

*IN THIS WEEK'S ISSUE: Solving The Other IT Problem; The Tricky Business Of Changing Company Culture. Hey, turn on those images, they might be cute. Or not. Probably not. But it's worth a try.*



# PACKETPUSHERS

## Human Infrastructure Magazine

A Newsletter About a Life in Networking

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**Issue Number 64**

08/31/2017

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The "Culture Club" issue.

**Thought For The Week:**  
"Culture eats strategy for breakfast."  
- Peter Druker

# 1. Solving The Other IT Problem

by Eyvonne Sharp

Have you ever been in a conversation about technology where you felt you had a solution to a business problem but couldn't get traction on your idea?

I've never been more frustrated than when my organization wastes time and effort when a simpler, more effective course of action was obvious to me but not to everyone else.

Sometimes, decisions are out of our control. Organizational structures, change management, politics, and strained relationships can impact technology implementation as much as the technology itself.

But as technology pros we can change our approach and gain more influence over the decisions that are made in our organizations.

## Earn A Seat At The Table

Technologists often decry their exclusion in important meetings. Many, however, don't realize that they've uninvited themselves.

If you're meeting with non-technical leadership about a business problem, avoid deeply technical topics. Save the debate over code trains, versions of the Linux kernel, and hardware specs for another conversation.

Technical decisions are important, and can make or break a project, but those decisions need to be abstracted from non-technical leadership where possible.

Your diatribe on the latest IOS code version might make you feel

better, but it will be perceived by others as a distraction and a derailment of the meeting. Inhibitors get left out, or minimized.

## Listen

When you have the opportunity to meet with leadership, listen more than you talk. Try to understand what you're being told, and why leadership is focused on a particular issue.

If there are business phrases you don't understand, jot them down and Google them later. Ask questions that demonstrate you're trying to understand. Summarize what you've heard and ask for clarity.

If asked a question about what you think, answer honestly. If there are answers you don't have yet, say so and describe how you're going to find them.

## Plan, Then Deliver

Technology makes non-technical leadership nervous. They don't understand it, yet they know it can be a critical business enabler. They also don't want to look stupid or be talked down to. That's why in every interaction, your goal should be to inspire trust and prove you can deliver.

One way to do that is with a project plan. A project plan is like a security blanket for leadership. It's a tangible resource they can understand. A carefully crafted project plan will help you communicate with leadership and it will help you think through your project.

Your plan will be best friend or your worst enemy, so be sure to identify any risks up front and communicate delays with mitigation plans early — not after you've missed a deadline.

To an engineer who only wants to do technology, effective communication with leadership may seem like unnecessary overhead. But if you want more influence in your organization, and if you want to

implement more ambitious projects, you will need these skills.

Like technical chops, your communication skills won't develop overnight. You'll need practice. So start practicing! A little bit of effort in now could pay huge career dividends in the future.

## 2. The Tricky Business Of Changing Company Culture

by Drew Conry-Murray

Uber's [new CEO](#) Dara Khosrowshahi is stepping into a company in turmoil. In the last year or so the ride-sharing service has been embroiled in:

- [allegations](#) of rampant sexual harassment
- the ouster of company founder Travis Kalanick as CEO
- an inquiry into [deceptive practices](#) to thwart regulators
- a Google/Waymo [lawsuit](#) alleging technology theft
- a [public reversal](#) of its unsettling practice of post-ride user tracking

All of these problems are heaped upon the plain old struggles of trying to build a profitable company.

From my perspective, many of Uber's problems can be traced to the company's culture.

In its early days, Uber was regarded, even celebrated, for being brash, bold, and aggressive as it upended transportation services.

Uber was the ultimate disruptor, the purest distillation of the Silicon Valley ethos: It attacked a sclerotic market to wring out new efficiencies (and profits) with the awesome power of unbridled techno-capitalism.

But brashness soured into boorishness, boldness became hubris, and aggression was revealed to be a euphemism for behaving like a jerk. And as the missteps accumulated, Uber's board decided enough was enough.

## Meet The New Boss

Presumably one of Mr. Khosrowshahi's goals is to steer Uber's culture in a more positive, or perhaps grown up, direction. Certainly he needs [to repair the company's public image](#) and deal comprehensively and decisively with its problem of harassment.

