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# The hardest refactor I've ever done



slides! 🙌

# Hi !

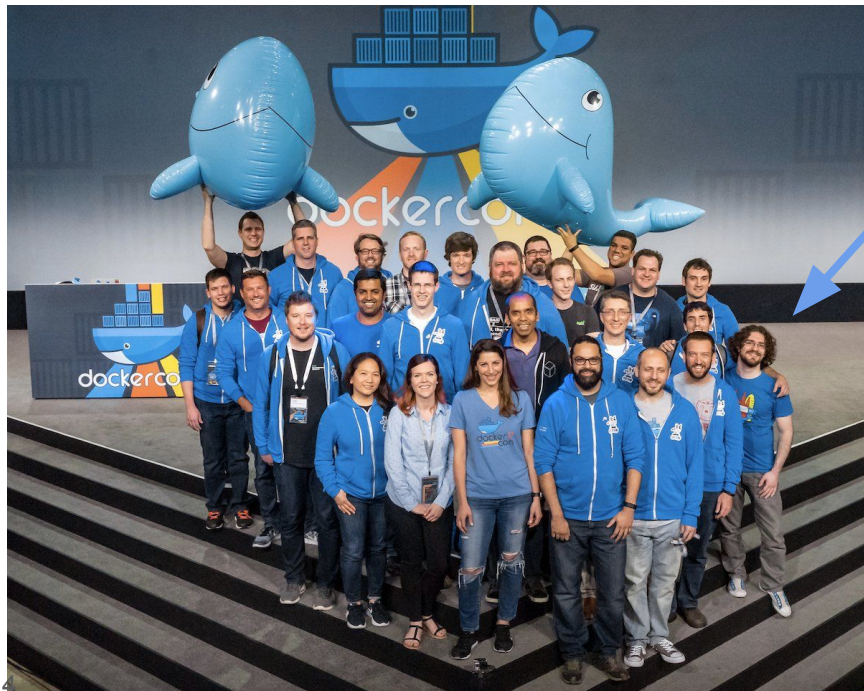
These are the slides of my talk at GOTO Chicago 2019.

The deck has a few hidden slides (the ones with a struck-over eye icon in the preview on the left). The hidden slides are here to give some extra details (that I decided to skip during the live presentation). You'll also find plenty of extra information in the speaker notes.

Enjoy your read!

# Hi !

- I'm Jérôme Petazzoni (@jpetazzo)



that's me!

# git log jpetazzo

- 30+ years coding
- ~20 years coding professionally
- = 7 years at Docker Inc.

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- 30+ years coding
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- ~ **2 years with depression**

I'm going to talk about  
depression and burnout.

I'm going to talk about  
*my* depression and *my* burnout.

# Outline

1. **Before:** what I already knew
2. **During:** what actually happened to me
3. **After:** how I recovered and what I wish I had known

Before

# Act I

I happened to read “[Devs and Depression](#)” by [Greg Baugues](#):

*« In 2006, I was diagnosed with Type II Bipolar Disorder. For years I struggled with long bouts of crippling depression punctuated by moments of hyper-productivity and creativity. »*

(Also available as an [excellent talk](#).)



# Act II

In 2014, during the SCALE conference in Los Angeles:

- [Burnout and Ops](#) by [Lars Lehtonen](#) ([video](#))
- [Smoke](#) by [Carlos Flores](#)

# Act III

In 2015, during the following edition of SCALE ...

I'm told that Carlos won't be giving any more talks.

I head back to my hotel room, and I cry for a while.

Without understanding why, exactly.

# Acte III

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Concerned.

# I read about mental health.

What are the odds?

In America, one in five adults experiences mental illness in a given year.

(Including depression, anxiety ...)

I read some more.

About brain chemistry, neurotransmitters.

Articles, blog posts, research papers.

I watch Robert Sapolsky's course at Stanford. ([v1](#) | [v2](#))

# After reading and learning that much ...

I should be well prepared, right?

Nope

During

# I had a lot on my plate

- almost 100 talks in 1 year
- the “[Docker Tour de France](#)”
- the (almost) Docker World Tour
- with hindsight, it was a lot ...

but back then (and with little basis for comparison) it seemed normal

# Symptoms 1.0

- September 2015 : I'm writing a [huge talk for AWS re:invent](#).
- I clear my agenda for the three weeks leading up to it.
- Two weeks in ... I have accomplished *nothing*.



