Welcome to Hiring, Firing, and Inspiring an Exceptional Team!

**<click: Once upon a time…>**

I’m Seth, and to introduce myself and explain why I feel qualified to stand up here, I want to tell you a quick story.

<click: show team>

Once upon a time, I joined the programming team at my current company. I was a pretty good programmer and I spent six or seven years on this team as an individual contributor, slowly gaining more and more technical leadership but really not *responsible* for other people.

Eventually, however, I was promoted into management.

<click: promoted to management>

My head grew a few sizes, and instead of spending my day doing code reviews in Visual Studio I began spending my days doing TPS reports, time sheet approvals, 1-1s and other super awesome and exciting stuff.

<click: Things were great for awhile>

Things were great for awhile and the team seemed happy and productive. I encouraged them to be open and honest with me about problems they might have, no one said anything, and so I believed there not to *be* any problems.

<click: but all good things come to an end>

But all good things come to an end, and eventually …

<click: someone quit>

… someone quit.

Unfortunately, this wasn’t a case of someone moving on to bigger and better things, it was a case of someone hitting the end of their rope and walking out.

<click: shook>

This really shook me. This was a key employee that I really depended on, and who I had thought to be happy and challenged in their job. I was taken totally by surprise.

<click: uncomfortable>

This was my first real blow as a manager, and the first real blow to the team I’d started to lead. I had to face the uncomfortable truth that it *wasn’t* sunshine and rainbows for everyone.

<click: lets fix it / got to work >

But instead of letting things fester, we worked hard to address those issues. I did a lot of research. I did a lot of introspecting. The team talked about morale and about how we interact with each other.

<click: things improved>

And you know what? Things got better! We identified some issues and fixed them. We strengthened our relationships, and it feels like the team really is productive and healthy now.

<click: … and then …>

I’m happy to report that this story has a happy ending! A few months later, the person that had quit came back.

<click: hey team, haz job>

A few months working elsewhere made him realize that while Heuristics isn’t perfect, we really are an exceptional group, and he really wanted to be part of it.

<click: yay>

So we welcomed him back with open arms. The end.

<click: cool story bro>

My point is that I have firsthand experience with an exceptional team. We have a very low turnover rate, and even when people leave they sometimes come back.

Now, some of our success is because we hire good, smart people with natural tendencies to work hard and be successful. If you hire good people, they tend to do good work.

But a big part of our success is *despite* our other natural tendencies. We’re imperfect human beings, we make mistakes, we sometimes act on emotion and not logic. When that person left, I spent a lot of time examining those tendencies and the ways that they affected how we communicated and how we both engaged in and avoided conflict. I learned a great deal about not only my own team, but about people in general, and I want to share some of those things with you.

However, I really want this talk to be more than just a random collection of things that some dude at a conference says you should do.

As I went through that research process, I learned about some aspects of management and leadership science that I was totally unaware even existed. And some of those things would have been really helpful if they’d been on my radar in advance.

So today, I want to focus on some “stuff you don’t know you don’t know”.

**<click: stuff you don’t know you don’t know>**

You all know *some* stuff about management and leadership and people already. And there’s probably some stuff that you know you *don’t* know, but you could at least recognize when you’re in a situation where you’d need that knowledge, and how to go about getting it.

But if you’re like me, you don’t have deep experience with this stuff. I was promoted into management because I was a good individual contributor, and someone thought “hey, Seth is great at programming and working with computers, so obviously he’d be great at management and working with people too!” What could possibly go wrong?

I wasn’t given any training, and none of my 20 years of technical experience really prepared me for what it meant to lead a team. And as a result, I had some pretty big blind spots where I didn’t know that some concept even existed, let alone when I might want to apply it.

<click: bring in 3 images>

Some of the things I’m going to introduce are some ways to recruit and hire team players that are aligned with your core values, how to use DISC personality profiles to improve communication with your team, and how to use the Cynefin framework to empower your team to make their own decisions.