Oh yeah--and also [take Uber public](#).

That's a lot to ask of a leader, especially an outsider stepping into the top role. Executive leadership is a popular topic in the business press and a subject of study in MBA programs. So how much influence can a new CEO have on transforming a company's culture?

Certainly, the chief executive should wield significant influence over Uber's business practices, including how it interacts with regulators, customers, and drivers.

But what about internally? A new leader can issue policies on behavior, define a set of guiding values, host brown bags and open forums, and hang motivational posters in cubicles and common spaces.

However, as an article in [Harvard Business Review](#) notes:

*“...culture change can’t be achieved through top-down mandate. It lives in the collective hearts and habits of people and their shared perception of ‘how things are done around here.’”*

In other words, an executive can issue a mandate for change, but how people actually behave will carry more weight. Culture emerges from the day-to-day behaviors of, and interactions among, company employees.

In my opinion, a company’s line managers, team leaders, and regular workers wield more influence over norms and practices than top executives. The gravity of “that’s just how things are done around here,” is a potent force that can be hard to overcome.

That said, there’s certainly an impetus among investors and board members for change (or at least the appearance of change). Mr. Khosrowshahi has his work cut out for him. If he pulls it off, maybe one day he’ll be written up as a case study.

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## Thanks, Internet

All kinds of amusing things wash up in our social feeds. Here's one that caught my eye.





Otto the skateboarding bulldog will make you smile.



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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 Greg Ferro and Drew Conry-Murray

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## Automating Documentation

If you're having trouble getting an automation project off the ground, Tom Hollingsworth makes the case for a side benefit: automation can generate documentation, saving you from having to perform this essential but oft-neglected task.

*"Automation of tedious tasks is exactly the thing that scripting and automation was designed to solve. Instead of focusing on the automation of the task, like adding VLANs to a set of switches, focus on the ability of the system to create documentation on the fly from the change."*

[LINK](#)

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## How I've Attempted to Blog More in 2017

This post by Joel Knight is a useful combination of the tools and processes that Joel (aka PacketMischief) is using to ship more blogs.

For those of you who've been meaning to blog more (or to start), this post may have some tips you'll find useful.



[LINK](#)

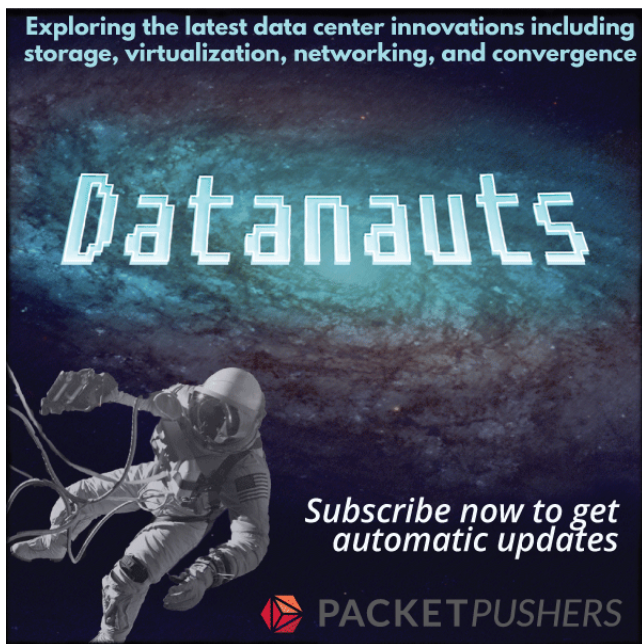
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## Kubernetes Networking 101

If you're looking for a visual introduction to basic networking concepts in Kubernetes, Bryan Boreham, who's Director of Engineering at Weaveworks, has a Slideshare presentation that walks through core concepts.

[LINK](#)

(And for more Kubernetes goodness, check out the [Datanauts tutorial with Kubernetes guru Kelsey Hightower.](#))



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## The Network Break



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Network Break is a weekly podcast that delivers news & analysis on the networking industry in a fun, fast-paced style. [Subscribe here!](#)

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# Product News

Find out about interesting new products, or get essential information about things you might already be using.