# What's going on?

- With hindsight: probably the first symptoms of burnout.
- But I only realized that two years later, during an open space at DevOpsDays, while listening to other people describing their experience of burnout.
- But back then, nobody\* thought about that!

\*To be honest: my partner thought about it. [One of my coworkers did too](#). But...

# Diagnosis 1.0

- GP: “Let's refer you to a psychiatrist.”
- Psychiatrist: “You have depression. Take these meds.”
- Therapist: “You don’t need medication. Drink water and exercise more!”  
(SGTM!)

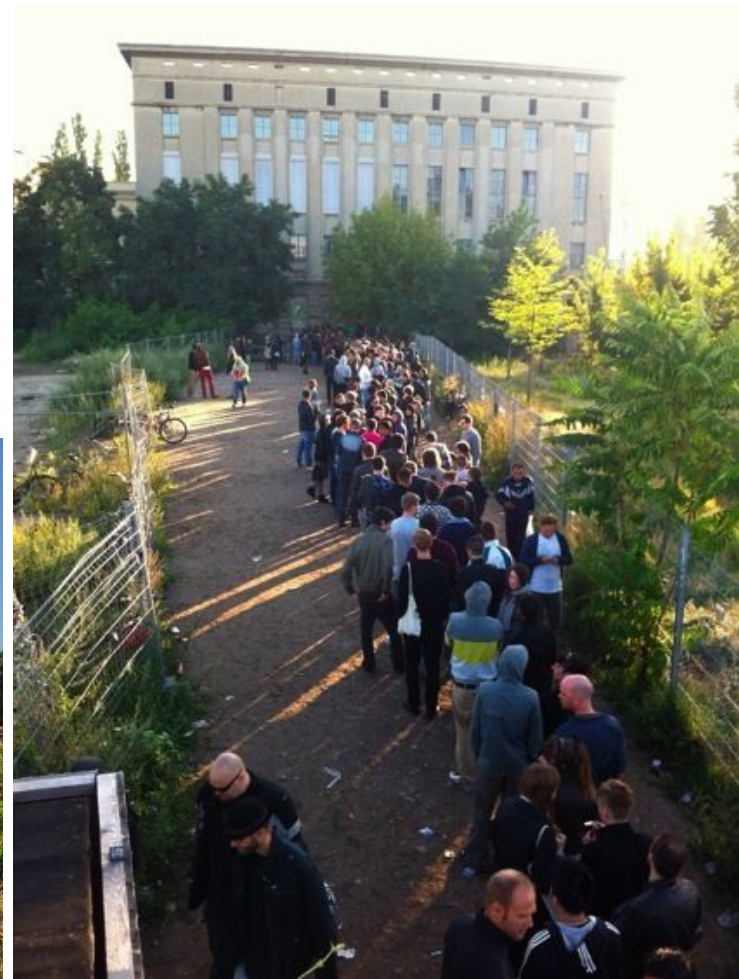
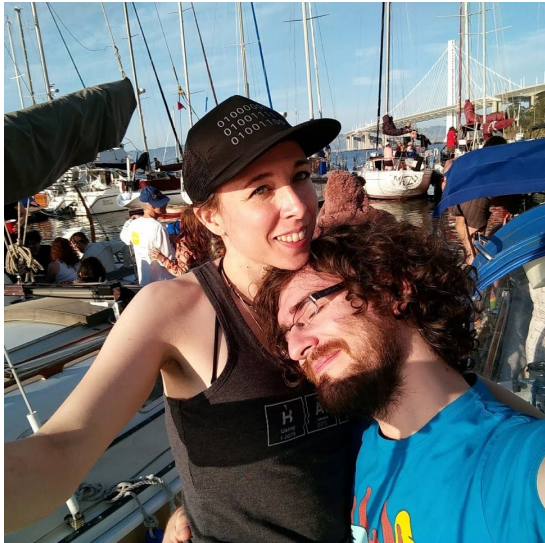
# And then...

- At the last minute, I snap out of it.
- My presentation goes well.
- That was probably just ... fatigue?

# Symptoms 2.0

- In spring 2016...

Fun things aren't fun anymore.



