

Communication Hacks: Strategies for fostering collaboration and dealing with conflict in open source communities

Nuritz Sanchez

>> Hello. Can you hear me well? Thank you.

>> Hello, everybody. Can you hear me.

>> Hello, Nuritz. We can hear you.

>> All right. Great. I will just stay kind of silent. This is really cool though. Okay. I won't stay silent. I was kidding. I really like the chat feature. This is pretty awesome. Big blue button. And I'm reading some of the comments, someone asked if I'm in the office. No, this is my home office. This is all IKEA bought, IKEA plant, so you don't see a messy room.

Yeah, the plant is fake, Jordan. I actually have two of them. They're so wonderful. They actually make you feel like you're outside. It's not really the kind of thing that grows in California perhaps but, yes, I'm going for the Japanese.

All right. We're getting close to when this begins.

>> Yes.

>> Sorry, was that a question do I want you to introduce my talk? I didn't hear you, sorry.

>> Yes.

>> Sure.

>> Yes. Now I can.

>> All right. And I can then remind people how to ask questions.

Okay. So welcome, everybody to Track two. This is communication hacks in strategies for fostering collaboration and dealing with conflict in open source by Nuritz Sanchez. Welcome Nuritz Sanchez. We're going to handle questions like this and please post your questions in the comments. Welcome.

>> Okay. Great. Thank you. All right.

This is great. We're starting about a minute early because I have a lot to cover. As Manuel said we're going to be talking about communication hacks. All right.

As some of you may already know me from the board and just general open source community things. But I'm currently a senior open source manager at GitLab. My name is Nuritz Sanchez. And collaboration is something that's really key to the work that I do. A lot of time is spent coordinating among teams and cultural teams. So it's something that I personally need to stay on top of to keep learning more. And today I'd like to share some of my learnings with you.

Today we're going to just briefly cover a lot of different topics. I'm sorry I can't deep dive into many of these. But I hope to give you a feeling for what each topic is. So if you like to

screenshot this, I've included a link to my slide. So hopefully your interest will be peaked and hopefully you'll try to dive in more. I'll be sharing some of my communications hacks.

The first is navigating cultural differences and this is really important in open source communities because they attract members from all over the world, or at least they should be attracting people from all over the world. And while there's many ways to look for cultural differences, I was recently inspired by a collaborating guide that GitLab had. What she has done is mapped many different countries into seven different areas. These areas are communicating, evaluating, leading, trusting, disagreeing, scheduling, and persuading. And I've included this here and I'll be going over it how it's used and it's an awesome way to think about how the cultures are different.

An example of this is communicating. There are cultures that are low context and some that are high context. The low context cultures value communication that is precise, simple, clear, and oftentimes repetition is used to avoid misunderstandings. Throughout my presentation you'll see me doing this because I'm from a culture that is low context. Sometimes you have to read between the lines in order to fully understand the message. And so I have -- this is one of the indicators and we see the low context cultures and the high context cultures. In here what's interesting is that the U.S. and UK still share the same language. Similarly two countries that are very close that share borders, Germany and France, Germany is much lower context than France. I've included this so you can see a lot of Asian cultures tend to go to the high realm of context.

Another indicator is evaluating. And this is around direct negative feedback. These are cultures that deliver feedback frankly, bluntly, and honestly. These are things like you always do this or completely they're absolutes. Negative feedbacks are acceptable in front of groups. For indirect cultures they deliver feedback softly, subtly, and diplomatically. Feedback here is given in private. So, again, I've included the list of different countries. Russia and Israel were called out in the book as being some of the highest in the direct negative feedback area where it's okay to give feedback in front of groups. And the content -- the feedback itself is very separated from the relationship. So it's seen as something much more acceptable to do there.

Another indicator is persuading. And for this indicator Aaron Myers hasn't finished mapping out all of the content. So we've included some of these here. Principles first cultures value the "why" first. It's really important to understand why. For applications first cultures they value the "how" and the "what" first. So they're trained to begin with a fact, statement, or opinion and back it up or explain it the conclusion as necessary. So then you follow up afterwards. Oh, and something that I wanted to mention is that the book says that oftentimes there's friction where, for example, if somebody from France is managed by somebody in the U.S. and they're constantly asked to keep going things and they're not given the "why" it become really frustrating. So it's important to understand these principles because they might have different values in terms of what to talk about first. So it's a really cool insight to have.

