Am I a brilliant jerk?

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QCon SF 2017
Nobody enjoys working with brilliant jerks
Audience poll
Has worked with a brilliant jerk?
Has worked with a brilliant jerk?

Enjoyed working with the brilliant jerk?
Story: Brilliant jerks leave
Brilliant jerks leave
Small team of engineers with two jerks
Brilliant jerks leave

Small team of engineers with two jerks

Practice jerk avoidance, limit interactions
Brilliant jerks leave

Small team of engineers with two jerks

Practice jerk avoidance, limit interactions

A jerk leaves, work on another team
Brilliant jerks leave

Small team of engineers with two jerks

Practice jerk avoidance, limit interactions

A jerk leaves, work on another team

Other jerk leaves, no jerks left
Brilliant jerks leave

Small team of engineers with two jerks

Practice jerk avoidance, limit interactions

A jerk leaves, work on another team

Other jerk leaves, no jerks left

Coding nights and weekends
Brilliant jerks leave

Didn’t happen, not working nights and weekends
Brilliant jerks leave

Didn’t happen, not working nights and weekends

Deliver higher quality software, more often
Brilliant jerks leave

Didn’t happen, not working nights and weekends

Deliver higher quality software, more often

More effective as a team
Brilliant jerks leave

Didn’t happen, not working nights and weekends

Deliver higher quality software, more often

More effective as a team

Assumed we went into hyper productivity mode
Brilliant jerks leave
Didn’t happen, not working nights and weekends
Deliver higher quality software, more often
More effective as a team
Assumed we went into hyper productivity mode
Didn’t analyze the situation
Amazing content
Amazing culture
Amazing content
Amazing culture
Freedom and responsibility
Context over control
No brilliant jerks
Amazing culture

Culture at Netflix

A hundred million members is a good start, but we want to entertain everyone.

Entertainment, like friendship, is a core human need. It changes how we feel and gives us common ground. The invention of motion pictures 120 years ago, and then of television 70 years ago, were the first two entertainment revolutions. The third revolution is streaming, personalized any-screen anytime anyplace video, which allows Netflix to provide better entertainment at lower cost and greater scale than the world has ever seen.

This document is about our internal employee culture: the unusual ways we work together so we can eventually entertain everyone.

Like many great companies, we strive to hire the best and we value Integrity, excellence, respect, and collaboration. What is unique and special, though, about Netflix is how much we:

1. encourage independent decision-making by employees
2. share information openly, broadly, and deliberately
3. are extraordinarily candid with each other
4. keep only our highly effective people
5. avoid rules
“no brilliant jerks the cost to teamwork is too high”
Relationship between quality, teamwork, and brilliant jerks?
Brilliant jerk definition

Someone with a high IQ
Brilliant jerk definition

Someone with a high IQ

Someone who treats people poorly
A brilliant jerk is someone who treats people poorly with a high IQ.
Quality, teamwork, brilliant jerks
Quality, teamwork, brilliant jerks

Delivering high quality software depends on teamwork
Quality, teamwork, brilliant jerks

Delivering high quality software depends on teamwork

Specifically, collaboration and feedback
Quality, teamwork, brilliant jerks

Delivering high quality software depends on teamwork

Specifically, collaboration and feedback

Design sessions, code reviews, troubleshoot prod issue
Quality, teamwork, brilliant jerks

Collaboration and feedback require healthy relationships
Quality, teamwork, brilliant jerks

Collaboration and feedback require healthy relationships

Specifically, trust, vulnerability, and support
Quality, teamwork, brilliant jerks

Collaboration and feedback require healthy relationships

Specifically, trust, vulnerability, and support

Speaking honestly, asking for help, assisting a teammate
Quality, teamwork, brilliant jerks

Jerks treat people poorly
Quality, teamwork, brilliant jerks

Jerks treat people poorly

As a result, we’re unlikely to trust them
Quality, teamwork, brilliant jerks

Jers treat people poorly

As a result, we’re unlikely to trust them

We’re probably not going to be vulnerable with them
Quality, teamwork, brilliant jerks

Jерks treat people poorly

As a result, we’re unlikely to trust them

We’re probably not going to be vulnerable with them

Supporting them will be really hard
Quality, teamwork, brilliant jerks

Jerks treat people poorly

As a result, we’re unlikely to trust them

We’re probably not going to be vulnerable with them

Supporting them will be really hard

Building a healthy relationship is going to be difficult
Teams with brilliant jerks produce lower quality software.
Intuition check
Thought experiment
Refer back to last high quality project
Did you collaborate?
Did you seek out feedback?
Improved the quality of software
Intuition check

Imagine person is a jerk

No trust, vulnerability, or support

No feedback or collaboration

Low quality software
But, by how much?

