

GDC

The Care and Feeding of Your Player Experience Team(s)

Tara J. Brannigan (Community Lead, 5CA)
Richard Kiernan (Head of Customer Care, Wooga)
Stephen Reid (Head of Community, Viveport at HTC)

GAME DEVELOPERS CONFERENCE

MARCH 18-22, 2019 | #GDC19

WTF is Player Experience?

Solo No More



Teams!



Why This Talk?

- With the GaaS model, PX consideration is a must
- As teams scale, there's a need for experienced leadership
- Great Individual Contributor != Great Leader by default

Sink or Swim



Source: The Neverending Story

Multiple Perspectives



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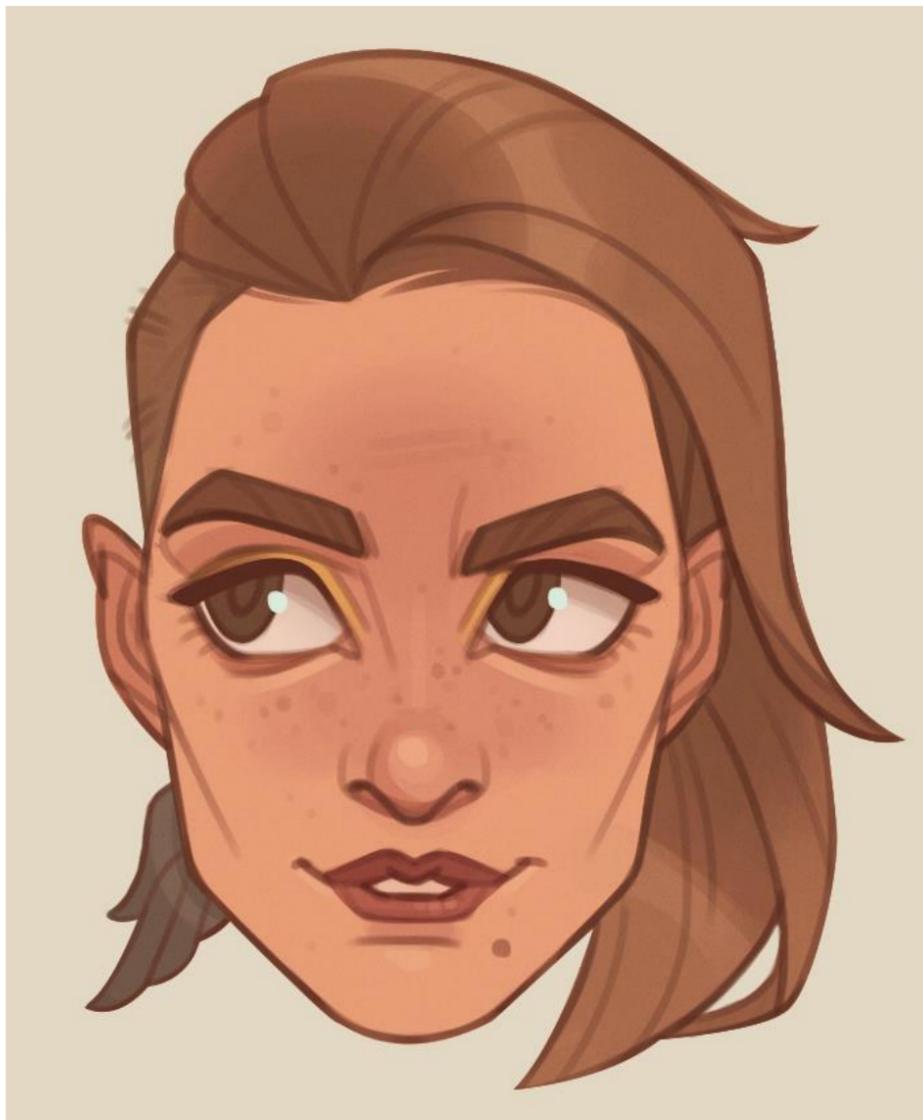
Level Up!

The Skills You Need to Survive

Tara J. Brannigan (Community Lead, 5CA)

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Icon by the amazing Nina: ninamodaffari.com

Tara J. Brannigan

Community Lead

Stock Photography Addict

@kindofstrange



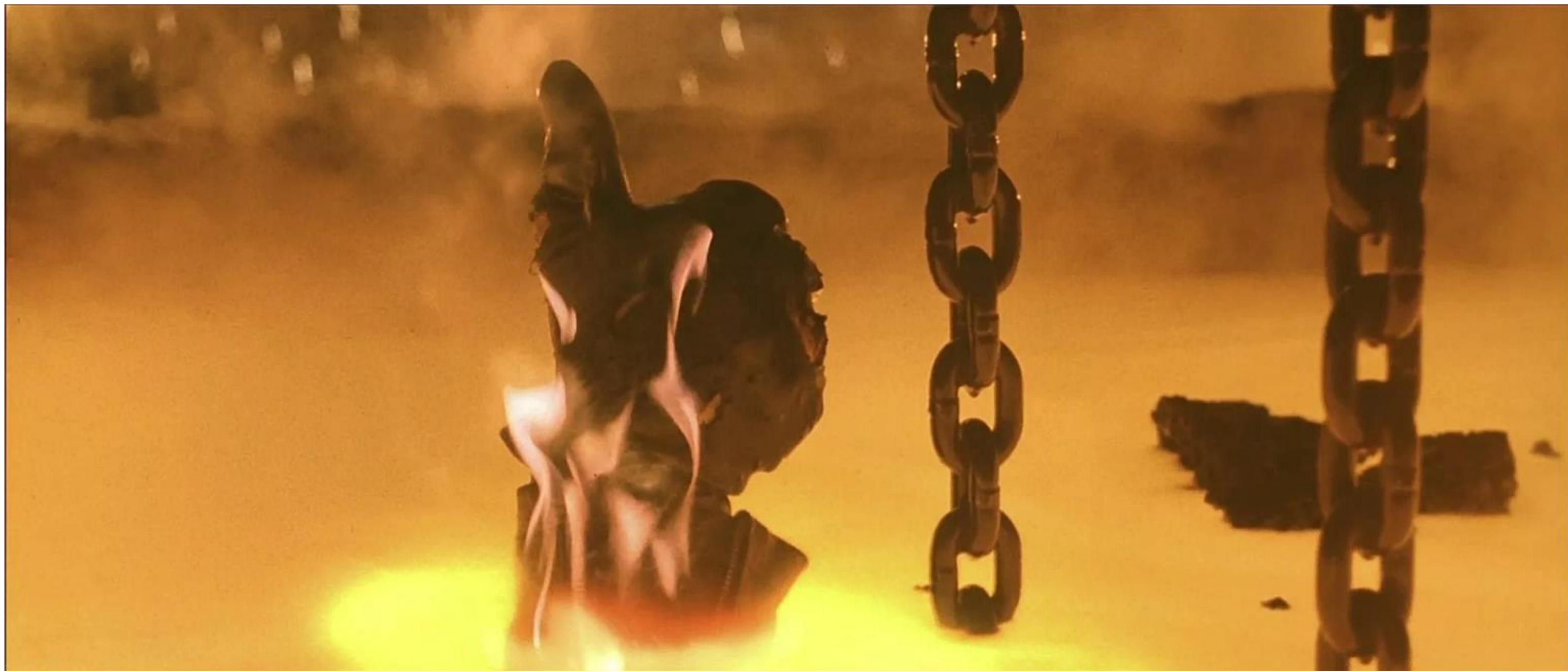
FLAREGAMES



Wipster







When you're responsible for leading a team,
the context of what success looks like shifts
dramatically

This? No Longer Your Job!

