

# NVC and OSS

Isaac Z. Schlueter

Hi, I'm Isaac, I'm here to talk about Nonviolent communication and open source

# obligatory intro

- 
- Before that, worked a bunch of places, did a bunch of open source
- Came to realize that the people are the hard part

5:30 (41:30)

Since a lot of you probably don't know who I am or what I'm doing here, I figured a brief intro would be helpful

Those of you that do know me probably know me from npm or Node.js

I've been working in the software biz since 2002, and while it was technology that got me interested initially, I've come to realize that all the hard and interesting problems of technology are really about social dynamics

# content warning

- Pictures of some angry dogs
- Sharing some communication techniques, some of which have been misused
- Not going to cover every possible failure mode

*POST-CONF-EDIT: There's a picture of recently deceased Marshall Rosenberg as well. I am very sorry that I neglected to mention that fact in this warning.*

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A content warning for this talk, there are some pictures of Jackals getting a little toothy, if you have problems with dogs, that could be an issue. Nothing terribly gory, but of course, it's totally cool if you need to look away or leave.

I'm also going to be talking about handling feelings and sharing some communication tools that I've found useful. But, since any language can be misused harmfully, the term "NVC" can be triggering if you've been subjected to certain kinds of manipulation or emotional abuse. This talk isn't about abuse perse though.

I don't really have time to delve into every kind of failure mode, but there's always a fine line with any communication thought technology, between sharing something useful, vs avoiding accidentally doing harm. I'm going to try to walk that line, and I am a bit scared about stepping over it, but I think it's maybe worth the risk

# software is social

- Collaborators
- Users
- Future/Past Self
- "Programs must be written for humans and only incidentally for machines to execute"  
– Harold Abelson

Software is fundamentally a social activity. It's really always been that way, but this myth persists for some reason that you can be "only about the code", and not be into people, and somehow make software that way.

I'm not really going to belabor this point much. It's been discussed elsewhere a lot

# Conway's Law

- "organizations which design systems . . . are constrained to produce designs which are copies of the communication structures of these organizations"  
— Melvin Conway

This point was captured nicely by Melvin Conway, who said that when a group of people design a system, then the interfaces of that system will tend to mirror the communication structures of the organization.

Any time we're doing software development, we're engaging in a sort of social cooperative thinking activity

A corollary of this principle is that if we can improve our communication structures, we can create systems that are more thoughtfully designed.

And speaking of cooperative thinking among primates,

# Dunbar's Number

- correlation: primate brain size and social group size
- Applied to human brain: 148

Neocortex size as a constraint on group size in primates,  
<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/004724849290081J>

in 1992, a Primatologist named Robin Dunbar noted that there was a correlation between primate brain size and the size of their social groups

Extrapolated out to humans, this correlation predicted a maximum effective group of about 150 people.

This 150 number shows up a lot throughout human history: farming village sizes, tribe sizes, military company sizes, and so on.

But we're not exactly like other primates...

# language

- language extends Dunbar limit
- BUT: lower bandwidth  
(imagination fills in gaps)
- 1:many asymmetry
- Still cognitively limited!

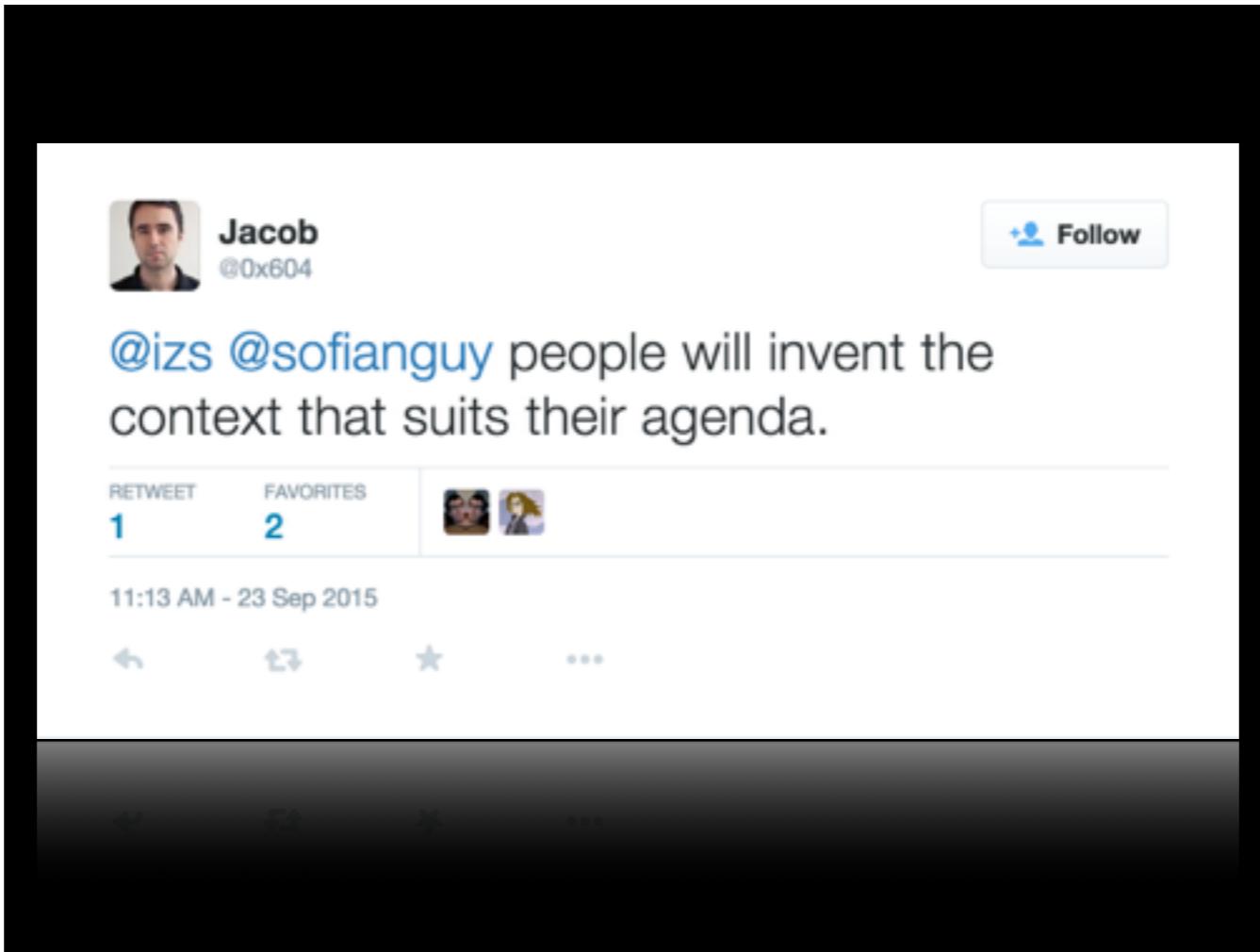
The biggest piece of technology that set us apart from other primates was the development of language a few hundred thousand years ago.

