NANOG Presentation

June - 2024

Four Simple Leadership Lessons that I wish Someone Had Taught Me

June-2024

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Who am I?

- Kam Agahian

- Sr. Director of Cloud Engineering with Oracle

- ~25 years professional Tech experience
  - Except one year; due to intense distress
  - ...and what a learning experience it was.

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Who am I?

- Started as "Net Admin"
  - Network, Linux, Windows, Storage, Printers, Hardware, Modems, Term95, BBS (huh?!)...
- Overall ~15 years management experience
  - 10 years global teams

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What's this talk about?

- I take notes, everyday, everywhere.
- Use them in blog posts, books and talks
- But more importantly:
  - <u>I use them to refine and improve my approach to leadership</u>

- This talk is about 4 of my all-time favorite points.
  - Surveys
  - Formal and informal feedback over the years

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The Primary Audience

- Almost anyone even outside tech
- Specifically:
  - New tech leaders and managers
  - Aspiring tech leaders and managers
  - Seasoned leaders (specially to share their perspective)

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Lesson #1
The Power of Authenticity

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Lesson #1
The Power of Authenticity

- Who remembers this?

Lesson #1
The Power of Authenticity

- This is how it started:

Lesson #1
The Power of Authenticity

- And how it ended:

Lesson #1
The Power of Authenticity

- 8 years later

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Lesson #1
The Power of Authenticity

- "I thought I'd blown it in front of the whole world" – The Guardian

- Overwhelming positive feedback on social media
  - Unfiltered collective feedback

- People appreciate original and authentic characters

- People do notice fake gestures
  - You know no one cares about you as much as I do...

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Lesson #1
The Power of Authenticity

- How do I fix that?

  - Started by **removing my virtual background**!
  - "After a horrible night I had, I am a **little unprepared** for today's meeting"
  - "Everyone knows my area of expertise, but at the same time my org owns this project and I count on **your** technical **leadership**" – **Admission but empowerment**

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Lesson #2
The Impossible Self-cloning

"I Quit: Where the Top Performers' Cloning Machine Fails?" - Link

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Lesson #2
The Impossible Self-cloning

- My long journey to become CCIE certified:

May 16, 2014 San_Jose	Service Provider	Pass	Time Expired
Dec 1, 2013 RTP	Service Provider	Fail	Time Expired
Oct 1, 2013 San_Jose	Service Provider	Fail	Time Expired
Sep 28, 2012 San_Jose	Service Provider	Fail	Time Expired
Jul 28, 2010 San_Jose	Service Provider	Fail	Time Expired
Sep 7, 2009 Tokyo	Enterprise Infrastructure	Pass	Time Expired
Mar 20, 2009 Sydney	Enterprise Infrastructure	Fail	Time Expired
Feb 13, 2009 Sydney	Enterprise Infrastructure	Fail	Time Expired
Nov 17, 2008 Sydney	Enterprise Infrastructure	Fail	Time Expired

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Lesson #2
The Impossible Self-cloning

- From 2006-2014 everyday, every weekend
- No birthdays, no wedding
- Had two short vacations in New Zealand and Indonesia (8 days total)

- ~13,800 hours logged
- 4-5 hours a day on average, most days.
- Many RFCs memorized. Authors, lists etc. contacted.
- Memorized the **Command Reference** IOS 12.x

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Lesson #2
The Impossible Self-cloning

- Fast Forward; 17 years later
  - My engineers NEVER spend nearly the same amount of time
  - **They have a million hobbies** that I never touched for about a decade

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Lesson #2
The Impossible Self-cloning

- How are they doing?
  - Top performers
  - Positive customer feedback
  - Positive business feedback
  - Fewer things to brag about **but they're just as effective**

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Lesson #2
The Impossible Self-cloning

- How do I fix that?
  - Look at the chessboard

Lesson #2
The Impossible Self-cloning

- ## My takeaways:
  - (1) Appreciate **people's differences**
    - Talents and efficiency (OCD, ADHD etc.)
    - Maybe I was not smart enough
    - Maybe I could have planned better
  - (2) You don't need a team of top performers. Not every chess piece needs to be a queen, **not every player has to be Kobe Bryant.**

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Lesson #2
The Impossible Self-cloning

- How do I fix that?

  - We don't need a team of top performers to succeed
    - That could actually fall apart
  - Listen and appreciate different ways to accomplish tasks
  - Appreciate the fact that many want a job to pay their bills.
    - They perform reasonably well
    - They achieve and are OK with being an average performer
    - They **don't want to become Kobe Bryant**
    - But, they are still an integral part of your driving force

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Lesson #3
The Flexible 1:1s

- How many of you have those 1:1s with your leader that you DO NOT look forward to?

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Lesson #3
The Flexible 1:1s

- Traditional approach to 1:1s with managers
  - Project updates
    - "Tell me what-you-got?"
    - Details, quiz on details, feedback on details
    - Eventually micro-manage: "Make sure we use the brown cable for that port in that room…"
  - Outstanding feedback
    - "Remember last week? Next time I want you to…"
  - What to do in the next 7 days?
  - Also- It would keep the team members and their projects in silos.

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Lesson #3
The Flexible 1:1s

- Opportunities Missed
  - Get to know your team members beside their badge:
    - Their motivations;
    - What they might be dealing with outside work
    - Their ideas to improve the business
    - Their challenges at work
    - Their future plans

- Last but not least:
  - They won't get to know any of that about you...