DO ALL THE THINGS!



Source: memegenerator.net, Original comic by Allie Brosh

This is Your Job Now



Source: <https://jillbinder.com/do-the-thing/>

TLDR;



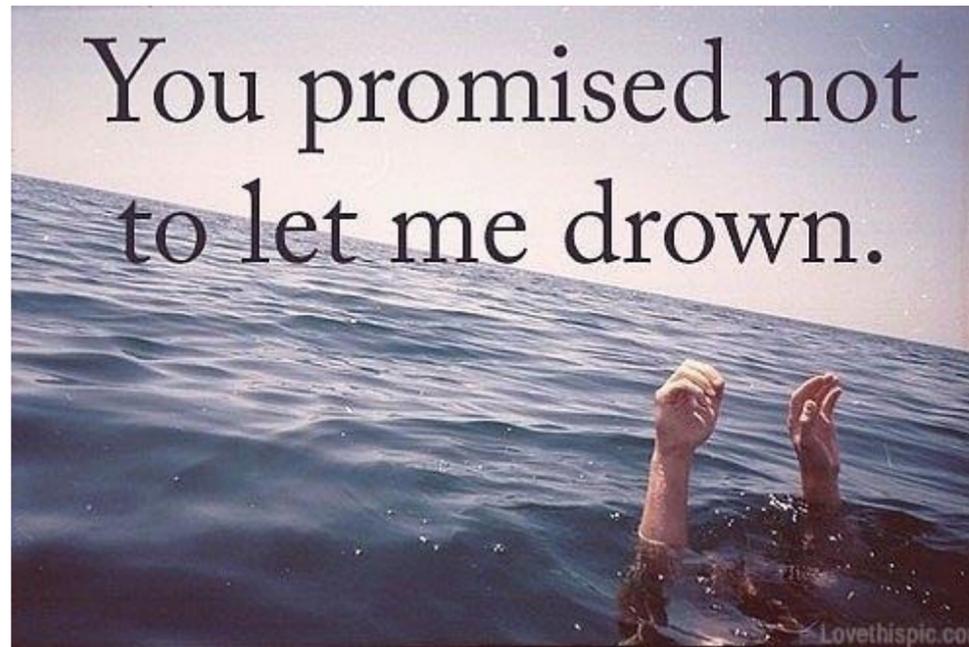
Check Yourself Before You Wreck Your... Team



It's Okay to Not Know



Your Word is Bond

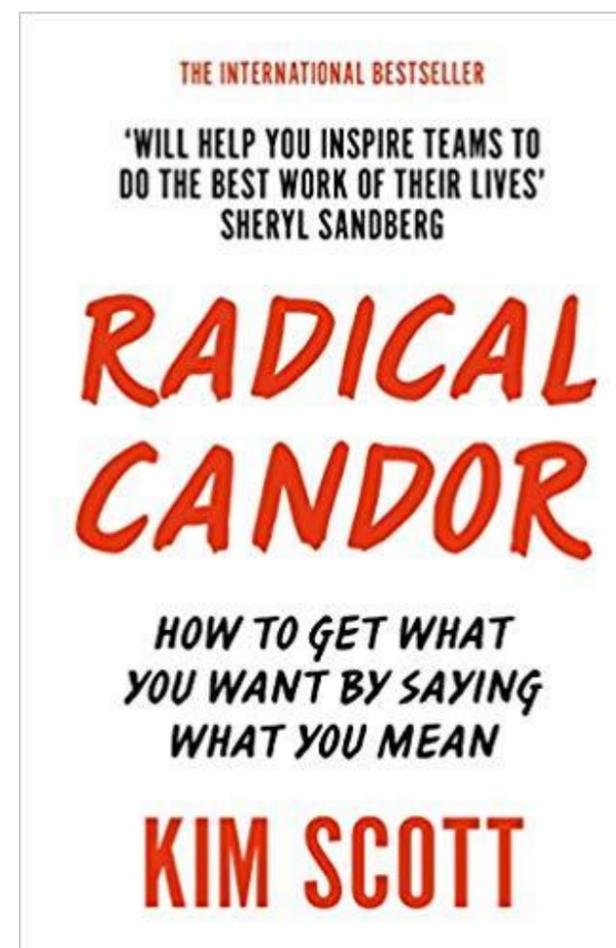
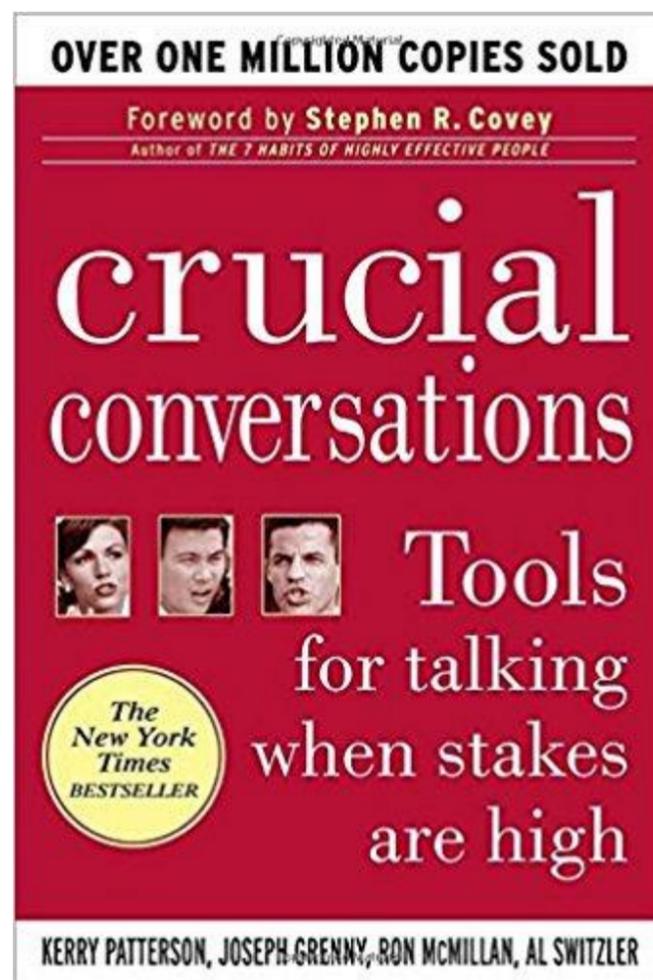
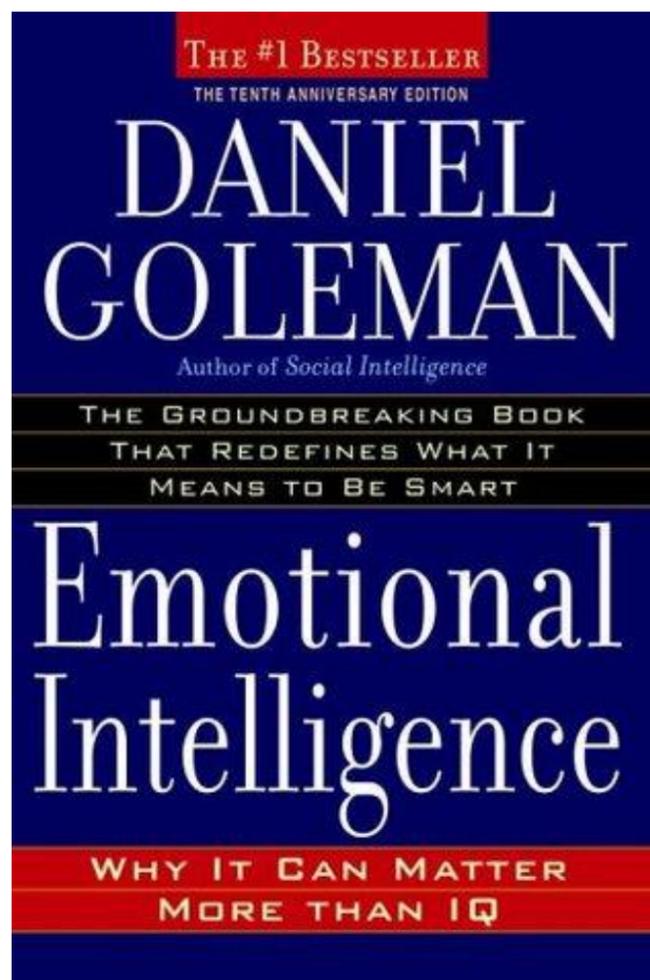


