Ingo Steinke
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Anger, Laziness, and Healthy Productivity

#watercooler   #productivity   #psychology

Constructive Criticism (5 Part Series)

Following up [Productive Procrastination vs. Apparent Productivity](#) and [Constructive Criticism and Resolutions for Future Content Creation](#), here are some more ideas and takeaways from trying to understand and improve the way that I work and how I deal with my emotions and energy.

Writing, Pragmatism, and Productivity

Getting serious about avoiding perfectionism and overthinking, I decided to keep the silly buzzword headline and just put together some more notes and observations. I will publish different versions of this article: this one, a nerdy English version focusing on technology and work life as a web developer. A less technological version will appear on my Open-Mind-Culture weblog both in English — [Anger, Happiness, and "Healthy Productivity"](#) — and in German — [Ärger, Wut und „gesunde Produktivität"](#).

I write these posts for myself, to order my thoughts, and to persist my knowlege, as well as mistakes that I hope to avoid in the future. If I ever lose my written notebooks or fail to find something, I can hope to discover the published versions using a search engine!

This is also a reason to link to the same articles again and again, like my posts about [learning in public](#), or the less serious and rather funny [I enjoy life-long learning, but...](#)

It also helps to know that there is an actual audience that will read and react to my thoughts, maybe even correct my mistakes and add new aspects and inspiration.

Sometimes I just draft a quick post and a codepen, add some screenshots, and publish it the very same day. But some other posts like this one, take more time, and often suffer from the higher expectations building up by not publishing an ambitious draft.

Efficiency, Effectiveness, and Productivity

Coming back to the topic of productivity, I repeat myself when I say that productivity is an overrated cult, maybe even a big lie, and it makes people sick trying to stay productive and avoid procrastination. [Procrastination can in fact be very productive](#), at least in the long run.

When we do nothing but work and work more and more efficiently, we behave like robots and we should actually fear getting replaced by artificial "intelligence". Just doing the same thing over and over again might be useful as a farmer, a hairdresser, or a fast food vendor, but even those jobs can do with some change and creativity.

So we might say that laziness is one underrated virtue for creative people using their brain. How can we claim to use ideas, intutition, and creativity to solve problems, and at the same time accept to estimate and bill based on time? I can tell you what time it took me to add a slider widget to your website and you will know, too, when you watch me working. But what about fixing a tricky bug or finding a creative solution to a seemingly impossible requirement.

Watch me try different code changes, move elements around the website, google, read blog posts, and watch videos. But how can you prove that I could have came up with the same solution in 5 minutes instead of taking 5 hours?

But there is another, even more mistaken and demonized than apparent laziness.

Rage, an Emotion that must not exist at Work?

I often get angry about bugs, problems, and missing features or documentation. This might be seen as annoying, funny, or an actual problem, but as any psychologist will tell you, rage is an emotion to be taken seriously. Of course, it depends on the actual situation: sometimes we are just stressed by the workload or having a bad day, and we should rather take a break away from the computer screen. That's the "work-life-balance" approach, embracing apparent "laziness" and "procrastination" as a source of energy and inspiration.

We can also get angry if we plan or promise too much and fail to meet our own expectations. Maybe some software has a steep learning curve, and it is kown to be

