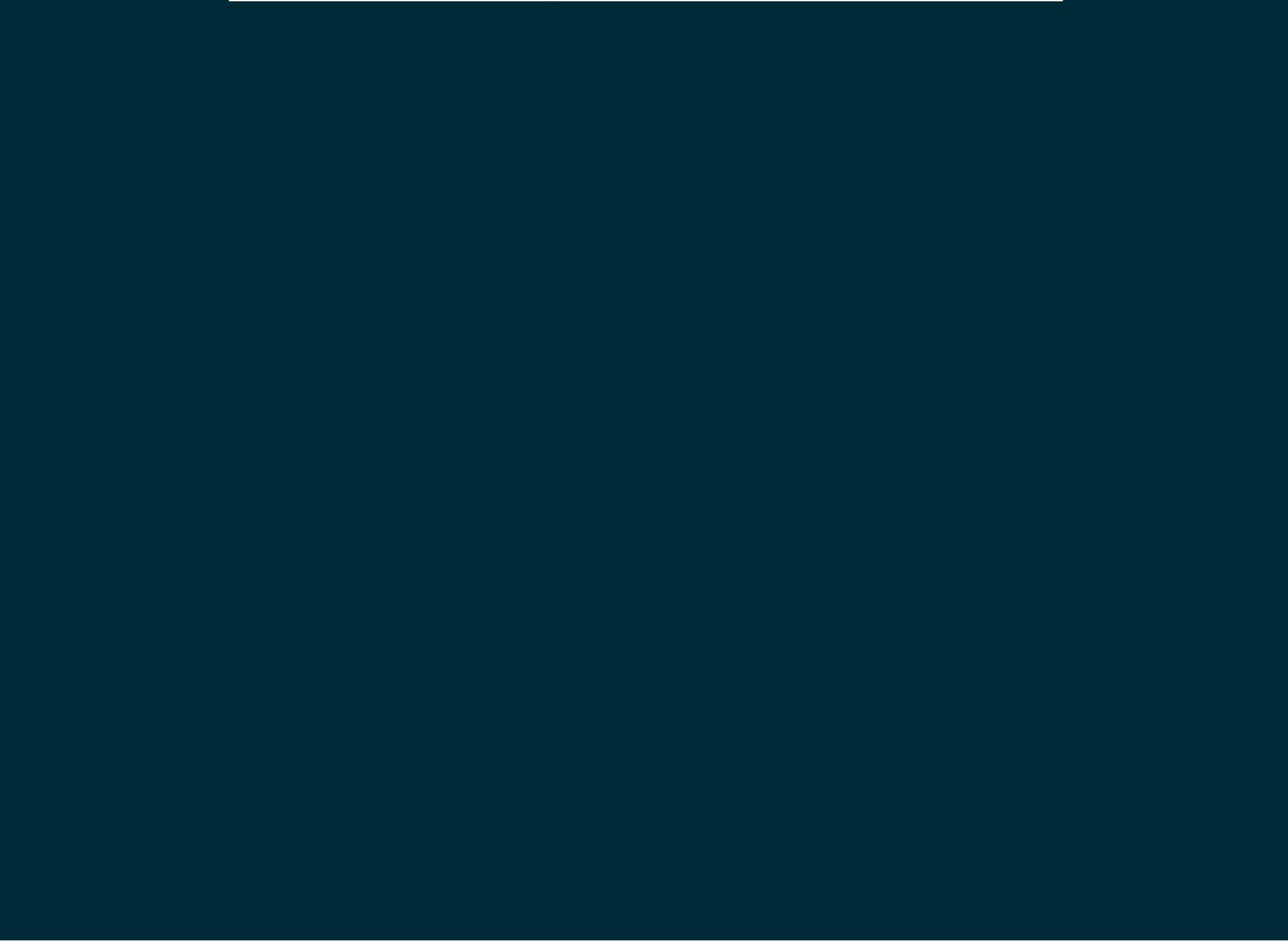
Lightning Toast
The only toast in the world which is struck by lightning

[View More Flavors](#)

I love it! Looks amazing!
I want to make love to it!

TA-DA!

But...



An abomination is born

The client has completely forgotten that they hired you, the web designer, to build them a great product.

If you were an engineer designing the turbine of a commercial airplane,
would they interfere then, I wonder?



Hello! Welcome to our website! I am miffles!
I love treats and biscuits! LOL
PS. My owner is a retard



The Toast

Boyd's has been in business since 2003 selling toast which pretty much changed the world. When you eat our toast, your mouth is taken on an enchanting journey of awe and wonder. [Click here](#)



A Little History

Matthew Boyd Inman was sitting in his kitchen one day eating bread. He thought to himself "This is super lame! I want this to be the best toast ever!" So he started experimenting with different ingredients and techniques. His first attempt was

Flavors

[Burnt to Perfection](#)

[Bacon Toast](#)

[Lightning Toast](#)

[More Flavors](#)





What is “Technical Debt”?

- No project is perfect.
- Shortcuts are sometimes inevitable.
- Shortcuts cause “Technical Debt”.

What is “Technical Debt”?

- A dam has a leak.
- Can stick a finger in the leak.
- Eventually you run out of fingers.
- Remove the brick and replace it.

*StackOverflow: Well, I would never do it
that way!*

*These are the times that I had to do it
that way.*

Some real-world bad situations

- Don't do these things just because you don't know the right way.
- This is not an excuse to write bad code or use bad practices.
- Let's look at some stories...

*When might you use <CFML>
Instead of CFScript?*

*When the client demands the ability to
change HTML in the source code via FTP*

...in Production!

*ColdFusion: When I used
CFForm/CFSelect on a recent project*

...and it was the right thing to do.

*When an open source MVC framework
wasn't the right answer*

*and “rolling my own” framework was the
correct decision.*

*Is emailing errors to the team always a
bad idea?*

No.

When the problem isn't in code.

So... my hands are completely tied and I have to change all of the URL strings that are passed with "Alter" in them (of which there are many) to "altr".

-- Poor guy on a Google forum, recently

When the problem isn't in code

- Find a stakeholder, outside of IT
- Communicate the issue
 - In a non-technical way.
 - Users have a lesser experience.
 - Magic phrase: “Lower click-thru rate”.
 - Magic phrase: “Lower conversion rate”.

How To Fix Things Later

- Start small if you have to.
- Bootstrap: “works” fine in table-based websites. Minor side-effects, nothing crazy.
- jQuery can just “sit there” for later.
- LESS / SASS to refactor old CSS.

How To Fix Things Later

- Source Control.
- Task tracking / ticket systems.
- Testing tools.
- Tools for automating.
- “I don't have time”.
 - 30 minutes a day works wonders! Seriously.

How To Fix Things Later

- Don't be afraid to ask questions.
- Post on Google Groups, StackOverflow, whatever.
- Talk to people at the conference!

How To Fix Things Later

- “But when I post on StackOverflow,
I get yelled at for doing it wrong!”
- Senior Developer != Great Communicator
- <rant>”how to ask questions”</rant>

Other Resources

- South of Shasta Consulting
 - Training on "real world" development, consulting on hard problems, a fresh set of eyes, advice, etc.
- JoelOnSoftware.com
- Ben Nadel's blog
- "Secrets of the Rockstar Programmers"
- Any "Head First" books
(Java, Design Patterns, etc).

Questions? Comments?

- southofshasta.com
- nolan@southofshasta.com
- Twitter: @southofshasta
- Github: nolanerck

Thanks!

