The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly of Growth

Aaron Quint / @aq / QCon NY 2015

#sincewebeinhonest
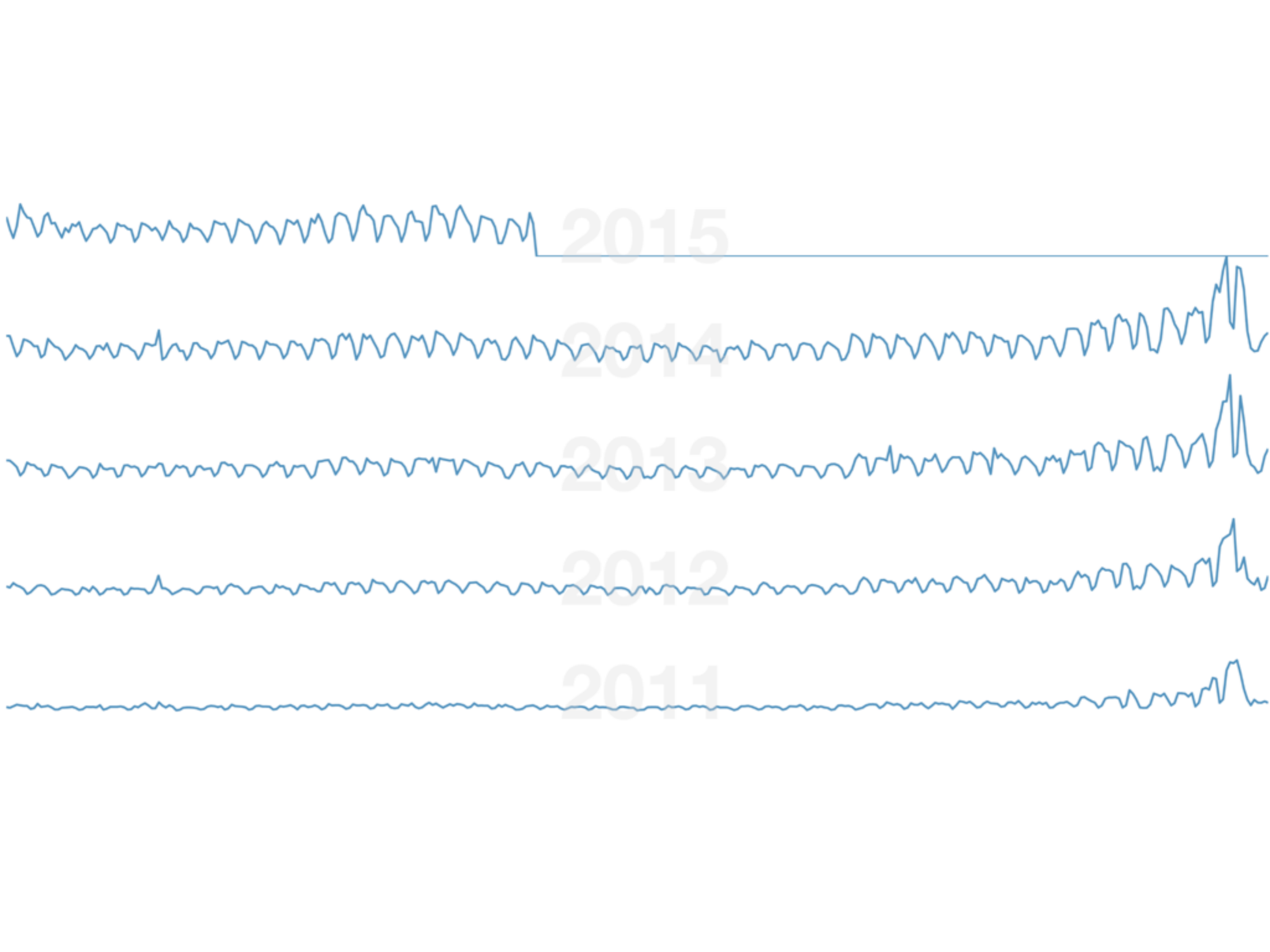
What follows is a true story, from an individual's perspective

THE TASSEL WAS WORTH THE HASSLE

You are invited to a Graduation Party
The McGovernan's Home
June 13, 2012 at 7:30 pm
1234 Montrose Lane
Washington, D.C.

RSVP

LET'S TOAST TO GENTLEMEN'S Cs!
(THEY GOT US THROUGH - DIDN'T THEY!)

