Mental Health and Workplace Culture in Tech:
A Personal Perspective

In 2011, I nearly lost everything.

2011 was the lowest point in my life. After a suicide attempt, I spent almost nine weeks in a closed psychiatric facility. During that time, I didn’t just learn how to live again – I realized how powerful real support can be. Without the trust and love of my wife Claudia, I wouldn’t be here. I share this part of my story to show that recovery is possible – and that a new path forward can begin, even in the darkest moments.

Today, I'm here to tell you why that became my turning point.

Mental Health and Workplace Culture in Tech:

A Personal Perspective

This presentation and the project is in memory of my friend and our industry colleague

Erik Bais

who passed away in 2024

This presentation – and the project behind it – is dedicated to the memory of my friend and our respected industry colleague, Erik Bais, who passed away in 2024. His impact, his presence, and his passion continue to inspire this work.

* 21st June 1972

† 28th May 2024

He showed me what listening truly means. This project is for him.

Rene Fichtmueller

Evangelical Optician- Flexoptix

Chairman - Global NOG Alliance

Co-Founder- Keep Ukraine Connected

Founder- OpenEars

Board Member- OIX

The René everyone knows

I’m Rene Fichtmueller – and for me, it’s never just about tech. It’s about people, community, and building something real together.
Whether I’m at events, on stage as a DJ, or simply connecting teams across the globe – I love bringing people together.
I believe in doing things with purpose, with honesty, and with a little bit of fun along the way.
What you see here isn’t just my job – it’s my life. Driven by passion, powered by people, and guided by vision.

Only a few people know the other René

Outside of projects, networks, and events, there’s one place where everything slows down: my family.
These moments – eating ice cream with my daughter, sunsets by the lake, a homemade birthday cake – this is my real life.
In these moments, I’m not a chairman, a founder, or a speaker. I’m just a dad. A partner. A human being.
And it’s this part of me that gives strength to everything else I do.

My personal struggle – short, real, and unfiltered:

ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder)

A subtype of ADHD without hyperactivity

(Easily distracted, Struggles to focus on boring or repetitive tasks, Frequently forgetful or disorganized, Tends to procrastinate, Can hyperfocus on things that are exciting or interesting)

ICD (Impulse Control Disorder)

Actions often happen spontaneously, without thinking of consequences

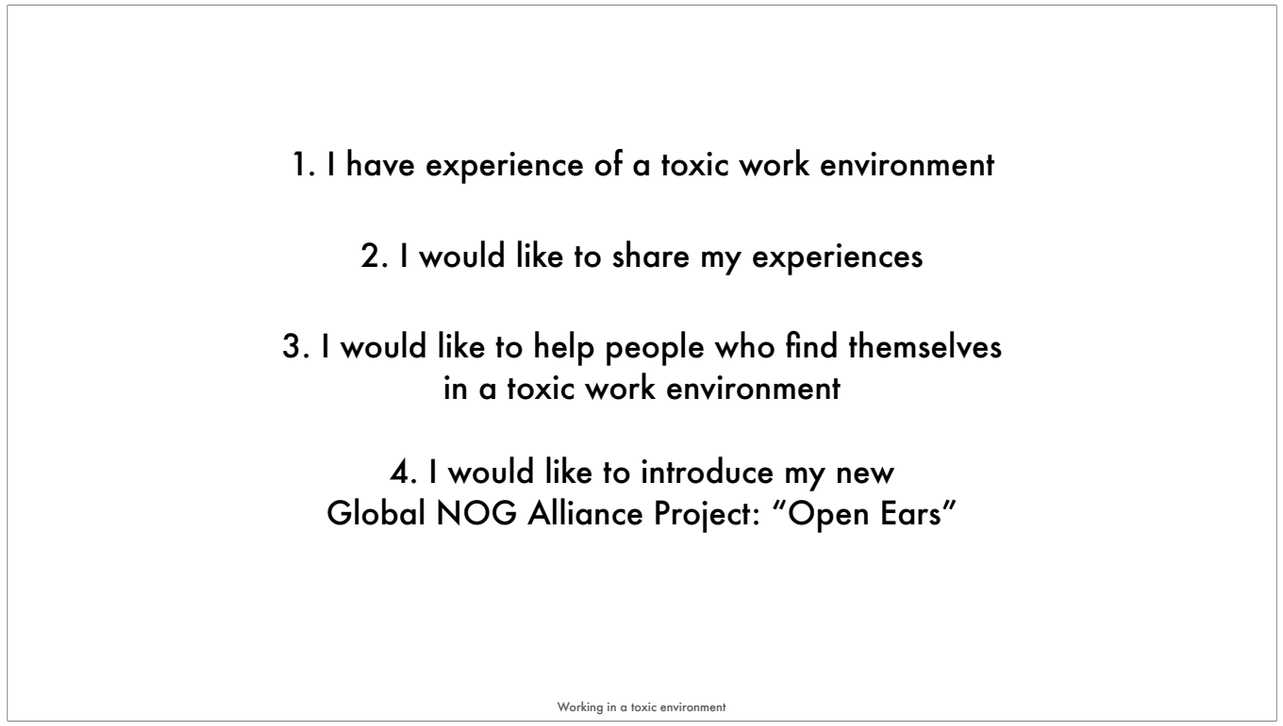
(Acting before thinking, Saying things unfiltered or emotionally, Difficulty holding back reactions, Trouble with frustration or delayed gratification)

