IMPROVING AS DEVELOPERS

Belén Albeza

@ladybenko
belenalbeza.com

A BIT ABOUT MYSELF…

- 8 years of experience in the industry, in UK and Spain
    - Game development for mobile and Facebook
    - Front-end, back-end, a bit of devops…
    - R&D and tiger team
    - DevRel at Mozilla
    - Firefox DevTools engineer, at Mozilla
- First joined a developers community at 14 yo.

BEING A “COOL DEV” TODAY

- LOTS of shiny new stuff every day
  - New frameworks, new tools, new API’s, new languages…
- LOTS of meet ups and conferences to go to
- LOTS of pressure to “contribute to the community”
  - Do you have projects on Github?
  - Do you contribute to open source?
  - Do you write technical articles?

WHO IS OVERWHELMED?

VAMO A CALMARNO

IN THIS TALK

- We’ll see which myths & beliefs are holding us back
- How we can improve our performance, and learn effectively during our career
- How we can make our teammates and colleagues better

MYTHS & BELIEFS

PASSION

ARE WE SURE “PASSION” IS WHAT WE ARE LOOKING FOR?

- “Passion” tells nothing about a person’s talent, skills, or performance
- “Passion” is sometimes used as an excuse to get advantage of people
- Remember that we can be passionate and still have a life outside software
- Let’s look for **professionalism!**

> **Professionalism** is about knowing your job, doing it well, and being proud of it […]
>
> **Passion** is no guarantee of talent or even basic competence. Ability, pride, discipline, integrity, dedication, organization, communication, and social skills are much more useful to an employer than passion is.

- Ernest Adams
Passion versus Professionalism (Gamasutra)

OUR HEROES

BAD ROLE MODELS

- Questionable ethics / behaviour
- Being a genius doesn’t excuse bad actions
- It’s naïve to assume their beliefs / actions don’t affect their code or the communities they lead

WHO CAN BE A GOOD ROLE MODEL FOR US?

- A person we can relate to (similar background, circumstances, characteristics…)
- Someone whose core values we respect
- Ideally: someone we can hang out with (i.e. people you have access to)

MERITOCRACY
& OPEN SOURCE

> “Hackers should be judged by their hacking, not bogus criteria such as degrees, age, race, or position.”

- S. Levy
Hackers: Heroes of the Computer Revolution

EMOSIDO
ENGAÑADO

THE MYTH OF MERITOCRACY

- It does not exist neither in our society, nor in tech
- Read Toby Morris' *On a Plate* comic http://thewireless.co.nz/articles/the-pencilsword-on-a-plate

Less whinging, more hard work I say. I'm sick of people asking for handouts. No one ever handed me anything on plate.
I REALLY HOPE NOT.
FURTHER READING: LOOK UP AUCKLAND CITY MISSION'S 'SPEAKING FOR OURSELVES' BOOKLET
@XTOTL 2015

