Changing Old Habits: Meetup’s Path to SRE

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SRECon17 Americas
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About Me

- Core Engineering Manager
- Been at Meetup since 2007
- Organizer of the Dashing Whippets Running Team
A Quick Poll
SRE Best Practices

- Defect Escalation
- Alerting
- SLOs
- SLAs

Monitoring

- Automation
- Postmortems
- Error Budget

Playbooks
Outline

I. Getting Buy-in for an SRE Team

II. Changing Old Habits to Implement SRE Best Practices
State of Meetup 2015

Product Engineers

Ops?

Help!

SRE?

Systems Engineers
Part I: Getting Buy-In

- Job Description
- Six-Month Roadmap
- Exit Strategy
Getting Buy-in #1: Job Description

- What exactly would I be doing?
- How does this role fit within Meetup?
- Are my expectations aligned with others?

Site Reliability Engineer

This role will:

- Introduce SRE best practices into our culture
  - Empower engineers across our organization to perform blameless postmortems, service roasts, playbooks and more
- Help improve the throughput and maximize the impact of projects
  - Reduce downtime on our platform and increase our ability to react to both emergency and long-standing issues
- Act as a Core Engineering resource for the Systems Engineering team
  - Assist and relay improvements and issues to the broader Engineering team

Meetup

The Site Reliability Engineering Team is responsible for ensuring that Meetup provides a reliable service to over 20 million Meetup members. As an SRE on this team, you will work closely with engineers across all disciplines to debug and fix issues and emergencies -- both large and small.
Getting Buy-in #2: Roadmap

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Task</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>July 2016</td>
<td>Start doing SRE-ish Things</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 2016</td>
<td>Create SRE Best Practices @ Meetup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 2016</td>
<td>Work with a Product Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 2016</td>
<td>Making Product Better through SRE Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 2016</td>
<td>Reflection of Last 4 Months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 2016</td>
<td>What is the future of SRE at Meetup?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Each month: **Theme, Focus, and Expected Output**
# Getting Buy-in #2: Roadmap

## July 2016

**Theme:** Start doing SRE-ish Things

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Create process to address on-call issues through Product Health</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Expected Output</strong></td>
<td>Eliminate 1+ repeating on-call issues working w/responsible teams</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Start 1:1 conversations with stakeholders to raise awareness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Expected Output</strong></td>
<td>Create future action items based on 1:1 conversations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Getting Buy-in #3: Exit Strategy

November 2016

Theme: Reflection of Last 4 Months

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Determine if this SRE team is sustainable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expected Output</td>
<td>Leave or continue with SRE</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Make sure SRE best practices are instilled in other teams
- “End well” -- no hard feelings
Part II: Changing Old Habits

“a settled or regular tendency or practice, especially one that is hard to give up.”

-- Oxford Dictionary
Science!

*Click!*
Science!
The Habit Loop

CUE

ROUTINE

REWARD
The Habit Loop (An Example)

CUE

ROUTINE

REWARD
To implement new processes, first focus on changing individual habits.
Habit #1
Habit #1
Habit #1: Old

#production-status
#core-engineering
#engineering
#orgx
#qa

and more...

Team Allies
Community Experience
Project Management
Avoid using backchannels when communicating breakage.
Habit #1: New!

Yes, critical!

#production-status
#core-engineering
#engineering
#orgx
#qa
+ @oncall!

and more...
Habit #1: New!

#engineering + @oncall

Yes, critical!
CULTURE

PROCESSES

HABITS

Defect Escalation

Communication

Transparency

Team Allies
Community Experience
Project Management
Habit #2: Old

“Brent knows! He’ll fix!”

From the authors of The Visible Ops Handbook

The Phoenix Project
A DevOps Fable, and Helping Your Business Win

Gene Kim, Kevin Behr, and George Spafford
Stop relying on a single engineer to fix an incident.
Habit #2: New!

“I got this.”
It’s Time for a Playbook

January

1 2 3
4 5 6 7 8 9 10
11 12 13 14 15 16 17
18 19 20 21 22 23 24
25 26 27 28 29 30 31

> 1 ?

? ? ? !

Meetup
Habit #3
Habit #3: Old

My fault.

I see what I did wrong.
Don’t just take full personal responsibility.
Habit #3: New!

It wasn’t just my fault.

Let’s see what went wrong in the team’s process.
First Step Toward Postmortems

Critical or Major?

Facilitators in #postmortems

POSTMORTEM
* What went well
* What could have gone better
* Corrective and preventive measures

Team Allies
- Product Managers
- Project Management
CULTURE

PROCESSES

HABITS

Postmortems

Blameless Learning
The Habit Loop

CUE  →  OLD ROUTINE  →  REWARD
In Review: Getting Buy-in for SRE

1. Job Description
   Align Expectations

2. Roadmap
   Demonstrate Impact

3. Exit Strategy
   Is it the right time?
In Review: Change Old Habits

1. Avoid Backchannels → Incident Escalation

2. Stop Relying on “Brent” → Playbooks

3. Don’t Take All Responsibility → Postmortems
A Final Thought
What habit are you going to change?

Thanks!
Meetup is hiring!
rich@meetup.com