All right. Well, I said I can't go into all of the different indicators. I thought it would be fun to map out the culture map board of directors. This is, first of all, what a map looks like. You can find that tool in the Erin Meyer website. Here you can kind of see the inclinations with Nigeria is a culture that values confrontation more so than the Mexican culture. This is how all they may fit in with all of the separate indicators.

Okay. There's a lag between my slides. Here we go. Improving feedback. Feedback is something that is extremely important, and I've included this grumpy cat image because getting

feedback often makes us grumpy. It oftentimes makes us react in a certain way where we understand that the feedback is good for us it's not always pleasant to have. And it can be challenging.

But I'd like to say that giving and receiving feedback is a skill that we can build. So even if you feel like, you know, you're not there yet, that you react really strongly and feel kind of hopeless even about the fact that you react really strongly to negative feedback is something that you can work on. Something that's really helpful is be air of underlying biases or tendencies. We're also influenced by our own stereotypes and biases. And I want to say that feedback is a good thing. Feedback-seeking behavior has been linked to higher job satisfaction. And it's associated with higher performance.

Receiving negative feedback is tough. And I just want to acknowledge that. We feel about emotions more strongly than we feel about the good ones. And the negative feedback kind of triggers those instincts, like this negative feedback is like a cheetah and it's going to eat me. So here's some tips for when you start to feel that way. The first thing is that it's really important to take some time. This is definitely an okay thing to do. You don't need to respond immediately. We often do get defensive or angry when we first hear it and we need to process the feedback. To help with creating that time you can create a script. And while it may seem a little bit cheesier you can just repeat it for yourself and say thanks for the feedback. I'll process it and come back to it later. Having something that you can go to really helps you when you're put into these situations when your head is just thinking, thinking, thinking, and spiraling out of control. And then if you notice that there's a physical reaction just focus on your body. Your heart rate might become elevated and you may feel a lot of pressure in your head. So there's a really cool breathing technique the four, four, four. Where you breathe in for four, you hold it for four, and exhale for four. And this is the most important thing, the reason to ground yourself is to be able to process that feedback. You need to ask yourself what is true about what you heard, what do you think is biased or incorrect, and what can you use in order to make progress.

Another really helpful thing is to identify your triggers. Why is this causing you to react this way? There are three triggers that are identified in a book that I really like called Thanks for the Feedback. This means actual content. We sometimes feel it is strong. The relationship triggers that are set off by a particular person is triggered by that relationship. So our focus shifts from the feedback itself to the relationship with the person. You might think they're unqualified to give me this feedback or I feel betrayed by this person or any other number of things that make you focus more on the relationship itself than the feedback. And then there are identity triggers. We might feel unbalanced and we no longer know what to think of ourselves. This is kind of turns people how to survive. So this is really useful to help us process our feelings and ground ourselves and get ourselves down to the stage to the process and ask ourselves what it is you're going to use to help you move forward.

All right. I don't have a lot of time to go into to giving tips for feedback, into giving the feedback, but I do want to mention some important things. Again, the book says that when you're giving feedback that it's really helpful to think about the specific type of feedback that you'd like to give. By trying to figure out what type you're giving it creates less room for, you know, just saying something that might actually be hurtful or might not be helpful. So evaluate it through these three things. There's evaluation feedback which helps the other person understand where they are and the expectations that you have for them. There's coaching feedback which helps them to improve. And there's positive feedback or appreciation which motivates and encourages. And all these things

are important to have. These are the things that help people make progress and all of them are equally important. So don't forget the positive feedback or any of the other ones. I also want to mention this cool trick where they were talking about connecting about your right and left side of the brain. And what you do is when I think it makes me feel. And so an example of this might be when I think that you are ignoring me in chat when I direct message you it makes me feel like I am unimportant or it makes me feel hurt or unimportant. It's not accusing you like you're being a jerk. You're focusing on the behavior and it makes me feel this way and it focuses on your experience. I tried this out in a few interpersonal and I found it works pretty well. When you get a little bit more comfortable using it, it can be pretty powerful. This next point maybe obvious, but maybe not so much. Remember to talk to the right person at the right place and at the right time. What this means is that if you have a conflict with person A don't talk to person B about it. Maybe reaping out to them as they're running off at the end of a workday. Just ask for some time and make sure it's in a private place so you can have the conversation and maybe work this out. Just a quick tip, I know we talked about personal differences, but it's important -- it's safe to give negative feedback in private and give good feedback in public. That always makes people feel really great.

