

The True Cost of Open Source

Patrick Steele-Idem
@psteeleidem

Based on my experience at 



Maintaining **marko** and other projects

Now leading our open source initiative

Why open source?

- Build a better project
- Attract outside contributors
- Retain talent
- Attract talent

...you probably know these things

Open source is easy

Successful open source is hard

Open sourcing a project introduces a lot of extra work

- Legal and security reviews
- Public engagement
- Community development and support
- External bug reports and pull requests
- Marketing and branding

Open source is risky

- Security concerns
- Reflects poorly on the company if done incorrectly
- Potentially bad interactions with outside community
- Employees may leave if they can take their code with them

Is it worth it?

ABSOLUTELY!

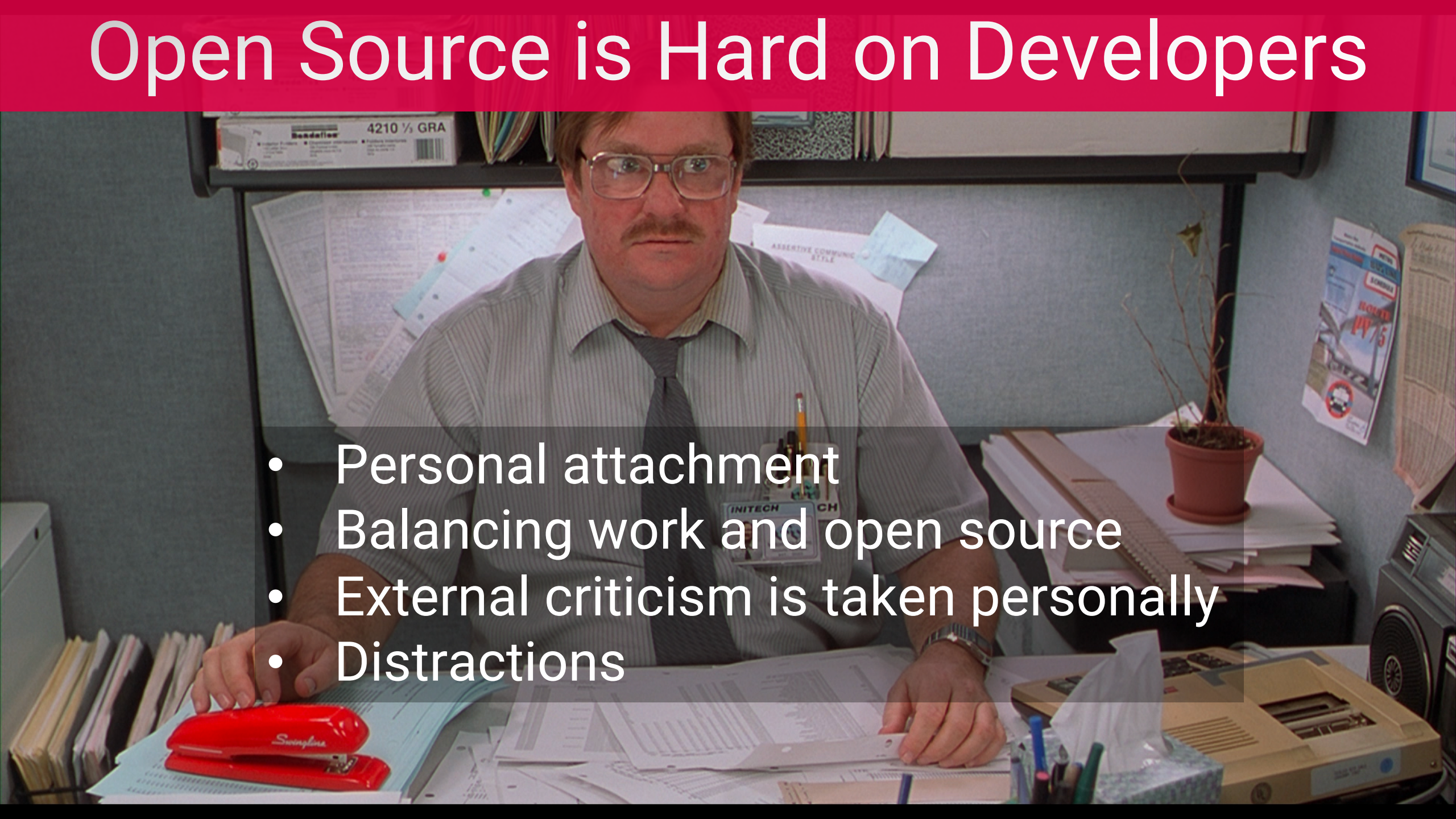
Before you open source, you really need
to know what you are getting into