Language complicates the socialization behavior considerably.

Instead of a face to face interaction, we can use words to communicate in a way that isn't always symmetrical or synchronous, but at the cost of a much lower bandwidth connection.

We spent a few hundred thousand years evolving with language, and many millions evolving the machinery to handle all that other stuff.

So when we're faced with this low-bandwidth communication, >>>



People will invent whatever context can fill in those gaps, based on what's going on for them, which might be very different than what the other person is intending.

For example, this tweet from Jacob Groundwater that seems totally appropriate here was actually about a photograph, and has nothing to do with NVC or any of this stuff. And that's just so meta it tickles me.

# OSS

- Usually start with one author-user, grow to many authors &/or many users
- Hit Dunbar cognitive limits, and don't notice
- Rely almost exclusively on generalizations

When your project is small, and there are much less than 150 people on the mailing list, it's easy for everyone to know everyone, so we mostly tend to behave.

However, as the project grows, this falls apart.

We are not cognitively capable of maintaining mental models for more than 150 or so people, probably a lot less while we're *\*also\** thinking through complex software problems, and the nature of cognitive limits is that we don't notice we're hitting them because the first thing to go is usually the self-awareness required to notice stuff like that.

# OSS Stereotypes

- Neckbeard
- n00b
- Sloppy Hack
- Architecture Astronaut
- "Good Guy"

(-> 36:00)

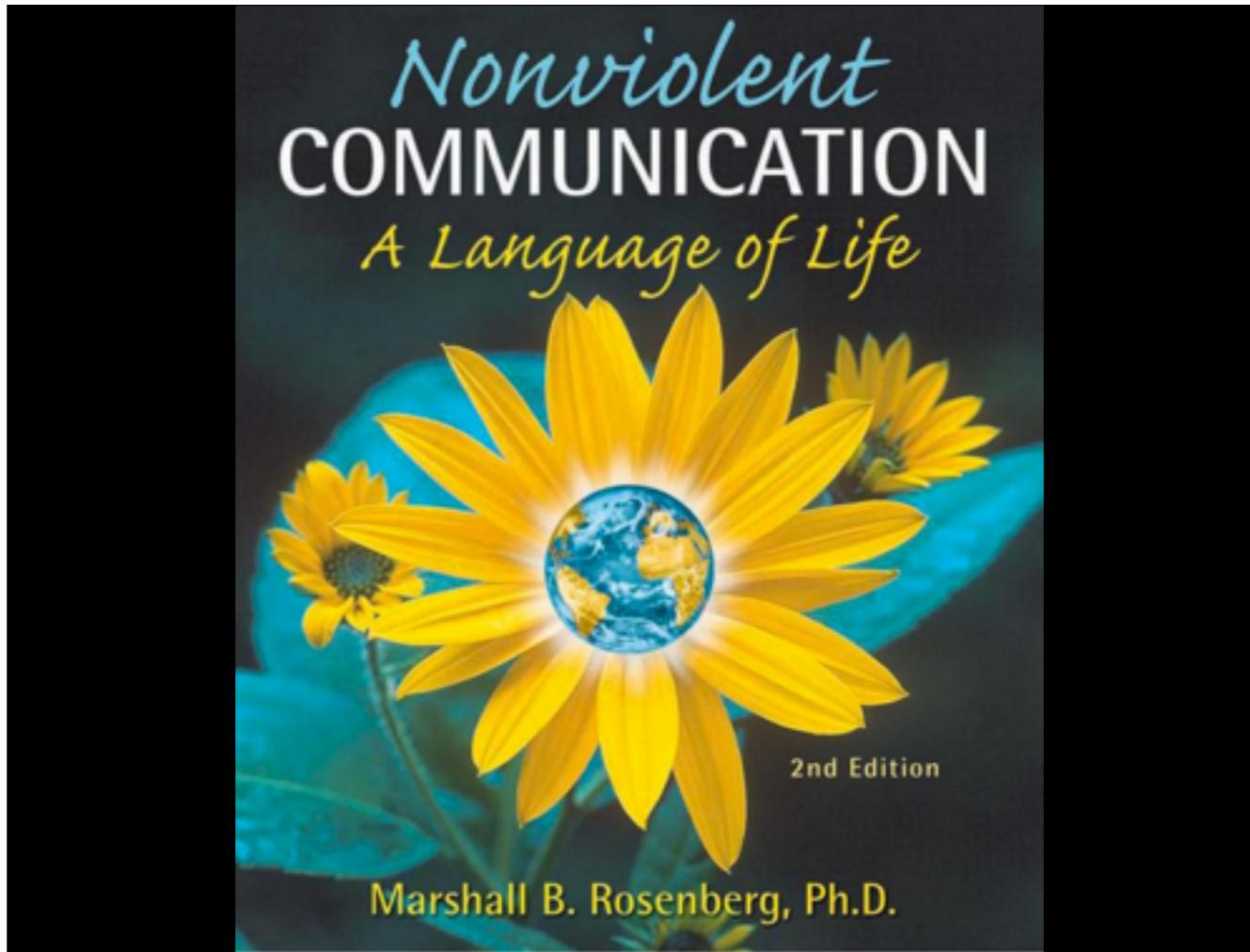
Here are some judgmental open source stereotype personas that we tend to put people in

You probably know all these people. Maybe you've been them. But, while I'm being an architecture astronaut, I don't see it that way. From MY point of view, I'm just being careful.

