

Compassionate Coding

being more humane in tech

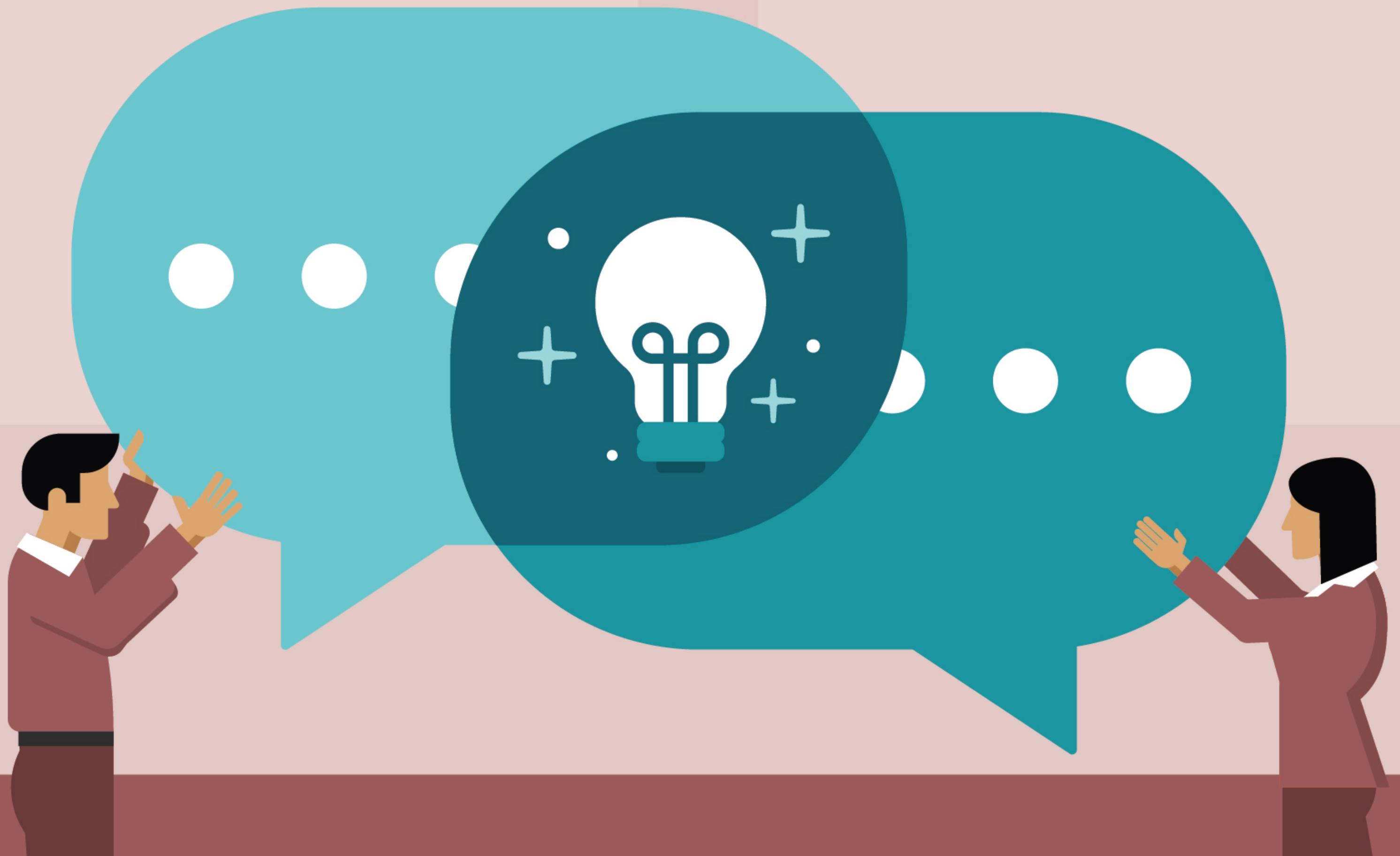
Sascha Wolf | Backend Dev/TSA @ grandcentrix

Thank you for being here! My name is Sascha,
backend dev/tsa @grandcentrix in cologne

Disclaimer:

- strongly inspired by "April Wensel" & orga
"Compassionate Coding"
- Not affiliated with them
- Giving credit & raising awareness for the awesome work they're doing!
- If you like this talk = check them out!

With that out of the way: Let's get going!