JOIN US FOR A GRADUATION PARTY

FRIDAY, MAY 3RD
7:00 PM COCKTAILS
RIALTO AT THE CHARLES HOTEL

RSVP   PARENTS WELCOME

Join us for a toast to our daughter
ELAINE + THE CLASS OF 2013!
Friday, may 4th at 7:00pm • rialto bar at the charles hotel
please reply • parents welcome

Join Us
FOR
EASTER BRUNCH
SUNDAY, MARCH 31ST AT 2PM
176 WEST 89TH STREET, NW
EGG HUNT TO FOLLOW
HOSTED BY
SAGE & SAK DALLOWAY
PLEASE REPLY

YOU'RE INVITED TO AN
EASTER GATHERING

ELIZABETH BENNET
&
FITZWILLIAM DARCY

BARBARA CUSHING
and
WILLIAM PALEY
invite you to join
in their wedding celebration
sunday, may tenth
nineteen forty seven
at five o'clock in the afternoon
RITZ-CARLTON
50 CENTRAL PARK SOUTH
NEW YORK CITY
cocktails, dinner & dancing to follow
RSVP

Daisy Fay
&
Thomas Buchanan

a sipping soirée
MAY 12, 2014
6 TO 8PM
JULES & ALICE'S HOUSE
33 EAST 7TH STREET, APT 3A
NEW YORK CITY
RSVP
CHEERS!

A SIPPING SOIRÉE
MAY 12, 2014
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NEW YORK CITY
RSVP
CHEERS!

THIS ROUND'S ON US!
JOIN US FOR CANAPÉS AND COCKTAILS

You're invited

Laura Palmer

In 2015

- > 1M receivers every week

- Revenue in the 10s of $M

- > 110 Employees, > 40 Dev/Ops

- Office across 2 floors in FiDi

In 2009

- 0 Receivers Weekly

- $0 Revenue

- 4 Full Time Employees, 1 Full time dev + a number of consultants (including myself)

- Using a set of 4 free (windowless) cubicles in one of our investors offices (which happened to be a women's lingerie co)

I became CTO March 2010

3 Full-Time Devs,
0 Ops,
11 total Employees

Good begets Great
Bad begets Ugly

In the beginning it was all about :shipping:

So many features, so little time

Good Thing #1: Creeds

Started as an oral tradition, turned into a written guide

Fixing > Complaining

We all live with the choices we all make

Helping > Winning

Roadies > Rock stars

Working > Perfect

Push for a balance of quality and quantity

Small changes > Big refactors

Win in pieces, not all at once

Understandable Working Code == Best Practice

The only best practice is that best practices change

#=> getting things done and constantly improving

agile deployment, focus on end-users

Hiring was a painful and stressful process

But very necessary

We tried to grow cautiously

Find people who could work in as many places as possible, and were OK with uncertainty

Good Thing #2: Interns!

Ah, the boundless ambition and energy of youth!

Started with 2 Dev Interns
Grew to ~10 each summer

SUMMER CAMP 2013
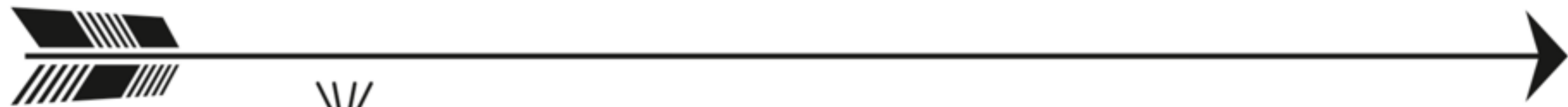
Good Thing #3: Mentorship

Over 5 years I got to watch individuals grow

I like to think that I helped

Individual growth is key to group growth

Good devs know they can always improve

We were all [*relative*] noobs

Not my first rodeo, but I'm not a grizzled commando either

We knew as a team that we were probably doing a lot of bad things

We were open to criticism.

Good Thing #4: Self-awareness

Biannual Performance Reviews

Sourced from peers, managers, team

Continuous *Process* Delivery

Not afraid to make changes to make our process better

This is not to say that we did a great job implementing change

But we were constantly aware of what *wasn't* working.

Great Thing #1: Mentorship as a Tree

Each one
Teach one

3rd and now 4th Generation Mentors

Great Thing #2:
Open Feedback Loop

Changes came from reviews and turned into action

Meaningful feedback -> Meaningful Progress

Great Thing #3:
Big Shippin'

Countless impactful features that improved our bottom line

Create Tool, PAPER, iOS Apps

Not all *rosy*

What is really?

Moving fast means making changes

And making changes sometimes means redirection

Bad Thing #1:
Top-Down Track Correction

More People =
More intentions =
Harder to shift focus

Also dangerous, people get hurt

Collecting feedback into themes

From written reviews/1-1s

A theme emerges: Transparency

(or lack there of)

Bad Thing #2: Misunderstanding Transparency

MGMT team was initially hesitant

Who needs to know what?

My understanding/method was to try to be open and upfront

Which garnered respect, but not necessarily motivation/better work

Transparency actually necessitates **clarity**

You can be "open" but if your message isn't clear, it's not going to help

Transparency is about intention **not action**

But we tried to set goals through metrics

Goals are good

Bad Thing #3: Metrics in the wrong direction

What happens when you set an arbitrary and potentially unrealistic goal and Fail?