Source: lovethispic.com

Personal Touch



Give Real Feedback



Inheriting a Team



Source: <http://okokate.blogspot.com/>

Grow Slowly and With Purpose



Try Not to Hire Assholes

THE NEW YORK TIMES, WALL STREET JOURNAL,
AND BUSINESSWEEK BESTSELLER

THE NO ASSHOLE RULE

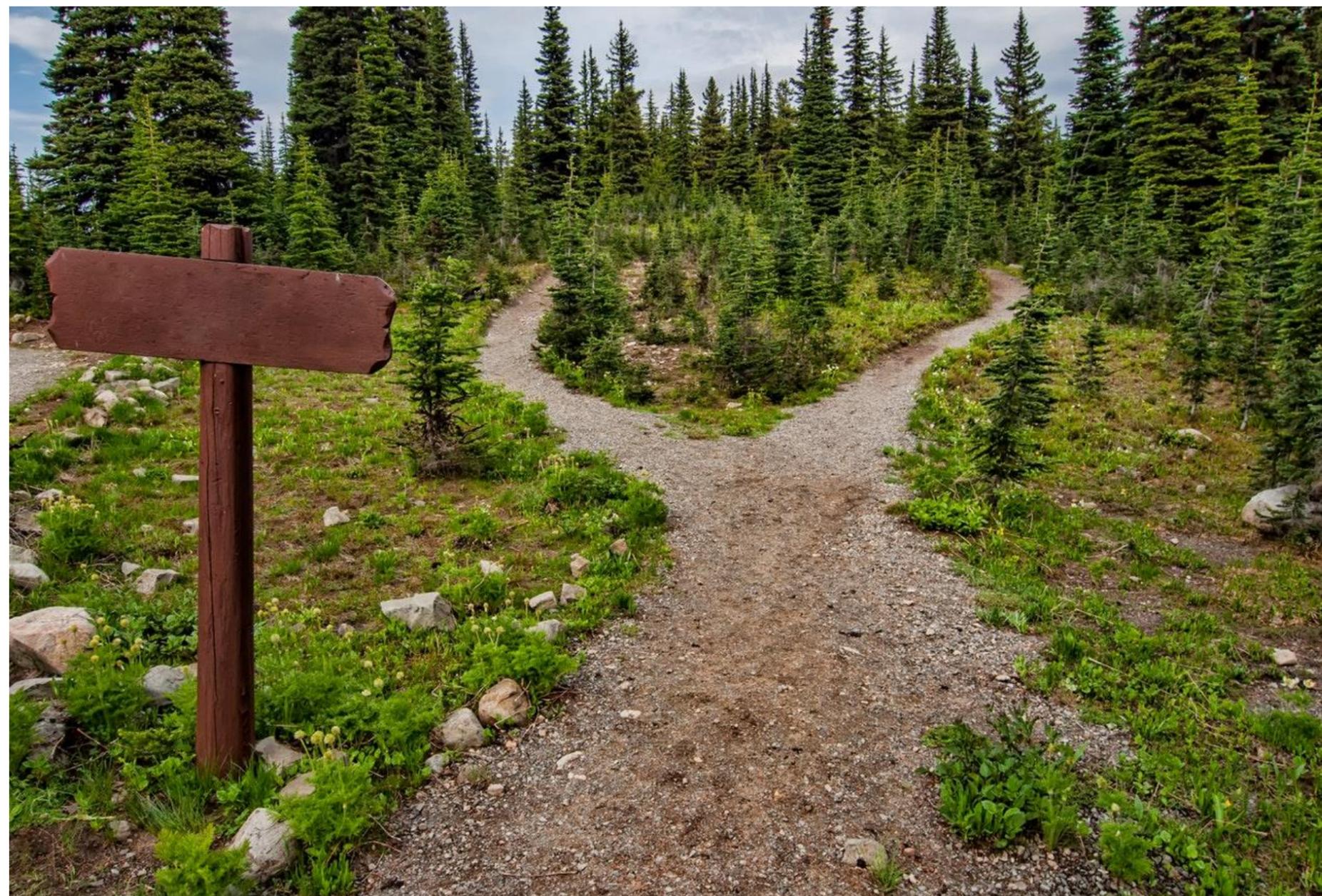
*Building a Civilized Workplace
and Surviving One That Isn't*



