So do you have teams that are walking around like a bunch of grumpy kitties...

When what you really want are lean, mean innovation machines ready to take on the world?

Or at least your competitors.

Then I'd say...
Recharge those Teams – Hold a Hackathon

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Frost’s Digital Services Tribe

- 9 Teams – size is 7 +/- 2
- Dedicated, Co-Located, Cross-Functional
- Scrum for 4+ years

On each team: PO,
UX/UI Designer, Developers,
QA/Automation Engineer,
Coach/Scrum Master

Frost’s Ecommerce teams – we call ourselves the Digital Services tribe.

Total of 9 teams – size is 7 +/- 2

Dedicated, co-located, cross-functional

Doing what we call “vanilla scrum” for a little over 4 years
hack-a-thon

'haːkə, 'θæn
noun informal

an event, typically lasting several days, in which a large number of people meet to engage in collaborative computer programming.

First time the term was used was 1999 – came from either marketing team at Sun for a JavaOne conference – OR – the developers of the OpenBSD – Berkeley Software Distribution group – who held a hackathon to get help with their open-source, Unix-like computer operating system.

Grown exponentially – estimated around 3,450 hackathons were held in 2016 – over 1500 in the US.

For quickly developing business start-ups, new software technologies, and to locate new areas for innovation and funding.

Even the idea of “Pro Hackers” – make their primary living off hackathon prize monies.

So with that kind of potential it was only a matter of time before corporate America got onboard.
Hackathons: Good for Business

- Can add to the bottom-line
- Drives innovation and business agility
- Can enhance community reputation
- Helps with attracting and keeping talent
- Helps build employee knowledge and skill sets
- And it’s just plain FUN!

- **Can add to the bottomline** - quick way to generate new ideas that boost business/solve a business problem - JIRA Service Desk and 25,000 orgs @ $2,700 per year = $67+ million

- **Drives innovation and business agility** – can’t build a product and then go years without changing – have to have the mindsets/skill sets to understand market/customers and deliver innovative products FAST! breaks-up organizational inertia - instills a more innovation-driven culture.

- **Can enhance a company’s reputation** - we support good causes – give back to the community

- **Helps with attracting and keeping talent** – we do cool stuff and we’ll pay you to do cool stuff here!

- **Builds employee knowledge/skill sets** – try new techniques, broaden skills/experiences, flex creative muscles.

- **And most of all – it’s FUN!** - people get inspired and recharged – funnels back into their “regular” jobs.
They Sure Work for Us!

- Gained over 200 new ideas
- Made us more agile and Agile
- Ups our "cool" factor with job candidates
- Truly recharges our teams and the entire organization

Gained over 200 ideas for customer products and internal tools – many have gone on for further research, development and implementation – has definitely helped our bottom line.

More agile and Agile - helped to develop the mindsets and skill sets we need to drive innovation and build business agility

Attracting and keeping talent – we definitely hype this up to job candidates and it helps up our cool factor, because we are after all a Bank.

Recharges our teams and our organization – it is the high-watermark for our tribe.

The idea of doing internal hackathons came from our Coaching guild while we were looking for ways to super-charge our teams.
Creating Powerful Moments

- **How can we elevate it?**
  - Boost sensory appeal  
  - Raise the stakes  
  - Break the script

- **How can we spark insight?**
  - Trip over the truth  
  - Stretch for insight

- **How can we create moments of pride?**
  - Recognition  
  - Leveling up  
  - Practicing courage

- **How can we boost the sense of connection?**
  - Create shared meaning  
  - Connect to our purpose  
  - Deepen ties

We were lucky that the designs of our Hackathons just happened to create the meaningful effects we were wanting – but there’s a way to intentionally manufacture defining moments and not just leave it to chance.

Highly recommend the book “The Power of Moments” by Chip and Dan Heath.

**Review points from the slide**

Can use these techniques in designing your Hackathons and many other instances – Stand Ups, Retrospectives and other ceremonies – when you want to create moments with meaning that have a lasting effect.