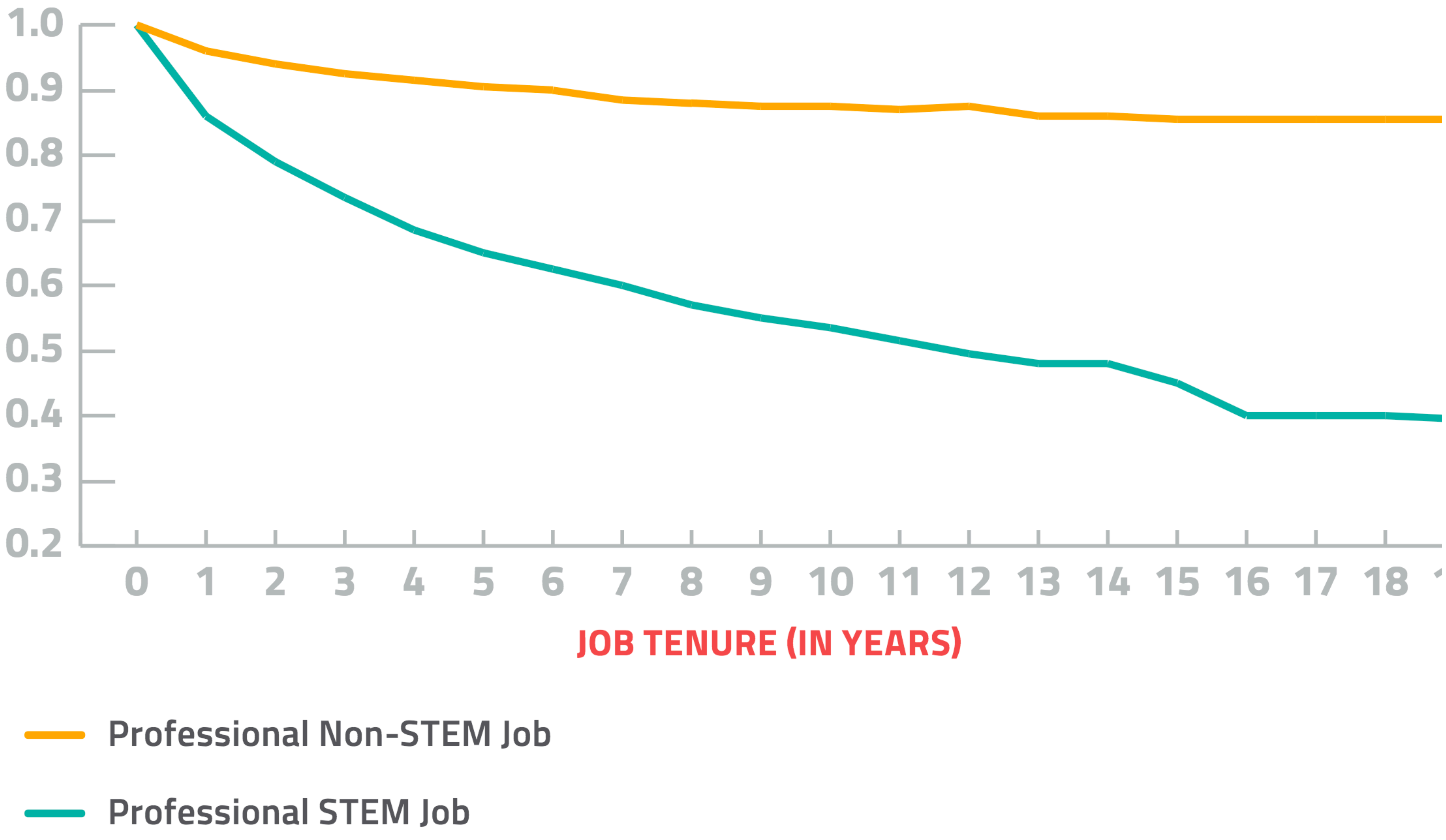
THE PROBLEM WITH OPEN-SOURCE

- On paper it's great…
- …on practice, a lot of people get excluded
    - Lack of time and energy due to family care or housework
    - Lack of resources / space at home
    - A lot of people just can't afford to work for free
- Read Ashe Dryden's "The Ethics of Unpaid Labor and the OSS Community"

WHY TALK ABOUT THIS?

WE ARE LOSING A LOT OF PEOPLE AND WE NEED THEM

FIG. 1.6 // Percentage of Women Retained in Career Field Over Time



Source: Women in tech: the facts (2016 update)

IMPROVING OURSELVES

IF WE BURN OUT, WE’LL STOP DEVELOPING

NIGHT IN THE WOODS
Follow

November (2017 film)
@bombsfall

I literally almost died in the last months of making NITW from overwork and I will be dealing with the fallout of that for a long time.

5:37 PM - 23 Aug 2017

https://twitter.com/bombsfall/status/900381593453330432

INCREASING OUR PERFORMANCE

- **Sleep** affects our learning, our performance, our decision-making, our stress levels, our *health*, etc[1].
- **Exercise** is crucial for health, energy and stress management
- **Meditation** to handle stress and improve focus (apps: Headspace, Calm)
- Try to be happy and fulfilled outside of work
  - Other activities can make us better devs (creative hobbies, sports, etc.)

