How to Work with Other People

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& Floor Drees

Understanding how *different* things affect *different* people *differently* will help make a safer and more productive workplace.

whoami

- Systems and Database Architect at large
- Based in Edinburgh, Scotland
- Open Source user, contributor (25+ yrs)
- PostgreSQL exclusively (16+ yrs)
- pg_statviz PostgreSQL extension
- Author, PostgreSQL Mistakes and How to Avoid Them
- Co-author, PostgreSQL 16 Administration Cookbook

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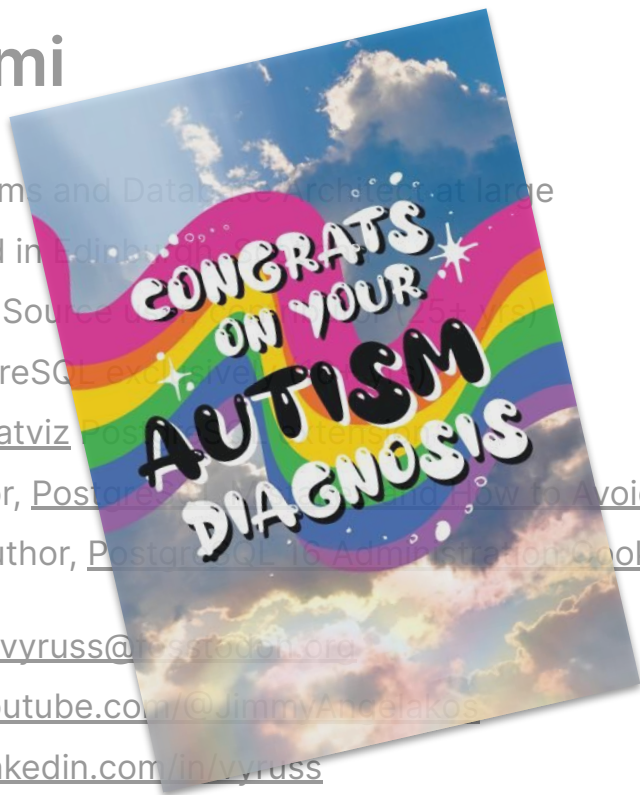
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whoami

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- Ex-Microsoft, Grafana Labs
- Devopsdays (Core) organizer
- Community over Code organizer
- Meetup (you guessed it) organizer
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whoarewe

- Neurodivergent means having **a brain that works differently from the average** or "neurotypical" person
- Invisibility makes it harder to talk about and for folks to consider
- Between **15-20%** of the global population are neurodivergent
- Only **29%** of autistic people are in full time work
- **Masking** can lead to comorbidities as it brings discomfort for sometimes long periods of time

It's rough out there

- Mass layoffs and restructuring

- Few entry-level positions

- Job descriptions, interviews

- WFH (Work from Home)

- But also RTO (Return to Office)

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- Anxiety, depression
- Hopelessness, despair
- Adequacy / Impostor syndrome
- Needing the structure
- Sensitive to triggers
  - EXTRA BONUS: Open plan office

Depression

- Extremely low energy
- Difficulty concentrating
- Sense of emptiness and despair
- Being on the verge of tears constantly
- Lack of motivation/pleasure
  - In doing those things they usually enjoy!

Autism Spectrum

- May have difficulty in social interaction
  - "Scary people"
- Hyperfocus
  - "Monotropism"
- Set very high standards for themselves
  - And very hard on themselves when they don't live up to them
- Constant internal pressure to do better
  - Tendency to take on too much → risk of burnout 🔥
- Comorbidities
  - Anxiety / Depression / ADHD overlap

ADHD (Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder)