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Lesson #3
The Flexible 1:1s

- How do I fix that?
  - Flexible 1:1s
    - The style of the session **varies from one employee to another**
    - The **It-is-your-time-let-us-chat** approach
    - ….let's check out some real world examples

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Lesson #3
The Flexible 1:1s

- My flexible 1:1s: Professional espresso machines (2 people)

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Lesson #3
The Flexible 1:1s

- My flexible 1:1s: Collection of watches (1 person)

Lesson #3
The Flexible 1:1s

- My flexible 1:1s: Long range competitions (1 person)

Lesson #3
The Flexible 1:1s

- My flexible 1:1s: Kids, family and schools (A few people)


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Lesson #3
The Flexible 1:1s

- But we also have this: (A few people)

The red squared source and destination IP addresses are represented by the IPSec tunnel headend and we are calling it outer IP header, or the IP header exposed to routers performing the route lookup. The original IP header is encrypted, it is not visible, thus the TransportMode name. The FastConnect will be used **only** to transport the encrypted packets and the IP forwarding will be based on the tunnel headend IP addresses of the IPSec peers until the packet reaches one end of the peers to perform traffic decryption.

Non-encrypted traffic cannot be sent over the virtual circuit in this mode. Some restrictions will be automatically enforced by OCI for the non-encrypted traffic to be dropped (we will analyze the restrictions later).

Let's go ahead and analyze some technical details based on the simple but interesting networking topology:
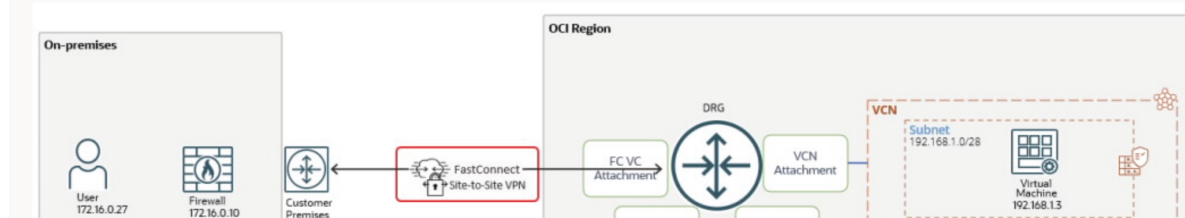
- **If that's your passion, the 1:1 is your time!**

Lesson #3
The Flexible 1:1s

- So what about your project updates?
  - We adopted a fast-paced weekly project review
    - For the most part we discuss TWO types of initiatives:
      - What does the business care about?
      - What made you proud this week? A blog post? Customer discussion? YouTube video? Your highlight.

- We also allow the team members to handpick initiatives and bring them to the review meeting
  - *Bonus point:* Everyone hears what everybody else is working on. Awesome place to hear feedback and suggestions.

Note: You might need to tweak the plan for your very junior-level staff

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Lesson #4
The Unreasonable Request

- What's an unreasonable ask?

Lesson #4
The Unreasonable Request

- In our world almost always, they are inevitable
  - **Unplanned outage**
    - Saturday night
  - **Accommodate customer's hours**
    - We start at 5AM tomorrow
  - **End of the quarter/year wrap-up**
    - We stay till mid-night this Friday
  - **Deadlines to release products**
    - We work 60 hours each this week

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Lesson #4
The Unreasonable Request

- In contrast to what many think; in emergency cases a leader can have out of the ordinary requests.
  - This usually is in the best interest of everyone to keep the ship afloat

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Lesson #4
The Unreasonable Request

- In contrast to what many think; in emergency cases a leader can have out of the ordinary requests.

- Catch: While we can totally make an unreasonable request for business reasons, we can have ONLY ONE at a time and not always.

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Lesson #4
The Unreasonable Request

- In our world almost always, they are inevitable
  - **Unplanned outage**
    - Stay Saturday night. Make sure you show up Sunday at 6AM on the bridge to discuss the outage.
  - **Accommodate customer's hours**
    - We start at 5AM tomorrow. Make sure you bring enough food in case you stay late.
  - **End of the quarter/year wrap-up**
    - We stay till mid-night this Friday. Also make sure we have daily reports submitted by 6AM.
  - **Deadlines to release products**
    - We work 60 hours each this week. We also need to stop the 401K contributions until...

Lesson #4
The Unreasonable Request

- In our world almost always, they are inevitable
  - **Unplanned outage**
    - Stay Saturday night but we will have food delivered. Expense late transport.
  - **Accommodate customer's hours**
    - We start at 5AM tomorrow but we will end early or take half-a-day off any day.
  - **End of the quarter/year wrap-up**
    - We stay till mid-night this Friday. Take next Monday off.
  - **Deadlines to release products**
    - We work 60 hours each this week. We will reward it properly.

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All ON ONE SLIDE

- **Lesson #1:** Authenticity goes a long way. People are smart.

- **Lesson #2:** We cannot clone ourselves. Different people can achieve goals in different ways.

- **Lesson #3:** Try **f**un and collaborative 1:1s. Project reviews can wait for project review meetings.

- **Lesson #4:** One unreasonable ask at a time and not always. If Joe must start at 5AM, he cannot skip lunch.

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Food for Thought

- How would tenue and seniority affect the lessons?
- How would cultural differences affect the lessons?
- How would low/high performance situations affect the lessons?

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Thank you

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