# Diagnosis 2.0

- Back to the doctor: “You have depression. Take these meds.”
- No follow-up with a mental health care professional.
- I’m not really feeling it.

(Serious communication problems with that doctor.)

- Plan B!

# Workaround

- Summer 2016: a holiday in France.
- I visit la Bretagne et la Normandie :-)

(thanks [Tiffany](#), [Nicolas](#)...)

- I'm feeling better!

# Symptoms 3.0

- In fall 2016, I move to Kansas City.
- Unpleasant surprise: I have become hypersensitive to noise.
- I'm losing sleep.
- Everything becomes... *difficult*.
- Including making a doctor's appointment...

But after a month, I manage to do it.

# Diagnosis 3.0

- My (new) doctor is adamant:  
“You have depression. Take these meds.”
- This time, I listen, and I start antidepressants.

Antidepressants:  
user feedback

# Pills 1.0

- Fluoxetine (aka Prozac)
- Trial period: 3 months
- Expected side effects:  
weight gain, loss of libido...
- Actual effects: zilch (at best)



# Three months is a long time

- For three months, I waited for some sign of improvement  
(knowing that “it may get worse before getting better”)
- Every time I increased the dose, I felt worse
- But every time, there was also an external factor  
(for example: the presidential election)
- That could have gone on for quite some time...

# The secret society

If 1 in 5 struggle with this...

You're statistically guaranteed  
to know at least one of them.

You just have to find them.

A friend suggests switching meds.

I started medication a few months ago, but it doesn't seem to be helping much. People sometimes complain that computers are the worst, but I wish diagnosing people and feelings were as easy as troubleshooting a buggy kernel. :) (Not saying it's easy, but at least there is a scientific approach that doesn't feel like tweaking a bunch of brain chemicals and praying for the best!)

6 Jan 2017 ✓

Yeah that's hard. I've definitely had some bad patches on the road and in new cities. Maybe switch around meds? Took me a while to find a combination that worked. Doctors seem open to it.




I just get Jesse to do it for me.... Kernel problem solved. Cost: Cocktail with umbrella. :)

3 Jan 2017

For now, mine just advised to ramp up dosage to see what happens. And it feels like things are getting worse each time, but there are always troubling coincidences. E.g. one time was the day of the election. Another recently, just after our friends left after spending NYE with us. So I'm left to wonder, "are the meds messing with my feels, or am I just being dissatisfied by the current events?"

I need a Jesse that can attach a serial console to my brain and single-step my monoamine transmitters. :)

# Pills 2.0

- Mirtazapine (aka Remeron)
- Trial period: 1 month
- Initial effects: 
- Then: iron-radioactive-man
- I need *lots* of sleep
- 1 drink is fine. But 2 drinks...



# What to do with all this newfound energy?

- Reinvest it in cool stuff!
- Like learning to play cello



# Pills 3.0

- There's a lot of room for improvement, so...  
let's try something else!
- Duloxetine (aka Cymbalta)
- Trial period: 9 months
- Results: much better  
(after adjusting dosing time)



# What about my day job?

- From October 2016 to March 2017: I'm significantly less productive.
- It is completely impossible for me to create new content or take initiative.
- I can still do public talks and workshops, but it is utterly exhausting.
- Fortunately, I had written plenty of content, so I can coast for a while.

Self care self care self care

# Self care 1.0: mens sana in corpore sano

- Exercise
- No alcohol

This is not helping ...

Quite the opposite.

# Self care 2.0: carpe diem

- Video games
- Books
- Raspberry Pi ([fonos](#))
- Cello
- [Berlin techno](#)

# Self care 3.0: phone a friend

- Friends and family come and visit in Kansas City.

(Thanks FX, Stéphanie, Dana, Romain ... and mom!)

- Meanwhile, my partner kept being the most supportive person in the world.



# Your self care mileage may vary

- We all have different needs.

(Thanks Captain Obvious!)

- What worked for me may not work for you and vice versa.
- Find what works for *you*.



Everything is under control.  
What now?

# Then one day ...

- In the summer of 2017, I'm interviewed for a study on:  
mental health, being an expat, remote work, and the tech industry.
- In this context, I take the [Maslach Burnout Inventory](#).  
(from [Christina Maslach](#), one of the best subject matter experts on the topic)

# Depression → burnout

- Surprise: according to the MBI, I'm severely burned out!