One of the worst of these is actually the \*positive\* judgement of "Good Guy". It makes it harder to identify abusive violent behavior when we are hanging onto this judgement of the perpetrator.

If we want to create software that's better, communities that are less harmful, then we need to steer away from harmful interactions, and reduce the harm that gets caused in a conflict.

To do that, we need to let our communication get at the underlying truth, past the generalizations and shorthands. And, it has to work even in spite of the fact that we lose our empathy when we need it most.



7:00 (36:00)

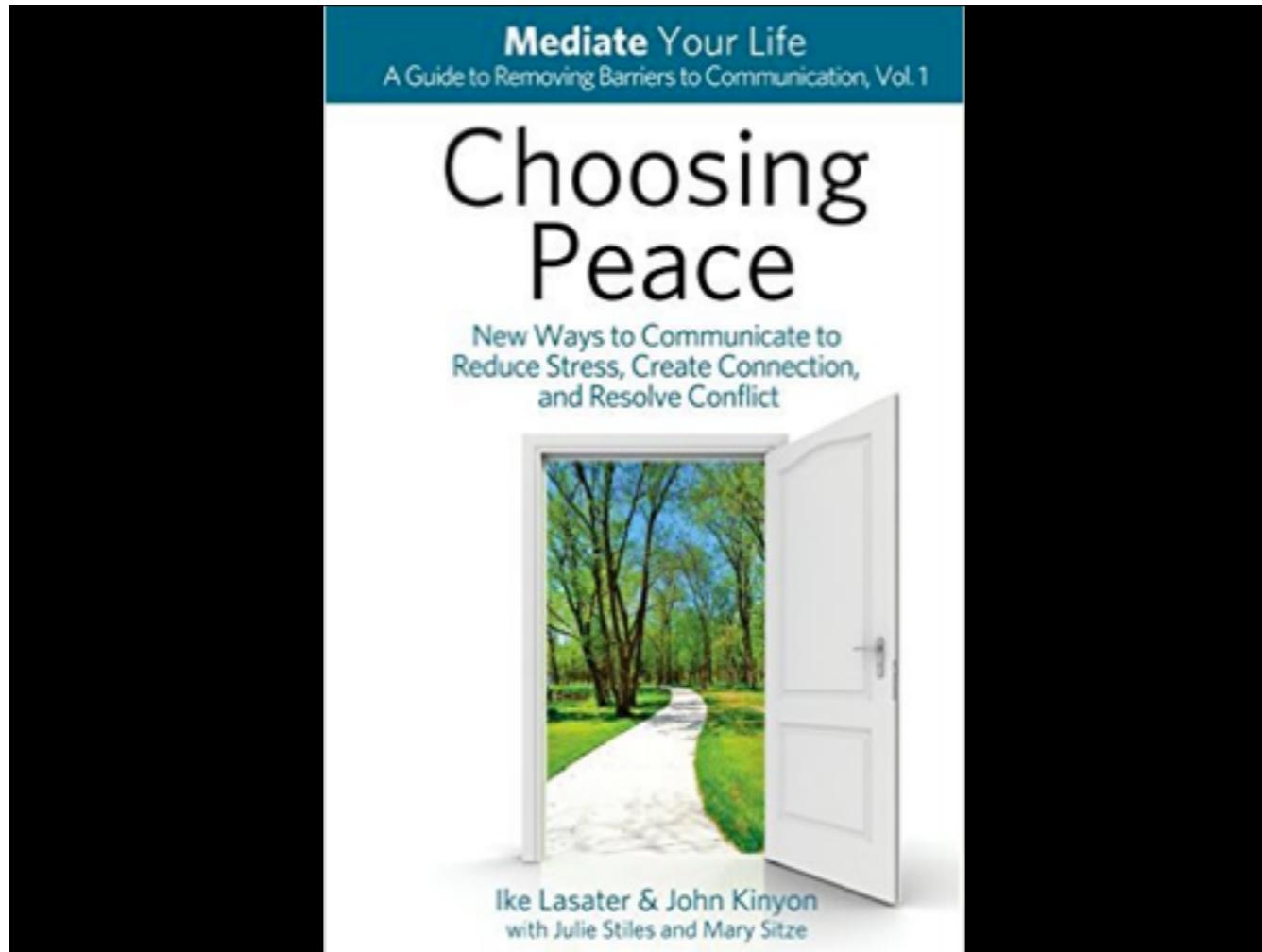
How many of you have heard of NVC before?

How many of you would say that you actively practice it on a regular basis? Or at least try to?

I want to get a little bit into NVC's nuts and bolts, and talk about really why it's useful in handling these challenges.

In my own experience, the value of NVC is that it can help us move past viewing others as stereotypes, and also give us tools to not take their behavior so personally when our own needs aren't being met.

So this book is the foundational text of NVC, by Marshall Rosenberg. I do recommend reading it, but if it doesn't agree with you, there are a lot of others as well.



Another book that I've found really helpful that digs into the NVC framework is called *Choosing Peace* by Ike Lasater and John Kinyon.

There is a ton of stuff written on this subject, and different approaches appeal to different people

What I'd like you to take away from this suggestion is just that there's more to learn than a 40 minute talk can cover, and hopefully I can urge you to pursue it further on your own, and find ways to apply it that work for you.

# Nonviolent Communication is a framework

NVC is a framework. It was originally developed by Marshall Rosenberg, and has a pretty large community of people who use it in the context of mental health therapy, conflict mediation, business, negotiation, and so on.

It's like a web framework or set of design patterns for how to use language in a way that doesn't get in the way of empathy.

# language

In his work as a therapist and conflict mediator, Rosenberg identified some subtleties in how we use language that affect our thinking, and our ability to connect empathically with another person. Certain language patterns tend to push us apart, and others tend to bring us closer to a positive connection.

humans are intrinsically driven to connect. We want to be heard and understood, and we want to understand the people around us. We NEED connection, more than almost anything else. But more often than not, our language and our thinking gets in the way, and doesn't serve this goal.

