

## HS Hackers Meetup at MHacks

### Lessons Learned



Hackers at the MHacks HS Hackers Meetup!

On the flight to MHacks 6, I was asked to organize a HS Hackers Meetup by one of the cofounders of hackEDU, Jonathan Leung. I had never hosted a meetup at a hackathon before, much less been to one, but I figured, “Why the hell not?”

For statistics, we had 25 people attend the meetup and participate in the discussions we held, out of a total of 73 high school hackers at MHacks. It goes to show that high schoolers aren't alone—73 is not a small number, especially for a collegiate hackathon.

Over the course of this meetup, I learned more not only about myself, but also about the surrounding hackathon community and event planning. It was a very important educational experience for me—new lessons learned, and old lessons reinforced.

### 1. Take risks.

I was doubtful of my ability to organize a meetup. Could I really create a meetup if I hadn't attended one before? Could I speak "well enough" to pass off as a prepared and confident speaker?

But it's the whole issue of risk versus safety. This entire meetup was a huge risk for me because I had literally *no idea* of what I was throwing myself into. However, there was nothing to lose, besides my reputation amongst HS hackers that wasn't really there. So I mean, why not?

However, this meetup didn't turn out too badly because I was able to ask for guidance. Those who were experienced in organizing events took me through the process of planning, which was a huge help. They offered tips, suggestions, and ideas for me to consider, but never really told me what to do. Having the freedom to take into account their suggestions and to make decisions on my own was crucial in developing planning skills. Despite the initial

doubts of not being able to plan an organized meetup, I came out not only with planning experience: I got new connections and more confidence.

## 2. Have a growth mindset.

Don't hesitate to believe that you can improve, because it's true. You can always improve as long as you put your mind to it. If I was so concerned about the doubts I had about myself and believed that I could not do it, an opportunity like this would have been lost.

You can't always be stuck on believing you'll fail. Everyone can improve.

## 3. Don't be afraid to reach out.

Guidance was so important to me in planning and running this meetup. There was absolutely no way I could've done it without the help of members in hackEDU, MHacks organizers, and a UMich senior named Angela, especially since I had never run a meetup before. Getting suggestions from others who may be more experienced was helpful—they knew what they were doing, but gave me the chance to be a leader even though I lacked experience.

The tips and ideas they gave were invaluable. They had experienced what goes right and what goes wrong, and coached me through that.

## 4. Prepare in advance.

Honestly, I started preparing for this meetup maybe an hour before it actually happened. I had advertised a day or so earlier, but I left my presentation's content unthought of

beforehand. I technically winged my entire speech because I didn't have time to practice more than once. Kudos to Angela for helping me run through it the first time! Stuttering was *very* prominent during that hour.

*Please* don't wait until the last minute to prepare an event.

## 5. Have fun!

It's not worth doing something if you don't enjoy it. I was pretty comfortable on stage because I ran the entire meetup in my Pikachu onesie.



:D

## Conclusion

Always be willing to take appropriate risks, and believe in those risks. You'll experience and learn so much more. Be open to communicating with those higher up, because they

can give you an endless amount of advice on the good and the bad. Prepare in advance, and have fun while you're organizing.

It's certainly not easy to organize such an event, but for the things you learn and the people you meet, the experience suddenly becomes so much more valuable.

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