# Pills 4.0

- During the same period, one day, I can't take my meds.
- I skip a dose. *Just one.*
- I immediately feel strong side effects ...
- ... But also a strong productivity boost, lasting a whole week!



# Diagnosis 4.0

- I talk about it to my psychiatrist, who is ... unhelpful to say the least.
- I decide that I need to stop treatment, very progressively.

(Some antidepressants, like duloxetine, shouldn't be quit cold turkey.)

- I end up finding a unicorn:

a doctor who knows what burnout is, and listens to me! 🎉

# Depression $\neq$ burnout

- If I understand correctly:

*treating my depression = treating my symptoms*

- How can I find the *root cause*?
- Hard to tell, but it seems to be work-related.
- Time for a break.

# Planning downtime ... Carefully

- My manager and team are very supportive.

(Thanks Ashlynn, Betty, David, Jenny, Laurent, ...)

- My doctors and HR team, not so much.
- After 3 months trying to get a medical or unpaid leave, I give up.

# The only way is the highway

- I quit Docker in February 2018.
- I could do it because I had savings.

*That was a f\*\*\*ton of luck and privilege there.*

- Goal: 6 months of vacation.

After

# It gets better

Personal and professional stuff:

- [Griode](#)
- [container.training](#)



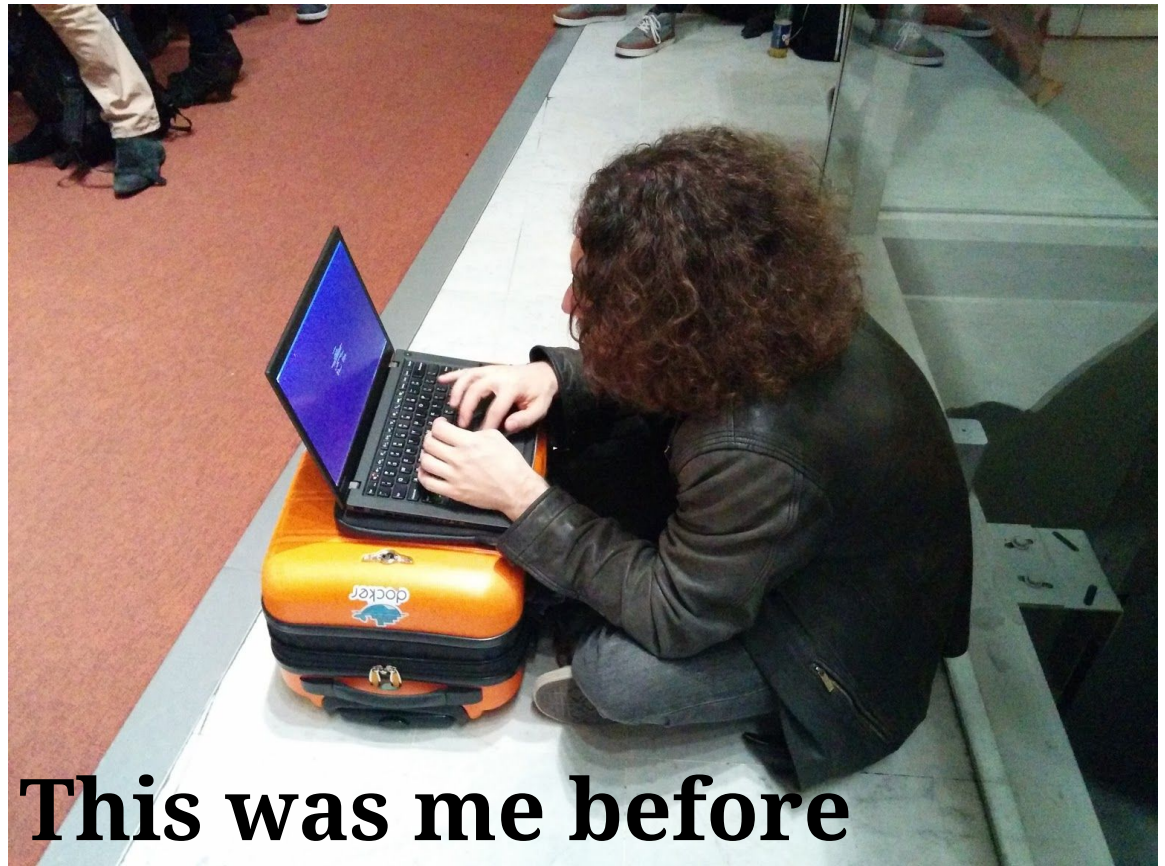
I was lucky.