# 3 parts of language

- Talking
- Listening
- Thinking

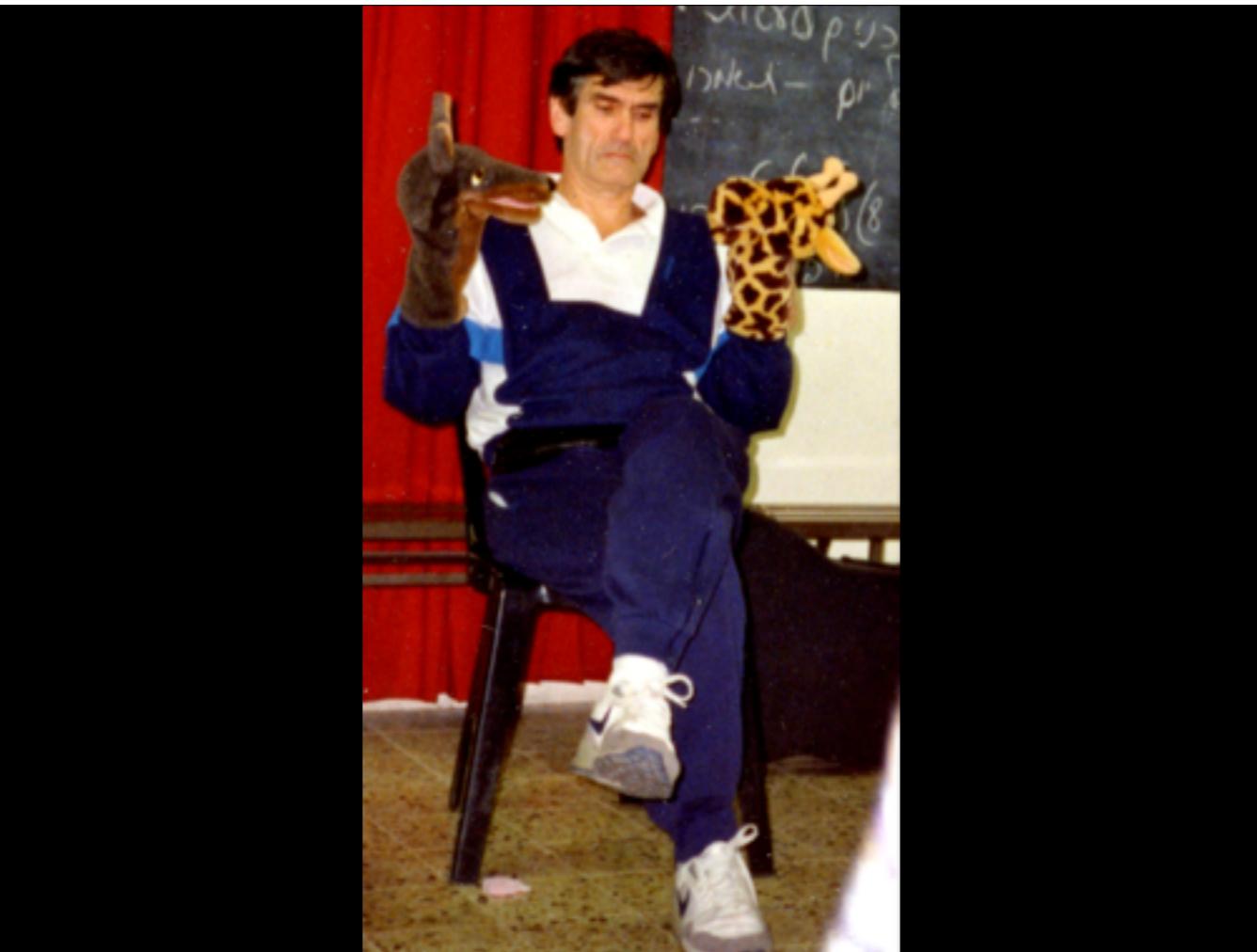
When I say "use language", I want make it very clear that I'm referring to all three parts: talking, listening, and also thinking—the conversation we have with ourselves internally.

There are no magic words that you can use in your talking to make someone always do what you say, and certainly you should never try to push somebody to open up more than they're willing to.

This isn't a technique for becoming some kind of magic Svengali. That is just another form of violence. We have to also change how we receive and process information from other people, because connection isn't one-way, and it can't be forced

There's no real "objective" except allowing greater understanding and connection. And I say "allow" very deliberately, because you can't MAKE it happen, all you can really do is get out of the way and be open to it.

The "nonviolent" part of "nonviolent communication" just means that it is a set of tools to avoid the ways that language can be used to harm one another, intentionally or unintentionally. When we opt out of that harmful intent, we can start to respond rather than react.



A metaphor that Rosenberg used to talk about this is the Jackal and the Giraffe, and I want to talk about that a little bit, because it's a useful way to categorize things in your mind.

That's him with his puppets. Look him up on YouTube, it's really great stuff. He's adorable.



The giraffe is tall, keeps a long view of everything. They see predators coming from a long distance, so they can move at a relaxed pace. They have the largest heart of any land mammal, and they symbolize communicating with empathy and grace.



By contrast, the jackal has big ears, and lives in a violent world filled with competition. It keeps low to the ground, always on the lookout for threats and hunting opportunities.

Brief content warning, the next picture is a bit scary, if you're afraid of dogs, you might want to look away.



They have to be violent to defend what's theirs. Anything that isn't definitely a friend is an enemy. This is two jackals fighting over the carcass of an ELEPHANT. Like, they can never eat that much, but still, they're always in a mode of scarcity, even when they have enough to go around.



the jackal has all the same needs for companionship that the giraffe has. The jackal's not a villain. But they symbolize a mindset that's focused on violence and scarcity



One thing that's interesting about giraffes is that they feed on the acacia tree, which is covered in thorns



(-> 29:00)

and what they do, is they strip the whole branch with their tongues, and then while they're chewing the leaves, they hold the thorns safely in their cheek. and over time, the thorns get softened until the giraffe can safely chew and swallow them.

