

A 2.0 IS NOT GOING TO KILL YOU BUT IT WILL TRY

by Jan Lehnardt at ApacheCon EU 2016 in Sevilla

Hi, my name is Jan Lehnardt, I'm a developer and business person from Berlin, Germany



JAN LEHNARDT

- **CouchDB since 2006**
- **Apache CouchDB since 2008**
- **PMC Chair & VP of CouchDB since 2011**
- **Longest active contributor**

- **CEO at Neighbourhoodie Software in Berlin**

Joined CouchDB in 2006, longest standing contributor

Have done everything from evangelising, community work, core engineering.

Still do all of the above

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Blog post by Michael Lopp who is good at identifying patters in software engineering management

**HE SAID: “SHIPPING A 1.0
PRODUCT ISN’T GOING TO KILL
YOU, BUT IT WILL TRY”**

— <http://randsinrepose.com/archives/1-0/>

Great article about the dynamics of trying to ship a 1.0 product as a startup and all the ways it can go wrong.

I’ve grown to not be a big fan of the whole startup culture and ecosystem, but the things outlined in the article are applicable to just about any endeavour.

Now that we’ve shipped CouchDB 2.0, I’ve seen that in retrospective, there is a whole different set of things that can go wrong when building on an existing project, with an existing community, with existing success.

**SHIPPING A 2.0 PRODUCT ISN'T
GOING TO KILL YOU, BUT IT WILL
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**SHIPPING A 2.0 PRODUCT ISN'T
GOING TO KILL YOU, BUT IT WILL
TRY
...IN ENTIRELY NEW WAYS"**

I'm using "Product" here in the broadest possible sense. Whatever endeavour you are on:

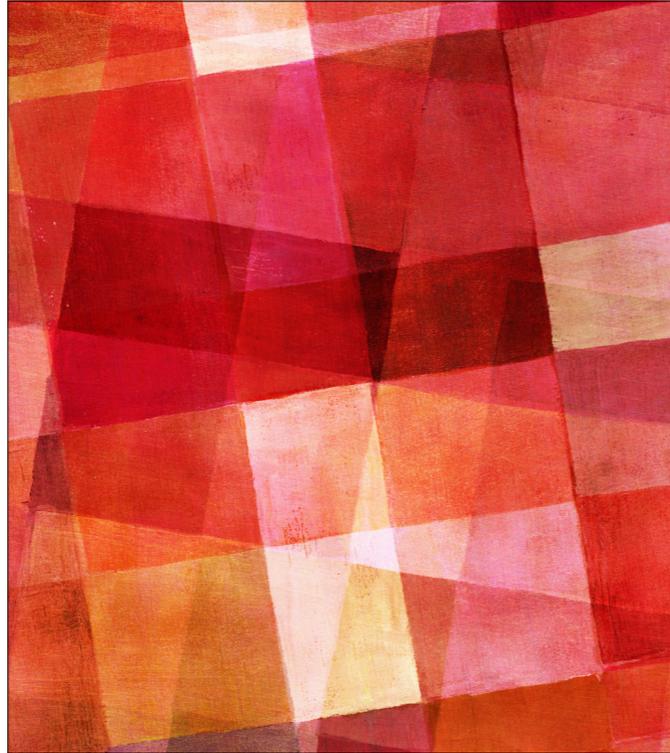
- a software product
- an open source project
- running a conference like this one
- starting a non-profit



This talk is not as universal as the blog post it was inspired by.

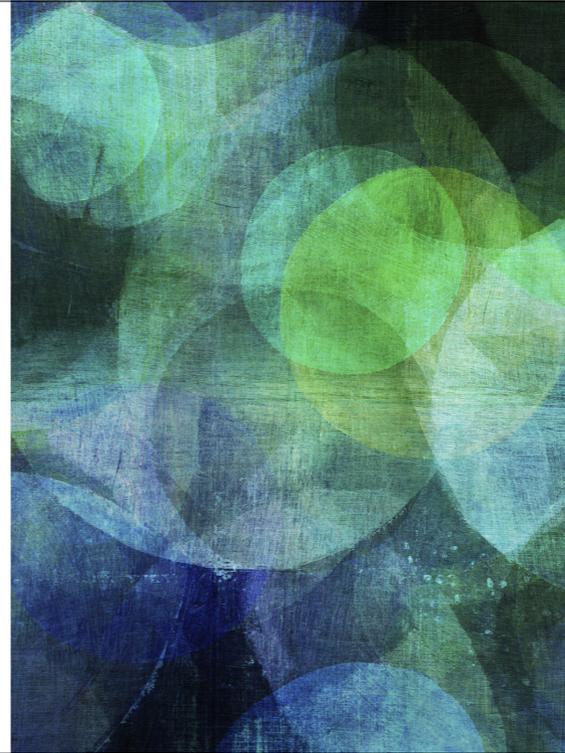
Since every 1.0 is different, every 2.0 starts from a different place.

