

# Scott Ringwelski's Blog

## Please just stop saying "just"

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Do you work in Software Engineering, and have you seen messages or sentences like these before?

*“Can’t we just set up a redirect to this other domain?”*

*“Why don’t we just add some caching to speed that page up?”*

*“I read their documentation, and we just need to inject some javascript, we should be all set!”*

Me too, and it drives me a little crazy.

Not because anyone is being rude, or because anything they are saying is necessarily wrong. Nobody is being intentionally malice, here. **It’s that (in my opinion) the word “just” added as a qualifier to an idea carries with it a whole bunch of implied baggage.**

## The Baggage

# Implies Simplicity

First and foremost, the word “*just*” implies that an idea is simple. “Oh, we can *just* do this!”.

If there is one thing I’ve learned with Software Engineering, it’s that *Computers are Hard* and implementation details matter, especially when it comes to complexity. Very rarely can the complexity of an engineering solution be outlined in a single sentence. There is almost always more to it.

Let’s take one of the above examples of “*just*” injecting javascript into the page.

- Do we trust this javascript to run on our page? What is the security posture of the javascript author?
- What dependencies does the script have, and are they trusted and up-to-date?
- What data is being sent from their javascript? Do we need to update our privacy policy?
- How will the javascript be minified?
- Does it work with our other libraries, such as React or Turbolinks?
- Do we need to load this Javascript from a third party? What if that server goes down? Can we trust the integrity of their server?
- Do we need to update our Content Security Policy for this script?
- What sort of performance impact will this have on our page load performance?
- Does the script need to run at any a particular point in the page load process?
- Does the styling of the DOM elements it produces match our brand? Is that important?
- What sort of impact will this have on the accessibility of our website?
- Who is going to maintain this javascript, and update it when it needs to be?
- How will we monitor if this javascript snippet is still working?
- If the business decides to stop using it, who will tell us and how will we know?

# Reinforces Imposter Syndrome

Many engineers report having Imposter Syndrome, with some data even suggesting over half of engineers at most major Silicon Valley companies.

Let's paint the picture of a very common, every-day scenario...

Imagine being an engineer with Imposter Syndrome, and you are working on solving a problem all day. You find yourself stuck on a few tricky details on the solutions you are considering, and so you ask for help from a Senior Engineer on your team. You sit down, start to talk through it, and your coworker says...

**“what if you *just* do this?”**

I ask you, reader:

- Would you feel good or happy to hear that?
- If you disagreed, would you voice that disagreement with such a confident and simple answer from a Senior Engineer?
- If you don't understand, do you ask “what do you mean?”

My guess is probably not. How could you disagree with such a simple answer?! Or not understand it?!

## Reduces Ideation

Because of the implications the word “*just*” comes with, I believe that engineers are less likely to ideate and brainstorm in that environment.

In the face of an idea that says to “*just* do this”, I believe engineers are less confident in voicing disagreement, and are less likely to ask “what do you mean?” to truly understand the problem and the solution.

A team where engineers aren't asking for clarification, don't understand their solutions, and aren't voicing alternative approaches is **not a team that I hope to be on**. That team is missing out on so much, including great ideas.

# Solution

My solution is simple: stop qualifying your statements with the word “*just*”.

Of course, I’ll acknowledge right away that such as task is not easy. And I continue to use the word by mistake all the time! But I try hard not to, and I believe I am better for it.

When I catch myself typing a sentence that uses the word “just”, I pause and rephrase my sentence to avoid using it. I find that doing so helps for me to:

- get better response and ideation back from others
- clarify my thinking with strong examples and evidence
- orient the discussion towards a more generative mindset
- produce a healthier debate with more learning and sharing from everyone

So please... *just* stop saying “*just*”!

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