**Very** lucky.



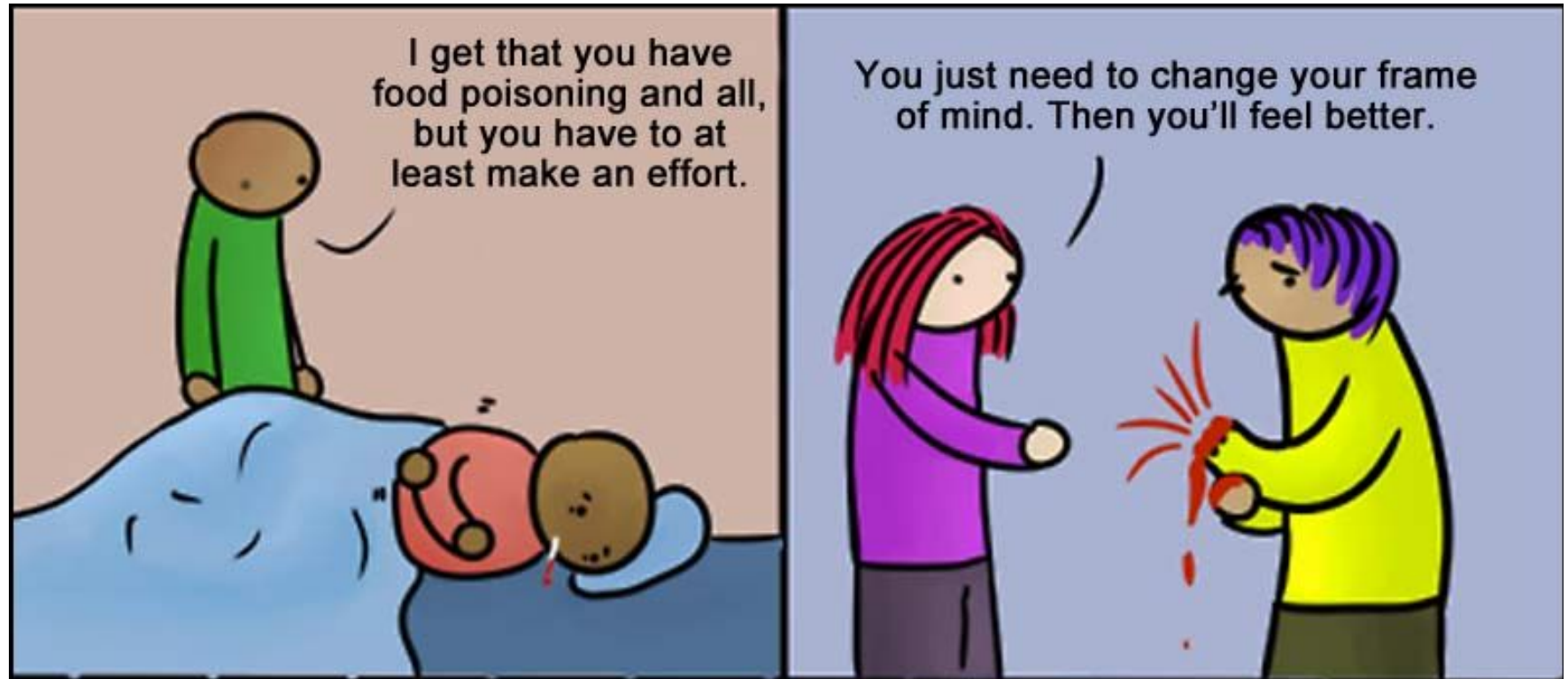
# However ...

- Less energy
- Occasional relapse
- When it happens,  
knowing what to do  
helps a lot!  
  