- Subtypes: inattentive, hyperactive/impulsive and mixed
  - Difficulty to manage focus, concentration, emotional regulation, impulse control and self-motivation
  - Dreamer / that person that can't sit still
- Time blindness
- Tendency to take on too much → risk of burnout 🔥
- Comorbidities
  - Depression / Anxiety / Substance abuse ("self medicate"), eating disorders
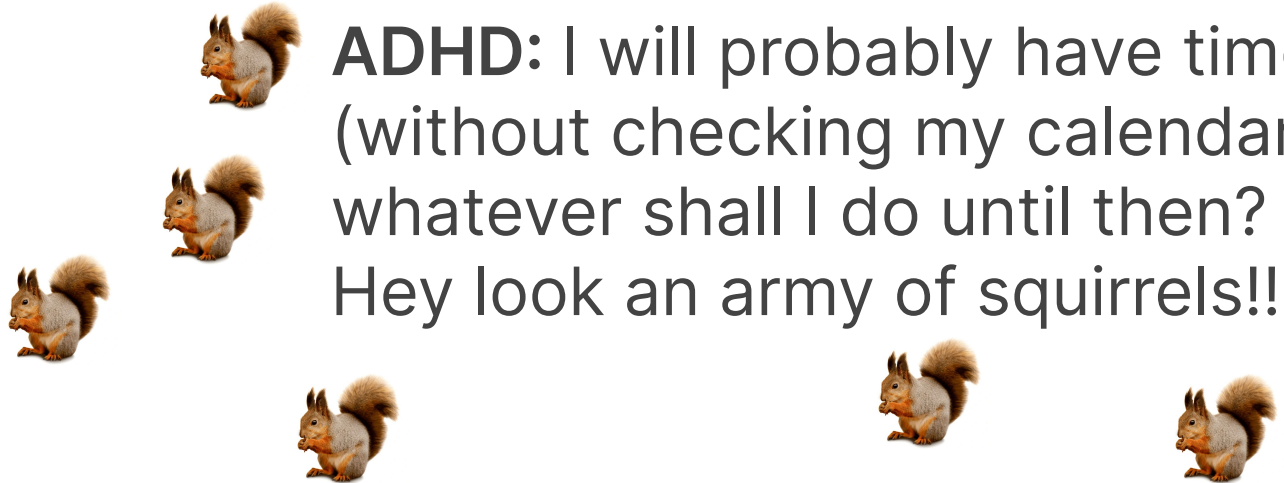
~~Reading~~ diving into (more) situations 🥽

Manager: Let's meet in an hour?

Manager: Let's meet in an hour?

ADHD: I will probably have time (without checking my calendar), whatever shall I do until then? Hey look an army of squirrels!!!

Colleague: Do you have 5 minutes now?

Colleague: Are you open
to feedback?

Colleague: Bill is OCD about getting these reports right...

Other mental health issues / neurodiversities

- Like dyslexia, OCD, Tourette's…
- Melatonin deficiency → "Not a morning person"
- Social stigma
  - Mental illness always mentioned in crime news reports
- Fear of being singled out
- "Stupid", "nonsense" — WORDS MATTER!
  - Enough self-worth issues and impostor syndrome already

BUT ALSO
- Sharing your condition can result in heartwarming acceptance & support

It doesn't *logically* make sense that everyone should have the same skills and aptitudes.

It *also* doesn't make sense that you can accommodate a broken limb but not anxiety or depression.

Diversity drives innovation 💡

- Can break groupthink
- Skills, not "superpowers"
- Neurodivergent folks self-select away from our companies and out of our communities
- Make sure you really need a "sociable data center manager" before you put that in your job ad
- Not everyone considers the same things perks