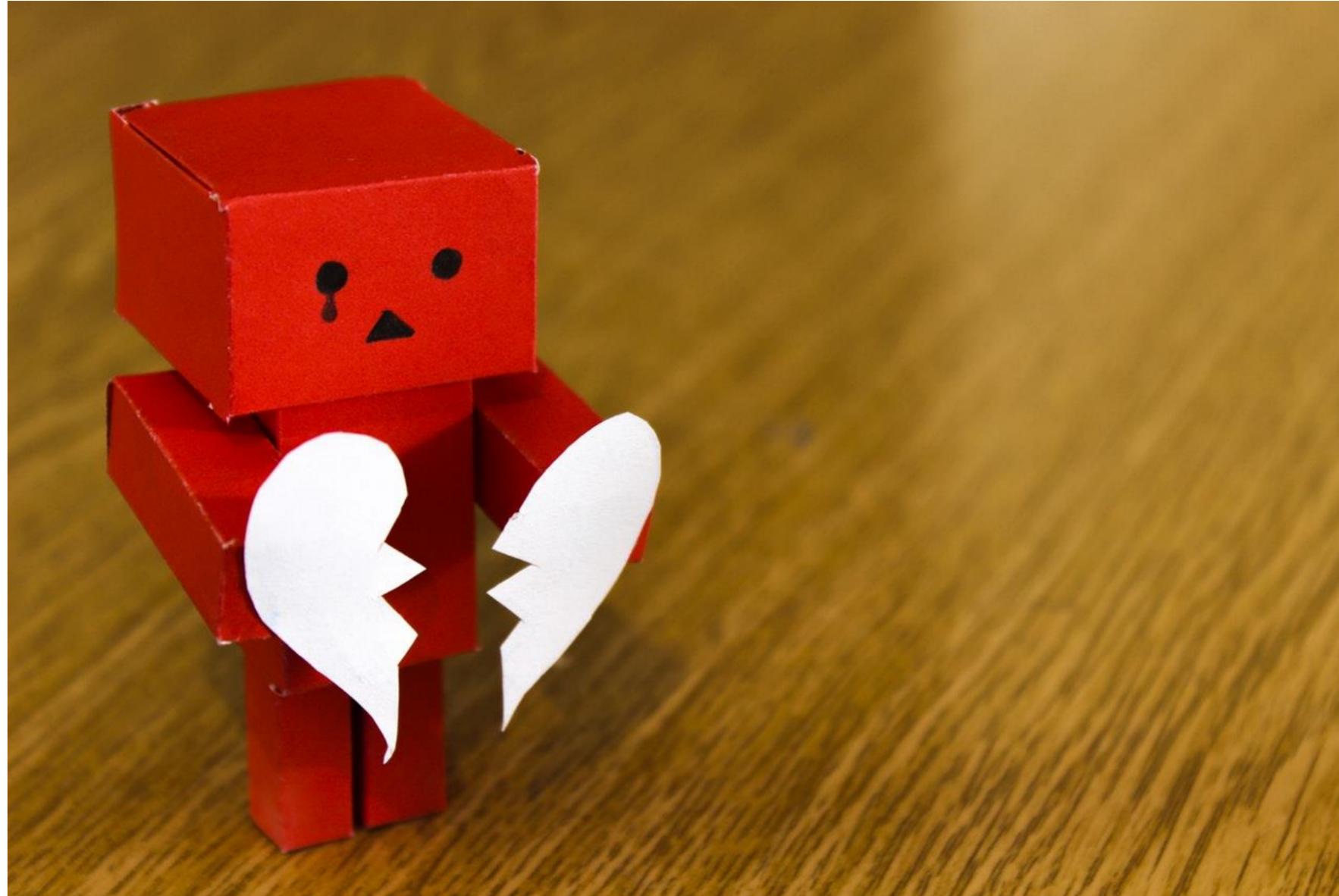
ROBERT I. SUTTON, PHD

FEATURING A CONVERSATION WITH THE AUTHOR
READ BY THE AUTHOR

Managing Someone Out



Emotional Tax of Leading Teams



Get Yourself a Mentor



Christopher Hinton
[linkedin.com/in/christopher-hinton-3a85623/](https://www.linkedin.com/in/christopher-hinton-3a85623/)

Something is rotten in the
state of Denmark...

Career Paths in Player Experience



Anonymous Quotes

“There was **no mobility or growth in my role, I was treated like the bottom of the pond** even though I had the most insight on how the consumer felt and behaved. My pay averaged 50k IN SAN FRANCISCO and **I had to work overtime to make liveable wages** here”

“**I was constantly being yelled at**, i never had enough tools at my disposal to really help and often left in demoralizing situations”

“I left because I had exhausted myself trying to fight the same fights over and over again. I **got tired of being accountable for things I was never given the resources to properly manage**. I left because there was no path for upward mobility in any studio I worked in.”

“My position was **looked down at by my peers** and undervalued and under-appreciated by my publisher and my supervisors.”

“**Ultimately it was never regarded as valuable work that required much skill**. It was seen as something you could hire for at min wage like a grocery store clerk.”

I left a company I loved, supporting a dream game of mine because community engagement clearly wasn't valued. The entire social community team, except for myself, were laid off. **We went from a team of over 10 to a team of one**, and they clearly felt the entire job could be handled by one person.

Oh, and with absolutely no pay or title change. **I was simply expected to carry on doing the work of an entire team by myself.**

“**I don't get paid enough to fight the dev team AND our audience.**”

“**If a dev team doesn't want to trust me**, then I won't trust them to allow me to do my job which means **I have to find greener pastures for my sanities sake**. Burnout is real.”

“**I was tired of being belittled by my team AND the Internet** - one of them has got to give if you want me the employee to last longer.”

“If budgets are doing badly, **CMs are always cut first** because they aren't considered as valuable as, say, a programmer. **Since September of 2016 I've had 4 positions**, and the one that lasted longer than 6 months was one that got publicly outed for chronically underpaying its employees and **abusive workplace conditions**. It's not been fun.”

“A new marketing regime came in that insisted community management and social media were one and the same as straight marketing, and that the most important skills for those jobs were marketing skills and ability to move growth. **I moved to Operations and gave up community and social media**”

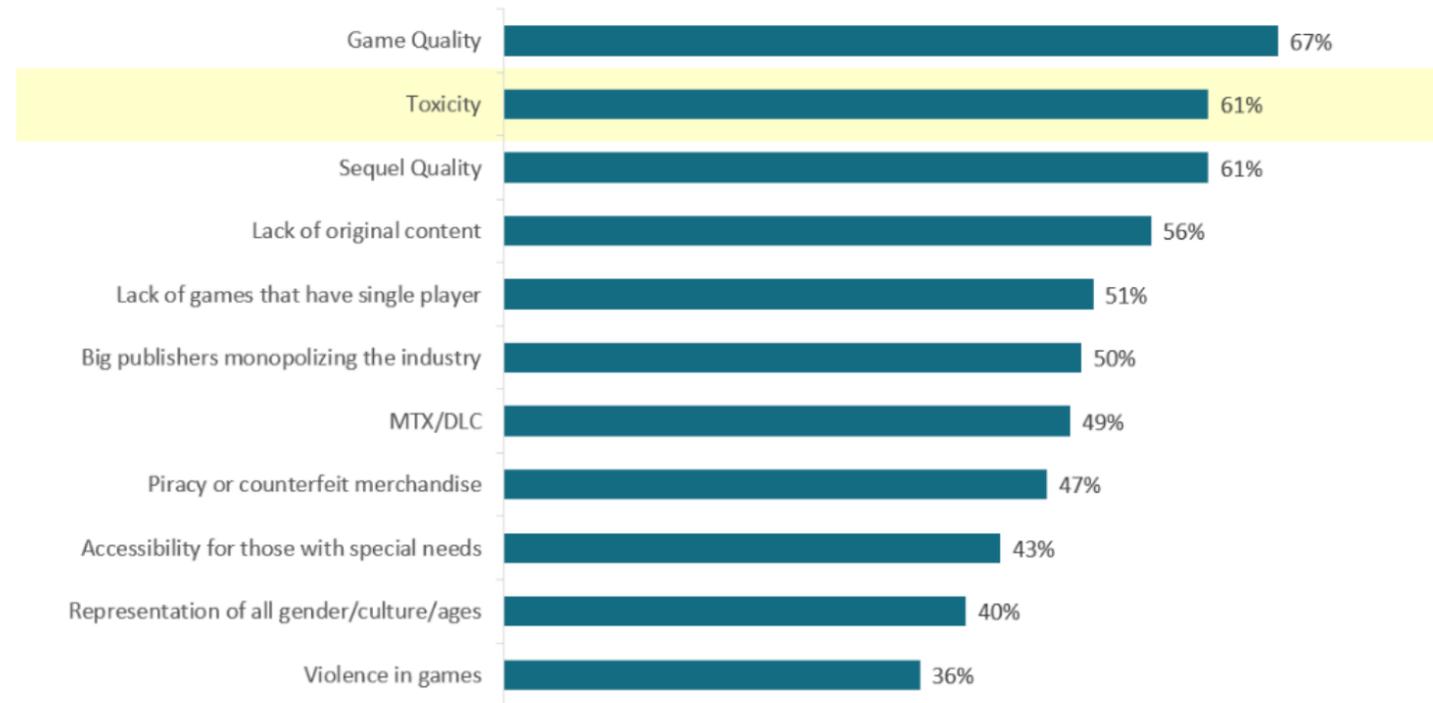
“I was laid off from my community management role, but it was the best thing to happen to me. Management was completely unwilling to invest in growth or content. **I was basically a gatekeeper meant to pacify the masses** while the company ran out the clock in our contract with the publisher. As soon as that contract finished, **I was let go without warning or severance.**”