I’m not going to dive super deep into any of these topics, I just want to introduce them and move them into your “things you know you don’t know” bucket. I want you to know enough to recognize opportunities to use them, so that you can seek out deeper knowledge when you need it.

If you’ve been in a leadership role for a long time, or if you’ve already applied these things on your own teams, then this talk probably isn’t a good use of your time and you won’t hurt my feelings if you “law of two feet” you want out of here.

**<click: Now Hiring>**

Let’s start by talking about hiring.

As a manager, your job is to organize and direct your team’s collective output towards meeting the organization’s goals. In a nutshell, that’s it.

The overall quality of your team’s collective output is heavily influence by the quality of the people that comprise the team, so one of the most impactful things that you can do is to make sure that the organization hires and retains the right people.

At Heuristics, we’ve been really successful on this front.

**<click: stable teams>**

Out of our entire 20-person company, we have 7 people that have been with the organization more than 10 years.

Of those 20 people, 9 are on my team, and we have an average tenure of 6.5 years with the organization.

And there have been 4 people across the company that have left for one reason or another, and then returned to us at a later point in their career.

We attribute the longevity of people’s careers with us to how well we’ve integrated our core values into the recruiting process. The more aligned with your team values a person is, the more at home they’re going to feel, the more likely that their knee-jerk reactions and decisions will be the “right ones” for your organization, and the easier it will be for you to manage them.

So obviously, it’s really important to hire people that share your values. We have a 4-step process for doing that.

**<click: build teams, 01 selected>**

The first step is to identify your core values.

I realize that this isn’t terribly profound advice yet, and I promise it’s going to get better, but it’s worth focusing on the basics for a moment because so many teams *think* they’ve done this, but haven’t.

Quick question: how many of you have seen a memo or a powerpoint on “core values” at some point at your job? How many of you are exposed to those values on at least a quarterly basis? Anyone have a team habit of actually *referencing the values* during team discussions or decision making?

**<click: identify core values>**

At Heuristics, we have a set of corporate values that the whole company aspires towards, and the technical team has its own set of technical principles that govern how we develop software.

<TODO: examples>

**<click: hire team players>**

I think that a good manager is a “force multiplier” for the team; he or she helps the team be more than the sum of its parts, and to be more productive as a group than the members would be working independently.

In order for that to happen, however, you have to have a team that is *capable* of working together. This can be harder than it seems.

One of the books that made the biggest impression on me was “The Ideal Team Player” by Patrick Lencioni. In it, he identifies 3 characteristics that are shared by the best teammates.

<click: humble>

First, team players are *humble*.

<click: hungry>

Second, team players are *hungry*…

<click: people smart>

Lastly, team players are *people smart*…

<click: The Pawn>

Let’s look at what happens when we hire someone that is lacking those characteristics.

Someone that is only Humble can be considered a pawn…

<click: The Bulldozer>

If someone is only hungry, then…

<click: The Charmer>

Likewise, if someone is people smart but not humble or hungry, then…

<click: Accidental Messmaker>

What if we hire someone that has two of the characteristics, but not all three?

Someone who is humble and hungry, but not people smart, is an accidental messmaker…

<click: Loveable Slacker>

Someone who is humble and people smart, but not very hungry, is a loveable slacker…

<click: Skillful Politician>

And lastly, someone who is people smart and hungry, but not humble, is the skillful politician…

<click: all three>

Someone with all three…

<click: TODO>

<click: Now what>

OK, so you’ve done all of that stuff and you’ve finally landed this awesome new employee that’s super aligned with your values, a total team player, and ready to join this amazing team you told them about.

Now what?

I believe that teams are immutable; when you add or remove people, you don’t just *change* the team, you create an *entirely new team*. This new team is susceptible to all sorts of disruptions as a result of new communication paths, new behavior patterns, etc.

**<click: Design the Alliance>**

One way that I like to head off those disruptions is an exercise that’s called “Design the Alliance”.