Trade off quality for IQ?
“no brilliant jerks”
Story: Some jerk for more brilliant
Some jerk for more brilliant

Relationship: quality, collaboration and feedback
Some jerk for more brilliant

Relationship: quality, collaboration and feedback

Relationship: quality, complexity collaboration and feedback
Some jerk for more brilliant

Relationship: quality, collaboration and feedback

Relationship: quality, complexity collaboration and feedback

Complex systems require *more* collaboration and feedback.
Some jerk for more brilliant

We were building complex system
Some jerk for more brilliant

We were building complex system

Trade off worth it?
Some jerk for more brilliant

We were building complex system

Trade off worth it?

Absolutely *not*
Some jerk for more brilliant

We were building complex system

Trade off worth it?

Absolutely not

Brilliant people introduce brilliant ideas
Some jerk for more brilliant

Brilliant ideas, like all ideas, need to be vetted
Some jerk for more brilliant

Brilliant ideas, like all ideas, need to be vetted

Especially in complex software systems
Some jerk for more brilliant

Brilliant ideas, like all ideas, need to be vetted

Especially in complex software systems

When complexity exceeds what a person can manage
Some jerk for more brilliant

Brilliant ideas, like all ideas, need to be vetted

Especially in complex software systems

When complexity exceeds what a person can manage
Some jerk for more brilliant

Brilliant ideas, like all ideas, need to be vetted

Especially in complex software systems

When complexity exceeds what a person can manage

Critical to collaborate and get feedback
Some jerk for more brilliant

Brilliant ideas, like all ideas, need to be vetted

Especially in complex software systems

When complexity exceeds what a person can manage

Critical to collaborate and get feedback

Brilliant jerks rarely collaborate or receive feedback
Some jerk for more brilliant
Nobody enjoys working with jerk
Some jerk for more brilliant

Nobody enjoys working with jerk

Especially for a long period of time
Some jerk for more brilliant

Nobody enjoys working with jerk

Especially for a long period of time

Jerk tolerance budget exhausted
Some jerk for more brilliant

Nobody enjoys working with jerk

Especially for a long period of time

Jerk tolerance budget exhausted
Some jerk for more brilliant

Nobody enjoys working with jerk

Especially for a long period of time

Jerk tolerance budget exhausted

Disproportionately influence outcomes
Some jerk for more brilliant
Nobody enjoys working with jerk
Especially for a long period of time
Jerk tolerance budget exhausted
Disproportionately influence outcomes
Disproportionately lower software quality
Some jerk for more brilliant
Nobody enjoys working with jerk
Especially for a long period of time
Jerk tolerance budget exhausted
Disproportionately influence outcomes
Disproportionately lower software quality
Brilliant jerks
disproportionately lower
software quality
Intuition check

Thought experiment

Refer back to last brilliant jerk

Same amount of scrutiny?

Collaborate?

Lower the quality of software
Slip through our interview process

Do we fire, first time exhibit behaviors?
Slip through our interview process

Do we fire, first time exhibit behaviors?

No, we should attempt to rehab jerk
Understand how a brilliant jerk behaves then rehab
Nobody wants to be a brilliant jerk
They do exist, what’s going on?
Audience poll
Think you might be, or have been, a brilliant jerk
Think you might be, or have been, a brilliant jerk

Enjoy being a brilliant jerk?
Nobody wants to be a brilliant jerk

They do exist, what’s going on?
Answer, jerks *ignore* data
Engineers love data
Engineers love data
Evaluate and predict
Engineers love data
Evaluate and predict
Intelligent decisions
Engineers love data
Evaluate and predict
Intelligent decisions
Emotions are data
Emotions *are* data