Highly recommend this book.
Always beware the soul sucking force of "reasonableness"

It's tough and we aren't perfect but we really work to avoid some of the corporate pitfalls that can wring the life and the fun out of hackathons.

**We work at being unreasonable...**

Example – our hackathon is **a full week** – our entire tribe, about 50 people – and we invite other groups within the company to join us.
Another example of our unreasonableness...

We have our **off-shore teams run their own parallel hackathon** – yes we pay our contractors to participate

... and folks from our ad agency

... and our PR firm.

We think that it's that important that we're willing to make the investment.
Three in Three Years

Unleash the creativity of team members to discover breakthrough ideas
• Try something radical
• Become entrepreneurs
• Run experiments

Reinvent relationship banking for emerging generations in the digital era
(Based on Eric Ries’ book)

Demonstrate the endless possibilities of technology by creating an experience that can make people’s lives better

Our Ecommerce tribe at Frost Bank has held three hackathons over three years.

Hackathons are ripe with opportunities to create powerful moments that will recharge our teams and our entire organization – and it starts with the goal.

Raise the stakes – Try something radical!
Break the script – Be an Entrepreneur!
Make them stretch – Reinvent... Endless possibilities...
Boost the sense of connection – Demonstrate the endless possibilities - re-connect us to the purpose to our work – live up to your tribal vision.
• Here’s the general structure of our hackathons – we’ve tweaked it a bit, changed the order a bit

• Going to touch on most of these and explain how we approached them
Another area of our unreasonableness... for about 5 to 6 weeks heading up to Hackathon we do a lot of training to get everyone ready. Everybody!

Topics have included: (read list from the slide)

All team members should be able to explain the value proposition of a feature they are working on – to understand why customer feedback is so important – to be able to stand in front of a group of stakeholders and be comfortable presenting their Sprint Review.

To build/re-inforce the Scrum role of "Development Team" – to create T-shaped team members who have their areas of expertise, but who can also cross-function across other disciplines.
Logistics & Initial Rules

Sample Logistics

- No sprint work the week of Hackathon
- Each team gets a workroom and supply bag
- Use assigned sandboxes
- Will be assigned a Coach

Intentionally hold back details on team formation and ideation

Do a session two weeks before to discuss some of the logistics and initial rules – for prep and to build anticipation.

Reminder: no Sprint work the week of hackathon – they plan accordingly when each team does capacity planning during their Sprint Planning ceremony.

Example where being Scrum helps – easier to carve out the time especially for the number of people involved.

We deliberately hold back certain details – about team formation and about how the problems/solutions/ideas will be selected for work – to discourage pre-work or pre-forming of teams (cliques)

Trying to raise the stakes by making everyone work under pressure.
Starts on Monday morning with an Event Kick-Off – we have breakfast – we’re all together in a room – our executive kicks it off.

We let the cat out of the bag - go over the final rules of engagement (the challenge) and the final formation of teams.

There’s lots of sensory appeal – people cheering, high-fiving – the executive is here – really elevates the moment.

And there’s a strong sense of connection – look what we’re all getting ready to do together!
Ideation – version 1

Idea should provide some benefit to Frost stakeholders

- We generate and post ideas
- Call for Champions
- Champion tries to form a team to work the idea

The idea or solution should provide some benefit to our Frost stakeholders – customers, employees or the Tribe.

Tried: individuals come up with ideas – they’re posted – review period – call for Champions – Champion has to pitch the idea in order to collect a team.
Idea should provide some benefit to Frost stakeholders

- Form teams
- Teams pick from a list of real customer problems

Also tried: creating the teams - presenting a set of customer problems for the teams to pick from.

All done in a short timeframe – want them thinking on their feet.

**Raises the stakes** – you’re championing an idea you’re passionate about – in competition for others doing the same thing.

**They have to stretch** – may not have had to “sell” your ideas before – what if I fail and no one wants to work my idea?