How to work with Other Colleagues

💚 Body Doubling

💛 READMEs, but for people

🩷 Time Out/Off

🧡 Assume good intent*

💜 Train your empathy muscle

💚 Body Doubling

- When you hold each other accountable by doing a thing together
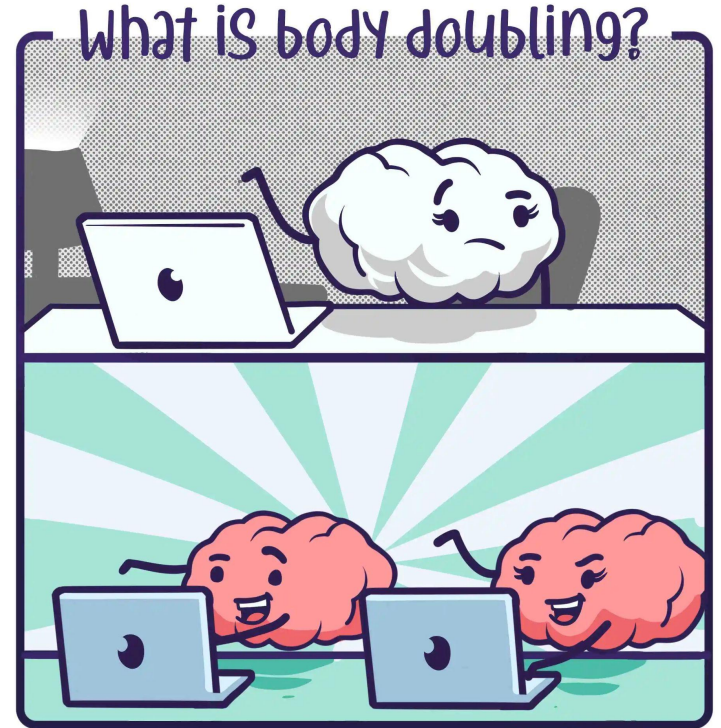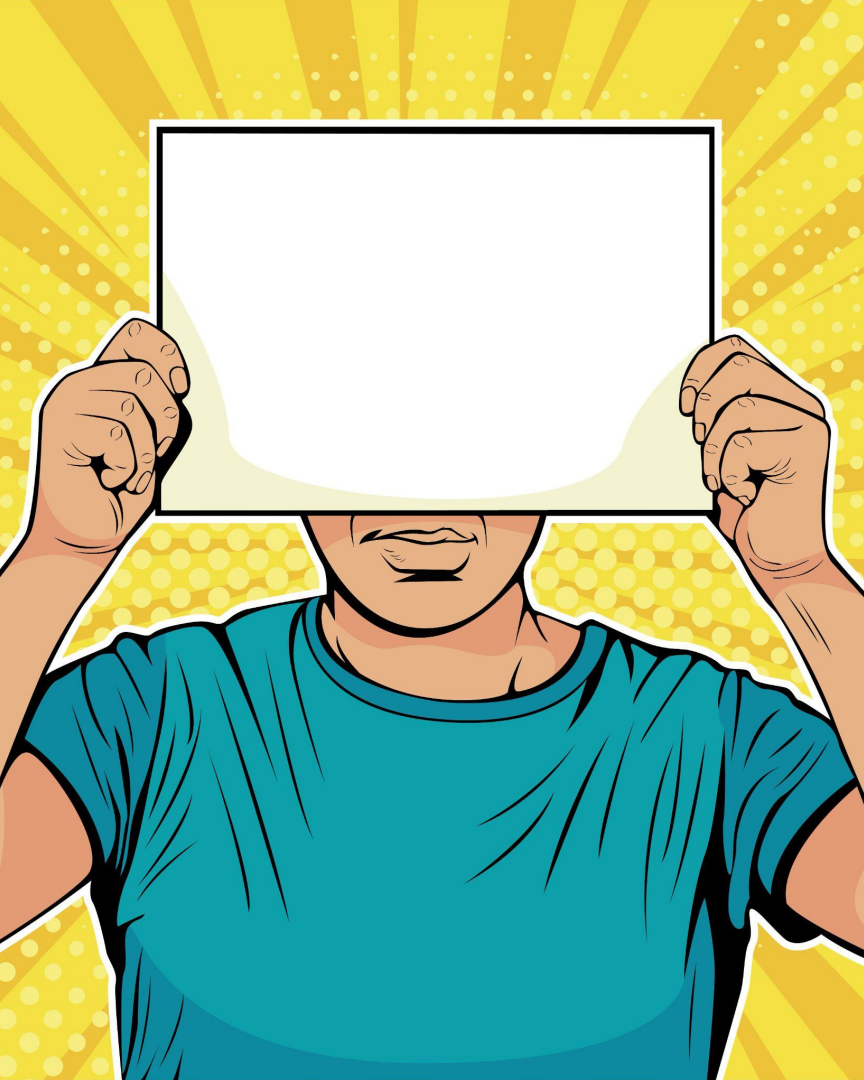- Productivity strategy with different implementations

What is body doubling?