impossible to learn and use in few days or even hours. Another possible reason is a stubborn mindset not ready to let go of concepts how to do something, when there is a totally different approach taken by the specific tool.
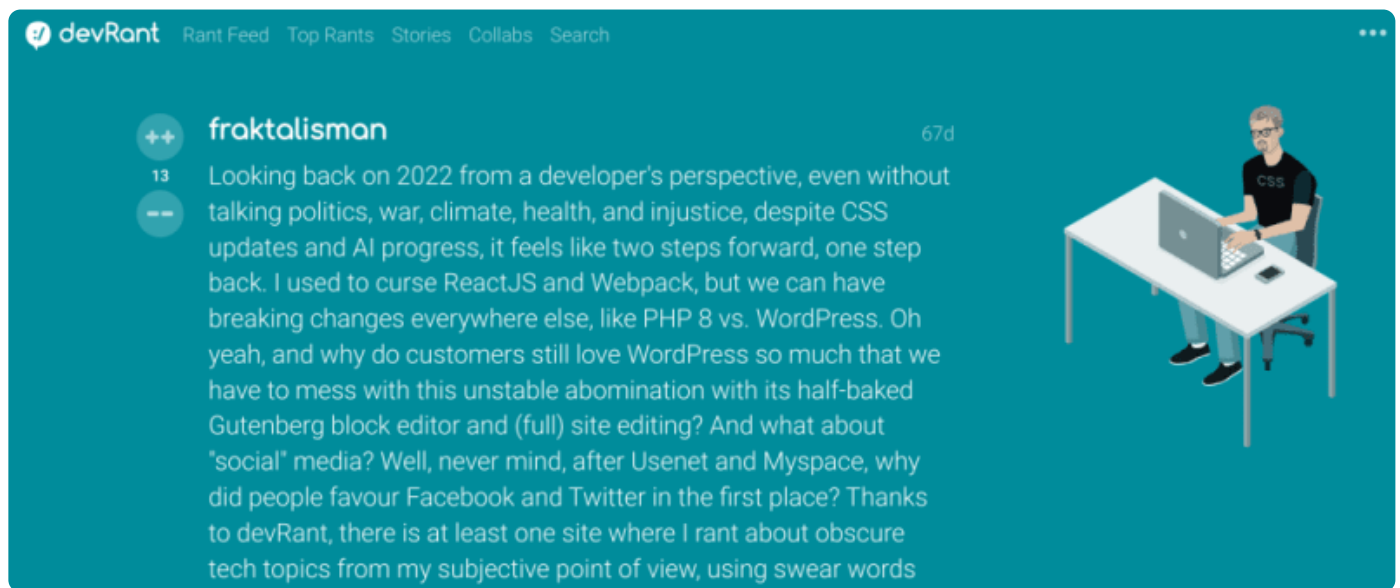
Reasons for Rage

Finally, there are some reasons for rage and rants that can't be be tackled by a change of personal behaviour. I don't want to get too political in a technological community (but I will elaborate in my personal open mind culture weblog), but there have been increasing debates about gatekeeping, injustice, gender pay gap, and even harrassment preventing people to do their job in STEM / information technology and get paid and respected accordingly. The so-called "marginalized" groups are often a majority in the world-wide population, but the tech sector is still dominated by white dudes from rich countries. And that might be directly connected with some other systemic problems that many popular software and web apps lack proper testing, documentation, and accessibility.

In this case, rage as a rightful reaction, serves several positive purposes.

Rage shows us that something does not feel right.

Rage raises attention to find out what exactly is wrong.

Rage gives us energy for a change.

Helplessness, Disappointment, and Fear

Unfortunately, there is another aspect of this emotion that often comes up when we start to feel helpless and it's not easy to make a change. Helplessness, disappointment, and fear are other emotions that feel negative and might be

connected to rage. But rage at least has a positive energy and a feeling or action and taking control.

So what can we do, as developers, when getting angry about a problem?

Here are some thoughts from my personal perspective, but I have to admit that it is a quite privileged perspective so it might not apply to your own situation or you might have completely different priorities.

Procrastination as a Form of Passive Aggression

Many people fail to understand why they procrastinate instead of doing what they want or have to do. Avoiding situations or tasks where we risk to fail is one possible reason, but I experienced a tendency towards procrastination in other situations as well.

We could look at procrastination as another reaction telling us that there is something not quite right that requires some kind of change. Between the passive emotions of helplessness, disappointment, and fear on one hand, and the active and possible aggressive emotions of anger and rage on the other, procrastination subtly sneaks in between as a passive-aggressive, and possibly more productive and inspiring alternative to anger.

Productive Procrastination vs. Apparent Productivity

Ingo Steinke · Mar 21 '22

#productivity #creativity #watercooler #motivation

Solutions using Anger as a Positive Motivation

- Rant! Sometimes it helps to say a swear word or write an ironic blog post or chat message. But some other times it doesn't, unfortunately. While it seems perfectly appropriate to swear and shout on a construction site, it can get you strange looks and worried reactions in an office.
- Question and observe: what's happening? Am I really angry? Maybe I just need a break?
- Is there something I might be doing wrong? Question my own mindset, take a step back and try to change perspective.
- Talk to somebody and/or write down actual questions.