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## Cumulus Releases Host Pack For Container Networking

Host Pack runs on a server and provides the routing stack for hosts that are serving up containers. It currently works with Docker containers and the Docker Swarm orchestration software. Cumulus says it will add support for Mesos in the next release, with Kubernetes to follow.

[LINK](#)

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## Juniper's Contrail Security Taps Microsegmentation And Intent For Cloud Protection

Juniper Networks has announced [Contrail Security](#), a new software package designed to distribute security policy enforcement within private and public clouds. The product combines microsegmentation and intent-based policy to address security gaps exposed by cloud-native application architecture.

[LINK](#)

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# Recent Podcasts

The last five podcasts published on Packet Pushers

## PacketPushers.net - The Last Five

[PQ 125: In-Situ OAM And Telemetry Is Magic – IETF 99](#)

[Datanauts 099: Understanding Microservices](#)

[Network Break 150: Cisco Buys Springpath; Google Introduces Network Tiers](#)

[Show 354: Future Of Networking With Fred Baker](#)

[PQ 124: Cloud SBC Security & Analytics With Sonus Networks \(Sponsored\)](#)



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# Quick Survey: Vendor Keynotes

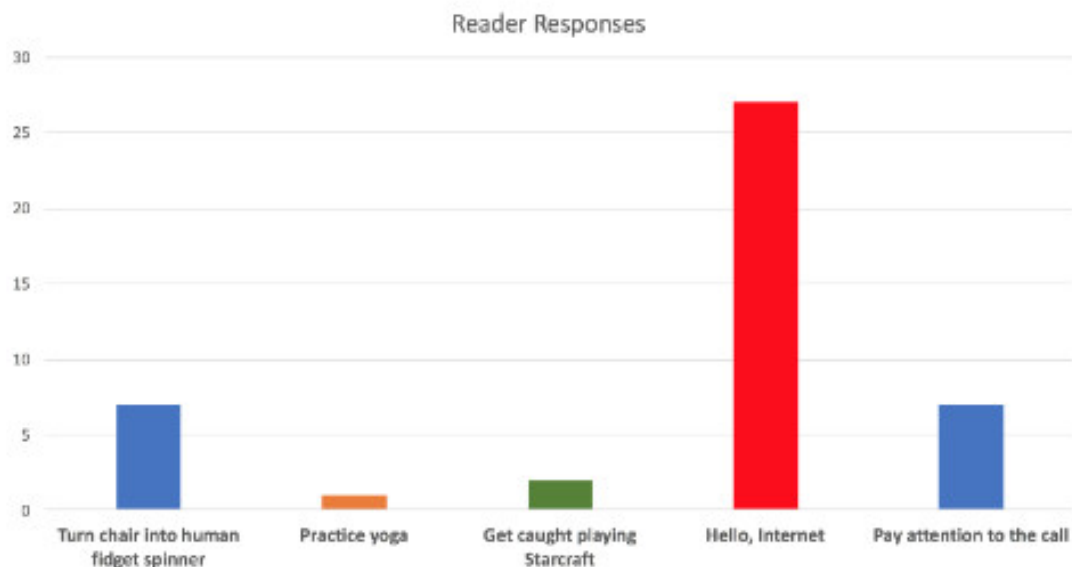
A big, dark ballroom in Las Vegas or San Francisco. A dazzling display of images, video, and lights. A tech CEO invoking the sacred powers of disruption, innovation, and transformation. This is the IT keynote, and it is...

- [A. A pleasing spectacle](#)
- [B. A chance to snark-tweet](#)
- [C. Giving me useful information](#)
- [D. Mostly crap](#)
- [E. All crap](#)

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## Last Issue's Survey Results

## How do you pass time on remote conference calls?



Source: Packet Pushers Human Infrastructure Survey August 17, 2017. 44 respondents

## Did We Miss Something?

Got an link or an article to share? Email it to [humaninfrastructure@packetpushers.net](mailto:humaninfrastructure@packetpushers.net)

### The End Bit

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**Human Infrastructure is bi-weekly newsletter with view, perspectives, and opinions. It is edited and published by Greg Ferro and Drew Conry-Murray from PacketPushers.net. If you'd like to contribute, email Drew at [drew.conrymurray@packetpushers.net](mailto:drew.conrymurray@packetpushers.net).**

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