Throughout this talk, I'll be presenting five stories, of how things could have gone wrong, what we did to save the day, and what you can learn from that for your projects.



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1. Community Struggle
 2. Feature Deprecation
 3. Trademark Disputes
 4. The Trade-Offs of Shipping
 5. Sustainable Open Source

COMMUNITY STRUGGLE



COMMUNITY STRUGGLE: 2012

All of this happened at the beginning of 2012

Inventor had founded a startup around CouchDB, direction changed with new investors, “new product” not compatible, but communicated as “the future”.

Project 1 we had worked with closely, even wrote custom code for them. Management issues, two people to build and run a multi-million user cloud infra + client software => doomed, shelved now.

Project 2 technology requirements changed. Early on CouchDB was a good fit. Changed to not be a good fit, they tried to make it work despite (bless them), but had to switch eventually.

Now, everywhere I go I hear “isn’t CouchDB dead?”

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- **The Result:**
 - **“CouchDB is Dead” is the meme du-jour for five years.**

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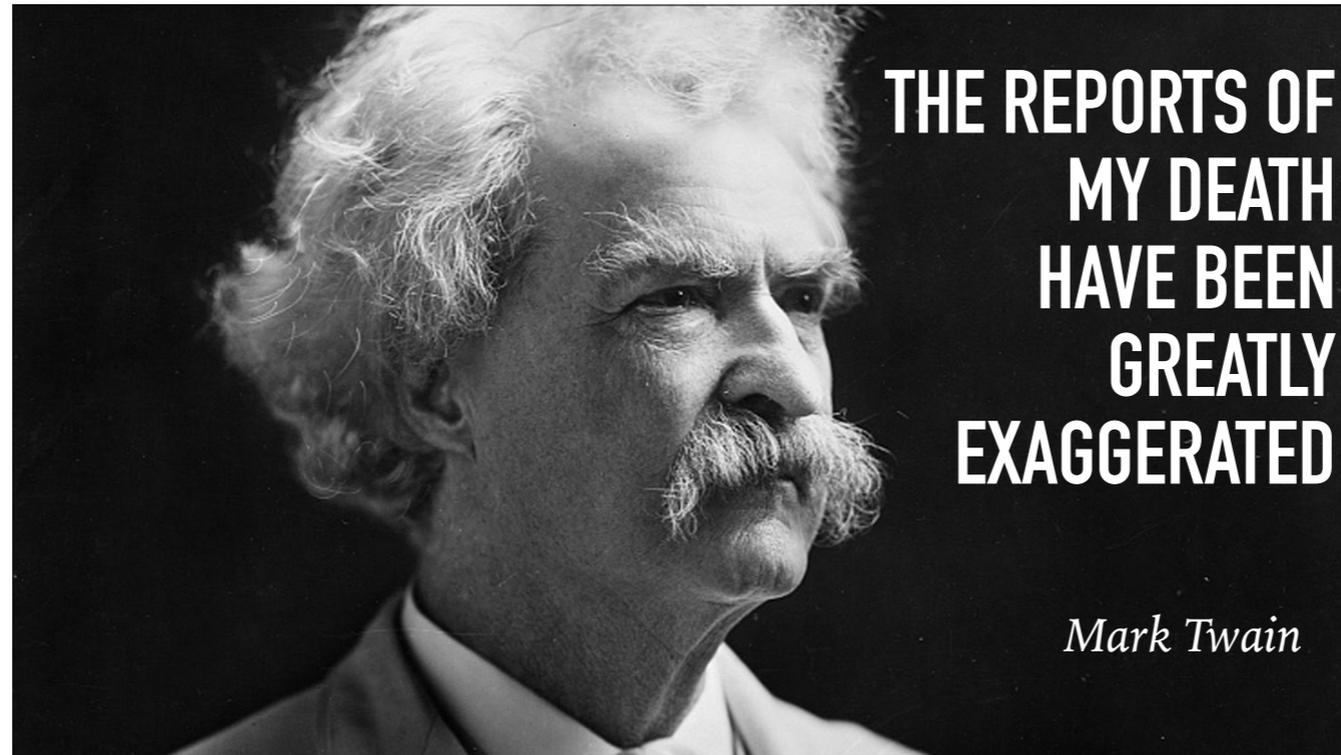
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What should we do?