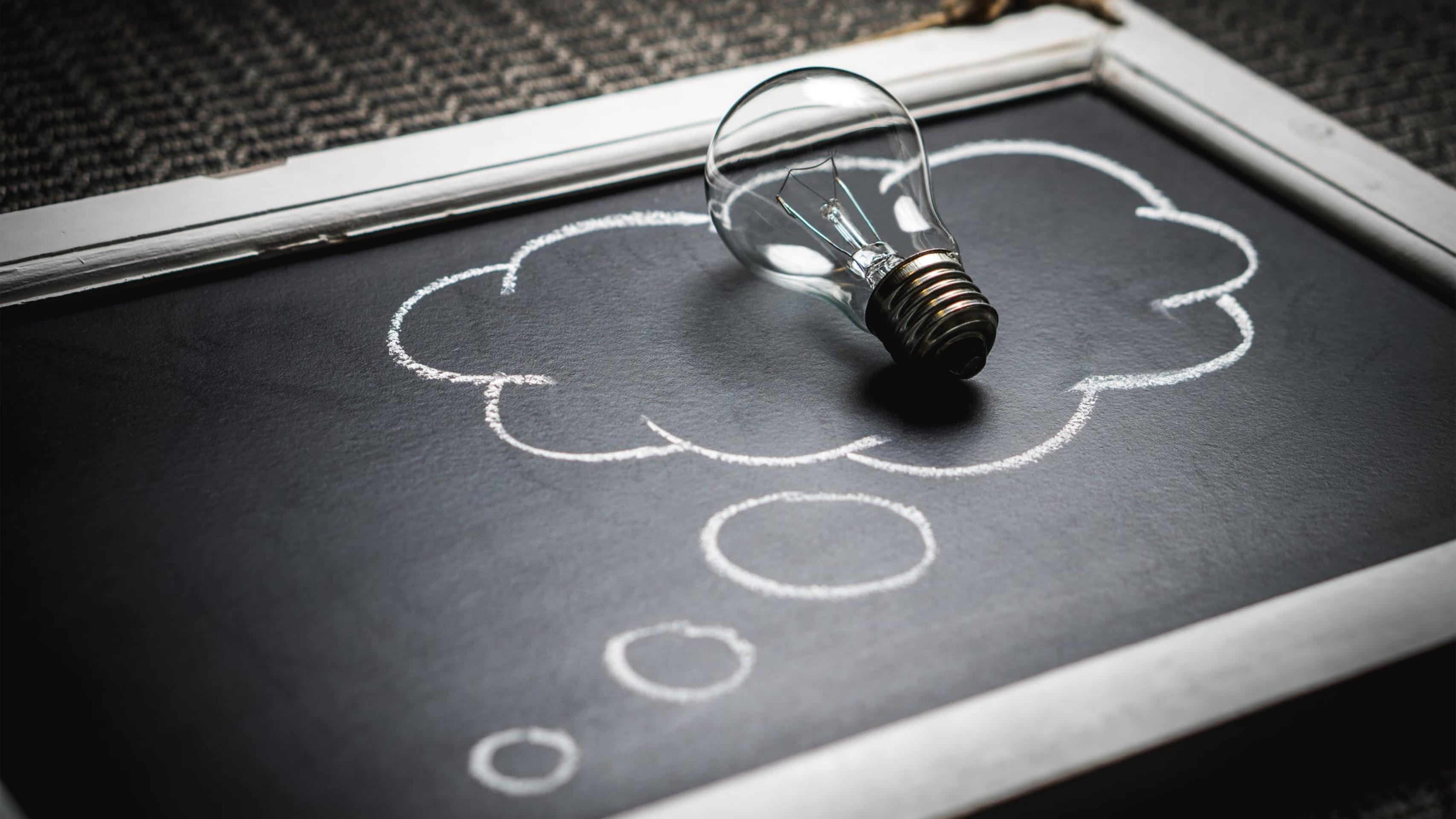


Communication: Transferring information from one person to another

All our jobs include it:

- Meetings: Daily/Planning/Retro
- Digital: Jira/Confluence/Slack

The thing is, we in tech are all about solving problems



Solving problems in an efficient manner; we talk a lot about

- Efficient Code
- Time Management
- High Velocity

Of course that also means we want to have ...

Efficient Communication

And for a lot of people that means ...

Brisk & Direct



Communication

In this talk I would like to pose
the question, if ...

Brisk & Direct?

Communication

most efficient way?

Let's start

small



Let me ask you a question ...

A dark, moody photograph of a person sitting with their head down, looking distressed.

