

How to Protect Your Open Source Project From Poisonous People

Ben Collins-Sussman & Brian W. Fitzpatrick

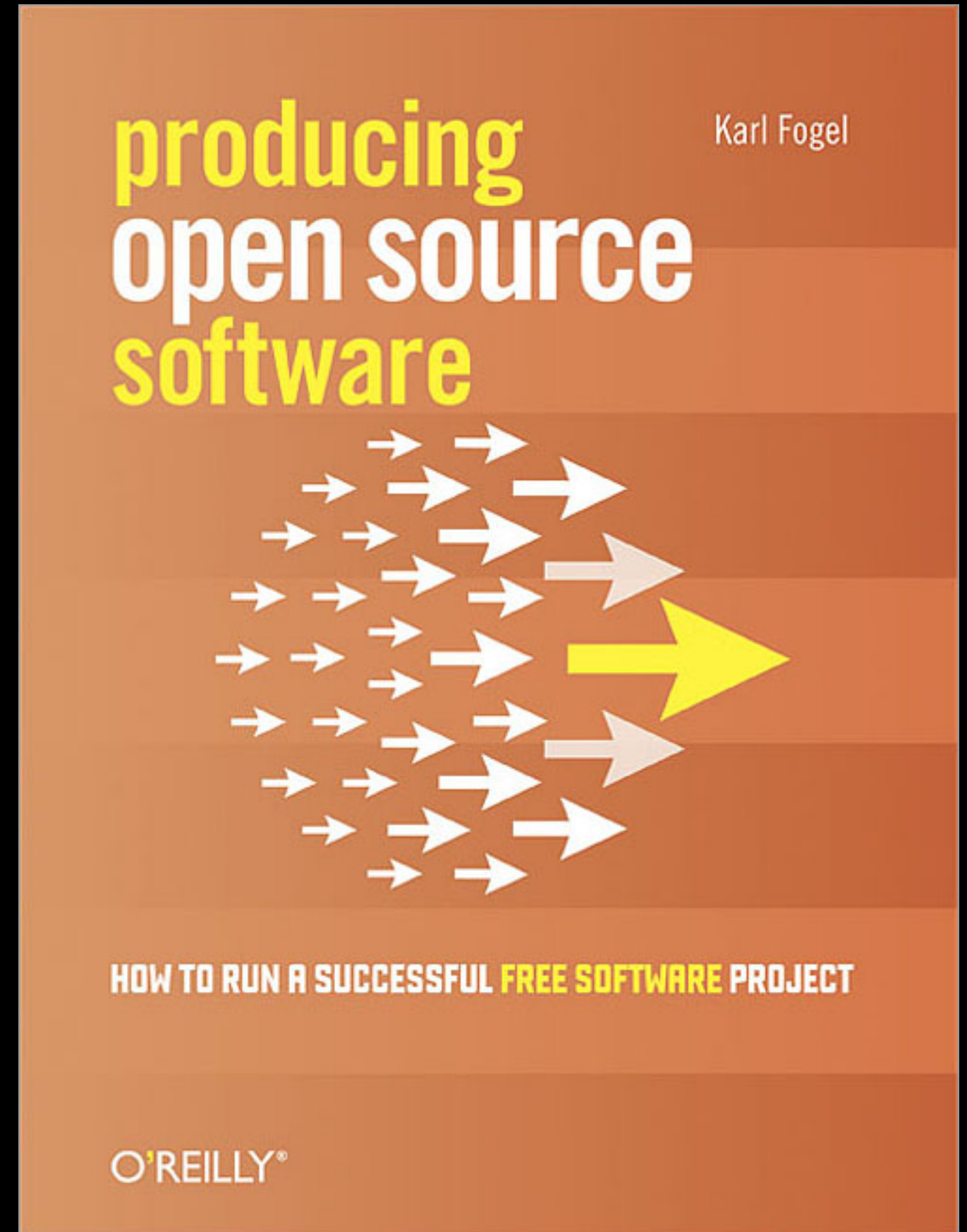
Senior Software Engineers

Google

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By The Way

- These are our opinions
- There's more than one way to run a community
- Based on our experiences...
- ... and Karl's book...
- ...which are both based on experiences with Subversion...
- ...and Apache



Comprehension

Fortification

Identification

Disinfection

Comprehending the Threat

Attention and Focus

These are your scarcest resources

You must protect them

Poisonous people can:

- Distract
- Emotionally drain your community
- Cause needless infighting

You Need to Avoid Paralysis

- OCD people can derail forward progress
 - Perfectionists
 - People obsessed with process
- Even nice guys can do this unintentionally!
 - "The perfect is the enemy of the good"
 - [Example: endless discussion]

Fortifying Against the Threat

Build a Strong Community Based On

Politeness

Respect

Trust

Humility

Best Practices

Have a Mission

- Pick a direction
- Limit your scope
 - [Examples]

Subversion

“To create a compelling replacement for CVS”

Google Web Toolkit

“To radically improve the web experience for users by enabling developers to use existing Java tools to build no-compromise AJAX for any modern browser”

Mailing List Etiquette

- Don't rehash old discussions:
 - Send 'em to the mail archives
- Don't reply to **every** message in a thread:
 - Reply to a summary
 - [Example: Email filibustering]

Document Your Project's History

- Design decisions
- Bug fixes
- Mistakes
- Code Changes (ChangeLog)

If you don't document your project's history, you
will be condemned to repeat it...

...over and over and over and over and over
and over and over and over and over and over
and over and over and over and over and over
and over and over and over and over and over
and over and over and over and over again

Have healthy code-collaboration policies

- Send commit emails, encourage email review
- Do big changes on branches for easier review
 - “Power plants” slow progress
- Be generous with branches
- Increase your project’s “bus-factor” on components
- Don't allow names in files
 - [Example: the date-parser contributor]

Have Well-defined Processes

- Releasing software
 - Backport bugs
 - Test and Release tarballs
- Accepting and reviewing patches
- Admitting new committers
 - The community founders establish the culture
 - The culture becomes self-selecting
 - [anecdote: even a founder can be booted!]

Voting is a last resort

- A healthy community should rarely need to vote
 - [Example: Subversion's critical decision]

Maintain Your Standards

“I have several friends who know him to some degree. One of them said ‘he often walks the fine line between genius and lunatic.’ The problem is, genius is such a commodity these days, that it's not acceptable to be an eccentric any more.”

--Greg Hudson, Subversion Developer

Identifying Poisonous People

The warning signs that you should look out for

...also known as...

When to flip the “bozo bit”

Communication Annoyances

- Uses silly nicknames
- Uses multiple nicknames in different media
- Overuses CAPITAL LETTERS
- Uses excessive punctuation!!!1!!1!one!
- ZOMGWTFBBQ!?!?!?

Cluelessness

- Unable to pick up on the “mood”
- Doesn't understand common goals of the community.
- Asks incessant RTFM questions

Hostility

- Insults the status quo
- Angrily demands help
- Attempts to blackmail
- Attempts to deliberately rile people
- Makes accusations of conspiracy (paranoia)

Conceit

- Refuses to acknowledge the opinions of others
- Makes sweeping claims
 - Usually about the project's future success
- Re-opens topics that are long settled
 - Without reading the archives

Non-cooperation

- Willing to complain, but not help fix anything
- Unwilling to discuss design
- Too insecure to take criticism

Disinfecting Your Community

Assess the Damage

Ask Yourself Two Critical Questions

- Is this person draining attention and focus?
 - If so, is the person really likely to benefit the project?
- Is this person paralyzing the project?
 - Is the dispute likely to finish soon?

Don't

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- Feed the energy creature! (old usenet adage)
- Give jerks "purchase"
- Engage them
- Get emotional
 - [Example: “your OSS project sucks”]

Do

Do

- Pay careful attention to a newcomer
 - Even if they're annoying at first
- Look for the fact under the emotion
- Extract a real bug report, if possible
 - [Example: raving lunatic with a real bug]

Do

- Know when to give up and ignore them
 - [Example: different raving lunatic]
- Know when to forcibly boot them from community
 - [Example: statistical analysis as evidence]
- Repel trolls with niceness!!
 - [Example: irc guy]

And Finally, Do...

- Address the behavior, not the person
 - [Example: the banished behavior]

Summary

- Comprehend:
 - Preserve attention and focus
- Fortify:
 - Build a healthy community
- Identify:
 - Look for tell-tale signs
- Disinfect:
 - Maintain calm and stand your ground

Shhhhhh, Don't Tell...

This doesn't only apply to
open source communities.

This applies to all
communities.

Q&A

Ben Collins-Sussman & Brian W. Fitzpatrick

sussman@google.com

fitz@google.com