[1] Watch "What happens to your body and brain if you don't get sleep"

LEARNING

LEARNING: WITHIN THE COMPANY

- Both the company and the employee benefit from training.
- It’s easier to get your company to provide you training for things that are related to your current job.
    - i.e. React training if you are a front-end dev, or attending Google I/O if you develop for Android.
- **There’s a lot to learn in a 40h work week.** Learn from your colleagues. Read their code. Try new things. Do your best.

LEARNING: ON YOUR FREE TIME

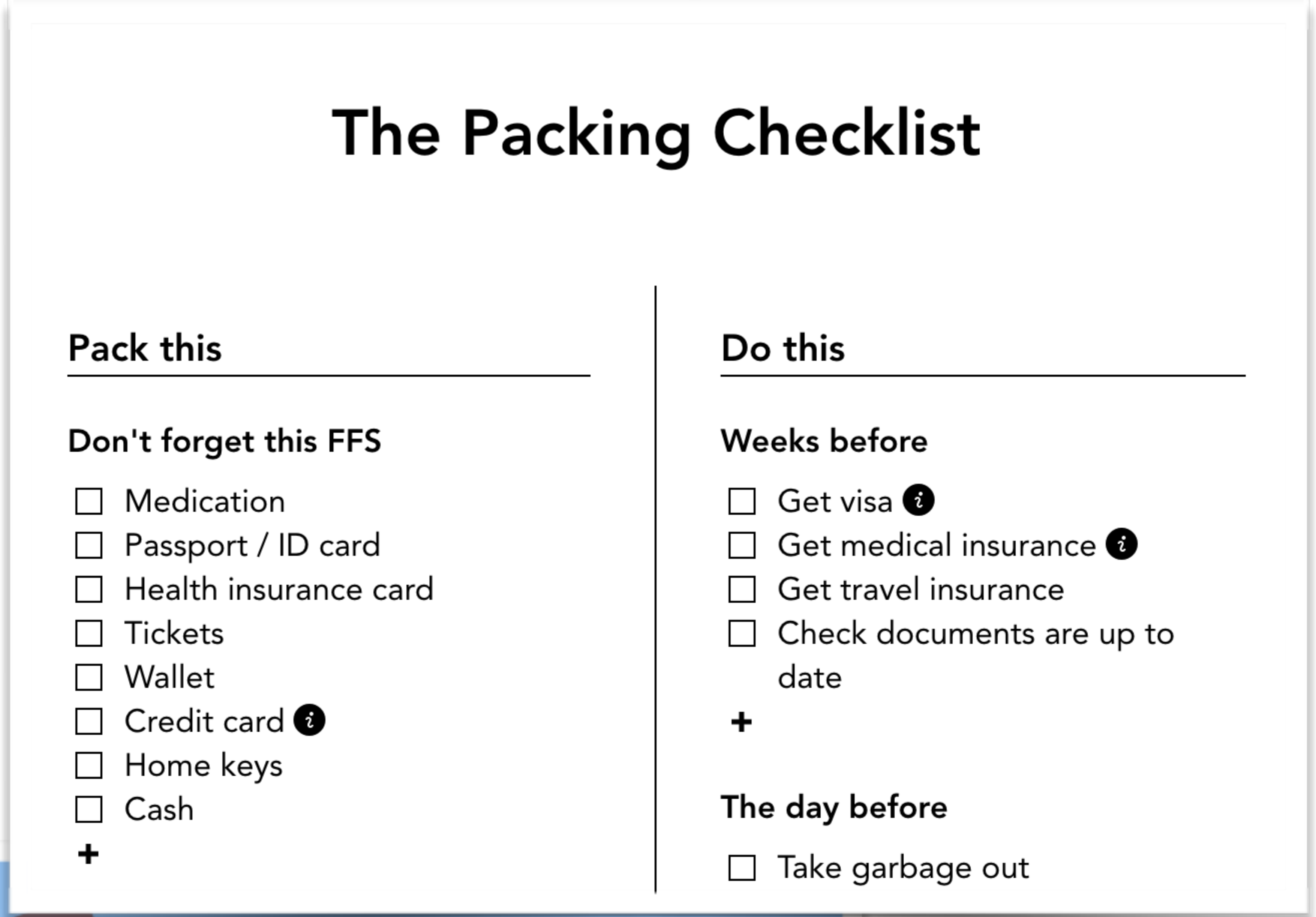
- Can you squeeze some time from your day? (read on your commute, don’t watch TV…)
- There are times when you just won’t have the time… and that’s OK.
- Sacrificing things that are important to you **is not sustainable** in the long term… so reserve this for special moments:
  - Landing your first job
  - Switching sectors
  - Learn a critical skill for a promotion you want