So, where the jackal reacts to a threat with violence, the giraffe takes the spiky bits and turns them into something useful.

# OFNR

- Observations (vs Evaluations)
- Feelings (vs Thoughts)
- Needs (vs Strategies)
- Requests (vs Demands)

8:00 (29:00)

The "giraffe" style language is made of these 4 contrasting elements:

Observations vs Evaluations or Judgements

Feelings vs Thoughts

Needs vs Strategies

Requests vs Demands

This is sometimes referred to as OFNR, for Observations Feelings Needs Requests, and I'll talk about that in more depth

# OFNR - Warning

- Nerds LOVE to replace social conventions with Weird Rules
- NVC is not a set of Rules for tone-policing others
- A framework for awareness and pragmatic empathy

We nerds love replacing social conventions with Weird Rules, to paraphrase the wise and funny Judge John Hodgman

NVC is not a set of rules that you should use to go around tone-policing everyone.

It's a framework for making better sense of what we hear from other people, for making our own speech less harmful and divisive, and for helping to direct our internal self-talk in a way that keeps the fire alive within us and keeps us from burning out.

# Observation

- Just sense perception:  
what can be seen/heard/etc
- Can be captured on a video
- No inference about  
motivation, value, good/bad

Observations are objective things that are going on in the world, that you can perceive with your senses. Stuff that would be captured on a video, that don't require any inference or evaluation

# Observations vs Evaluations

- Evaluations are inferences and value judgements
- Observation:  
You are wearing a red shirt
- Evaluation:  
You are wearing fancy clothes to attract attention

Evaluations are statements that are phrased like observations, but include some additional inference or judgement, and whether it's true or not, it's something additional on top of the observation

Now, there's not really anything wrong with evaluations. But they're a higher level of abstraction.

Just to take this example here, if something about someone's clothes bothered you in some way, if you were complaining about their choice in clothes, then it would be harder for them to hear "you're trying to attract attention", because that's an inference about their motives. Even "fancy" here is an evaluation. But anyone with color-sensitive vision can look at the shirt and see that it's red. there's nothing to argue about, it doesn't become more fuel for derailing the conversation

# Feelings

- Feelings are emotional states
- Not "loosely-held judgements"
- Not "tentative conjectures"
- Sad, mad, frustrated, happy, excited, scared, distracted

Feelings are a lot like observations, but they're observations of what's going on with our physical and emotional state in our bodies. They're not loosely-held judgements or tentative conjectures.

# Feelings vs Thoughts

- "I feel like..."
- "I feel that..."
- "I feel insulted"
- "Hey, that's just how I feel"

A feeling isn't something that someone can criticize or take away from you. If I say "I feel hungry", a reasonable person is probably not going to say "No you don't". We learn this as little children, and then subconsciously, "I feel" becomes a protection against criticism.

So, when we want to express a thought, or a judgement, we often put "I feel" in front of it, so that the other person won't attack us. It's a jackal move, because in the attempt to become less vulnerable, we make connection more difficult.

Another sort of faux-feeling is when we sneak in a statement about what someone did to MAKE us feel that way. But "insulted" isn't actually a feeling, especially since there are a lot of ways that you might respond to someone insulting you. You might feel angry, or ashamed, or incredulous, for example.

# Needs

- Fundamental human needs
- Security, order, food, shelter, teamwork, love, attention, space, etc.
- Not specific attempts to meet those needs.

Needs are the things that all people everywhere need. Things like...

Importantly, they're not specific attempts to meet those needs, and one of the hardest challenges in NVC, for me at least, is to separate that out

# Needs vs Strategies

- Strategy is an attempt to meet a Need
- "I 'need' this job" vs "I need financial security, which this job provides"

A lot of times when we talk about needs, we stop at the strategy and never really identify what's motivating it.

For example, you might think you need your job. But maybe what you need is financial security, and food, and shelter. If you had another job, or if some rich old relative dies and leaves you millions of dollars, you might not need that job any more.

Also, you might need the job for completely different reasons! Maybe you really want to learn something, or you get some artistic satisfaction from the job, or you love being a part of the team you work with, or something completely apart from financial security.

Understanding needs is a powerful way to have a deep understanding of what we're trying to do and why

# Requests

- "Would you be willing to..."
- Specific positive action
- Not: change in attitude, thoughts, feelings, etc.
- Saying "no" is ok

The last step in the OFNR pattern is to make a request. A request, in NVC lingo, is asking for someone to perform some specific positive action. Something with a verb that they do.

If a person says "no" to a request, that is ok. It tells you something about their needs. The goal is to figure out what they're willing to do, what would get you closer to a mutually beneficial situation where EVERYONE's needs are met

# Request vs Demand

- Demand is not optional
- If you say "no" to a demand, there's negative consequence
- Demands teach you nothing. They don't ask, they tell.

(-> 21:00)

the key difference between a request and a demand is that a demand is not optional. If the person says no, there are some negative consequences. As a result, making a demand doesn't teach you anything about their needs. It pushes out rather than drawing in.

Now, there are valid situations where you need to make demands. Sometimes you have to give someone orders, or set a boundary, and there are situations where doing that physically or violently, even.

If your kid is about to run into traffic, then that's not the time to have a conversation about their need to be free and make a request that they stop running. No, you grab them by whatever you can get ahold of, and demand that they stay the hell away from cars, for their own protection.

The CoC at this conference is also a demand. If you don't follow it, you'll be kicked out.

But its important to understand the difference. Requests draw out more information, and lead to connection; demands push out, and cut off the connection.

# software

8:00 (21:00)

So, with that framework in mind, let's talk about software.

it's a very social activity, like I said

# oss is even MORE social

In open source, our users are not limited to our team, or the team next door at the same company. The code is out there, and other people can send us new ideas, and new bug reports, and they can come to rely on our free software so much that they feel a lot of anxiety when it doesn't meet their expectations, and they bring that anxiety and frustration to us

# Tech Support 101

- frustrated users
- XY problem
- drowning in support
- Not what you signed up for!  
Leads to being overly curt  
(ie, "rude")

There are a lot of ways that open source can fail. My favorite is when a user makes a request that just makes absolutely no sense whatsoever.