We considered publishing a blog post stating that we are very much alive



NO

But no, we thought this was more of a desperate move and we decided instead to:

buckle down and continue to work, and show, rather than tell

SHOW, NOT TELL

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COMMUNITY STRUGGLE: REMOVE POISONOUS PEOPLE

c.f. Google I/O 2008 - Open Source Projects and Poisonous People: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-F-3E8pyjFo>

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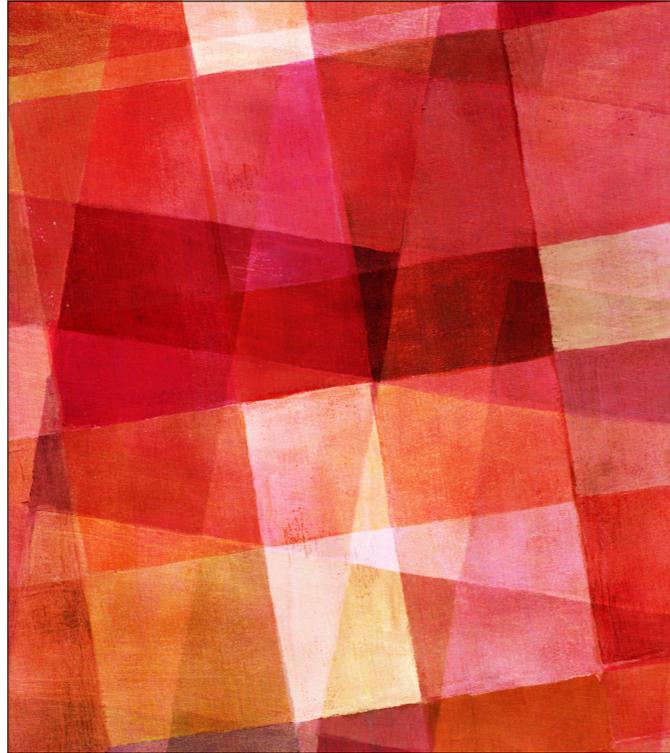
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COMMUNITY STRUGGLE: REMOVE POISONOUS PEOPLE

- 5 years to realise a committer was poisonous / toxic
- Another year to set up the process to remove them
- Hardest thing I've ever done in open source

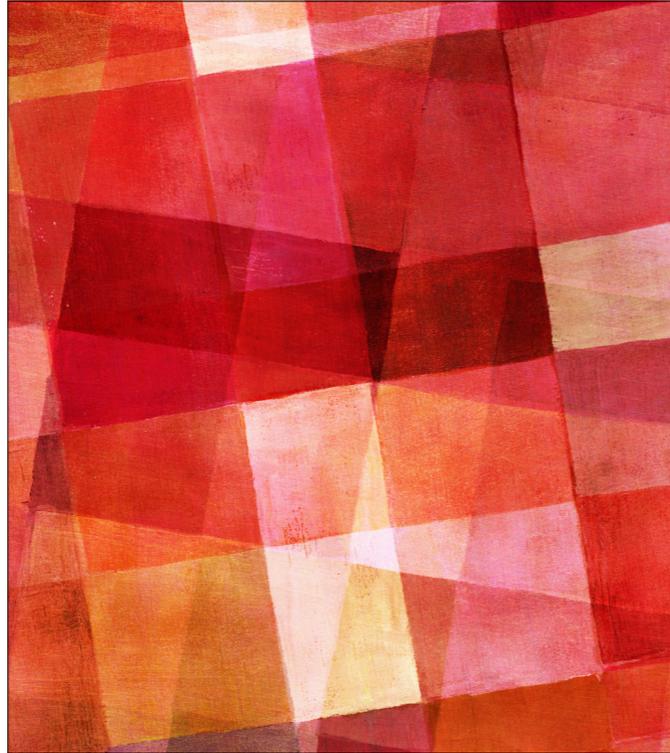
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1. More frequent and more regular releases
2. New website
3. Regular online meetings
4. Weekly news blog posts about everything that's going on
 - Since adopted by a number of other ASF projects

This helped stem the tide, but took a year or two to arrive in the immediate communities, more in the larger tech world.

And we still got some of this when we shipped CouchDB 2.0 two months ago.



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- ▶ They are a bad idea
 - ▶ It just took us a couple of years to figure that out

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That isn't to say you can't do anything useful, but it is not really convenient.

cgi-bin: used for another thing where the model is okay

In the meantime, Node.js came, saw, and won that space of web development and CouchDB should just follow suit.

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- ▶ No active development

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FEATURE DEPRECATION: LESSONS LEARNED

Lesson 1: this will give some people the wrong idea about your project and course correction is going to take time and effort

Lesson 2: otherwise people will take all the fun out of the project, they drain resources by binding everyone into discussions that lead nowhere.

