Getting some peace and quiet as an open source maintainer

KVM Forum/OSS Europe 2018, Edinburgh
Cornelia Huck <cohuck@redhat.com>
Senior Software Engineer
2018-10-24
Introduction
What does a maintainer do?
Technical and workflow issues
The human factor
Caring for yourself
Questions?
Introduction
Introduction
(or, who is going to talk about what?)

Intention: share my personal perspective in the hope that it is useful

- As a maintainer (Linux: since 2012, QEMU: since 2013) and a contributor (Linux: since 2001, QEMU: since 2012)
- For maintainers – and for the people who interact with them
- YMMV...
What does a maintainer do?
What does a maintainer do?
(a personal perspective)

A maintainer assumes responsibility for a project or a specific part of it:

- Maintenance: keeping it in good shape
- Gatekeeper: keeping not so good things out
- Coordination: within the project, with other projects, with users, ...
- Sharing information
What does a maintainer do?
(a personal perspective)

... but some things a maintainer should not be responsible for:

- Fixing everybody’s bugs, even if they are perfectly capable of doing so themselves
- Extended hand-holding for people who do not make a reasonable effort
- Controlling what other people are doing
Technical and workflow issues
Technical and workflow issues
(or, how you work)

There is no silver bullet; a good workflow needs to:

- Work with your personal preferences: what works for someone else might not work for you
- Work with the project and its members: project dynamics can vary a lot
- Try to shop around for good ideas; at least some tweaks are usually required
Technical and workflow issues
(or, how you work)

Be transparent about what you do:

- Communicate your expectations so people do not need to guess
- Be clear when you accept something, but also when you reject it (and why!)
- Let people know that you have seen something, but have not yet time to act on it
Technical and workflow issues
(or, how you work)

Try to spread the load:

- To our robotic overlords: Patch handling tools, automated testing
- To your fellow developers: Solicit their opinions, ask for assistance with tasks
- To the general public: Talking about your project area may bring in interested people
The human factor
The human factor
(or, how you work with others)

The people you are interacting with come in many varieties...

- Different cultural backgrounds, including language barriers
- Personal preferences, interaction styles, and quirks
- An experienced developer employed by a company has different interests than a newbie hacking something for fun
The human factor
(or, how you work with others)

Behavioural traps: the dictator vs. the doormat

- Trying to control everything is likely to lead to complete overload...
- ...as is not pushing back and accepting everything
- Beware of company politics influencing working with others
The human factor
(or, how you work with others)

When things do not work out as expected...

- Tempers running high among people passionate about their work
- Trolling and people fanning the flames
- Rejecting ideas that won’t work – gracefully
Caring for yourself
Caring for yourself
(or, things that should be obvious but often are not)

Even though you can’t control what others do, you can improve things for yourself:

- Try to get a clear head once in a while (even if you do not notice being stressed…)
- Somebody to chat with is usually an excellent idea
- You are not in this alone: Find others to help you
Caring for yourself
(or, things that should be obvious but often are not)

Things change… it might be time for you to change as well:

- Ask others to share responsibility
- Interests evolve; consider shifting to a different area
- Don’t let yourself be forced to do something that is doing you harm!
- …and maybe it is time to just move on
Questions?
THANK YOU

plus.google.com/+RedHat
linkedin.com/company/red-hat
youtube.com/user/RedHatVideos
facebook.com/redhatinc
twitter.com/RedHat
Copyright notices

- Tux by Larry Ewing <lewing@isc.tamu.edu> and The Gimp
- Kew the Angry Emu by Benoît Canet, CC-BY 3.0
- All other pictures by Cornelia Huck <cohuck@kernel.org>, CC-BY-SA