:::OPTIONAL:::

I wonder if people working in other fields have this. Like, if you make socks, do you ever have someone call up the support line, like, "How do I make the socks stretchier?" And you say, "Um... well... our sport sock line is lycra or whatever, so it's a bit more stretchy..." "No, I tried that. It's way too small. Do you have that in bigger sizes?" And you go back and forth and try to figure something out, all the while wondering why he needs such a stretchy sock, only to find out that he's trying to stretch the sock around a table to use it as a table cloth.

Eventually, he's like, "Whatever, nevermind, I'll just cut a bunch of socks up and sew them together. Thanks a lot, you've been no help at all. <click>"

That's what we actually deal with in open source! This is the "XY problem". You want to do X, and you've thought up solution Y, and now you're asking for Y, without mentioning X.

Then maintainers come to expect that, and they respond to reasonable requests with jerkwad responses like, "Oh, you should be using Erlang or Ember or whatever"

# OSS Team Management

- People working on your project don't work for you
- Motivations vary wildly
- Without understanding needs, easy to inadvertently harm

And if you have a bunch of people working on a project, it's even more complicated. They might be working for a competitor of yours, or they might be in college and only able to spend an hour here or there, and not really be interested in the problems that aren't fun for them

Understanding the motivations of your team is a huge part of leadership at all levels, of course, but it's a lot trickier in OSS. You can really easily ruin a relationship by failing to give someone the right amount of credit, or falling through on what seem like inconsequential responsibilities.

Some of you who were involved with Node a few years ago may remember pronoun-gate. What you might not realize is that I'd totally dropped the ball as a leader long before that ever happened. No one came out of that bathed in glory, but because I didn't understand the needs of my team, it blew up into a catastrophe that chased people away from our community.

If you don't understand the needs of the people around you, it's very unlikely to go well.

# OSS maintenance is Jackal husbandry

Open source happens in a crowd of Jackals. People operating WAY past their Dunbar limit, falling back on stereotypes constantly.

And you see people at their worst, because you see them when they're frustrated about computers, which are like the most frustrating things that humans have ever invented.

And that's leaving aside the attention of dedicated trolls. Remember when I said before about valid uses of demands? Banning people who don't respect boundaries is one of those.

Managing a popular open source project is a form of emotional labor. If you really care about it, and it's successful, then you can find yourself in a position where you're just overwhelmed.

# examples



imperoster syndrome  
@izs

Lazyweb: Share with me your favorite examples of OSS maintainers being jerks, and being nice.  
(Bonus if I was the one being a jerk.)

RETWEETS 2 FAVORITES 3

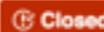
6:30 PM - 29 Aug 2015

So, I asked on Twitter for some examples of people being nice or being jerks in open source. What I found really was interesting. In the "good" examples, mostly what people seemed to connect with wasn't effective or compassionate communication, there was a lot of underdog-defending and drawing firm boundaries against trolling.

And that's useful, but what I found is that it's really hard to find examples of good NVC in practice! When communication really works, it doesn't look like anything special, it just looks like everything going smoothly. I think the "nice vs jerk" request of mine really sort of primed people to think of conflict, which makes it hard to find good examples of people connecting.

Anyway, here's a classic OSS jerkwad:

## Require & case sensitivity #2621

 Closed

scriby opened this issue on Jan 26, 2012 · 1 comment



scriby commented on Jan 26, 2012

I ran into a weird case when someone included a module I wrote twice. Once using all lower case, and once using camel case. This was on a mac, so the require worked in both cases, but the module ended up actually getting required twice -- and it caused some things to break.

I understand that this issue is a little sticky, as it matters whether you're on a case sensitive or insensitive file system as to what the behavior should be. But, node could take the stance that require is case-insensitive regardless.

Thanks,

Chris



Isaacs commented on Jan 26, 2012

Owner



We're not going to make changes to the module system unless it is a matter of life and death.

I'd recommend bring this up on the nodejs-dev mailing list. If a lot of people agree it's important to be case-insensitive, then I could probably be convinced, but it'd be best to keep that area of the code as stable as possible.



Isaacs closed this on Jan 26, 2012

I don't know if you can read this, but this is a great example of what not to do. This person scriby has a question, and kind of explains his position pretty clearly, I think.

And the maintainer is just like, "NO!".

The problem here isn't the answer I gave. It's the way that I gave it, it's all the things that weren't said. There was no appreciation of the needs the user was trying to get met, or the work that they'd already done.

# needs

- "Nice" is never enough
- People believe you care about their needs when you do the work to figure them out
- Turn inwards as well

(-> 13:00)

It's tempting to say "be nice", but that's not enough. I'm sure you've probably all had this experience in the past, when you were being super polite, and someone reacts like you just flicked them the booger.

A frustrated Jackal probably doesn't just want you to be nice to them, they want you to understand their needs so that their problem can get fixed. Unless their problem is politeness, being polite isn't going to fix it.

People believe that you care about their needs when you do the work to figure out what those needs are. This is the "hack" of NVC.

NVC mindset can turn hostility into puzzles to be solved. We are so eager for connection that we tend to internalize the judgements of other people, and then get hurt by that.

it's not about you personally. turn the giraffe inward to take care of your own heart and stay in touch with the needs YOU have, and make sure that you can maintain motivation to stay with it

When we are in a balanced place, when \*our\* needs are met, it's a lot easier to approach things in a way that doesn't add to the harm, either to ourselves or others.

# Process

- Don't try to jump to the end
- Iterate, then iterate again
- Practice towards perfection
- Take your time

10:00 (13:00)

So, process, putting this all together.

The practice of NVC is about iterating towards empathy and understanding, in specific conversations, and overall. Over time, by continually practicing it, we can increase empathy just like any other skill. If you try to set your goal as jumping to the end, and being amazing at this skill right away, and just right away nailing someone's needs and feelings on the first guess, it'll be difficult and frustrating when it doesn't work out like that.

