Another week of being a Human in IT Infrastructure. Are you still alive to talk about it?

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IN THIS WEEK'S ISSUE: Cisco And Staff Decimation; DING Automation. Please remember to enable the images; the magazine looks a lot better that way!

PACKETPUSHERS
Human Infrastructure Magazine
A Newsletter About a Life in Networking

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(aka The Project Plan)

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The "Stupid Management Tricks" issue

Thought For The Week:
These go to eleven.

1. Cisco And Staff Decimation
by Greg Ferro

Lots of people get bent out of shape when Cisco lays off staff every

year. Except that Cisco decimates its staff every year. It's a way to weed out the weak and the under-performers, and a reminder to employees that bad performance will be instantly punished. Lots of companies use this model.

> *The word decimation is derived from Latin meaning "removal of a tenth." The procedure was a pragmatic attempt to balance the need to punish serious offenses with the realities of managing a large group of offenders. -* [*Decimation (Roman army) - Wikipedia*](#)

Decimation is a management process that was common in the Roman Army, wherein units who failed to perform were severely punished:

> *A cohort (roughly 480 soldiers) selected for punishment by decimation was divided into groups of ten. Each group drew lots, and the soldier on whom the lot fell was executed by his nine comrades, often by stoning or clubbing. The remaining soldiers were often given rations of barley instead of wheat (the latter being the standard soldier's diet) for a few days, and required to camp outside the fortified security of the camp - Wikipedia*

The interesting part is that there was no attempt to select good or bad people. It was about motivating the maximum number of people for least amount of effort by raising the lowest performing to average.

> *Because the punishment fell by lot, all soldiers in a group sentenced to decimation were potentially liable for execution, regardless of individual degrees of fault, rank, or distinction - Wikipedia*

In large groups, it more effective to either remove the least effective person or improve their performance than it is to make the most of your best people. Just another aspect of why big companies are [stupid](#).

The Etherealmind View

This "management methodology" was very common in the 1980s and 1990s but doesn't really produce results today. Companies that use decimation probably haven't modernized. Why? Think about it: if you are one of the best, do you want to be decimated?
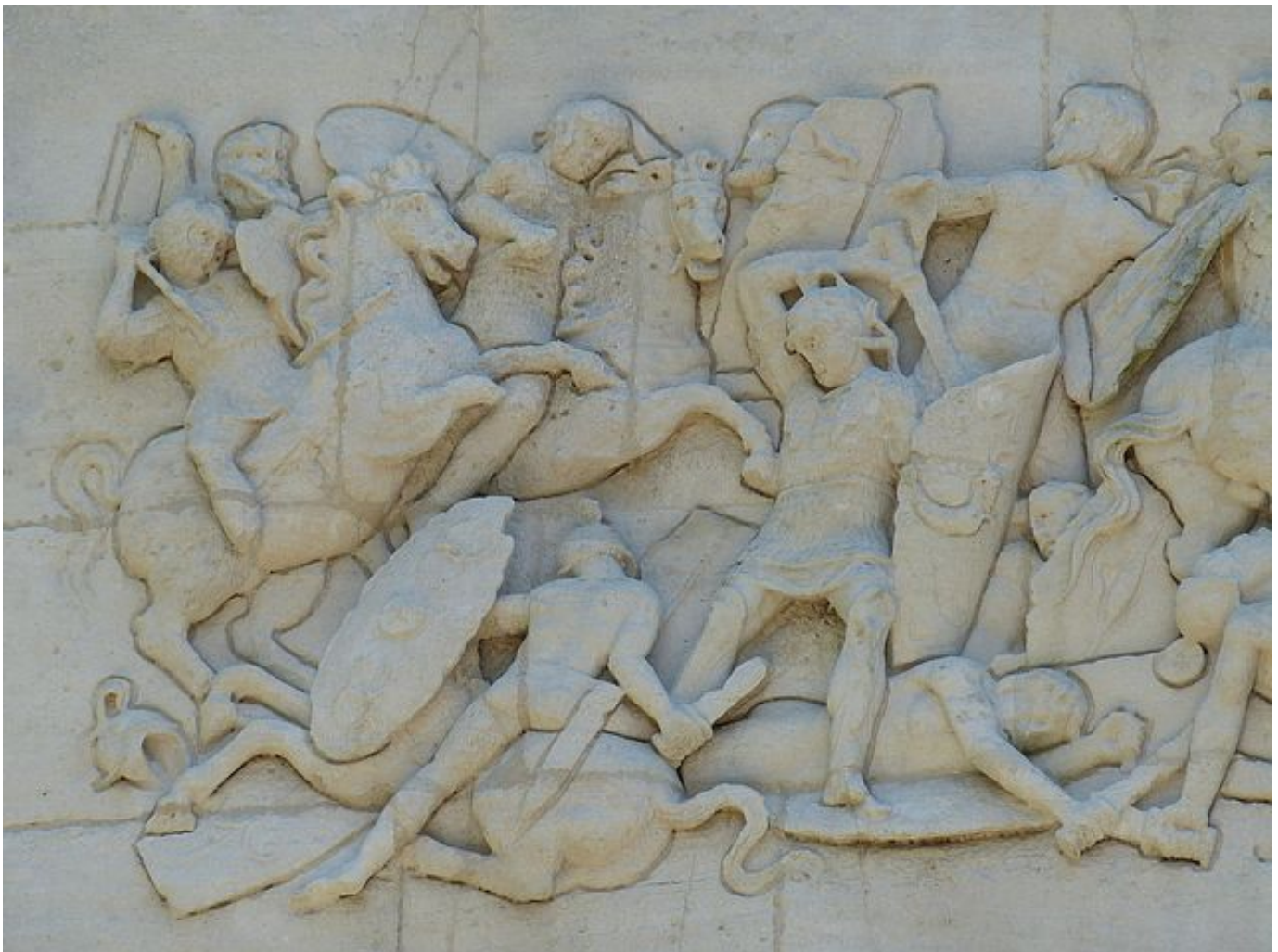
Do your management meetings look like this?