Evaluate and predict
Emotions are data

Evaluate and predict

Intelligent decisions
Story: Rational behavior only
Rational behavior only

Harsh code review comments
Rational behavior only

Harsh code review comments

No design discussions
Rational behavior only

Harsh code review comments

No design discussions

On call nightmare
Rational behavior only

Well intentioned, all very rational
Rational behavior only

Well intentioned, all very rational

Did not evaluate
Rational behavior only

Well intentioned, all very rational

Did not evaluate

Did not predict
Rational behavior only

Well intentioned, all very rational

Did not evaluate

Did not predict

Did not make intelligent decision
Rational behavior only

Well intentioned, all very rational

Did not evaluate

Did not predict

Did not make intelligent decision

Treating people poorly
Emotional intelligence (EQ) is understanding and managing our emotions. It’s relating to others.
Emotional intelligence (EQ) is understanding and managing our emotions. It’s relating to others.
Daniel Goleman
www.danielgoleman.info
How emotionally intelligent are you
Someone with a high EQ

Self-aware
Someone with a high EQ
Self-aware
Someone with a high EQ

Self-aware

Self-regulates
Someone with a high EQ

Self-aware

Self-regulates

Exercises empathy
Someone with a high EQ

Self-aware

Self-regulates

Exercises empathy

Social skills
Someone with a high EQ

Self-aware
Self-regulates
Exercises empathy
Social skills
Intrinsically motivated
Story: Rational EQ/IQ behavior only
EQ/IQ behavior only

Self aware they are angry and stressed
EQ/IQ behavior only

Self aware they are angry and stressed
EQ/IQ behavior only

Self aware they are angry and stressed
EQ/IQ behavior only

Self aware they are angry and stressed
EQ/IQ behavior only

Self aware they are angry and stressed

Self regulate by not lashing out
EQ/IQ behavior only

Self aware they are angry and stressed

Self regulate by not lashing out
EQ/IQ behavior only

Self aware they are angry and stressed

Self regulate by not lashing out

Respond with constructive feedback
Story: Rational EQ/IQ behavior only
EQ/IQ behavior only

Design proposal by someone new
EQ/IQ behavior only
Design proposal by someone new
Lacks deep systems context
EQ/IQ behavior only

Design proposal by someone new

Lacks deep systems context

Jerk aggressively questioning design
EQ/IQ behavior only

Design proposal by someone new

Lacks deep systems context

Jerk aggressively questioning design
EQ/IQ behavior only

Design proposal by someone new

Lacks deep systems context

Jerk aggressively questioning design

Social skills, empathy, and motivations
EQ/IQ behavior only

Design proposal by someone new

Lacks deep systems context

Jerk aggressively questioning design

Social skills, empathy, and motivations
EQ/IQ behavior only
Design proposal by someone new
Lacks deep systems context
Jerk aggressively questioning design
Social skills, empathy, and motivations
EQ/IQ behavior only

Design proposal by someone new to team

Lacks deep systems context

Jerk aggressively questioning design

Social skills, empathy, and motivations

Exercise EQ, more effective design session
A brilliant jerk treats people poorly because they ignore emotional data and do not exercise emotional intelligence.
Intuition check

Thought experiment

Refer back to interactions with brilliant jerk

Did they have EQ?

What if they did?
There is good news. Hope.
...ignore emotional data and do not exercise emotional intelligence.
Two ways to rehab a brilliant jerk.
Courage

Honesty and commitment
Be courageous, be brave

Working with a jerk? Tell them
Be courageous, be brave

Working with a jerk? Tell them

Considered all the data
Be courageous, be brave

Working with a jerk? Tell them

Considered all the data

Emotional data

Emotional intelligence
Be courageous, be brave

Working with a jerk? Tell them

Considered all the data

Emotional data

Emotional intelligence

Healthy relationships, teamwork, quality
Be honest and committed

Am I a brilliant jerk?
Be honest and committed

Am I a brilliant jerk?

Do I ignore emotional data?

Do I have a high EQ?
Be honest and committed

Am I a brilliant jerk?

Do I ignore emotional data?

Do I have a high EQ?

Do I struggle to build healthy relationships?
Be honest and committed

Am I a brilliant jerk?

Do I ignore emotional data?

Do I have a high EQ?

Do I struggle to build healthy relationships?

Be committed
You can rehad a brilliant jerk.
I am proof.
You can rehad a brilliant jerk.
I am proof.
Final request
Am I a brilliant jerk?
Thank you!