(see “self care”)



What I wish I had known  
from the very beginning, instead of learning it painfully

# Depression is a disease like any other



# Depression is a disease like any other



# Depression is a disease like any other



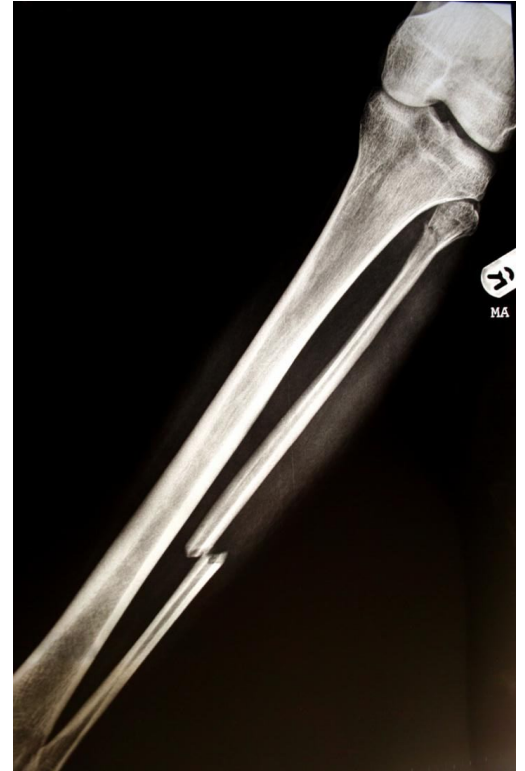
# Depression is a disease like any other

(Illustrations: [Robot Hugs](#))

# Diagnosing depression is complicated

*« Depressed mood or a loss of interest or pleasure in daily activities for more than two weeks. » (DSM4)*

We can't measure the levels of dopamine,  
serotonin, etc. in our brains.  
(At least, not easily.)