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2. DING Automation
by Ethan Banks

DING. A ticket just hit your inbox. You turn away from configuring that useful new test you've been trying to finish for a month to look at the ticket. Yep. Another virtual IP build on the load balancer. A rush request, of course. Sigh.

You fire up the clunky GUI, where for the hundredth time this year you create a pool, add pool members and backup pool members, apply health checks, wince because you know how weak the current health checks are, build a virtual IP, assign the pool, check VIP status, run a test in your browser, mark the ticket as completed, and go back to...what was it? Oh, right. That advanced test that will give you insight

into that app performance problem the finance people keep whining about. On the last Thursday of the month. *Every* month. And today's the last Wednesday of the month, so it would be really nice if...DING.

And there's another ticket. This one's from the dev team in Boise. They are somehow out of IP addresses in the seemingly huge block you assigned them, and are requesting more. Of course, the app deployment schedule is stalled until they have the new pool, so hey, you drop everything. For what feels like hundredth time that year, you log into the leaf switches feeding the Boise dev rack, create a new VLAN, stand up VRRP, add the new block to the routing config, verify the new block is showing up in the routing tables in the HQ core, then forward the ticket to the DHCP admin to build the scope. Ah, finally...back to sorting out this thing for the finance depart...DING.

So your day goes. And so *every* day goes, it seems. Ticket after ticket. Interruption after interruption. Mostly, these demands on your time are to take care of simple, routine tasks. Provision little things. You're a shop that runs lean, and you don't have a lot of help. There's no one to delegate tasks to. Oh, Bob will help now and then when he's not too slammed, but let's face it. He's always slammed. It's you, buddy. All you.

Or is it? Does it have to be all you, just because there's no one else with a "Network Something-Or-Other" title attached to their name? I believe that we're at a point in networking where we can stop spending our time doing repetitive things, but it's up to the networkers to make this transition.

Many Packet Pushers listeners tell us that they are so busy, they don't have time to figure out new things. Right. I get that, but here's the deal. You're going to have to make the time (somehow), because the payoff will be huge. By "new things," I'm referring specifically to understanding the automation capabilities of your infrastructure, and then taking advantage of them. I see two huge potential time-savers here.

1. Automate a task by reducing it down to the fewest number of inputs possible and then building in verification. Then you use that task to save yourself some time. Rather than playing clicky-clicky-clicky in some GUI to do essentially the same task for that hundredth time, speed up the process through a script that accesses the device's API. Sure, you'll have to figure out the hard bits of "script" and "API" if you've never worked with those tools before. But in the end, you get back time.

2. Enable other people to perform tasks you've automated. When the dev team wants another VLAN, should that really require you to log into CLIs and hammer our routine paragraphs, again, for the hundredth time? Doesn't it make sense to write a script that can accept input, sanity check it, apply it, and verify it's working? And then report back to you that said work was completed? Why couldn't such a tool be turned over to dev folks to take care of routine network provisioning business themselves? "Because control," perhaps you're thinking. Fair enough, but balance the risk of them screwing something up with the reward of you not

having to worry about the task. If the blast radius is relatively small, then delegation is smart.

