Let’s Stop Making *Each Other* Feel Stupid

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ThoughtWorks
(I changed the title slightly... )
FEEDBACK
CLOSE YOUR EYES
Making Each Other Feel Stupid

What does this mean?
Elitism: What impact does it have?
Impact on the industry?

• US: There will be an estimated 1 million more computing jobs than applicants who can fill them by 2020.

• US: There are more than 500,000 open computing jobs nationwide, but less than 43,000 computer science graduates last year

Talking in jargon
Impostor syndrome
Diversity and inclusion
“This is a talk aimed at women”
Have you been a part of this?

(1 minute alone, then 2 minutes for discussion with a neighbour)
DO YOU BELIEVE IN...
FAIRIES?
FAIRIES?
Ghosts?
Ghosts?
ROCK-STAR DEVS?
Is it sometimes reasonable to judge people?
When is it unreasonable?
Exercise

• Turn to your neighbour. Take it in turns to describe something you think you should know more about

• One minute each.
Non-techies are impacted too
My experience - the happy story
"Be curious. Read widely. Try new things. What people call intelligence just boils down to curiosity." - Aaron Swartz
The Stupidity Manifesto

• LET’S STOP MAKING PEOPLE FEEL STUPID. INSTEAD, LET’S...

• Have an explicit policy of curiosity towards all things
• Encourage each other to shout out if we discourage curiosity
• Ask what people NEED to know, not what they know
• Never judge someone because their knowledge doesn’t match ours
• Give our colleagues every opportunity to learn and explore WITHOUT RISK
• Give new people a chance to show us what they can do
• ENCOURAGE EVERYONE TO ASK QUESTIONS
• Acknowledge the broad range of knowledge in our industry
The range of knowledge in our industry is very wide.
The range of knowledge in our industry is VERY WIDE
The Lucky 10,000

I try not to make fun of people for admitting they don’t know things.

Because for each thing “everyone knows” by the time they’re adults, every day there are, on average, 10,000 people in the US hearing about it for the first time.

Fraction who have heard of it at birth = 0%

Fraction who have heard of it by 30 ≈ 100%

US birth rate ≈ 4,000,000/year

Number hearing about it for the first time ≈ 10,000/day

If I make fun of people, I train them not to tell me when they have those moments.

And I miss out on the fun.

“Diet Coke and Mentos thing”? What’s that?

Oh man! Come on, we’re going to the grocery store.

Why?

You’re one of today’s lucky 10,000.

XKCD comic: https://xkcd.com/1053/
The Stupidity Manifesto

• LET’S STOP MAKING EACH OTHER FEEL STUPID. INSTEAD, LET’S...

  • Remember our industry never stays the same
  • Remember we all forget stuff
  • Lead by example: Be honest when we’re confused
  • Focus on aptitude, not knowledge
  • Remember what it feels like when we are still learning
  • Prioritise clarity over jargon
  • Remember this is not idealism, it’s pragmatism
  • LET’S STOP MAKING EACH OTHER FEEL STUPID.
Resources and References

• Stereotype threat: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stereotype_threat
• Delusions of Gender: Cordelia Fine
• April Wensel (@aprilwensel): Compassionate coding
  • Blog: https://medium.com/compassionate-coding
  • Site: https://compassionatecoding.com/
  • “Software development that values humans”
• https://insimpleterms.blog/2017/10/16/advice-for-women-or-anyone-starting-a-career-in-tech/ - Advice for anyone starting a career in tech
• https://insimpleterms.blog/2017/10/13/resources-for-women-arriving-at-or-returning-to-it/ - Resources for Women Arriving at or Returning to IT
• https://insimpleterms.blog/
• https://medium.com/a-woman-in-technology - learning, teaching, women in tech, maths
What can you do to make things better? (2 mins)

“If you don’t leave the room with a commitment to change, then you have wasted your time. Do things a little bit differently tomorrow than you did today.”

Tobias Mayer – Agile Manchester 2018
Did you come up with any new suggestions?
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