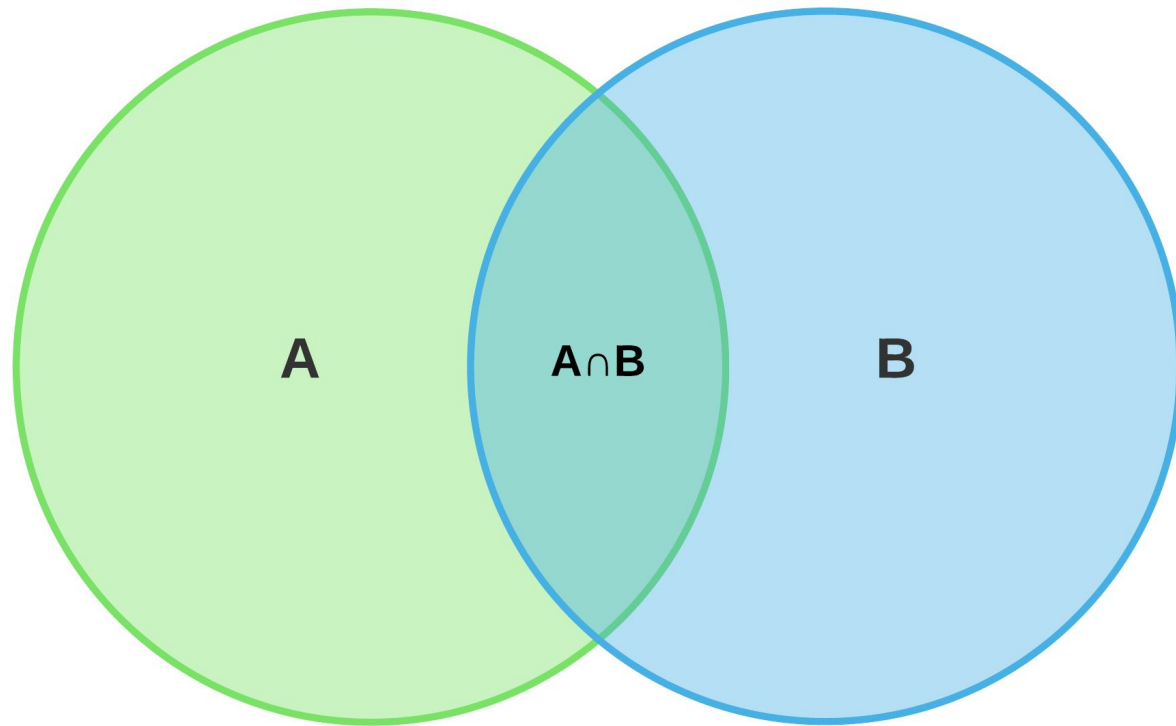


# We can still be *data driven*

This is my  
*Mood Chart.*

|    | A                            | B     | C   | D   | E   | F   | G   | H   | I   | J   | K   | L   | M   | N   | O   | P   | Q   | R   | S   | T   | U   | V   | W   | X   | Y   | Z   | AA  | AB  | AC  | AD  | AE  | AF  | AG  |     |
|----|------------------------------|-------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| 1  |                              |       | Thu | Fri | Sat | Sun | Mon | Tue | Wed | Thu | Fri | Sat | Sun | Mon | Tue | Wed | Thu | Fri | Sat | Sun | Mon | Tue | Wed | Thu | Fri | Sat | Sun | Mon | Tue | Wed | Thu | Fri | Sat | Sun |
| 2  | June 2017                    | Day-> | 1   | 2   | 3   | 4   | 5   | 6   | 7   | 8   | 9   | 10  | 11  | 12  | 13  | 14  | 15  | 16  | 17  | 18  | 19  | 20  | 21  | 22  | 23  | 24  | 25  | 26  | 27  | 28  | 29  | 30  |     |     |
| 3  | Happy                        | 5     |     | x   |     |     | x   |     |     |     |     |     |     |     | x   |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     | x   |     | x   | x   |     | x   |     |     |
| 4  | does life seem               | 4     | x   |     | x   | x   |     | x   | x   |     |     |     |     |     | x   | x   | x   | x   | x   | x   | x   |     |     | x   | x   | x   | x   | x   | x   | x   | x   | x   |     |     |
| 5  | exciting and fun and         | 3     |     |     |     |     |     |     | x   | x   | x   |     |     | x   |     |     |     |     | x   |     | x   | x   | x   |     |     | x   | x   | x   |     |     |     | x   |     |     |
| 6  | stuff?                       | 2     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     | x   | x   |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     | x   | x   |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| 7  | Sad                          | 1     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     | x   |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| 8  |                              |       |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| 9  | Driven                       | 5     |     | x   |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     | x   |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| 10 | do I want to do things       | 4     | x   | x   | x   | x   | x   |     |     | x   | x   |     | x   | x   | x   | x   |     |     |     |     |     | x   | x   | x   |     |     | x   | x   |     | x   | x   | x   |     |     |
| 11 | and achieve, or am I         | 3     | x   |     | x   |     | x   | x   | x   | x   | x   |     | x   |     |     |     | x   | x   | x   | x   | x   |     | x   |     |     | x   | x   |     | x   |     |     |     |     |     |
| 12 | falling back to coping       | 2     |     |     |     |     |     |     | x   |     | x   | x   |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     | x   |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| 13 | Apathetic                    | 1     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| 14 |                              |       |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| 15 | Energetic                    | 5     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| 16 | do I have the energy         | 4     | x   | x   | x   | x   | x   | x   | x   |     |     |     |     | x   | x   | x   | x   | x   | x   | x   |     |     | x   | x   | x   |     |     | x   | x   | x   | x   | x   |     |     |
| 17 | to do all the things, or     | 3     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     | x   | x   | x   | x   |     | x   | x   | x   | x   | x   | x   | x   |     |     |     |     |     | x   | x   |     | x   |     |     |     |     |
| 18 | am I constantly feeling      | 2     |     |     |     |     |     |     | x   | x   | x   |     | x   | x   |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| 19 | Tired                        | 1     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     | x   |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| 20 |                              |       |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| 21 | Focused                      | 5     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| 22 | am I able to stay focused on | 4     | x   | x   | x   | x   |     |     |     |     |     |     | x   | x   | x   | x   | x   | x   |     |     |     | x   |     | x   |     |     | x   | x   |     | x   | x   | x   |     |     |
| 23 | things, or am I constantly   | 3     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     | x   | x   |     |     | x   | x   | x   | x   | x   |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| 24 | jumping from one thing to    | 2     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     | x   | x   | x   | x   |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| 25 | another and not getting      | 1     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| 26 | much done?                   |       |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| 27 | Distracted                   |       |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| 28 | Social                       | 5     |     | x   |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     | x   |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     | x   |     |     |     |     | x   | x   |     | x   |     |     |
| 29 | do I want to be around       | 4     | x   | x   | x   | x   | x   |     | x   | x   | x   |     |     | x   | x   | x   | x   | x   |     | x   | x   | x   | x   | x   | x   | x   | x   | x   | x   | x   | x   | x   |     |     |
| 30 | people, or do I want to      | 3     |     |     |     |     |     | x   | x   | x   | x   | x   |     |     |     |     |     |     | x   | x   | x   | x   | x   |     |     | x   | x   |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| 31 | lock myself in?              | 2     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     | x   | x   |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| 32 | Grumpy                       | 1     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |

# Depression and burnout can look the same



# Burnout is not *just* about being exhausted

*« When you read about other people's experience of burnout, they almost always talk about it being caused by the workload. Long hours, weekends spent at the office, unrealistic deadlines, imposing bosses. When I thought about burnout, this is what I imagined, but my situation couldn't be more different. » ([Kieran Tie](#))*

# What else can it be?

- Conflicting values
- Lack (or perceived lack) of control / rewards / purpose

# There are tools to measure burnout

- Again: the [Maslach Burnout Inventory](#) is very useful
- It gives three scores, on three scales:

Exhaustion

Cynicism

Efficacy

- There are other tools too.

# Depression and burnout are *common*

- In tech as much as in other fields  
(maybe even more so in specific areas like Open Source, Dev Rel...)
- I wrote a blog post, “[Seven Years At Docker](#)” ...  
and I received hundreds of messages of support and dozens of stories.
- We don't talk much about it ... Let's change that!

Healing takes time

*« I took 7 months off in 2017 [...] for the same thing. It gets better. »*

# Sometimes it's longer, sometimes it's shorter...

*« [Taking a break] is indeed worth it!*

*I was not sure how long I needed, so I planned to take at least six months off.*

*I had no agenda and no clear destination. [...]*

*The relief for me mentally/emotionally/physically was immediate and profound. [...] The amazing thing is that after only a few months — half of what I was financially prepared to take off (actually, I was prepared to take a year if I decided I wanted that) — I was so invigorated and rejuvenated I was excited to come back. [...]*

*I took the time off because I was losing my mind from depression and worse.*

*I was burned out. »*

It can be lifechanging

*Burning out was a very positive event, in reality.*

*It changed my life for the better.*

*I would say that if it happens, don't be afraid.*

*My life is better today.*

*« Mon burn out est un événement très positif en réalité.*

*Il a changé ma vie pour du mieux.*

*Je dirais qu'il ne faut pas en avoir peur si ça arrive.*

*Je vis aujourd'hui une vie bien plus en adéquation [que] celle que*

# Sometimes, taking a break seems like the only way out

- Especially when it's gone too far.
- Especially without a good support network.

(family, coworkers, friends...)

Let's get rid of one specific bias ...

Let's get rid of one specific bias ...



# Meds can help

- Finding the right one is tricky!

- It's a slow process.

(it can take weeks after switching meds or dosage)

- Treatment may vary from one person to another.

(even with the same symptoms)

- Treatment may vary over time.

# Therapy is vastly underrated

- It's like going to the gym!
- It helped me a lot (before, during, after...)
- Don't hesitate to switch therapists [if needed](#)

## *On average, it's harder in startups*

- Fewer people
- Less money
- Fewer points of reference

One more thing ...

# This made me stronger

- Not in the sense of "what doesn't kill you makes you stronger"...
- But because I learned a great deal about a very common condition
- I hope to be able to better help others
- Which makes me a valuable part of a team.

# The role of the people around you is *vital*

- At work: [you need a good manager](#).

(If you are a manager, you also need to be a good one.)

- Everywhere: look after and take care of each other ...

and pay attention to what others tell you.

*“You look tired!”*

- Easier said than done, but: don't isolate yourself.

# What's the point of this presentation?

- Unfortunately, this is not a magical shield against depression and burnout.
- If this talk inspires you to do your own research,  
and learn more about it,  
I'll take it.

# Thank you.

slides (with all the links)  
+ lots of extra notes  
and information!





*Please*

**Remember to  
rate this session**

*Thank you!*