



# PALOMINO DB

## The Art of Cat Herding: How to Manage Geeks

Presented by:

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[www.palominodb.com](http://www.palominodb.com)

Slides - <http://bit.ly/oscon11manage>

Why are you here?



# Management means:

- Team steward
- Provide optimal working environment
- Ben and Fitz say:  
“Management is a way of scaling yourself”



# Happy Employees

- Feel listened to
- Grok that things are not 100% tech
- Will stand by you



# Motivating Employees

Happy employees:

- Feel listened to
- Grok that things are not 100% tech
- Will stand by you
  
- Money/bonus/time off?
- Or praise, pride?
- Prioritize a pet project for them?



# Effective Managers

- Delegate. No really.
- Help employees succeed
- Help employees not fail
- **KEEP THEIR PROMISES**



# Effective Employees

- Have pride in their work
- Care about what they do
- Care about doing a good job



# Trust your employees!

- Assume they are professional
- Assume they know their job
- Even if you know better





CASE \$team  
WHEN \$action  
THEN \$result

How can I help you change the algorithm?



# The Team Solves Team Problems

- “Nobody is updating their priority lists. Do you think you'd freak out if we put project management software on top of the ticketing software?”



The Body Odor Issue



The Personal Scent Issue



# Hard Issues: Part 1

- Impact
- Causes
- Know your resources
- Get specific information
- Do not commit to specific action
- Gather data and decide



# Hard Issues: Part 2

- Deliver privately
- Deliver directly
- Offer resources
- Discuss followup



# Effective Meetings

- Have an agenda
  - Nobody will read the agenda
- Stick to the agenda
- Listen to your employees



# Working Managers

- Do the same work, just a bit less
- Lead by example
- “I’ll do it”



# DOCUMENTATION

- Have one point of documentation
  - Even if it some docs are links to other places
- “Is it in the documentation?”
- “I thought I documented that, could you not find it?”





# Checklists

- Make 'em
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> set of eyes
  - For competent co-worker (or you at 3 am)
- Share credit, take blame



Let go of the unimportant little stuff...  
but do not let it build up, either



# Encourage Team Management

- A team meeting can happen in your absence
  - Structured agenda
- Status of projects
- Documentation
- Misc (oncall handoff, etc)



# Effective Micromanagement

- Ticketing system
  - Status updates
  - Regular meetings....
  - Ask privately / have a one-on-one meeting



# Sometimes, Firing is the Answer

- Problem employees end up working alone
- Not good for the team
- Even if they are the best coders you have



<http://manager-tools.com>



That's it!

Questions? Comments? Feedback?

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MySQL Administrator's Bible

OurSQL Podcast ([www.oursqlcast.com](http://www.oursqlcast.com))

<http://planet.mysql.com>





PALOMINO<sup>DB</sup>

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You are a manager now, or were a manager, and want to know how to improve?

You are thinking of becoming a manager and want to know tips?

You have a bad manager and want to try to “manage from below?”

My stuff is mostly operations, but it can be ported to developers.

## Management means:

- Team steward
- Provide optimal working environment
- Ben and Fitz say:  
“Management is a way of scaling yourself”



Steward is the political advocate for the team

Note all the good things you do too. Have an “agile”

“release” even if you're ops. Note that you fixed X bugs, remember that each bug is at least one customer made happier. Build cred for your team.

It also helps secure a regular maintenance window – it's easier to say “no we don't need that window this time around” than to fight for each window.

Be transparent as a manager, both to your team and to your higher ups. Be open and clear when a project is slipping.

Sometimes you need to play politics, but usually it's best to lay your hands on the table as the best politics.

Get rid of roadblocks.

## Happy Employees

- Feel listened to
- Grok that things are not 100% tech
- Will stand by you



Sometimes the best tech isn't the best thing for the environment. For example, when I worked at a famous online dating site, we had a cisco pix firewall and a really smart NEW sysadmin who wanted to use a BSD box as a firewall.

He didn't grok why, and he left after 2 months because he wasn't happy, because things weren't going his way.

“I don't like it either, but that's the way it is.” Not confrontationally, not “life is unfair suck it up and deal” but really empathizing. And trying to find workarounds, not just shooting stuff down.