**Who here had a
negative experience
in a code review?**

hurt; left back a bad feeling/
bad taste; didn't feel quite right

So what? Some might say ...

People need a thicker skin!



Somebody

It's not my job to care
about others feelings!



Somebody

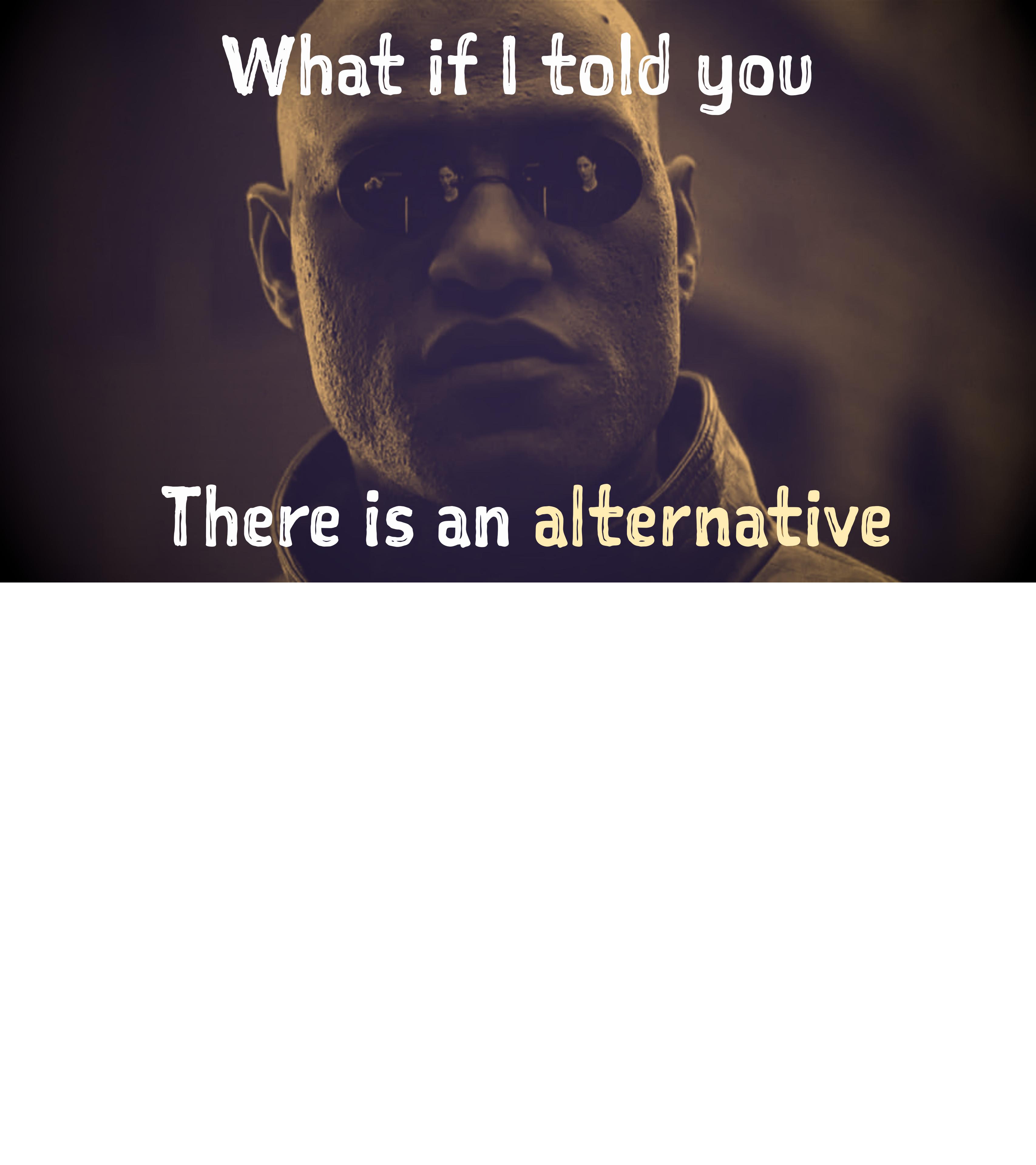
That's the way tech works!



Somebody

I used to think like that!

It doesn't have to be that way!



What if I told you

There is an alternative



Compassion

Definition: the feeling that arises when you are confronted with another's suffering and feel motivated to relieve that suffering.

Compassion != Empathy != Pity
=> You want to DO something!

How might that look like in Code Reviews?

How about some examples?