Lesson 3: if they won't shut up, get them out of the critical path, give them clear criteria for re-joining the mainstream. If they step up: great, if not: also great.

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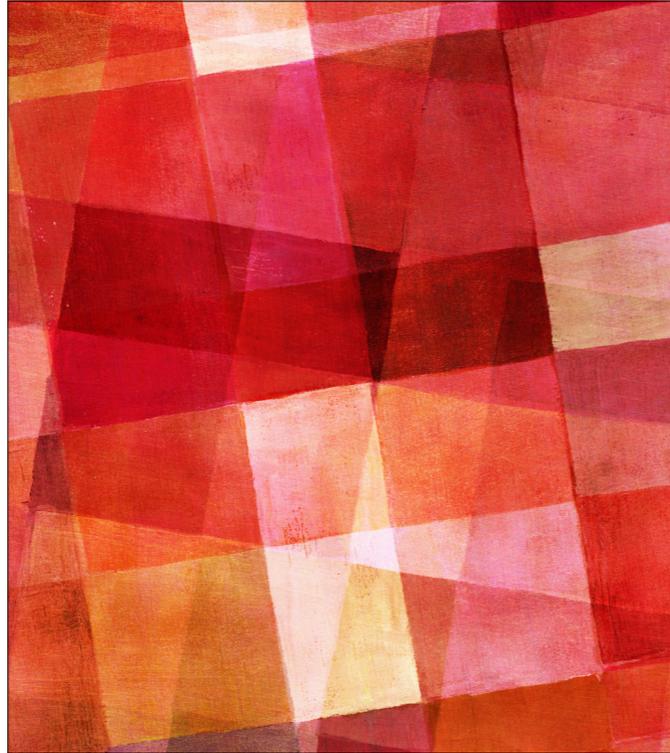
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We failed to do incubation right. ASF has a lot of rules for projects just coming in. They are all there for a reason. It is not easy to find out those reasons.

ASF was built to avoid this

ASF needs to document itself better, and “read the mailing list archive” is not documentation

Nobody has got time to do this

Renaming: **CouchDB** is too good a name, we can't possibly rename, but some in the PMC argued the benefits. And I agree with the benefits, but the downsides outweigh the benefits.

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He never contributed a single thing

No surprise: one of the vocal “CouchApp” minority

Only wasted hours and hours of time.

Never bothered to talk to the ASF whether they’d even accept a sponsor that violates the TM

Some people’s ego so big. 🙄

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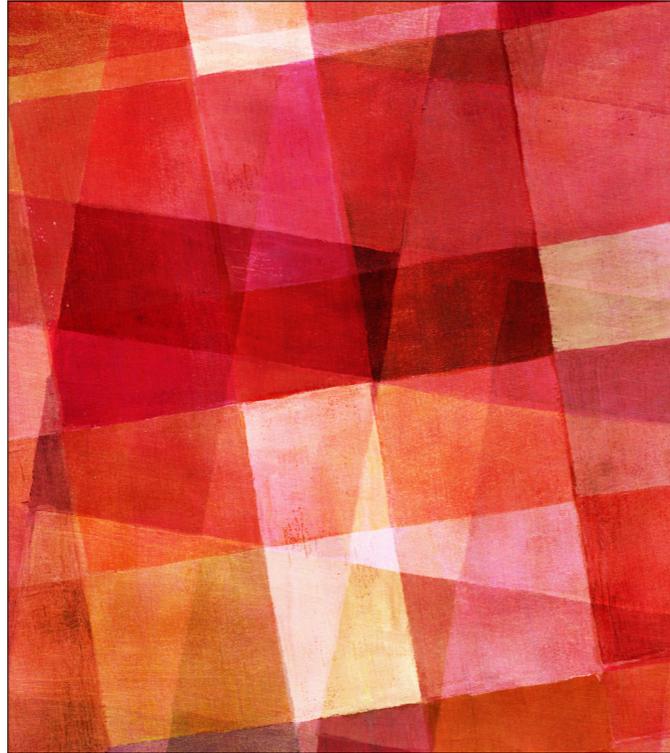
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 2. Feature Deprecation
 3. Trademark Disputes
 4. **The Trade-Offs of Shipping**
 5. Sustainable Open Source

THE TRADE-OFFS OF SHIPPING: THE NEW BUILD SYSTEM

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Swag: my idea, ElasticSearch tried it, we adapted it