“here's the deal -- I know this deadline is hard to meet. I know we're up against big odds, and we have some long nights ahead of us. What do you need?”

# Motivating Employees

Happy employees:

- Feel listened to
- Grok that things are not 100% tech
- Will stand by you
  
- Money/bonus/time off?
- Or praise, pride?
- Prioritize a pet project for them?



Money and “stuff” cannot be the ONLY motivating factor.

Taking the team out to lunch, especially if it's on your own dime, means a lot.

Status

Access – you help them get their pet project

Power?

Stuff

## Effective Managers

- Delegate. No really.
- Help employees succeed
- Help employees not fail
- KEEP THEIR PROMISES



Stirring the soup; delegation is a promise too, as is followup. If they fail they have to fail on their own. That doesn't mean sacrificing a project, but it may mean sacrificing a milestone or two.

COMPLETELY IMAGINARY SCENARIO - we had goals of a chapter every 2 weeks or so. This was done so that if we started to get really far behind we'd know and be able to fix it, or can the project all together.

We were on time, but only because my co-author, in the first chapter he wrote, felt pressure and couldn't meet the deadline, so as a place holder he copied the MySQL manual. Editors are pretty hands-off, but a good manager would have had a good enough relationship to see my co-author struggle.

COMPLETELY IMAGINARY SCENARIO has no plagiarism, btw.

# Effective Employees

- Have pride in their work
- Care about what they do
- Care about doing a good job



It's not easy to get people to this place, but this is what makes an effective employee.

They're not going to do a half-ass job if they care.

The problem is that if they do care, they're more emotionally invested in their work, which is usually the problem with geeks.

## Trust your employees!

- Assume they are professional
- Assume they know their job
- Even if you know better



This is the #2 message to take away, this is your prime directive.

If something is wrong, you have to act as if it's wrong **IN SPITE OF** your employee knowing their job. It's almost passive-aggressive, but it works.

If they're always late, explain to them why it's important that you know where they are (project status, can't find you, then it looks like the team is disorganized). Again, happy employees will understand, also if they put you in bad positions, you can put them in bad positions.

Never forget you have the power, even if it never feels like it. Assuming medical things, telling them they need medical help, is a no-no. "As a manager, I can tell you're having trouble focusing. As your friend, I'm telling you to **GET ADD MEDS.**"

There is some SQL on the next page, that is the #1 takeaway:

# CASE \$team WHEN \$action THEN \$result

How can I help you change the algorithm?

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How to discipline employees. Ben & Fitz said this in their presentation, but I got it from a great podcast called manager-tools. Their message was “when you do X, Y happens” but I figured I'd put it in geek speak for all of us.

Have the person help solve their own problems, but sometimes too many “lessons learned” is annoying. See copy/paste “lessons learned”.



## The Team Solves Team Problems

- “Nobody is updating their priority lists. Do you think you'd freak out if we put project management software on top of the ticketing software?”



I asked what the problem really was and suggested she bring it to our team meeting so our team can help solve the problem.

**Problem:** In order to make sure that everyone is prioritizing appropriately and that emergencies aren't getting in the way of work, there needs to be some sort of daily list of priorities and then a weekly report compiled by an admin asst. of what was a priority vs. what got done.

By asking the team, they have buy-in, the process is transparent. Also, you're giving them specs, let them design the product.

Blueberry yogurt and kids.

Interview with 8 of us, we all liked one guy but not the other, they hired the other guy.

The Body Odor Issue

The Personal Scent Issue



We all have a personal scent, from us and products we use. “I have a personal scent, you have body odor”.

# Hard Issues: Part 1

- Impact
- Causes
- Know your resources
- Get specific information
- Do not commit to specific action
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What's the impact, and how can you minimize the impact?

Ask about possible solutions.

**DO NOT TURN OVER TO HR.** HR's interests are the company, period. Their job is to not get the company sued. You can ask HR, maybe they have a dr or nurse or wellness program w/dietary info that you can refer the person to.

Some people burn candles or smokeless incense at work. Don't assume it's hygiene!

What if it's a medical issue? The body odor issue is one because we assume it can be fixed. “just wear deoderant!!!” Sometimes the complainer will understand if it's a medical issue. Not the case if it's causing migraines. Sometimes they want to just be heard, remember.