(both employer and employees)

Costs over time



Open Source is Hard on Developers

- 
- Personal attachment
 - Balancing work and open source
 - External criticism is taken personally
 - Distractions

Open source is not a one-person job!

Promote collaboration

- Every maintainer should have a partner
- Find the right tools
 - Gitter, Slack, Skype, Screenhero, Github, etc.
- Internal Open Source (AKA “Inner Source”)
- Mentoring

WARNING

Preparing a project for
open source is costly

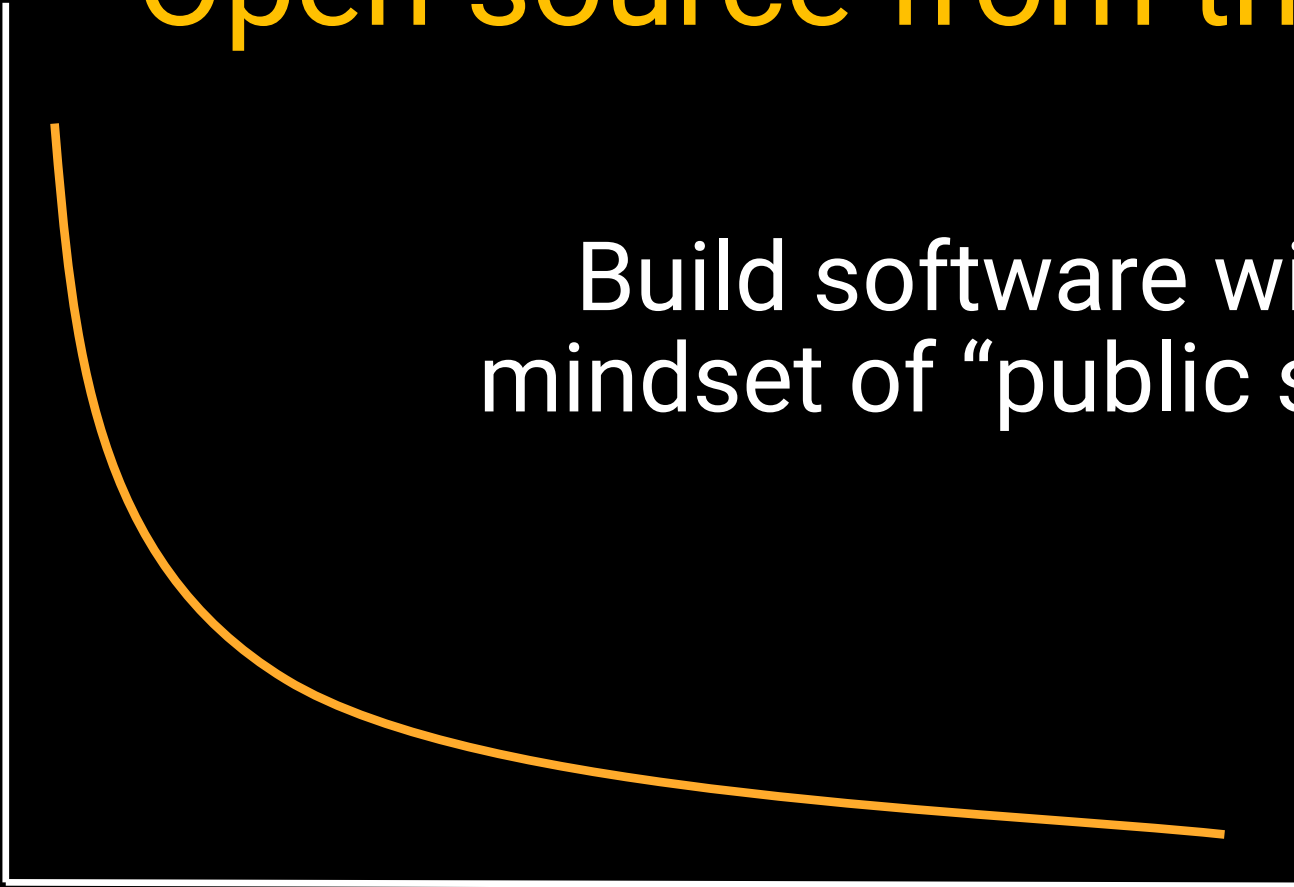
Legal reviews, polishing the code, adding docs,
removing internal references, etc.