Be the one to add a missing Issue

- If it's a technical problem (inluding missing or misleading documentation): How can I describe the problem in a way that others can understand and help me? Is there a minimal reproducible code example that I could show on CodePen, GitHub, or my own website?
- Who could have an answer? Where could I leave a question or feature request? GitHub issue, specific forum post, or a general interest question on StackOverflow?
- Anticipate possible inquiries and reactions before actually posting the question.
- Take a break! Then come back, re-read the question and think again about an answer.
- Post a question and proceed with another task. Maybe there will be help.

Wrong Tools vs. Wrong Mindset?

When we discover that we tried to (mis)use a tool with the "wrong" mindset, then maybe it wasn't the right tool in the first place. Also there can be different strategies to use the same technology. I used to rant a lot about React, but some reasons for my rants were caused by technological decisions like CSS-in-JS, or controlled input, that I would never voluntarily chose when setting up my own project. Later, I ranted a lot about WordPress. Again, there was a mismatch between my own preferences and what seemed to be required or advised, like using WooCommerce Blocks, Full Site Block Editing, or the new theme engine. After having successfully solved the specific problems and completed my project tasks, I asked myself, what exactly I would have preferred to use instead.

So when I have the chance to make my own technical decisions and choose which new technology to learn in my next project, at least I know what *not* to use next time and I have enought motivation and energy for a change by looking back on my past unhappiness and anger.

Major Problems beyond our Control

If there is no techhnical issue, what else is the problem? Maybe we are unhappy about a specific requirement, the whole project or our job. Can we quit, can we pass the problem to a coworker? Maybe we have to go on, knowing that we don't like it and why, and try to make another choice next time. If we are able to make a choice: say no to a possible customer or project as a self-employed freelancer, or ask to change teams or even quit our current job as an employee? But maybe we're happy about mostly everything, but there is a toxic person or some other specific aspect of our situation that we might be able to change, even without thinking of quitting our jobs (and

becoming a blacksmith, gardener, or dancing teacher which will of course - NOT - solve all of our professional problems).

If it's a greater issue beyond our own control: who could help us? Is there possible support, communities, a way of getting in touch with other people who are in the same situation? That's one positive aspect of the internet and globalization: you can connect with like-minded people all around the world, and you can raise world-wide support for your issues.

Using our Power to Support and Make a Change!

Being in a privileged position, we can become the ones giving support, choosing what to work for, who to work with, where to invest our money. Stop our teams hiring the next white German dude with a high reputation on StackOverflow. Stop unknowingly taking part in common exclusion and harassment. Support, upvote, link, and talk about issues raised by people who face more serious problems than we do. For a start, Abbey Perini's 8 Ways to Support Women Developers offers very specific and measurable aspects that need our awareness as a "typical tech guy".

8 Ways to Support Women Developers
Abbey Perini • Mar 8
#wecoded #womenintech #programming #career

And there is Leah Thomas' Intersectional Enviromentalist, a book and an initiative imagining a more equitable and diverse future of environmentalism.

Conclusion

There are many valid reasons to get angry.

I started to write another post about productivity and might have wandered from the subject a bit, but this is my retrospective takeaway: don't try to suppress rage and anger! Take it seriously and make use of its positive energy. After a coaching session, I drafted a post about "healthy productivity", and I decided to keep those words in the title as it can be very unhealthy to suppress seemingly negative emotions, and a lot of people think they have to. We don't need to shout and get aggressive, or lay down and cry, but there are other ways to take our emotions seriously, and that can help us grow both personally and professionally as well.

Constructive Criticism (5 Part Series)

Top comments (2) ⇅

Ingo Steinke 🎖 · Mar 31

Another related article and discussion: 😤 That feeling when your favorite project too goes in the graveyard… by Jean-Michel Fayard:

> ### 😤 That feeling when your favorite project too goes in the graveyard…
> Jean-Michel Fayard 🇫🇷🇩🇪🇬🇧🇪🇸🇨🇴 · Mar 30 · 1 min read
> #discuss   #healthydebate   #watercooler

We should admit and accept being angry or sad so that we can also accept loss and move on, just like the Buddhist monks practice their sand mandalas that must be destroyed when they are finished. 😮

Ingo Steinke 🎖 · Mar 31 · Edited

I added a paragraph about how procrastination can possibly be seen as some kind of passive-aggressive alternative to actually getting angry.