**Sense of connection** – we are fully connected to our purpose – what are our customers’ problems? How can we solve them?
Form a Team

- Small size
- No more than X people from your regular team
- Fully cross-functional

Parameters around team formation (read points from slide)

Have had folks “guest star” in different roles to balance out teams.

Went a step further this last time by allowing team members to “wear a different hat” than their usual role – Dev can serve as a Product Owner, etc.

All sound familiar? Basically creating Scrum teams on the fly.

And they have to do it quick – we tend to put tight timeboxes around the Ideation and Team Formation – we mean for it to be hard – another sign of our unreasonableness.

Each team gets a bag of office supplies and they’re off to the races.
Java & the Journey

- Final deliverable does NOT have to be code
- Share the story of your journey during the demo
- MVP
- Tight feedback loops
- Validate with real people

Where our Hackathons are different... our focus is not just on the code, but just as much on the process the team used – the journey they took to get to their solution.

The final deliverable does NOT have to be code – has to be demonstrable in some way – this requirement also helps non-coders to participate.

Share the story of their journey as a part of their demo/final presentation.

Focus on MVP - smallest thing possible that will provide customer value.

Work incrementally and iteratively – to have the tightest feedback loops possible – again, sound familiar?

And to validate their assumptions/designs with real customers – we expect them to leave the building – there’s even swag for them to use.

The 2016 Hackathon winners didn’t have any working code to present at the end, but the story of their journey was compelling.
Hack Away!

Teams typically are heading off by Noon on Monday to start their work.

**So here’s a bit of what the week looks like... Watch the video**

We’re on-site and in centrally located spaces so that other employees can watch and ask questions – the energy level really goes up across the building when a Hackathon is in progress.

Have an **event headquarters** staffed with Coaches and a Leader or two – a place where teams can come to ask questions, get help, snacks, etc.

We also offer **“Office Hours”** for teams to sign-up for special consult time with our tribe Leaders of PO, UX Design, etc.
We try to add in extra curricular activities throughout the week that help to boost the fun and team/tribe building.

Examples: ping pong tournament – pipe cleaner sculpture contest – Hacky Hour on Wednesday evening
The Demos/Product Pitch

Typical Demo Parameters
- All team members must help
- Explain the problem/solution
- Share the story of your journey
- Demo any artifacts, code
- Share what you learned about each other

Scrum Alliance

On Friday demos start at 1:00pm sharp – we draw the to determine the order
Demos are time boxed – 10 to 15 minutes – then there’s a Q&A period.
Demo parameters given at the Kick-Off session – (read slide).

All kinds of people attend – the CEO and other executives, our tribal leadership, lots of people from different areas of the company – attendance has grown year after year.

Sensory appeal - there’s skits, they dramatize customer scenarios
Raising the stakes - the CEO and other executives are there.
Explain how they stretched – the possibility of failure that they faced and what they learned from it.
May have tripped over a truth or two - being a PO is harder than they thought or that Scrum practices really helped them to work better together.
Moment of pride - made it through the demo without screwing up.
Sense of connection – from the shared struggle they all completed to the stronger understanding they have gained of their customer and the purpose of their work.
“People’s Choice Award” to select the winner – everyone votes for their favorite team/solution for whatever reason they want.

Used to use paper ballots - this past year we went to electronic voting – there’s the CEO voting – this was a hackathon solution from a prior year.

Announce the winners at an Ice Cream social that caps off the event.

The winning team members get a prize – nice but not real expensive – our emphasis in on the experience not the prize at the end, although bragging rights has become a big deal.

And just amazed at all the tribe was able to accomplish during the week... everyone leaves tired but charged.
No Grumpy Kitties Here!

Questions?

So I’m going to stop for a few questions...

(after questions)

Our hackathons really do recharge our teams and the entire organization.
Always beware the soul sucking force of "reasonableness"

So my recommendation is to just GO FOR IT

And remember to be as unreasonable as possible.