Open source from the beginning!

Likelihood of success

Build software with the
mindset of “public scrutiny”

Length of time kept proprietary



OUR SUPPORT COSTS

ARE TOO DAMN HIGH

Good documentation and
extensive tests are critical

Open source forces this,
but you should be doing it anyway

Flexibility is not always needed

Be prepared to say “no”

WARNING

Breaking changes hurt

Dividing your community increases your support costs

Open source projects require extra planning

- Gather opinions
- Keep the public API as simple as possible
- Have clear guidelines

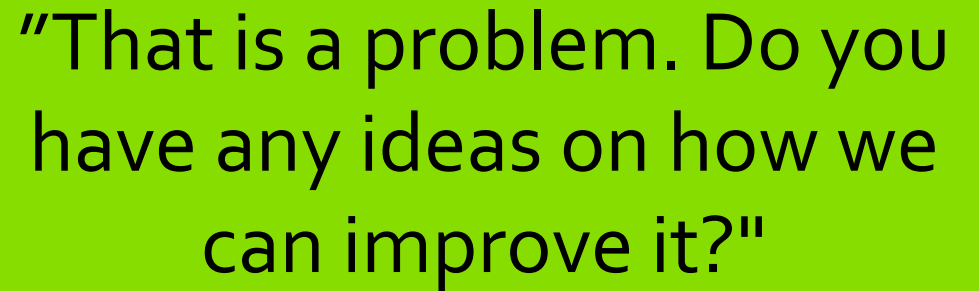
Community!!
Community!!
Community!!



If you open source a project
and no one knows about it,
is it really open source?

Tips for building a community

- Be helpful, kind, and make people feel welcome
- Leave some problems for others
- Ask inviting questions
- No ego
- Get to know other developers
- Don't be afraid to have voice chats with outsiders (you'll learn a lot!)
- Be transparent
- Talk about it!
- Celebrate the accomplishments of others



"That is a problem. Do you have any ideas on how we can improve it?"

Make source code approachable

Flat directory tree FTW!

The screenshot displays the GitHub interface for the `nodejs/node` repository. The top navigation bar includes links for Pull requests, Issues, and Gist. The repository name `nodejs / node` is shown, along with statistics: 1,904 Watchers, 27,938 Stars, and 4,623 Forks. The main navigation tabs include Code (selected), Issues (580), Pull requests (275), Projects (2), Wiki, Pulse, and Graphs. The file browser shows the `node / lib /` directory, with a list of files and folders. The files are listed in a table with their names, descriptions, and commit dates.