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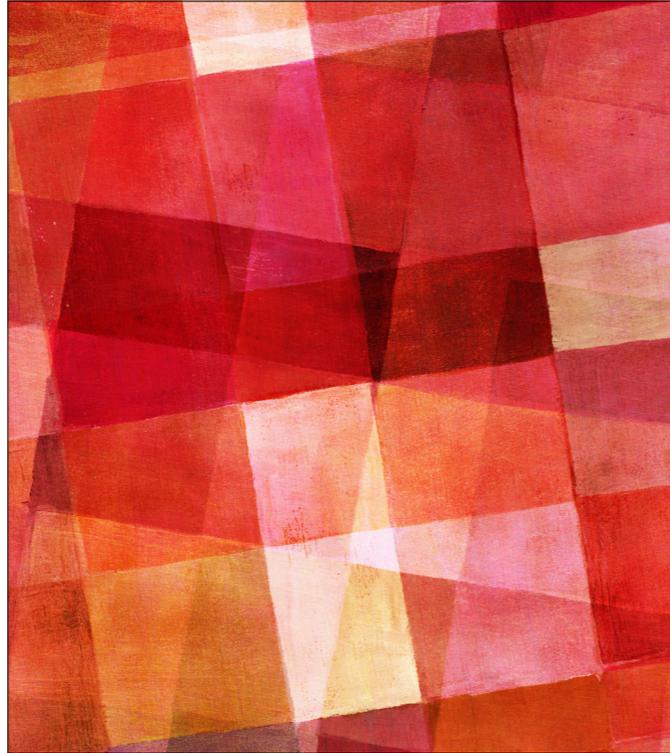
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SUSTAINABLE OPEN SOURCE: HOW PROJECTS DIE IN TWO ACTS

People leave the project:

- no more time
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- no more energy to overcome project friction (like getting new features in, setting project direction, release chores, microaggressions)

No new people join:

- project not well presented (website, blogs, conferences, books)
- technically no longer relevant (maintenance mode)
- hard to get started (obscure programming language, no getting started docs, no internals handbook, no starter issues, confusing bug tracker, not on GitHub)

Let's look at how we can fix both causes of project death.

I would argue that making sure people don't leave should be the first priority, because when we only focus on people joining, they'll leave as fast as we recruit them.

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Community over code, people > *

Doesn't have to be friendship, but professional care. Tell them it's okay when they miss a deadline, or have stress at home, work. Appreciate them being part of the project, don't define them by way of their contributions.

Lack of control: project things happen and contributors or even committers don't know why. Document your processes.

Insufficient Reward: *cough* Merit *cough* contributor -> committer -> pmc member -> ASF member: not enough levels of recognition

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Conflict in values: have a clear mission statement, keep it up to date, talk about it regularly, frame everything you do as part of that mission statement: align people, outliers will leave (this is a good thing)

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CoC / Diversity Statement: signal that you welcome `_everyone_`, otherwise only white men will show up. This is the baseline, don't start before you have this. CoC needs to be actionable, be prepared to enforce it.

Document everything: have a newcomer do a release: you win

"I think" considered weak in some cultures, leads to "rude"-sounding comments/emails, learn the source of the perceived rudeness / cultural difference, work together to find a solution.

Be nice: <http://qz.com/625870/after-years-of-intensive-analysis-google-discovers-the-key-to-good-teamwork-is-being-nice/>

Money: underrepresented people in tech tend to not have the same privilege of most of the people in this room: having enough spare time, or being paid to work on open source. We need programmes to support these people getting into Open Source. Luckily, these exist. Please ask your employers to support them: RailsGirls Summer of Code (not just Rails), Outreachy, etc.

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- Document all processes, make it easy for anyone to do anything on day one by following the process docs

CoC / Diversity Statement: signal that you welcome `_everyone_`, otherwise only white men will show up. This is the baseline, don't start before you have this. CoC needs to be actionable, be prepared to enforce it.

Document everything: have a newcomer do a release: you win

"I think" considered weak in some cultures, leads to "rude"-sounding comments/emails, learn the source of the perceived rudeness / cultural difference, work together to find a solution.

Be nice: <http://qz.com/625870/after-years-of-intensive-analysis-google-discovers-the-key-to-good-teamwork-is-being-nice/>

Money: underrepresented people in tech tend to not have the same privilege of most of the people in this room: having enough spare time, or being paid to work on open source. We need programmes to support these people getting into Open Source. Luckily, these exist. Please ask your employers to support them: RailsGirls Summer of Code (not just Rails), Outreachy, etc.

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THANK YOU!

CouchDB 2.0: Five Lessons Learned
Jan Lehnardt @janl jan@apache.org
Professional Support for Apache CouchDB: <https://neighbourhood.ie>