It's Okay to Walk Away

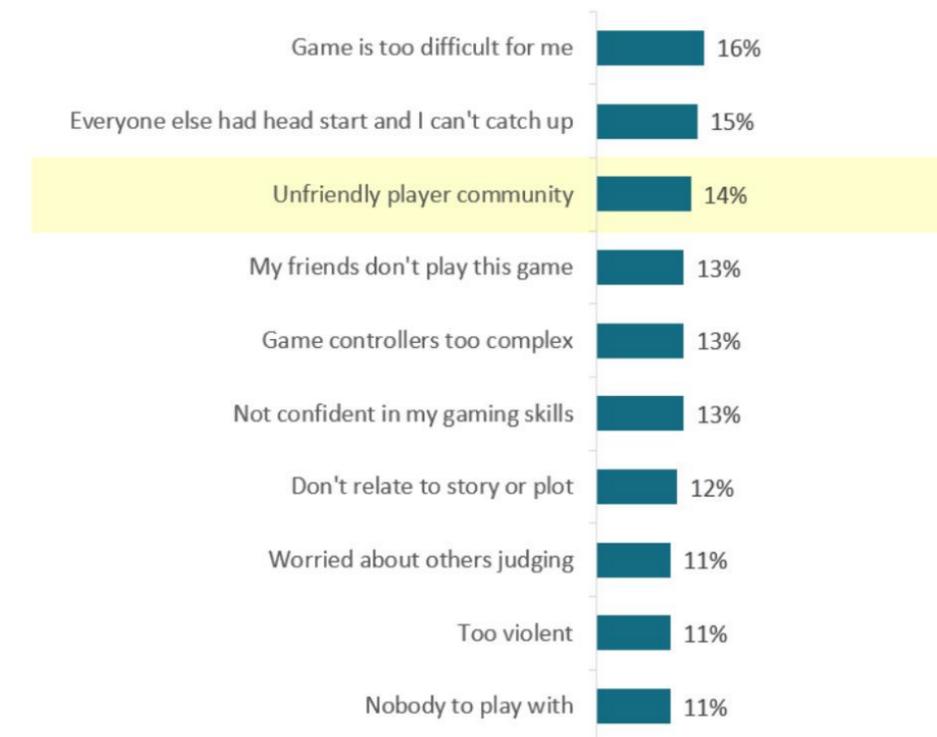


Experience is Critical

How concerned are you about the following in the gaming industry?
Among total players – “Very/somewhat concerned”



What, if any, barriers prevent you from enjoying video games in general?
Among total players



Source: What Inclusion Means to Players, EA https://medium.com/@Electronic_Arts/what-inclusion-means-to-players-db4522bdd8a0

Lead the Charge



Source: Vikings

Game Studio Leadership



Game Studio Leadership, You Can Do It! by Jesse Schell
<https://www.gdcvault.com/play/1024490/Game-Studio-Leadership-You-Can>

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Use the Community, Luke

Stephen Reid (ex-Head of Community, Viveport at HTC)

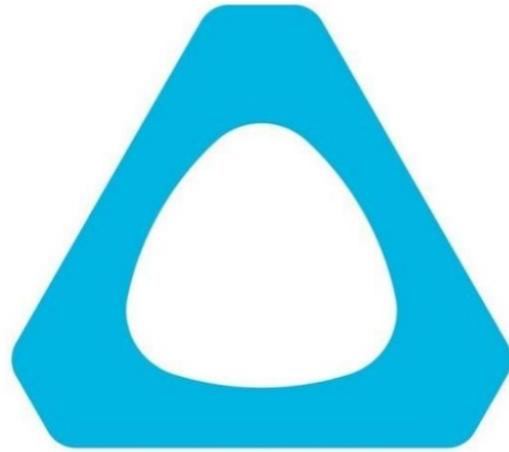
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Quick background (Where I am now, time in games, what I'm going to talk about)