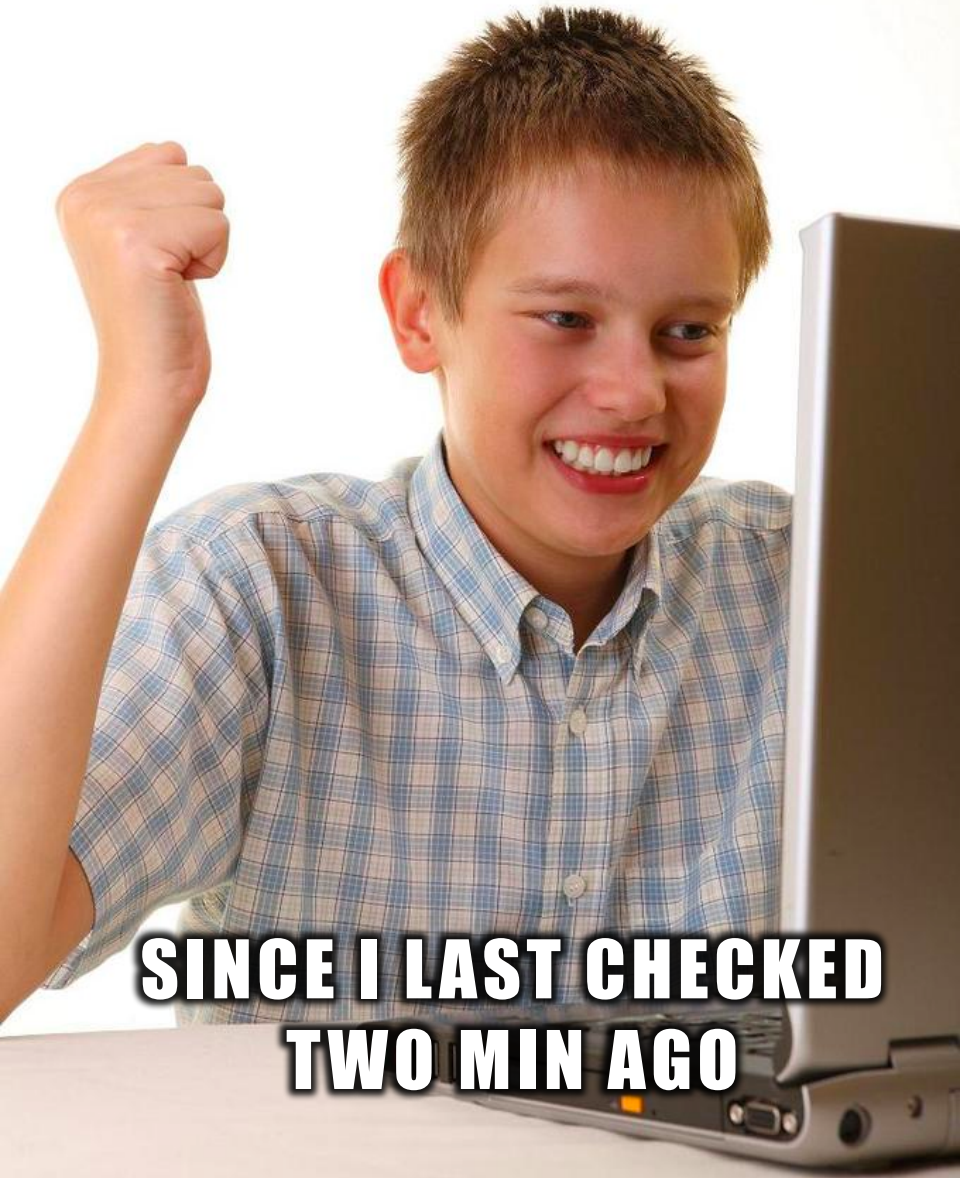
File/Folder	Description	Commit Date
..		
internal	process: improve performance of nextTick	7 days ago
.eslintrc	tools: avoid let in for loops	6 days ago
_debug_agent.js	debugger: use arrow function for lexical `this`	2 months ago
_debugger.js	debugger: remove obsolete setTimeout	5 months ago
_http_agent.js	http: name anonymous functions	2 days ago
_http_client.js	http: name anonymous functions in _http_client	2 days ago
_http_common.js	http: fix connection upgrade checks	2 months ago
_http_incoming.js	http: name anonymous functions in _http_incoming	2 days ago

Company should help promote projects

- Publish press releases
- Promote on social media
- Publish articles on company tech blog
- Host meetups

Hire open source contributors

TWO NEW STARS!



**SINCE I LAST CHECKED
TWO MIN AGO**

WARNING

You'll be obsessed with your
successful open source project

Notifications, page refreshes, scouring
the internet, responding, etc.

Thanks for listening!

Any questions?

Patrick Steele-Idem
 @psteeleidem