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Good afternoon, everyone—

It’s really good to see the Atrium this full on a Friday, with faces from Engineering, QA, Product, Ops, Support, HR—and just as importantly, Dan’s family here with us. I’m speaking as a colleague from Product and as someone who’s had the privilege to be a project partner of Dan’s for a lot of sprints that turned into marathons.

We’re here to celebrate Daniel Brooks—Dan—who, after 17 years with this company, is choosing longer trails, more sawdust, and golden-hour light over stand-ups and release notes. And honestly, he’s earned every bit of it.

I still remember when Dan joined in 2009 as a Junior QA Analyst. Some of you were here then; many of you weren’t. What I noticed early on was how Dan went about learning—quietly, thoroughly, and with that look that says, “give me the puzzle, I’ll find the seam.” He wasn’t trying to make a splash. He was trying to make things work.

By 2014, he did a lot more than that. Dan led the rollout of automated testing when a lot of us were still treating automation like a nice-to-have. He made it real and he made it usable. Not flashy, usable. He went team by team, sat next to people, listened to what actually broke for them, then built tests that mirrored real behavior. That rollout changed our pace and our confidence. It also changed how Product partnered with QA—because Dan made it safe for us to push harder, knowing that the ground under our feet had been checked, measured, and strengthened.

Ask the twelve people he’s mentored since then—twelve new hires who walked in with a laptop and some nerves and left Dan’s desk with a plan, a repo link, and the sense that they belonged here. I’ve heard versions of the same story:

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“He didn’t just show me where the documentation lived. He showed me what questions to ask.” That’s mentorship. Not answers, but a way to look at the problem so you can find your own.

In 2018, the company gave Dan the Integrity Award. If you’ve worked with him, you know why. Integrity isn’t just about telling the truth; it’s about aligning your work with your words every single day. It’s about saying, “the build is green, but this edge case is red,” and trusting that honesty is more valuable than speed. Dan has been that steady voice for 17 years—reliability, humility, craftsmanship, and a team-first mindset braided together into the way he commits code, reviews PRs, and shows up to stand-up.

And then came the Phoenix Project migration in 2021. Those of us in the trenches remember it as a long calendar of short nights. Dan was a key contributor in that push. He treated migrating like restoring a vintage piece of furniture: sand it down, understand the grain, only then apply the new coat. He caught dependencies we hadn’t mapped, flagged risks before they snuck into UAT, and, somehow, kept the temperature of the room down. It wasn’t magic. It was a craftsperson doing the craft right.

When I think about Dan’s character, though, there’s one morning burned into my memory—2019, the weekend outage. Some of us were on Slack pretending coffee was a strategy. I got here at six. Dan biked in at five. Five. He rolled in with a box of donuts that tasted exactly like hope, put them on the table, and went straight to the whiteboard. No drama. No blame. He sketched the flow of the core script, found the seam that no log was telling us about, and rewrote the piece that was choking the release. It was this elegant little fix that made the whole system exhale. By noon we had recovery. By two, we had a plan. And we also had powdered sugar on half the terminal keyboards. That was Dan at his most Dan: early, prepared, generous, and fixated on helping the team win.

If you ever visited his desk, you saw the other hint of who he is—a small photo of a trail somewhere green and high, a tiny wooden box he made himself, a Post-it that read “measure twice” stuck to his monitor. He brings that same

spirit outside of work too.

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The hiking—national parks, rain or shine. Dan can tell you the right layers for a sudden temperature drop on a ridge and where to stand at sunrise in Zion to catch the canyon waking up. The woodworking—small furniture that fits exactly into the corner that always looked awkward, or a box joint so clean you wonder how human hands did it. The volunteering at the local animal shelter—week after week, no fanfare, just showing up so the dogs who can't yet trust the world get to trust one person. And his weekend photography—if you've ever scrolled his shots, you know the way he frames light is the way he frames problems: patient, exacting, waiting for the moment where everything lines up and you can finally press the shutter.

Dan's taught a lot of us that reliability doesn't mean predictability—it means trust. You trust that he'll listen before he speaks. That he'll catch what you missed without making you feel small. That when it's time to choose between "fast" and "right," he fights for "right" and somehow still helps us get there on time.

Seventeen years is a lot of sprints. It's a lot of release trains. It's also a lot of people, and I want to thank the ones who made it possible for Dan to give so much to this place—his family, who shared him with us during those migrations and late nights, who cheered him on when he came home talking about tests and tooling and that one log line that finally told the truth. Thank you for being part of his team behind the scenes.

What will we miss? We'll miss his dry one-liners that break tension without breaking focus. We'll miss the checklist he kept in his head. We'll miss the way he translated between Product optimism and QA realism so both sides felt heard and the product got better. And we'll miss the simple ritual of hearing his "Good morning" that somehow set the tone for the day.

What won't we lose? The systems he helped build, the people he mentored, the standards he set. Those don't retire. They stick around in code comments, in

test suites that refuse to let bad ideas out the door, and in the confidence of the folks who learned under him and now lead with the same quiet steadiness.

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Dan, I hope retirement feels less like a stop and more like a trailhead. I hope there are long trails that earn their views, and a garage that’s loud with good tools and the hum of a project that turns out even better than you sketched it. I hope there are plenty of golden-hour photos—on trips that don’t require a red-eye, with your camera pointed at whatever catches your careful eye. And I hope the animal shelter still sees you, not because you have to, but because you want to keep that part of your week that’s just about showing up and helping.

If you ever miss us—which, to be clear, we fully expect—you know where the Atrium is on Fridays. We also accept unsolicited donut deliveries. More seriously, the door is always open for a coffee, a code review story, or a picture of a dovetail joint you’re particularly proud of.

Thank you for the years, Dan. For the release saves and the guardrails. For the mentorship. For showing us that humility is a superpower, not a soft skill. For proving that craftsmanship belongs in software the same way it belongs in wood.

On behalf of your friends across Product, QA, Engineering, and the rest of this very grateful, very lucky crew—congratulations on your retirement.

May the next chapter be an adventure you build with your own hands, one careful measure at a time.

And may the light always be better than expected.

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