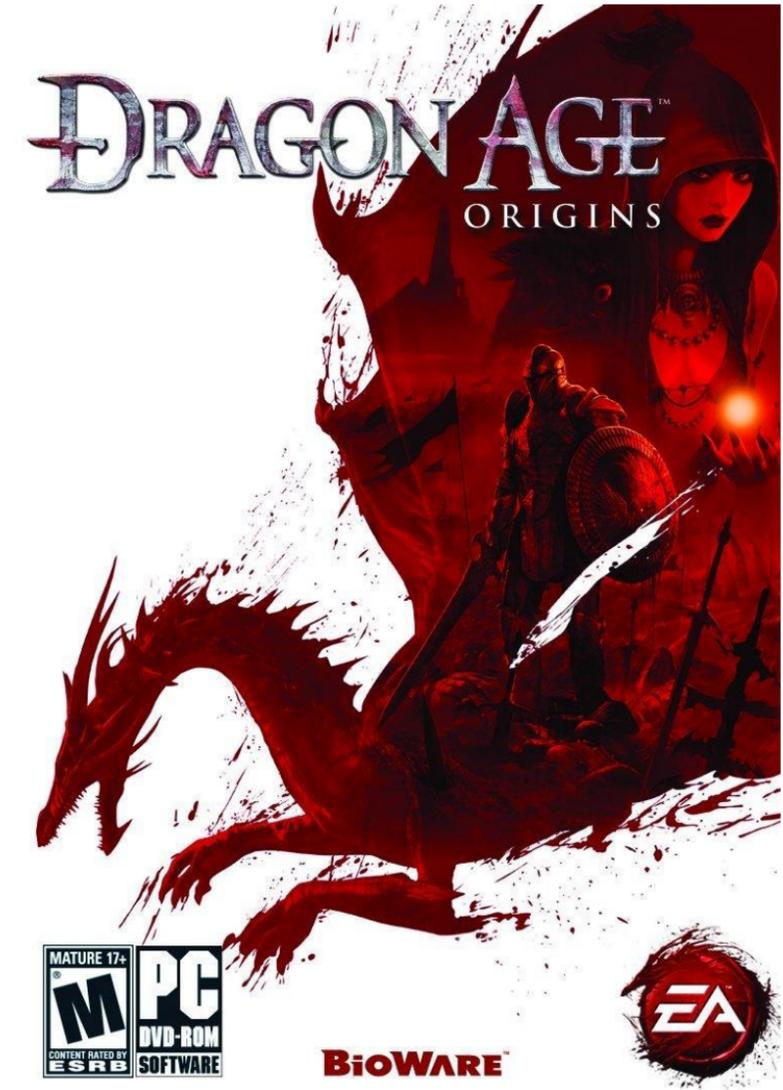
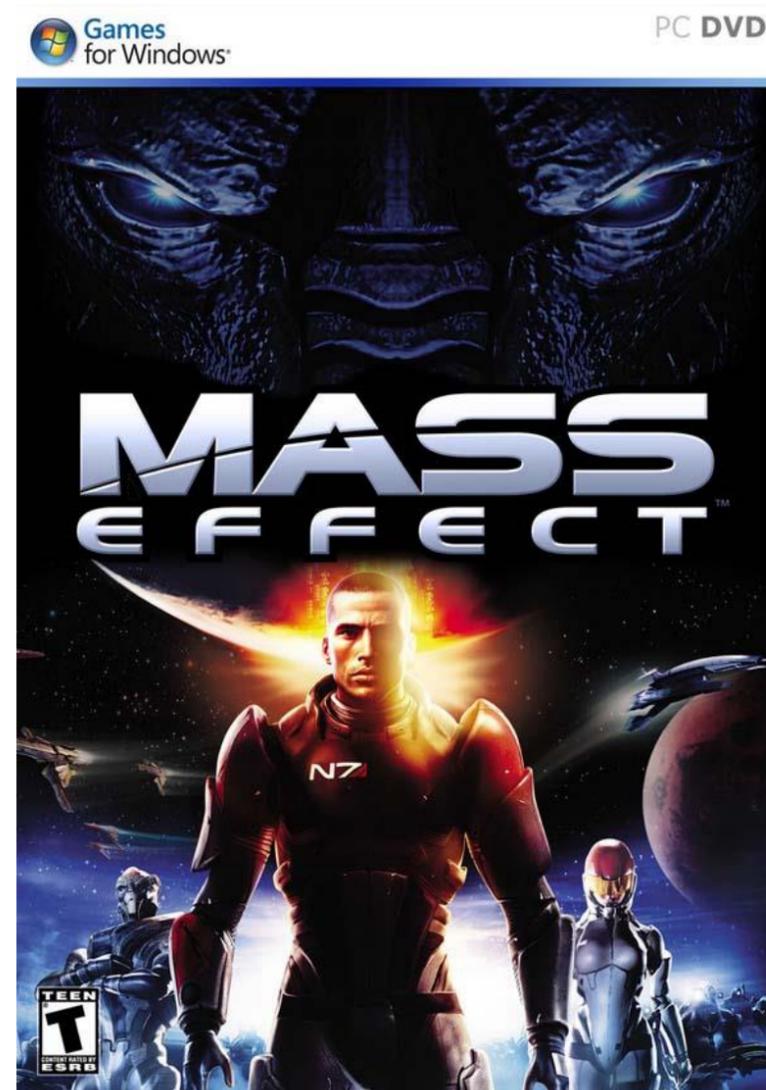
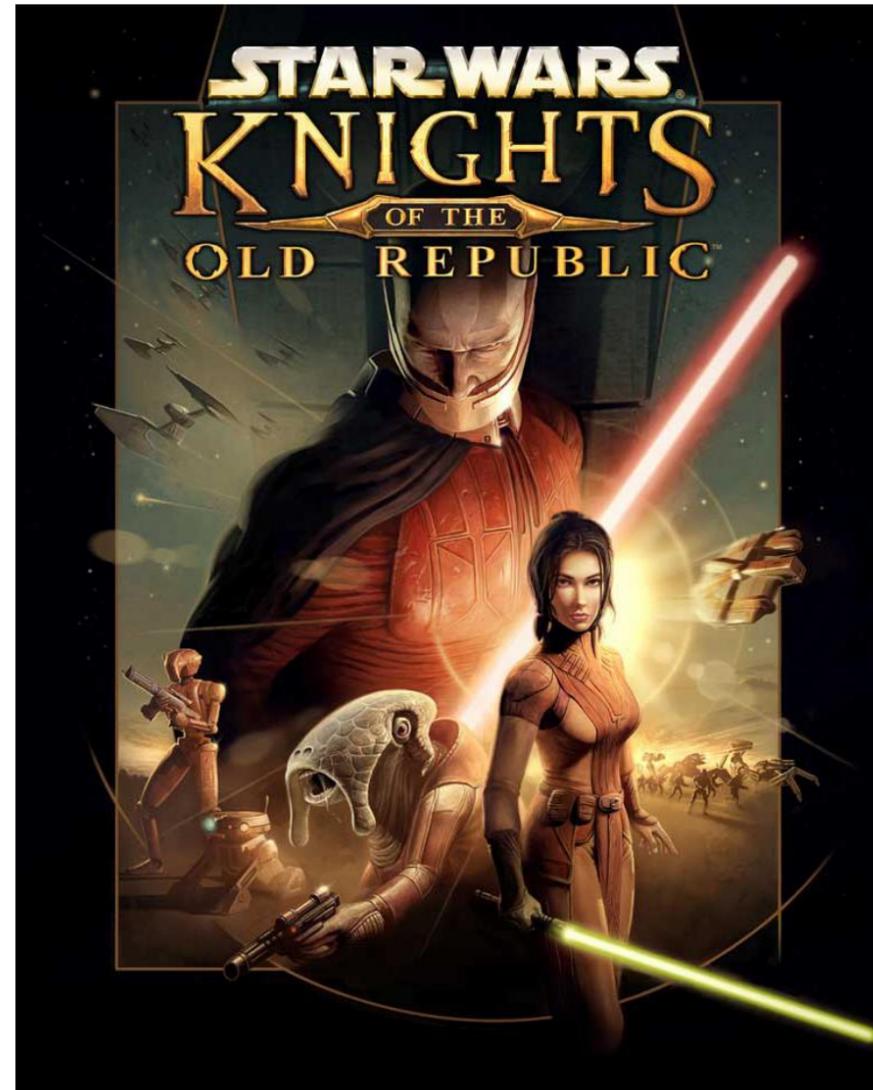
- Star Wars: The Old Republic was a big deal in 2010/11 honest (Background on SWTOR and launch plans)
- Establishing a global team (What 'global' meant to EA; structure, initial choices (EU citizens/natives, able to move))
- Why not remote (central office, moral, communication)
- First hire: French team leader; then... (outline whole team)
- Launch ramp up (team expands) - final team makeup
- 5hr time diff and how we worked with it - better than 8 hrs!
- The video link, the 'Captain's chair'
- Daily routine - patch notes - social media (x3)

Who am I?



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Bio... who?