I want to take a moment to share something personal – honest, raw, and unfiltered.
I live with ADD – Attention Deficit Disorder – a form of ADHD without the hyperactivity. I get easily distracted, struggle with boring or repetitive tasks, and procrastinate more than I'd like. But when something grabs my interest, I lock in completely. That hyperfocus can be a superpower – just not always predictable.

I also deal with Impulse Control Disorder. Sometimes I act or speak before I think. It's spontaneous, emotional, and often unfiltered. It used to create a lot of problems for me – but I've learned to manage it.

I'm not sharing this for sympathy – I share it because real change starts with real honesty."

Why am I dealing with this topic?



This next part gets personal – and that’s exactly what makes it so powerful. We’ll hear about real-life experiences with toxic work environments. But more than that – it’s about turning pain into (GAIN) purpose. Get ready for honest insights, inspiration, and the introduction of a special initiative: Open Ears by the Global NOG Alliance.

Part I: Understanding Toxic Work Environments
= **No room for mistakes** =

Do you avoid mistakes – and end up stuck because you're afraid to make them?

Now let's pause and look at a pattern we all know – especially in tech: Why is it so hard to allow ourselves to make mistakes? And how often do we end up stuck, just because we're scared something might go wrong?"se is to assign blame,
fear arises from the consequences of mistakes or missteps.

This fear discourages individuals from stepping outside their comfort zone,
which ultimately impacts the performance of the entire team.

Part I: Understanding Toxic Work Environments
= **Lack of trust** =

Toxic workplaces often stem from a lack of trust within the team.

Toxic work environments don’t appear overnight – they often start with a slow erosion of trust within the team. When trust is missing, miscommunication, insecurity, and a culture of fear take over. Let’s take a closer look at what happens when trust breaks down – and how we can rebuild it.

Part I: Understanding Toxic Work Environments
= **Excessive Stress** =

Employee stress often stems from **burnout**, **poor communication**, **leadership conflict**, **fear of failure**, and **unclear expectations**.

Employee stress has many faces – but often the same root causes: burnout, poor communication, leadership conflicts, fear of failure, and unclear expectations. These factors don’t just affect individuals – they can disrupt entire teams. Let’s explore this more closely now.

Part I: Understanding Toxic Work Environments
= **Office Gossip** =

Office gossip may seem normal, but it fuels drama, distrust, and emotional tension

–

turning teams against each other and creating a toxic atmosphere.