Take it in stride?

Maybe you feel like you didn't get enough done

The list keeps growing!

Bad Thing #4:
Hiring under duress

Desperate times need Desperate measures

Do they? Define desperate

Ugly Thing #1:
Bad, Destructive Hires

That doesn't even mean bad developers

It means the wrong people for the wrong situation.

Desperate to
"*Make it work*"

Huge expense of time and energy

Ugly Thing #2: Burnout

This brings us to my story

There's a new CTO
I'm now Chief Scientist

I stepped down for a many reasons that won't fit into a single talk

Life, babies, balance, etc.

Paperless Post is in amazing hands right now

And all are working to address the bad and ugly
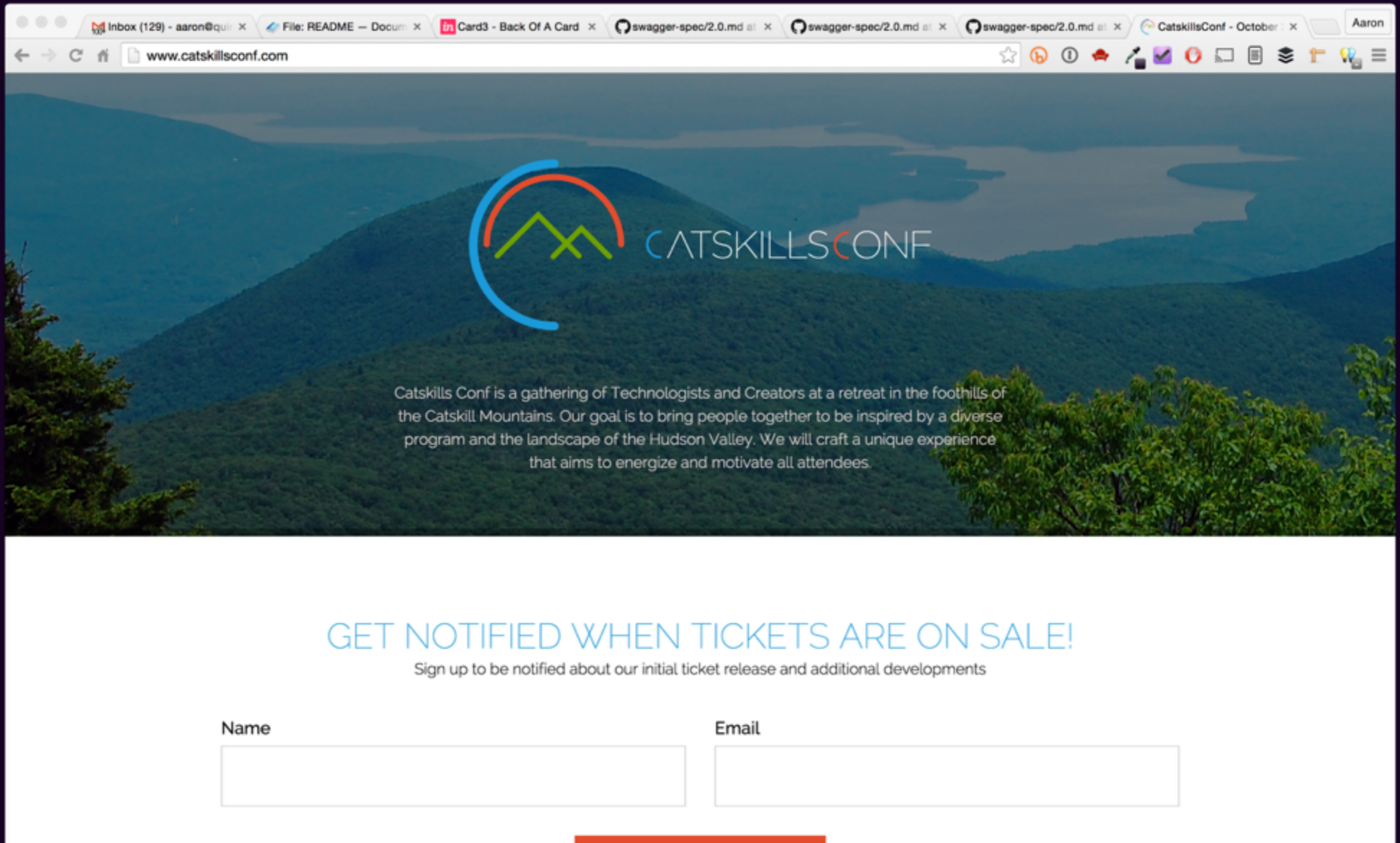
Learning and sharing what you've learned is crucial

Please do so!

CatskillsConf.com Oct 23-25, 2015

THANKS!

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quirkey.com/hireme

github.com/quirkey

beatsryetypes.com

catskillsconf.com