

All Tech is Debt

Dave Stanke

<https://devopsdays.org/events/2019-washington-dc/program/dave-stanke/>

- Twitter - <https://twitter.com/davidstanke>
- Video Recording - <https://youtu.be/qc7PprUPOks>
- Slides - <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1t2pz0sr5PcD6UsQGJNtnLsFmm79LOBX9/view?usp=sharing>
- Audio - <http://traffic.libsyn.com/devopsdays/all-tech-is-debt.mp3>

Next up we have David Stanke. Give it up for David.

[Applause]

So David, question is, how many times did you look at your phone today before you got out of bed?

>> Before I got out of bed? Exactly once.

>> What was the very important thing that you saw on your phone?

>> I was trying to remember whether I had done the New York Times crossword puzzle or not. And of course I already had it so I did it last night. It's Monday so it took me a couple hours.

>> Are you ready?

>> I'm ready.

>>> All tech is debt. Yes. All. I've built a ton of tech in my career, and I can tell you, all of it was debt. And though I didn't build your tech, I'm telling your tech is debt too. And so is yours and yours. Hi. My name is Dave and I've been doing this a long time. I've been a programmer, a admin, a CTO, a project manager, I've seen it all it was all debt. Let's define debt.

Unfortunately it's a little bit of know it when you see it kind of situation, right? It's stuff that has that tech debt smell. But to be more precise, let's say this. Tech debt is something that you would rebuild if you were in charge, and if you had time to do it. It's the stuff that you look at and you say, I'm going to fix that. . . Later. Now we spend a lot of time talking about tech debt, trying to figure out how to isolate it, identify it, contain it, exterminate it, and prevent it from ever happening again. But it's not going to happen. Why? Because all tech is debt. Okay.

Because we're not quite there yet. But can we agree in order to have -- in order to not be debt, it has to have value. Let's look at our stuff. Most of this your customers don't know about, and

don't care. Not value. Business logic, that's important, right? But your competitors have that too. That's not value, that's the cost of doing business. The only thing that might have some value is the differentiators for your business, what helps you over your competitors. That's not debt, right? Yeah, it is. Why? Because tech is always changing. Like crazy. Right? There's always a new framework, a new language, a new this, a new that. It's baffling. And that means the best practices are always changing. Whatever was the state of the world when you designed something, that's old news by the time you've deployed it. Here's a debt smell, when you have to figure something out before you can make a change to it. When do you ever not have to do that? When it's still in your head. By the time it's committed and deployed, it's long gone from up here. Another debt smell if there's a tax on making changes. Something that gets in the way. Well, what does that? Users. Why can't you turn it off in the middle of the day? Because of those pesky users. So users are debt too. In fact, think about that most important thing, the worst hairball, the one you hate. Why can't you just throw it away, push it off the cliff and laugh. Because people are using it. It's essential to your business. Your nasty dumpster fire is an asset, but it's worse than that. Not only is all tech debt, all tech is a ticking time bomb. Think about a zero day exploit. Day zero is the day that it was exploited. It's already in your tech. All of our fancy CI CD systems are pushing vulnerabilities out to our users as ever increasing speeds. We've mostly been talking about things that kind of sound like code, right? What about infrastructure? Well this is DevOpsDays, right? Our infrastructure is code. Or maybe it's not. Maybe it's a bunch of cloud settings that someone clicked in a UI and forgot about or it's physical infrastructure which not only bit rots, it actually rots. No one is going to disagree with me on this one, right? If so, you may throw the first stone. So it's all debt, what do we do? I'm going to give you my three-point plan. This is how I learned to stop worrying and love my tech debt. Step one, throw it away. Less tech means less debt. Is there an open source package? Use it. Is there a managed service provider? Use it. Say thank you for your service, and. Step 2, break the wheel. Before you build something ask. Am I building this because my business really needs it or am I building it because I like building things. That feeling of accomplishment, that fleeting. Debt is forever. Remember most important thing. There's nothing you can build that's not debt. By the time you shipped it it is already old news. What matters is what's next.

The thing you haven't built yet, that's the good stuff. Your only hope is to get to what's next as fast as possible and squeeze it. So invest in people. Your teams, your technical team is your true technical asset. The skills, the domain knowledge, the collaborative abilities. So commit to

a positive team culture and commit to keeping teams together. So in conclusion, tech is debt. Burn it. People are gold, cherish them. And me, I'm Dave and that's my time. Thank you.
[Applause]