Heroes are Expensive
Extinguishing the Firefighting Culture
PLEASE NOTE
SLIDES ≠ PRESENTATION

- These slides are designed to be viewed in conjunction with a human being talking and interacting with you.
- They will make little sense to you if you were not at the live session.
- But if you find them useful, I’m happy.
Meet Folsom
Who is Sue Johnston?

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Toronto
WE DON’T NEED ANOTHER HERO
What we’ll explore

- Characteristics of hero
- Causes of heroics
- Impact of heroics
- What to do about it
- Firepoles + Ladders
How to Spot a Hero
How to Spot a Hero

- At the centre of every crisis
- Rushes in to save the day
- May intervene without the full story
- "I do all the work around here"
- "Only I can fix this"
- Puts in long hours
- May solve the wrong problem
- Seems to create problems to solve
What leads to heroics?
What leads to heroics?

Individuals

- Derives self-worth from fixing things
- Adrenaline junkies
- Desire to look SMART
- Attention Seeker
- "Rescue" personality
- FEAR of losing STATUS
- FEAR of losing Job
What leads to heroics?

System or Culture

- Bonus for extraordinary work $$
- Praising
- You're not dedicated if you're not ALL IN
- Recruiting "Rock Stars" + "NINJAS"
- Bosses set the example
- Poor planning
- Delayed decisions
What’s the impact of heroics?
What’s the impact of heroics?

- It’s not sustainable (principle #8)
- Always patching not fixing
- When we’re fighting fires, we don’t do our own work
- Unsocial hours become normal + expected
- Proactive efforts can look like liability (rather slop)
- No visibility into problems
- Resentment
- Creates dependency
- Some team members check out
- Less skilled team members copy the hero
- Nobody else can work the code
What can we do about it?
What can we do about it?

- STOP THE REWARDS
- Reward real success
- MEANINGFUL METRICS (reliability, capacity, quality)
- Look at the RISKS regularly
- TALK ABOUT IT
- Surprise! Time off
- Coach the Heroes
- Make sane work hours a goal
- Reward 9-5
- Focus on disciplined practice (planning, testing, architecture)
- Be alert for information hoarders
Firepoles and Ladders
Let’s redefine “Hero”
“Six months seems much longer in anticipation than it does in retrospect.”

Robin Korthals
Former President, TD Bank
Let’s redefine “Hero”

- Keeps an eye on risks
- Keeps and encourages sustainable pace
- Engages in healthy discussion
- Supports the team
- Considers the impact of their actions
What will YOU do?

- Model Agile values + principles
- Pair
- Mob
- Mentor
- Be curious
- Get 5% braver

STEP FIRST
THE TAKE JUST
!
What happened to Folsom?