Up next: a topic that’s often underestimated – office gossip. What seems like harmless chatter can quickly fuel distrust, tension, and a toxic work culture. It’s time to shine a light on the impact of words behind closed doors.

Part I: Understanding Toxic Work Environments
= **High turnover rates** =

High turnover signals deeper problems.

When people keep leaving, it’s usually a sign that something’s off. High turnover means employees don’t feel seen, valued, or supported. Let’s take a closer look at what that really means.

Part I: Understanding Toxic Work Environments
= **Unhealthy work boundaries** =

Toxic cultures destroy work-life balance.

Toxic work cultures don’t just drain energy – they invade personal life. When employees are expected to stay late, reply to emails after hours, or work weekends, balance disappears. It’s a fast track to burnout.

Part I: Understanding Toxic Work Environments
= **Lack of career support** =

No support. No growth. No motivation.

Lack of career support isn’t just about missed promotions – it’s a major motivation killer. When people feel stuck, they stop striving. Let’s explore why growth opportunities matter so much.

Part I: Understanding Toxic Work Environments
= **Lack of career support** =

Some employees feel unsupported in their career growth due to a lack of mentorship and team connection.

This absence of guidance complicates their ability to identify career advancement steps.

With more employees working remotely, especially entry-level staff, building connections with teams and managers can become even more challenging.

Working in a toxic environment

I know how frustrating it is to feel left alone in your career. Without mentorship or a real team connection, it’s hard to see the next step – especially for entry-level employees working remotely. Career paths get blurry, and the sense of direction fades. That’s exactly what I want to talk about today.

Part I: Understanding Toxic Work Environments
= **Low morale and negativity** =

Low morale spreads negativity fast.

When morale drops, everything follows. Negativity spreads like a virus – dragging the whole team down.

Part I: Understanding Toxic Work Environments
= **Sick guilt** =

Feeling bad for not performing while unwell.

Feeling guilty for being sick – that’s Sick Guilt. When we pressure ourselves to perform, even when our body clearly says ‘stop.’ Let’s take a closer look at this mindset and where it comes from.

Part I: Understanding Toxic Work Environments
= **Sick guilt** =

- **Guilt blocks rest:** People avoid leave or home office.
- **Speak up:** Breaks must feel safe to request.
- **Be real:** Honesty about limits when sick matters.
- **Lead by example:** Companies must support health-first culture.

I’ve felt it myself – that guilt when you need a break, like you’re letting the team down. Many people stay silent, even when they’re sick or burned out.
But this needs to change. Taking time off should feel safe. Being honest about your limits should be normal.
And it starts at the top. Leaders need to set the tone and build a culture where health always comes first.

Part II: Why am I addressing this topic?

We have to react since the statistics are alarming!

Part II: Why am I addressing this topic?

High Burnout Rates:

61% of tech workers felt burned out

driven by long hours, high pressure, and poor work-life balance.

Source: https://www.teamblind.com

Burnout isn’t rare anymore – it’s a reality for many in tech. According to Blind, 61% of tech workers report feeling burned out. Long hours, intense pressure, and poor work-life balance are the main drivers. Let’s dig deeper into what that means.

Part II: Why am I addressing this topic?

Workplace Stress:

77% of tech employees report burnout –

driven by high demands and industry pace.

77% of tech employees report burnout. The industry moves fast, demands a lot, and rarely slows down. The impact? High stress and serious mental strain.”

Part II: Why am I addressing this topic?

Burnout hits retention:

Burned-out tech employees are 2.6x more likely to job hunt –

raising turnover and hiring costs.

(Harvard Business Review)

Burnout doesn’t just affect individuals – it hits the business too. According to Harvard Business Review, burned-out employees are 2.6 times more likely to look for a new job. The result: higher turnover and rising recruitment costs.

Part II: Why am I addressing this topic?

Mental Health Impact:

83% of tech pros say work stress harms their mental health –

more than the general workforce.