The good news is that even though it's pretty much impossible to do this perfectly right away, people will tend to respond positively to even small improvements, so there's constant reinforcement and lots of small victories that feel really good.

# Jackal is not the enemy

- non-OFNR talk provides clues
- Jackal loves telling you if you're wrong! Use that!
- Guess about needs and iterate towards understanding

But the jackal is not the enemy, remember.

Evaluations, thoughts, strategies, and demands are valid parts of the human communication dance. But each of them hides an underlying need, and the goal is to get at those needs, and communicate them effectively.

If someone spits thorns at you, then the giraffe-style response is to make what you can with that, and try to get at the underlying need.

# Practice

- Iterate towards less-badness
- Giraffe Ears: Hear clearly
- Giraffe Voice: Avoid violence
- Giraffe Heart: Self-care

The practice of NVC is getting in touch with our needs and the needs of the person we're talking to. It's not a club that you hit the other person with. That's not effective.

The goal is understanding and connection with ourselves and others, so we need to really keep that as the motivating principle, and continually evaluate if we're getting closer to that goal.

This isn't about getting anyone to stop being a jackal. This is about how to move past the jackal-mind yourself, so that you can connect with the needs, and figure out what's really going on, while taking care of yourself.



It can help a LOT to pair up with someone else.

If you decide to start trying to implement this in your own life and OSS projects, I highly recommend trying to find someone else that you can lean on for support in this process. Doesn't have to be an old man in a kimono distributing swords by firelight in a random cave, and probably a sword wouldn't help you be less violent anyway, so maybe this isn't a great analogy.

But the point is that this stuff is work. Moving from a jackal mindset to giraffe isn't just a switch you can flip. It's real gritty challenging work. Banning trolls is one thing, but dealing with well-meaning jackals can quickly swamp all your time and energy.

Most people do want to help, and you may be surprised just how helpful they are if you reach out to your friends and colleagues and tell them that you want to work on improving your communication.

# giraffe voice

- First, be mindful of OFNR.  
Notice evaluations, demands,  
faux-feelings, mind-stories
- Next, separate/identify OFNR  
from non-OFNR language
- Eventually, OFNR is natural,  
jackal stories seem fake

So, i actually recommend NOT trying to speak in OFNR lingo right out of the gate. Trying to change your language all at once can feel very stilted.

The first step is to become aware of it. Just notice when you've said something that's a judgement, or when you demand a specific strategy, rather than clarifying the underlying need and making requests to meet that need. Don't stop yourself from saying those things, but just notice when you do.

The second step is to explicitly identify the OFNR bits after you've said something Jackal-ish, and try to clarify what the observations feelings and needs are, and then drive to a specific request that everyone can feel good about.

Eventually, the OFNR language will feel like it fits, and hiding behind the very cognitive Jackal-type stories will seem fake and unsatisfying.

Over the last few years, I've removed a few words from my vocabulary that had sexist and ableist implications, using guys to refer to a group of people, or "lame" to mean something is bad. At npm we have a jar that we put a dollar in when we use problematic language, not as a punishment, but just as a way to raise awareness, and that awareness will tend to change you on its own.

# giraffe ears

- Focus on speaker, reflect w/o judgement (esp "great!" or "well, actually...")
- Pick out OFNR that speaker reveals. Reflect those parts.
- Make intuitive guess about missing OFNR bits, verify with speaker

The first and most basic listening tactic that we can employ is to just actually listen to what someone is saying, without putting our own spin on their message, and then reflect it back so that they know they've been heard. This is SOOO challenging!

Maybe I just find it challenging because it's hard for me, but really, if all you can manage to do is just focus on someone and observe exactly what they're saying without any well-actuallys or not-all-blanks, then most of the time, that's a huge step in the direction of building connection.

The next level listening skill is to identify the observations feelings needs and requests that the person shares, and reflect just those bits back to them. So, we're not adding anything, but might be trying to strip away the bits that aren't helpful.

The pro-level NVC technique, once we've gotten skilled at holding someone else's message and engaging our own emotional machinery, is to try to figure out what they're not saying, and then verify if we've guessed correctly. The nice thing here is that Jackals usually love correcting you when you're wrong, so if you don't get it right they'll be very helpful.

# giraffe heart

- Breath, Body, Need
- Framing: What am I feeling, and what story am I telling?
- What are my internal/external observations right now?
- Never a bad idea to show yourself empathy!

In Choosing Peace, Ike Lasater and John Kinyon talk about a self-connection process called "Breath/Body/Need". In a lot of communication dynamics, we get into trouble by losing track of ourselves, and end up burning through our resources. Alex Harms' talk yesterday, "Learning to Empathy" started out with a similar exercise.

Remember what I said about cognitive limits? When we're stressed and unhappy, when our needs aren't being met, we are much more cognitively limited, and it becomes much more tempting to use those defensive strategies.

Turning OFNR inward, if you can make a regular practice of being aware of your own fundamental human needs, then you might still not get those needs met in any situation, but it'll help at least to know what they are, so that you can avoid becoming attached to particular strategies, and guide the conversation back towards connection.

What happens when the internal awareness slips and we stop showing ourselves empathy?

# 🔥 burnout 🔥

- Result of repeatedly not seeing to your own Needs
- Eventually lose energy, lose mindfulness, cycle continues
- Not just about overworking!

A key component of Burnout is repeatedly ignoring and de-prioritizing our own needs. Over time, we start to wither like a sad little grape into a spiteful bitter raisin.

In that state, it becomes harder to summon the energy to initiate the connection with ourselves or anyone, we get grumpy, and it's a vicious cycle that feels terrible.