WHAT IF I DON'T HAVE FREE TIME?

- Then you have to maximise the learning you do at your job.
  - Working at the right place and doing the right job is *crucial*.
  - Inquire about learning opportunities when you interview for a job.
  - You might need to quit your job and look for a new one so you can keep learning.

SIDE PROJECTS & MOTIVATION

- Side projects are wonderful for learning new tech.
- …but they are much more useful, career-wise, if we **ship** them.
- Ways to keep your motivation high enough to finish it:
  - Mini-projects (ex: hackathons or game jams)
  - Break a long project in small milestones… than can be shipped on their own
  - Dog fooding



The Packing Checklist

Pack this

Don't forget this FFS

- □ Medication
- □ Passport / ID card
- □ Health insurance card
- □ Tickets
- □ Wallet
- □ Credit card ⓘ
- □ Home keys
- □ Cash
- +

Do this

Weeks before

- □ Get visa ⓘ
- □ Get medical insurance ⓘ
- □ Get travel insurance
- □ Check documents are up to date
- +

The day before

- □ Take garbage out

LEARN EFFECTIVELY

- Maximise your learning hours. Have a learning plan and don’t go blindly.
  - Enrol in a class / workshop.
  - **Ask an expert** for resource recommendations, which topics to learn and in which order.
  - You can repeat the plan for similar tech (i.e. create the same video game when learning different game engines).
- If you can afford it, don’t be afraid of spending money on this.
- Teach what you learn to consolidate it.

WHAT TO LEARN?

TRANSVERSAL SKILLS

- **English!**
- Abstract thinking & creativity
- Time management
- Focus
- Public speaking
- Reading & writing

“EVERGREEN” TECH & TOOLS

- Version control
- Text editor (vim key bindings 💜)
- UNIX tools: the terminal, pipes, cat, grep, sed…
- Scripts and automation
- Debugging tools

“ETERNAL” CONCEPTS

- Regular expressions, parsers
- Programming paradigms: functional programming, OOP, pattern matching, polymorphism, etc.
- How memory works
- Concepts / methodologies: SOLID, design patterns, architectures, data structures, algorithms, etc.
- Concurrency
- Databases

“SOFT SKILLS” ARE HARD!

- So called “soft skills” are usually dismissed because we are bad at them or we don’t like them
- They are **crucial for your career**
- Learn to communicate, to speak, to give feedback, to lead, to handle conflicts, to be a team player, to be empathic…
- … and you can keep them from job to job :)

IMPROVING OTHERS

MAKE YOUR TEAMMATES BETTER

- Your contribution to the team is not just your code… it's also how *you* affect other's code as well.
- If you are a senior developer, **this is your job too**.
- Provide constructive feedback (be extra nice, some people have trouble separating their ego from their code).
- Answer questions and be nice – don't make your team fear or hate you.
- Learn from each other: pair programming, code reviews, discuss together how to approach a problem, etc.

PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

- Read “High-performing teams need psychological safety” article
- Study at Google on team performance saw that **psychological safety** was the common factor of their highest performing teams.
- In psychological safe teams, people are able to share ideas and execute them without fear of negative consequences, and they feel respected and accepted.
- Don’t be the one who makes your team unsafe

YOU ARE NOT YOUR CODE

- And others are not their code.
- Don’t diminish yourself (or others) because of a mistake. What is important is learning from it.
- Code is ideas, and we should be able to discuss ideas without personal attacks.

THANKS!

@ladybenko
belenalbeza.com