Image: https://www.flow.club/blog/body-doubling-adhd

💛 READMEs, but for people

- Internal cheatsheet shared where everyone can access it
- Standardized questions
- Read your team's manuals, and discuss

- Manual of Me: https://www.manualof.me/
- How to work with me manual: https://www.remotecompany.com/blog/how-to-work-with-me-manual

💗 Time Out/Off

- Having a quiet space to retreat to when things are too much

- Part time contracts and other "solutions" HR comes up with

- "Unlimited vacation days"
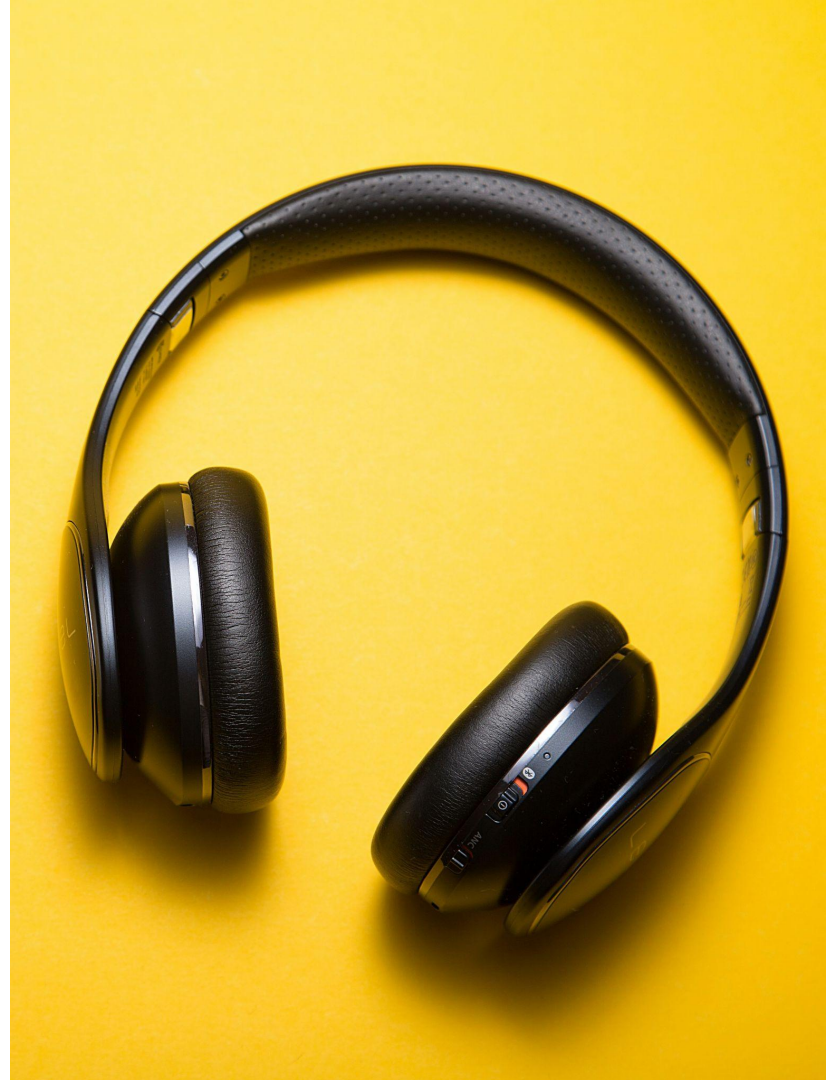
🧡 Assume good intent*

- Nobody wants you to fail
- Find your community / ERG / SIG / supportive coworkers

💜 Train your empathy muscle

- Use scheduling to not add to overload

- Write and maintain wikis

- Low lighting / low noise

- Accommodations by default

- Listen, don't "solution"

Thank you!

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Resources

- [Neurodiversity at Work podcast](#)

- The Neurodiverse Workplace (book)

- On building your empathy muscle, Huffington Post: [I Don't Know How To Explain To You That You Should Care About Other People](#)
- NPR: [How to protect your privacy when using mental health care apps](#)