The common wisdom is that burnout comes from working too much, and certainly that can be the case. But there have been times in my life where I've worked my ass off, but my needs were being met, and I didn't get into a cycle where I started feeling terrible. If what you need is connection or recognition, then a vacation won't cure burnout. If you don't know your needs, you can't meet them, and neither can anyone else

There's been a lot said about Burnout, I recommend if you're seeing this talk online to go look up Jacob Kaplan-Moss's talk from earlier in this conference titled "What part of '...for Life' don't you understand?" and also all the links and references he pulled in, especially Kathleen Danielson's talk "Avoiding Burnout and other essentials of open source self care"

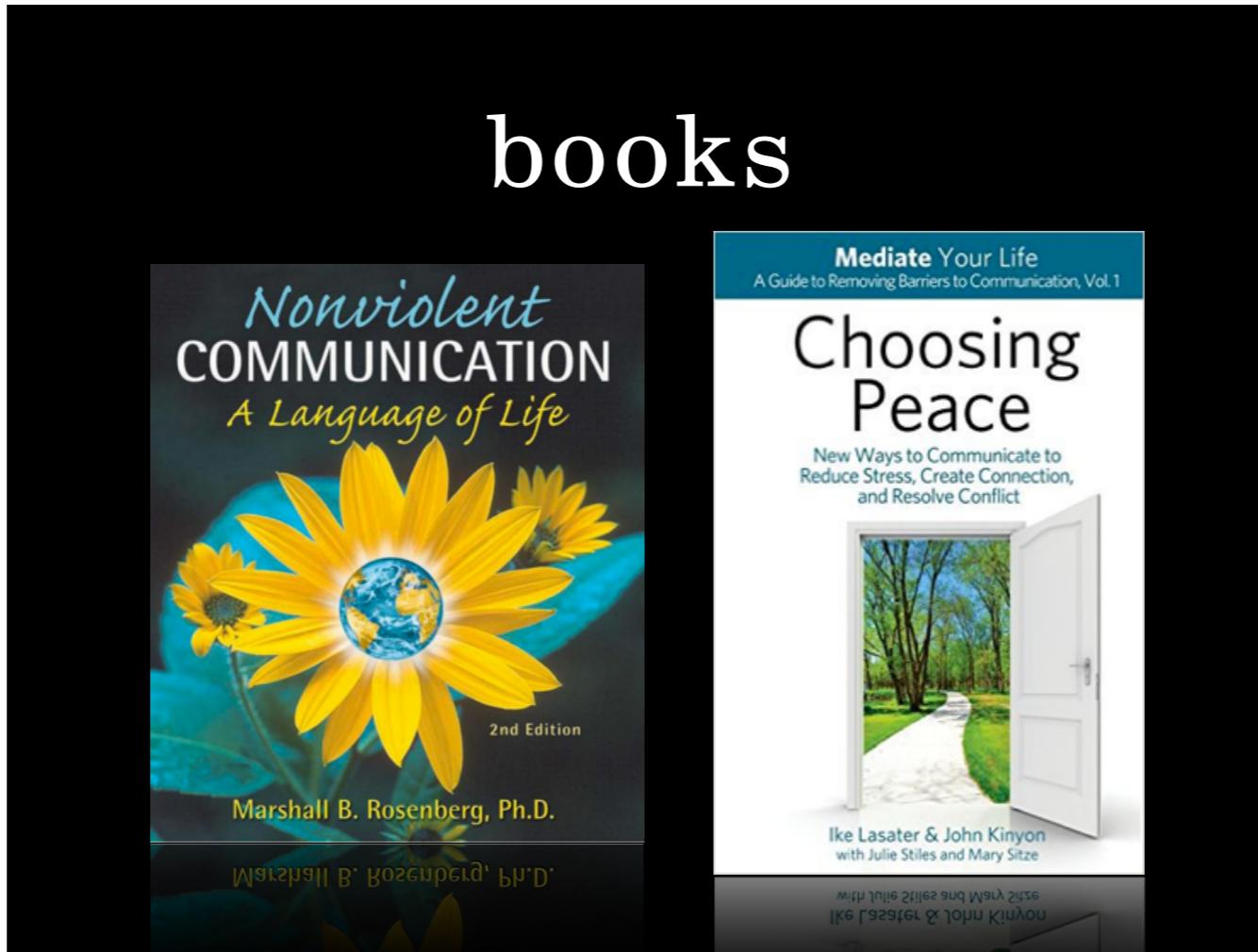
# homework

3:00

So, I do have some homework for you, if you're willing to do it and if you're interested.

And I'll put these slides up online and tweet the link so you don't have to write it down right now.

# books



The first bit of homework is to pick up one or both of the books I mentioned earlier, and read through it. But don't just take it as gospel. If things in the book \*don't\* resonate with you, make a note of that.

The first one is Nonviolent Communication, A Language of Life, by Marshall Rosenberg. The second is Choosing Peace, by Ike Lasater and John Kinyon.

I hear that there's a bookstore in this city, that has a website, it's mostly a south american themed I believe, but it may carry these, I have not confirmed that.

<http://smile.amazon.com/Non-Violent-Communication-Language-Marshall-Rosenberg/dp/B00BDXM2NG/>

<http://smile.amazon.com/Choosing-Peace-Communicate-Connection-Communication/dp/0989972003/>

# find a buddy



the second bit of homework is to try to find someone, a colleague or friend or whoever, and see if they'd be interested in partnering up with you on learning and improving your compassionate communication.

Really think about this. Pick someone that you think will get something out of it also, and who you can trust to both have your back, but also candidly call you out, and phrase the request so that you make it clear why you're asking them and let them know that "no" is a perfectly acceptable answer.

It's easy to read about empathy, but practicing it with another person is the only way to really level up your skills. It'll feel ~weird~ if you're not used to this, but it's so valuable. That awkwardness is a sign that you're learning a new skill. It's good. If you can make a safe space where it's ok to be clumsy, it's at least possible to get better.

feedback

i@izs.me

@izs

here today

Oakland usually

<http://j.mp/nvc-oss>

<http://j.mp/nvc-oss-notes>

<http://j.mp/nvc-oss-video>

And if you don't like the books, or if you find that some aspects of NVC or this talk are helpful and some aren't, or if there's some reason why you think this homework idea is not something you're interested in doing, I'd love any feedback you might have for me.

You can hit me up on email, or twitter, or walking around here today, or near Lake Merritt in Oakland most of the time.

I really appreciate your time and attention today. Thank you.