The next thing I want to talk about is active listening because communication is not just about talking. It's about listening just as well maybe even more importantly. And I love this quote by Richmond Carlson that says, "being heard and understood is one of the greatest desires of the human heart." I think somebody listening to you really well is a way that helps us feel that way.

So maybe some of you have heard this before while you're in a conversation with somebody and you're listening and they say I don't feel like you're listening to me and you're able to repeat exactly what they said but they still feel like you're not listening and this frustrates both people. It could be that you feel that you're listening, and the other person doesn't feel heard. So I'd like to talk about the different types of listening. You can start to analyze how you are reasoning to each of the conversation. The first one is distracted listening when you're not fully there with the person. There's content listening which is listening to the facts and planning how to respond. So this might be somebody is responding or saying something, and you hear something, and you start to formulate your answer. Then there's identifying listening where you respond to a similar situation. So this might be your friend that says, oh, I'm so excited, I'm going to go to Croatia next month and I want to tell you about it. Then you say, oh, I love Croatia and I went here and there. And you started talking. So you might be really excited to share your experience but first give your friend time to share theirs. So say, oh, Croatia, tell me about it. Then I've been there to.

The next type of listening is problem solving and this is something that we often do. We really want to help people. And we listen with the intent to help provide feedback and ideas. Some people might not be ready for this type of listening and maybe when you're doing it, you're ignoring some of the feelings associated or you're bringing in your perspective sooner than might be needed. So oftentimes when we're listening, we can default into this. So I want to say that active listening is sort of the gold standard for how to listen. This is when you hear both the facts and the feelings, and you can respond appropriately to both. And so I just really want to repeat that again. Active listening is when you hear facts and feelings and you respond appropriately to both. And so this is where people really start to feel heard and understood. And it's something we should all aspire to be as listeners.

>> Nuritzi, you have 20 minutes left for questions.

>> Oh, oh my gosh. So I probably am not going to get through all of this but what I want to say is active listening is how you do it. Much like a stoplight tells you to stop, go, or yield, our actions and words do the same. So having body language or eye contact and similarly verbal cues like, oh, really, tell me more. So your grandmother did this. Those are things that will keep you speaking. And paraphrasing is not just repeating back exactly what the person has said but taking the key message and rephrasing it and rewording it in order to make sure that both people are on the same page. A speaker may say, oh, that's not what I meant to say. So this also means that you don't have to be in agreement. You can say, okay, so what I hear you saying is that you like to have the logo be a fine donkey. You may not agree with it. But maybe that's the closure. That might even just be enough.

All right. So in the -- I think this is the last bit that we have time for. But active listening is really important for building relationships. You can employ this in the virtual world, the principles of this, the virtual world. But more importantly, you should use them at in-person at events that you have or places where you have in-person interaction because the relationships carry over into the online world.

I don't have time to share my favorite hacks I think, or I don't know, Manuel. There's like two pages.

Basically one of them is when you're writing it's a writer's job to be understood. So make sure you have the right formatting. I really love making a scheme test and making sure you can read through it and that the key messages are easy to find. That call to actions are very clear. This "yes, and" principle really helps you keep it going because it helps you acknowledge the person and continue with your own thought.

This is my last slide and its collaborative phrases. This is just something that helps you collaborate with others, how might we do this, what are your thoughts. All of this list is really useful when talking to people and it encourages multiple perspectives. My final quote, I just wanted to end with a quote by John Powell which is, "communication works for those who work at it." This is really important. This is a skill that you can build. I hope that my presentation has given you at least some foundation or some sparks of new interest and giving you new ideas so you can progress in your journey of better communication and collaboration.

All right. That is all. This slide just has some references and resources. Some of the books and articles that I've mentioned. And with that, thank you. Here's the link to my slide.

>> Thank you so much, Nuritzi. I have some questions. Maybe you can answer them in the chat since we ran out of time.

>> Okay. Sure. Where do I see the questions?

>> I will forward them to you.

>> Okay. Great. Well, thank you, everybody. See you later.