Halt and Don’t Catch Fire

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Who Cares?

Startups

Small organisations

Newly formed “sysadms”* teams

Solo systems engineers
Technical Debt

- Lack processes and experience
- Early adoption of new tech
- Re-inventing the wheel, and cargo cult
- Frequent change of requirements
- Overestimation and Time
How we got here?

Startups

• Short term planning
• Duct tape and bubblegum
• Early adopters :)
• No documentation
• No processes
• No boundaries
• No backups
How we got here?

!Startups

• Duct tape and bubblegum :)  
• Lack of original information  
• *Some* documentation  
• *Some* backups  
• Lack of original information  
• Waiting for a(nother) hero  
• Communication issues  
• “Don’t touch this” systems
Challenges of new teams

• Who are you?
• Who are they?
• Unknown infrastructure
• Finding information
• Unaware of what’s coming
The 5 Stages of Technical Debt

- Denial
- Anger
- Bargaining
- Depression
- Acceptance
Take a breath

- Ask the right questions
- Go through the backlog (if any)
- Write down everything
- Create a complete dashboard
- Prioritise
- DO\'T SKIP weekly/biweekly meetings
- Build relationships
- Rinse and repeat
Slowing it down

- Take care of repetitive tasks
- Choose software wisely
- Know your current limits
- Keep track of what’s going on around you, and talk
- Break bad habits
- Be consistent and apply rules
How debt can kill a team

• Burnout
• Blame game
• Tension and toxicity
• Martyrs and messiahs
Creating a culture

• Being a guard
• Junior engineers
• Adopt good practices
• Make mistakes, it’s human
• There’s no shame in asking
• Following the Golden Rule* can go a long way

* https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golden_Rule
Takeaways

- Technical debt in small environments sucks
- Stop, ask the right questions, and breathe
- It will never be eliminated
- Identify the debt that kills you and the one that burdens you
- Our systems will never be perfect, just manageable
TL;DR

How we got here?

Go through the stages

Ask the right questions

Document the problems

Try not to kill your team

Create a sustainable culture
Thank you!

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images

- https://www.deviantart.com/sudeepdash/art/IT-Crowd-200295794
- http://fuckyeah-pixels.tumblr.com/post/31749217421
- https://mymodernmet.com/pop-culture-pixel-people/
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