It can also be a cultural issue

## Hard Issues: Part 2

- Deliver privately
- Deliver directly
- Offer resources
- Discuss followup



Avoid giving suggestions unless asked.

Remember it's not a judgment.

# Effective Meetings

- Have an agenda
  - Nobody will read the agenda
- Stick to the agenda
- Listen to your employees



Ratholing happens....but employees want to feel listened to. If you find yourself going down a rat-hole, promise to follow-up on the issue presented – don't try to solve it, and definitely don't act as if it's solved. Treat it as pending and come back to it at the end of the meeting or have another meeting about it, or if it's a serious rat-hole, have a private meeting with the person.

We're all in tech so we all rathole and sometimes we need a cooling off period or a reminder that sometimes the optimal path is not the best tech.

"those are good points, we'll write them down and make sure to deal with them but let's get through the rest of the plan and come back to it at the end."

Remind them that, so that they know you want to be 95% done and talk about this 5% issue, as opposed to getting 15% of the way through and getting stalled.  
**MAKE SURE TO FOLLOW THROUGH WITH THAT.**

## Working Managers

- Do the same work, just a bit less
- Lead by example
- “I’ll do it”



Don't leave the crap work to the employees. Do your fair share – which is a bit less than the usual fair share.

Listen to your employees on what is worst about their environment. Maybe they hate their ticketing system. Maybe their pagers go off too often (offer to shadow a pager so you can feel it, or take the pager if you're a working manager).

Don't be the first volunteer, allow others to volunteer if they can. But you are the one who has to make sure it gets done, so if nobody else wants it you're stuck with it.

Mentoring effectively doesn't mean “let me do it”. See stirring the sauce.

# DOCUMENTATION

- Have one point of documentation
  - Even if it some docs are links to other places
- “Is it in the documentation?”
- “I thought I documented that, could you not find it?”



Document, document, document.

If a piece of information comes up, make sure it's documented. Give the task to employees to document their areas of expertise, especially in operations.

Docs mean you can get sick, go on vacation, get hit by a bus, etc.

Have people check each other, when possible.

If it's found that a piece of documentation is missing, make sure it's added. By person who should have added it, by the person who found it, or by you or even a teammate.

This is a good managing from below example.

If you document we'll see how smart you are, or not. If you don't, we won't know, and we'll know about mistakes eventually, so prove you're smart ahead of time so when mistakes happen we know it's the exception to the rule.

If they can't find it, tell them how to get to it, or make how to get to it easier.

“Ops->procedures->how to change write masters”

# Checklists

- Make 'em
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> set of eyes
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- Share credit, take blame



When Jim wanted to fire me, I was mentored to have weekly meetings where I documented what I did, and sure enough he came up with teeny little problems here and there, but my case was strong enough for all the good I did.

There's taking blame to a point; sometimes a project does fail because of an employee when you didn't realize something. But that's also a failing on your part.

Praise in public, criticize in private. Sort of. If something happens and you send a reminder to your team about process or whatever, everyone knows why, so it's basically the same thing.



Let go of the unimportant little stuff...  
but do not let it build up, either



The pool supply story

But if this is an employee who never listens.....

## Encourage Team Management

- A team meeting can happen in your absence
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# Effective Micromanagement

- Ticketing system
  - Status updates
  - Regular meetings....
  - Ask privately / have a one-on-one meeting



Nobody likes a hoverboard. And putting publicly in the ticket “WHAT'S THE STATUS OF THIS IT HASN'T BEEN TOUCHED IN THREE WEEKS” is criticizing in public. Do it in e-mail, and if it's a problem for an employee, ask what's wrong, etc.

Ticketing is where what's done is documented, too. Even if you're a developer.

## Sometimes, Firing is the Answer

- Problem employees end up working alone
- Not good for the team
- Even if they are the best coders you have



Nobody wants to fire anybody. But as one of my bosses said, “I don't fire people, they fire themselves.”

<http://manager-tools.com>



They take a while to get to the point sometimes but it's a lot of good stuff.

That's it!

Questions? Comments? Feedback?

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MySQL Administrator's Bible  
OurSQL Podcast ([www.oursqlcast.com](http://www.oursqlcast.com))  
<http://planet.mysql.com>