I went through my own
personal history of code
reviews

I'm gonna eat my own dogfoot

Passing of Opinion as Fact

Passing of Opinion as Fact¹



swolf on 1 Sep 2017

This shouldn't be a helper. This should be a context. The Lineup context.

¹<https://medium.freecodecamp.org/unlearning-toxic-behaviors-in-a-code-review-culture-b7c295452a3c>

What's the problem with this?
No backup (docs, guidelines etc.). Personal preference is not enough!

How might an alternative look like?

Compassionate Alternative

The Phoenix docs suggest to move persistence related functionality into a so called “Context” ([see here](#)). I think that’s applicable here and would improve the project structure. What do you think?

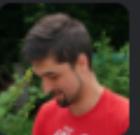
— A better me

Better!

- Links to docs
- Explains why
- Asks for feedback

Asking judgmental questions

Asking judgmental questions¹



swolf on 5 Sep 2017

Why not use a view?

¹<https://medium.freecodecamp.org/unlearning-toxic-behaviors-in-a-code-review-culture-b7c295452a3c>

Implies solution should be obvious => Person is dumb to not see it

Veiled demands => Instead provide recommendations (links)

Compassionate Alternative

You could move this into a view, which has the benefit of separating the “response building” from the “rendering” logic.

— A better me

There are other things: Too much for this lightning talk!

Some of you might ask yourself: Why should I care?



That's certainly a valid
question! Why should we?
No Advantage = No Reason
Because it leads to better
collaboration



~5 minutes

Ask yourself: Which of the comments above would have had more of an impact on you?

Not convinced? In 2012 Google embarked on journey to answer the following question ...

What's the secret to a successful team?



Google (Project Aristotle)

2 years of research

- 200+ interviews (employees)
- 180+ active teams
- 250 different attributes

In the end it boiled down to
something called:

Psychological Safety

Psychological Safety

[the] shared belief held by members of a team that the team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking. [...]

A sense of confidence that the team will not embarrass, reject or punish someone for speaking up.

— Amy Edmondson (Harvard Business School)

What does that mean?

- A protected environment to exchange ideas
- Healthy culture around failure
- A lot more things: article from NY Times!

How to build it? One approach could be COMPASSION



Be more compassionate in
code reviews and all problems
are fixed?

Compassion in Code Reviews
= Profit? No

Of course



Code Reviews



are just a small part

But they are a
—
great start

Now that you might have an impression why these ideas are important ...

Let's go

big

And by that I mean, let's talk
about ...

The Tech Industry

At large ...

Because you see, right now ...

We in the tech industry value

intelligence

We talk about

ROCKSTAR DEVS

and

CODE NINJAS

We make fun of

"untechnical" people

Things like: "The customer requested the source code in a PDF!"

It IS pretty funny but let me ask you:

But what does



technical



actually mean?

Technical

having special and usually practical knowledge especially of a mechanical or scientific subject

— Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary

Interesting: "especially" not
"exclusively"

Technical

having special and usually practical knowledge especially of a mechanical or scientific subject

— Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary

Based on that: what would be some examples

Technical Examples

Technical Examples

→ Programming Python

Technical Examples

- Programming Python
- Accounting in EXCEL

Technical Examples

- Programming Python
- Accounting in EXCEL
- Using Photoshop

Technical Examples

- Programming Python
- Accounting in EXCEL
- Using Photoshop
- Dancing Disco Fox

Technical Examples

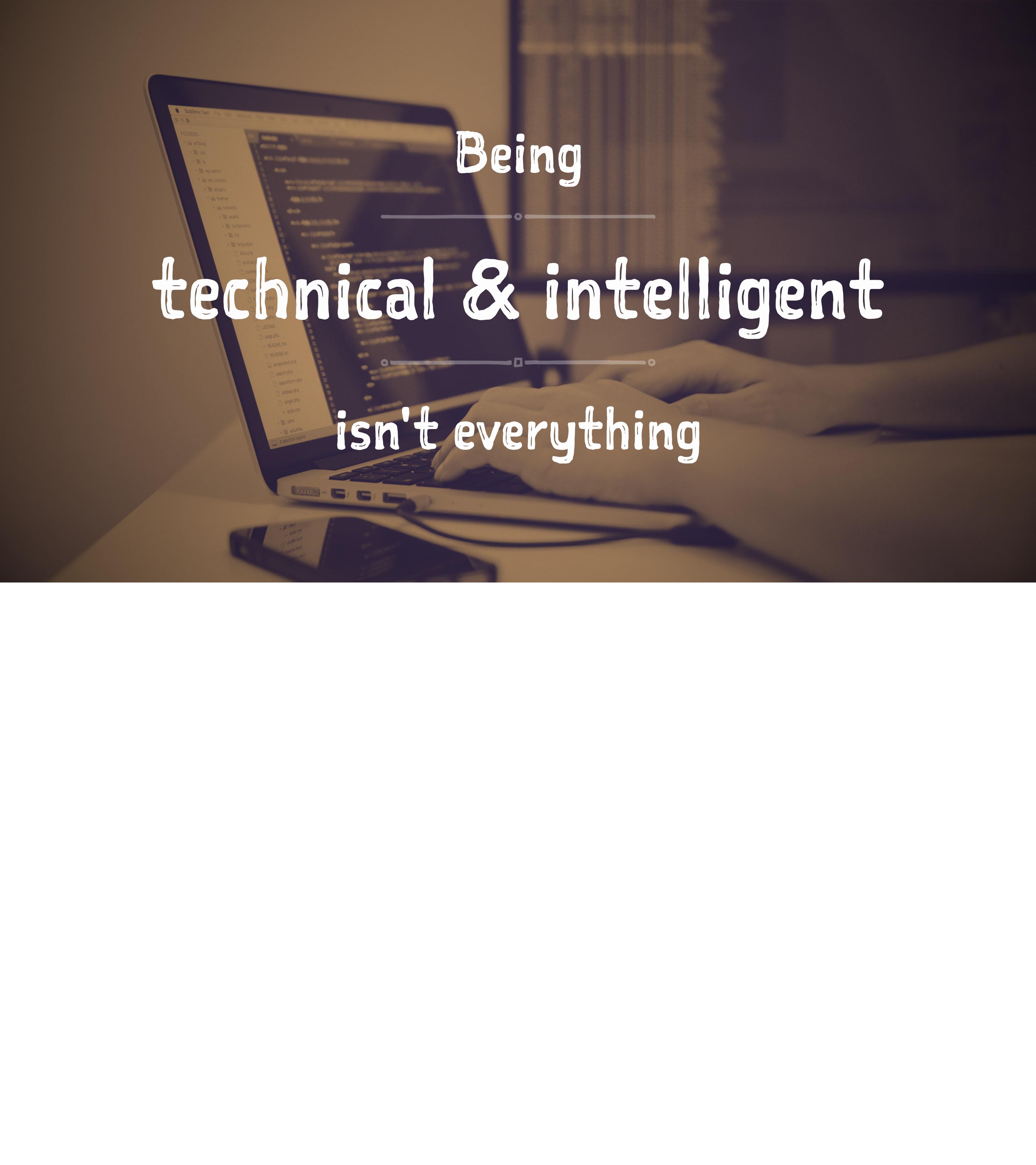
- Programming Python
- Accounting in EXCEL
- Using Photoshop
- Dancing Disco Fox
- Using chopsticks/a fork²

²<https://medium.com/compassionate-coding/if-you-can-use-a-fork-youre-technical-352e21d92c87>

Pretty much any learned skill!

"Not technical" = "Not versed
in MY technical stuff"

But as we just discussed:

A photograph of a person's hands typing on a laptop keyboard. The laptop screen displays a code editor with multiple tabs open, showing lines of code. The background is blurred, focusing on the hands and the screen.

Being
technical & intelligent
isn't everything



Being
compassionate
counts too

As a rule of thumb: Avoid triggering thread responses

- You can handle criticism?

Great! Others might not!

- Try to leave them better!

Let's use this knowledge and ...

Let's build



psychological safe
environments



For ...

- Better Teams
- Efficient Communication

I want to close this talk with a quote from the person who inspired me to do this:

Be the change ❤

The tech industry — and the world — is made up of individual humans, and a lot of those humans are suffering. Each of us has the opportunity to do something about it.

— April Wensel (Compassionate Coding)³

³<https://medium.com/compassionate-coding/confessions-of-a-recovering-jerk-programmer-b9d531a05ea9>



Thank you for listening



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You can find me on Twitter
@wolf4earth, or visit my
website

Links? I'll post on Slack/
Twitter!

Resources

- [Link to the Slides](#)
- [Compassionate Coding on Medium](#)
- [Confessions of a Recovering Jerk Programmer](#)
- [Tech has a Toxic Tone Problem — Let's Fix It!](#)
- [Unlearning toxic behaviors in a code review culture](#)
- [What Google Learned From Its Quest to Build the Perfect Team](#)