(LifeWorks, 2020)

Working in a toxic environment

Mental health is taking a hit – especially in tech. According to LifeWorks, 83% of tech professionals say workplace stress harms their mental health – well above the average across other industries. That’s a serious red flag.

Part II: Why am I addressing this topic?

Remote Work Strain:

20% of remote tech workers feel lonely –

fueling burnout and disconnection.

(Buffer)

Remote work offers freedom – but also new challenges. According to Buffer, 1 in 5 remote tech workers feels lonely. That loneliness can worsen burnout and weaken team connection. Let’s take a closer look.”

Part II: Why am I addressing this topic?

Unhealthy Coping:

30% of tech workers deal with stress by overworking or neglecting their health.

(HR Management Journal)

When stress becomes constant, many turn to unhealthy habits – overworking, ignoring their health. According to the HR Management Journal, 30% of tech workers do exactly that. A clear sign it’s time to rethink how we handle pressure.

Part III: **Psychological** and Physical Effects on Employees

Increased Stress and Anxiety:
Heightened emotional strain from negative interactions

Depression:
Feelings of hopelessness and lack of motivation

Decreased Job Satisfaction:
General discontent and lack of fulfilment in work

Burnout:
Emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion over time

Lower Self-Esteem:
Erosion of confidence and self-worth

Isolation:
Disconnection from colleagues and team dynamics

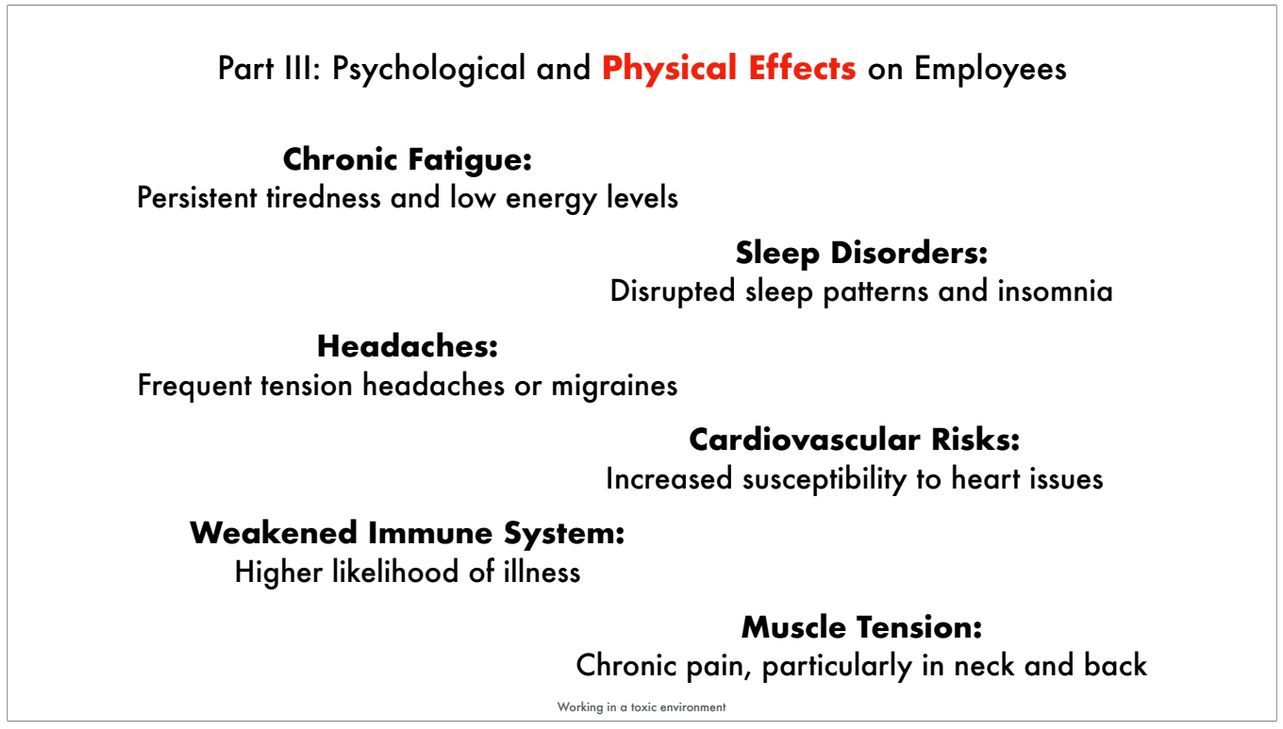
Cognitive Impairment:
Challenges in concentration and decision-making

