work-life
balance at npm

or, why I **hate** the term "work-life balance" & what this **means** at npm

Buzzfeed on Uber's culture

"impossible workloads, around-the-clock emergencies, fear of management, a total erosion of work-life balance, and a pattern of public humiliation at the hands of higher-ups"

this article made me angry
maybe even ANGERY

ceej **anger** boxes checked

— 12 hour days ✔

— 7 day a week ✔

— abuse from management ✔

— constant emergencies ✔

the **research** is clear: this isn't just **inhumane** it's also **stupid**

"Why crunch modes don't work: 6 lessons"

http://www.igda.org/?page=crunchsixlessons

the opening

"There's a bottom-line reason most industries gave up crunch mode over 75 years ago: It's the single most expensive way there is to get the work done."

"More than a century of studies show that long-term useful worker output is maximized near a five-day, 40-hour workweek. Productivity drops immediately upon starting overtime and continues to drop until, at approximately eight 60-hour weeks, the total work done is the same as what would have been done in eight 40-hour weeks."

5-day 40-hour work weeks were chosen for peak **efficiency**

tech is not a magical exception
you are not a magical exception

programmers seem best around 35 hrs/week

you might think you're **helping**
guilt might push you into overwork
but you're **not** doing your best work

deny human biology at your peril

note a lurking fact:
brief bursts can be effective!

it's just that we turn **bursts** into **crunches** into **death marches**

the fact that "death march" exists as a term of art in project management is pretty horrifying

Uber is an extreme example
but this is common behavior in tech

jwz rants: watch a VC use my name to sell a con

jwz **slept under his desk** in 1994 to ship Netscape

managers demanding burnout are attempting to exploit you

I reject the premise burnout results in neither speed nor excellence

you don't run **marathon** distances at Usain Bolt **sprint** speeds

sprinting is sometimes right!
for npm right now, it's **wrong**
npm is a marathon

humans are npm's biggest investment far more than servers & bandwidth

we need each other at our **best**
our most **creative**, our most **skillful**

and that means we need each other
rested, refreshed, recreated

our mission: take npm to the stars on a budget we can't afford Uber-level

you bring to npm your **previous** experiences including this **crunch or else** habit

my **experience** taught me
to bring something else to npm

npm's values unite
kindness and pragmatism

talk of values is all very well; how is this shown in our **behavior?**

let's talk about vacations

why have **fixed** vacation days?

"unlimited vacation" means "untracked vacation" which often means pressure not to take vacation

my usual joke is that your vacation **is a mandatory minimum**

use **all** your vacation

let's talk about sleep

if there's a Bateson's pyramid of human needs, sleep is the base

ceej story time: how 2am decisions made the Danger SAN disaster worse

management needed to appear to be engaged & involved

never make decisions on that little sleep

you can do mechanical, habitual things while sleep-deprived

don't try complex cognitive tasks while sleep-deprived

this lesson affects how we designed npm's operations

npm does not need you to **appear** to do lots of work

npm does need you to **accomplish** good work

let's talk about balance

ceej story time: the General Magic

2am company meeting

the meeting felt **normal**
narrator voice: it was not

deeply imbalanced

why do I hate the phrase "work-life balance"? I reject the premise

our work & our lives affect each other
we're **whole human beings**

our **work** matters to us
we want it to be **fulfilling**
emotionally & intellectually

we **need** to do our work well

we still want to do good work and make awesome things but we want to do this effectively

what balance means is **individual** and will **vary** over your lifetime

a **weekend** spent hacking is sometimes **refreshing** sometimes **exhausting** only you know which

if npm **demands** a weekend from you it will be in a **dire emergency** and the 3Cs will be there too

then I'll run a **retro** to figure out how to **avoid emergencies** like that so it never happens again

selfish goal: help npm win

altruistic goal:
be kind to our colleagues

these two goals **align** when we
balance work & life

the **winning** strategy is
the **kind** strategy

I can't stop you overworking you're all adults

all I can do is explain why it's not effective

if you need to burst, **burst**
please **rest** after you burst

be with your loved ones
pursue your hobbies
take vacations
get plenty of sleep

npm should be a place where you can do the **best work** of your career thus far and take npm **to the stars**

npm ❤️ your work

npm ❤️ your life

npm ❤️ your humanity

npm ❤️ you