**STAR
WARS**

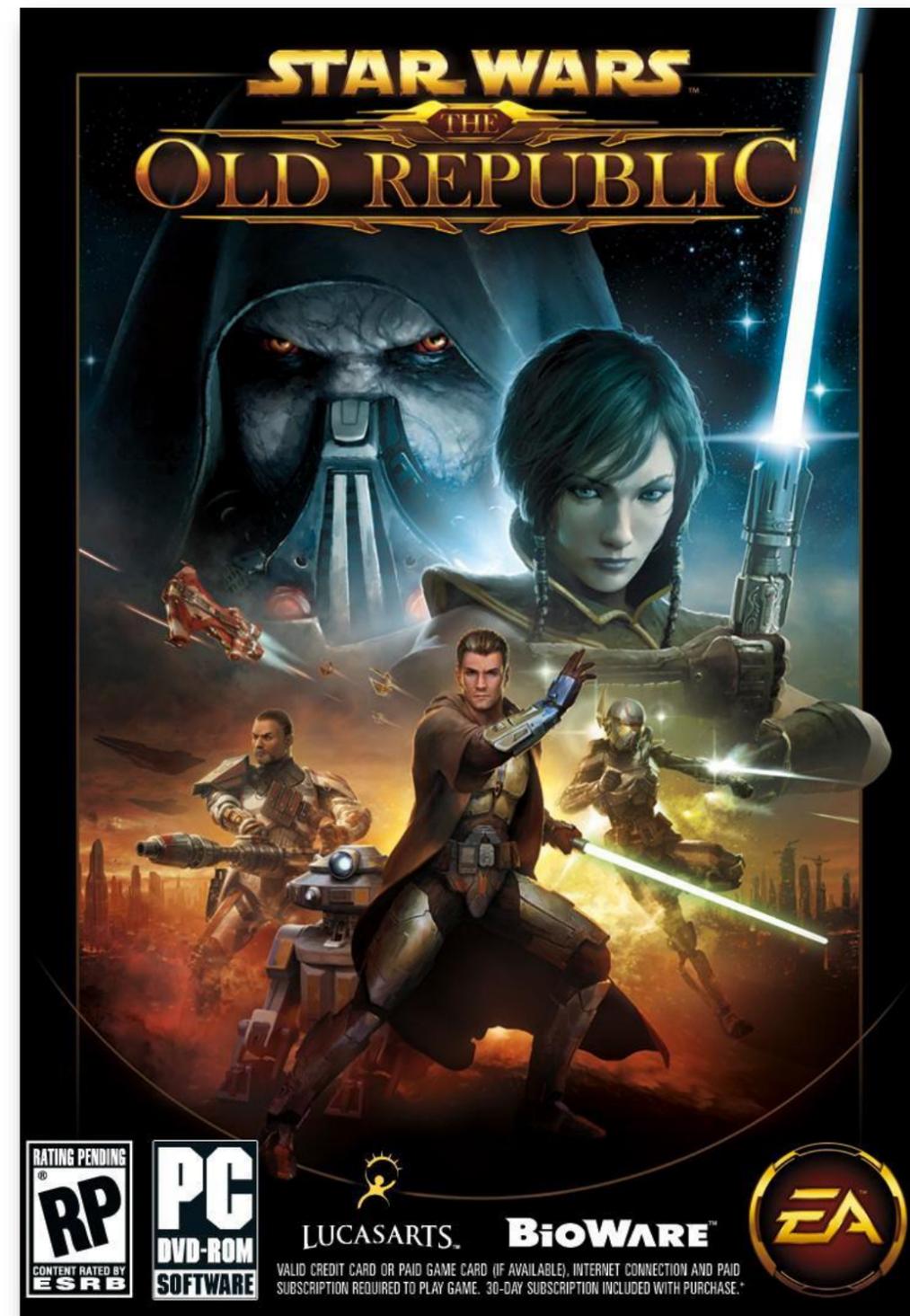
+ **BiOWARE**[®]

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STAR WARS THE OLD REPUBLIC

(This was actually quite a big deal when it launched, y'know.)



Quick history



- Announced in 2008
 - (for launch in 2009 😬)
- I joined late 2010
- We launched at the very end of 2011
- Biggest launch in EA's history (at that time)

The 'one million and no more' plan

- Bioware intended to launch SWTOR for approx 1m players... and no more.
- Belief that this was all that could be reasonably supported at launch, with servers, customer service, etc.

The 'one million and no more' plan

- This was a **good** and **smart** plan.
- (More games-as-services should pick a number!)
- Then, y'know, the realities of the games business hit.
- **Spoiler:** We had a lot more than 1m at launch.

Hey, hold on

1,000,000

is a big number.

So... how do you handle a global launch...?

What does 'global' mean?

- Uh, not the entire globe
- Basically - the west (US, Europe)
- Uh, except Australia and New Zealand
 - but we won't tell them until summer
 - and we'll make the community guy do it lolz

Who's where for this launch?



San Francisco

- EA HQ
- LucasFilm

Austin, TX

- BioWare Austin

Galway, Ireland

- BioWare Ireland

Pre-2010 community structure

- Centralized in Austin, TX (home of BioWare)
- Forums-focused
- A few on-site staff + moderators
- Peak 20?



2011 community structure

- Centralized in Austin, TX (still)
- EU team based in Galway, Ireland
- Peak 48 people



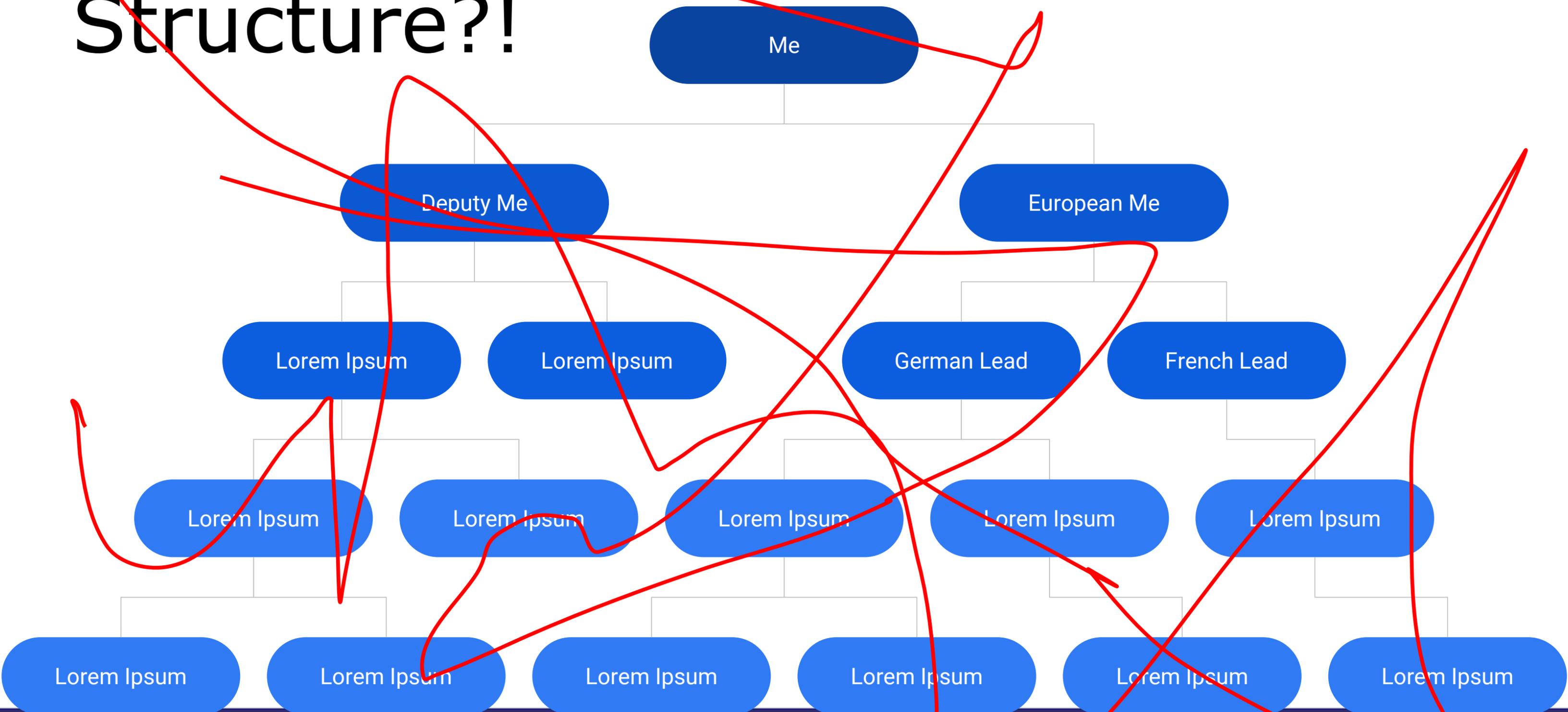
Not just forums...