You should be able to focus on systems-level thinking. Hard problems. That interesting issue going on in finance on the last Thursday of every month. On the design for the network that's going into the new data center coming online next year. On the big picture. Every time you're called away for a DING, you lose focus on the important stuff. Automate those DINGs.
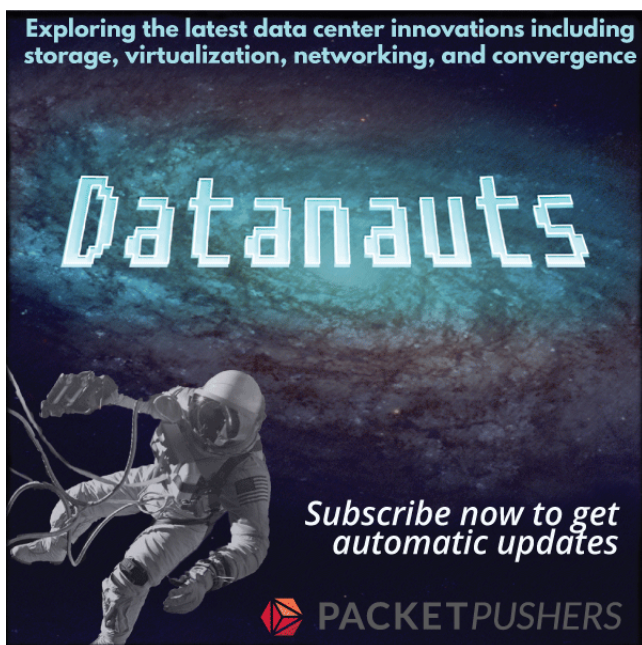
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Internets Of Interest

A collection of pre-loved links that might interest you. "Pre-loved" because I liked them enough to put into this newsletter. It's not *true* love.

By Ethan Banks

Are You Proud Of What You Do In IT?

Eric Shanks, Datanauts guest and writer at theithollow.com, considers the worth of IT. Is what we do as IT engineers worthwhile? How can IT workers take pride in their efforts? A worthy contemplation.

http://theithollow.com/2017/01/30/proud-youve-done/

"Literally, all of the work that I do could be deleted in minutes in order to save on operational costs. It would be like building a house out of Lincoln logs and then putting them back in the box at the end of the day. So, if you're in IT, especially cloud, would you have a thing that you've built that you're especially proud of, or would it be destroyed just as fast as it was created?"

Network VendorSpeak 1.1

Andrew Lerner, Gartner analyst (but still one of the good guys), wrote a funny post translating vendor spin into real English. Ply Andrew with weasel words, and feel his written wrath.

http://blogs.gartner.com/andrew-lerner/2017/01/31/network-vendorspeak-11/

"Network VendorSpeak is one of those things we as networking folks have to deal with. It isn't fun, but that doesn't mean we can't have fun with it. Fifteen months back, I blogged 25 examples, and here's another 10 (actually 11… because you should always give 110%)."

OSPF TLVs - Unthinkable In The Old Days

Russ White goes deep in this post on OSPF and TLVs at rule11.us. Back in the day, the OSPF spec used fixed length fields exclusively, which was appropriate in an era where control-plane CPU and memory was limited. But times have changed, and TLVs make sense for OSPF. Russ charts the state of this change, providing a rich, detailed history lesson along the way. Also a bit of ASCII charting, IETF style.

http://rule11.us/ospf-converging-tlvs/

"As compute, storage, and network capabilities have increased, the arguments against using TLVs have faded into the background. Keeping with this, OSPF is moving towards a TLV based structure, slowly replacing the FLF structure it was originally designed with (OSPF TLVs!). The first big move in this direction was actually taken in RFC5340 in 2008, when OSPFv3 was designed to carry IPv6 reachability information."

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Is vendor tech support a scam? Greg has some thoughts about this.

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Quick Survey: Are you concerned about DDoS attacks

against your company?

Several high-profile DDoS attacks made headlines in 2016, and we're likely to see more in 2017. Are you concerned about a DDoS attack against your company?

[A. Yes, and we're generally prepared](#)
[B. Yes, but we aren't prepared](#)
[C. We recognize the possibility, but we have other priorities](#)
[D. No, we're not a likely target](#)
[E. Our stance is too complicated for a simple survey](#)

Did We Miss Something?

Got an link or an article to share? Email it to
humaninfrastructure@packetpushers.net