Working in a toxic environment

Let’s take a moment to talk about the human impact – the things we often don’t see on the surface, but that quietly wear people down over time.
Toxic work environments don’t just hurt productivity – they hurt people.

Stress, anxiety, burnout, depression – these aren’t buzzwords. They’re real experiences that many employees face every day.
Loss of motivation, isolation from teams, declining confidence, and even trouble concentrating – these are all signals that something deeper is wrong.

This slide isn’t meant to shock – it’s meant to remind us:
Behind every role is a person. And the effects of unhealthy workplace culture are not just professional – they’re deeply personal.



When we talk about toxic workplace culture, we often focus on stress and burnout – but we sometimes forget how much the body suffers too.

Chronic fatigue, sleep disorders, headaches, a weakened immune system – these aren't just random symptoms. They're physical warning signs that something in the work environment isn't right.

Over time, this leads to real health risks: cardiovascular issues, muscle tension, and long-term exhaustion that no weekend off can fix.

This slide is a reminder:
The body keeps score. And when the workplace becomes a pressure cooker, it's not just morale that drops – it's our health.

Part IV: How can we tackle?

Open Communication

Open communication isn’t just a nice extra – it’s the foundation of trust, psychological safety, and true teamwork. When people can speak up honestly, they stay healthier, more engaged, and more connected. Let’s dive into why that matters.”

Part IV: How can we tackle?

Promote Work-Life Balance

Work-life balance isn’t just a buzzword. Sustainable performance needs rest, personal time, and clear boundaries. Companies that support this are investing directly in well-being and motivation.”

Part IV: How can we tackle?

Implement Strong Leadership Training

Great leadership doesn’t happen by accident – it’s a skill that needs training. Leaders shape culture, team morale, and mental well-being. Investing in leadership development pays off for everyone.”

Part IV: How can we tackle?

Build a Positive Company Culture

A strong company culture doesn’t just happen – but it’s what drives long-term success. When values are lived, people feel respected, and collaboration thrives, real motivation follows. Let’s explore what that looks like.

Part IV: How can we tackle?

Prioritize Employee Well-being

When people feel well, they perform well – and stay longer. Prioritizing mental health, rest, and personal needs creates a culture where people can truly thrive. Let’s take a closer look at how that works.

Part IV: How can we tackle?

Establish Clear Roles and Responsibilities

Unclear roles create stress, conflict, and confusion. When everyone knows their responsibilities, teams work better – and feel more secure. Structure brings clarity – and clarity brings calm.

Part IV: How can we tackle?

Encourage Professional Development

Growth drives motivation and builds confidence. When companies invest in their people, they send a clear message: you matter, and your growth matters too. And that makes all the difference.

Part IV: How can we tackle?

Create a Safe Reporting Mechanism

When people can’t speak up, issues stay hidden – until they explode. A safe and anonymous reporting system builds trust and shows: your voice matters, without fear of backlash. Let’s look at why that’s essential.

Part IV: How can we tackle?

Conduct Regular Assessments

You can’t improve what you don’t measure. Regular check-ins on well-being, workload, and team dynamics reveal what’s working – and what needs attention. Progress starts with awareness.

Part IV: How can we tackle?

Lead by Example

Leadership isn’t about what you say – it’s about what you do. When leaders model balance, respect, and openness, they build real trust. Great teams follow strong examples.

How to get further help!

Global NOG Alliance

„Open Ears“

How to get further help!

Rene Fichtmueller

Let's keep in contact