- ... although we had those...
- Social media (Twitter, Facebook, YouTube)
- Creative Services outputting editorial, video trailers, screens
- EU team translating everything + local forums & social

Oh and also

- Dedicated fan site program
 - Hosted multiple on-site fan site summits
- Guild management and onboarding
 - Post-launch guild summit
- Events - PAX, Gamescom, E3, EGexpo etc

Structure?!



Let's just do Europe

- EU team leader (English, but not required!)
- German and French team leads
- Multiple people under them
- 12 in total

European (and global?) success

- Staff who are **citizens of that country**
 - No, you don't know the culture
- Located in the correct timezone
 - Players aren't on your time
- With appropriate support
 - They do everything twice... localization is a bitch

Care and feeding

- Be there!
 - Austin - New York - Cork - and back (a lot)
- Video link, always on (dedicated PC at both ends)
 - Plus the 'Captain's Chair' (whoops wrong IP)
- Assume **they know more than you** about their community

Did it work?

- Mostly, yeah!
- Aaaaand then remember the realities of global business?
- Yeah, EA laid off a lot of people (including me)
- But SWTOR is still around!

Remember how...

1,000,000

is a big number?

It's still do-able. With the right commitment.

As for me

700,000,000

... is another, uh, bigger number...

brb, bio

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Managing Change

Richard Kiernan (Head of Customer Care, Wooga)

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Richard Kiernan



Head of Customer care

richard.kiernan@wooga.com

Change happens

Usually because the company is addressing a problem



Old Structure



PEX & Localisation
1 person

New Structure



PEX
1 Person

Localisation
1 Person

Areas of Change



Structure &
Process



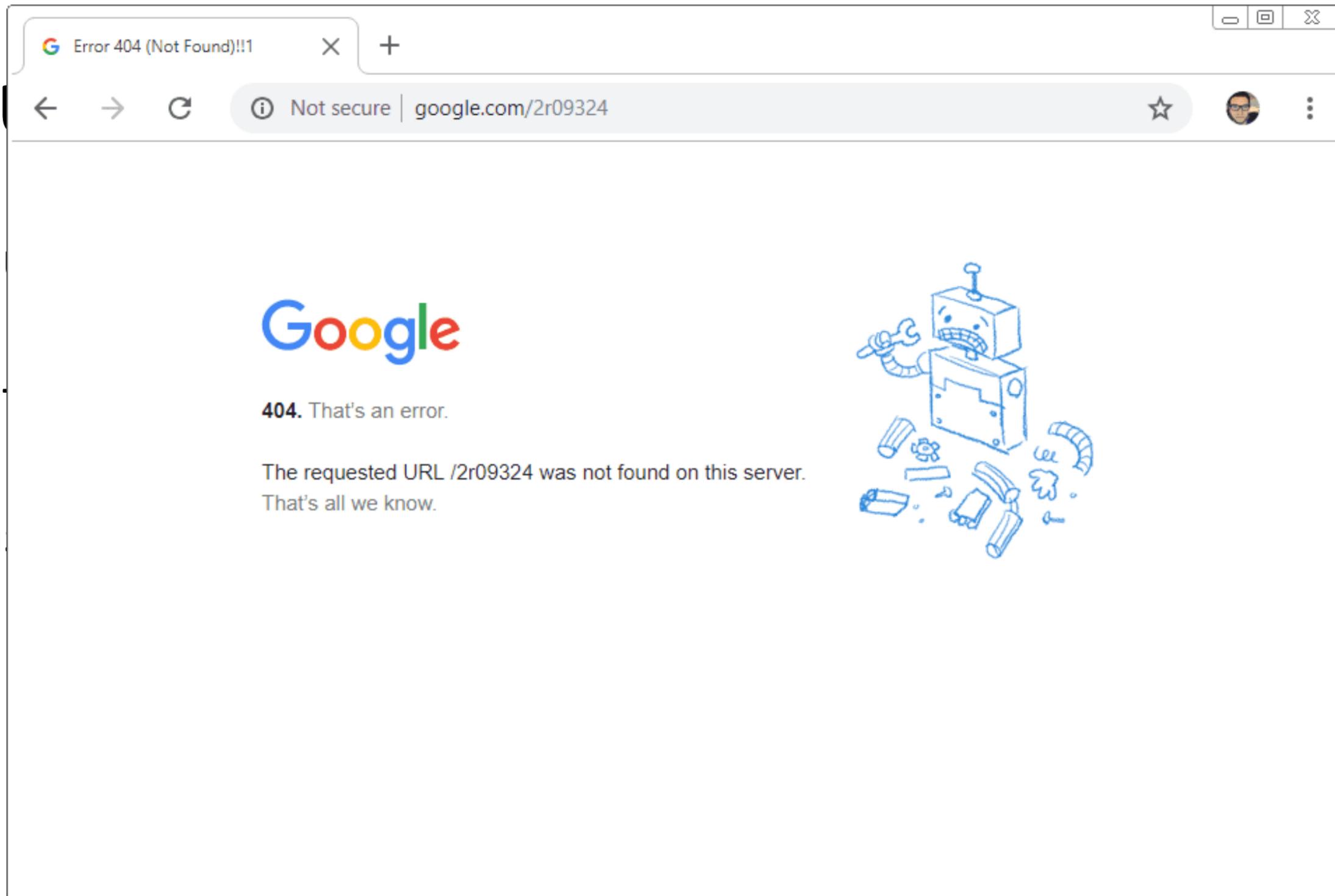
Job
Satisfaction



Career
Development

Struct

- What is o
- Where is
- When wa
- When do



Satisfaction



Seating



Branding



Team events



Mental Health

Mental Health



Career Development

How do I fit?

What does this mean for me?

Change Happens

- My boss quit (another boss)
- A new boss came in - with new change
- How do I fit? What does it mean for me?
- I left

Change happens

Usually because the company is addressing a problem



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Q&A

Tara J. Brannigan - @kindofstrange

Stephen Reid - @rockjaw

Richard Kiernan - richard.kiernan@wooga.com

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