

#TestBash Brighton 2024

How Applying Critical Thinking Saved My Mental Health



by Antonella Scaravilli

About me



Trying to look pensive

- Argentinian living in Barcelona for 8+ years
- Obsessed with raccoons
- Starter of hobbies, master of none
- QA Engineer at Wallapop (3+ years)

! Disclaimer: I'm not a doctor, psychologist, therapist, psychiatrist, coach or specialist in anything related to health. What you're about to hear is my experience and my experience only.

Content warning:



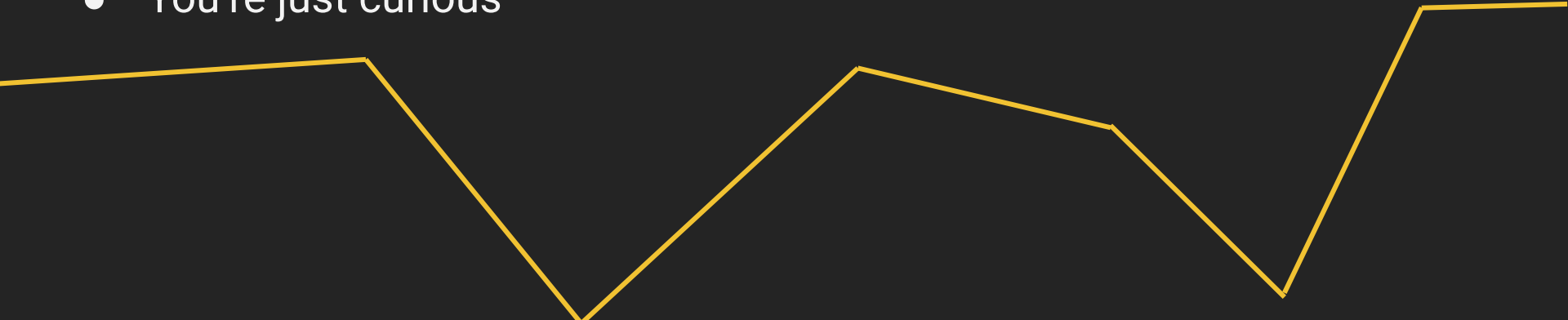
Experiences of extreme
anxiety, frustration, sadness,
anger

Today's journey in a nutshell

The ups and downs of my experience trying to quit my medication

This talk is for you if:

- You need help and don't know where to start
- You're in a position of power at work and want to help
- You're just curious



But first, some important context

- Anxiety disorder diagnose 6+ years
- Medicated for anxiety
- Medicated to sleep
- I've been on a weight loss program since Jan 2023



**“Hmm maybe it’s time for a
little experiment”**



Designing the experiment

Hypothesis

Maybe I don't need medication anymore.

Purpose

To find out information.

Assumptions

Healthy habits will make me happy.

The plan

- **Train** to do the “Camino de Santiago” (a pilgrimage in Spain)
- **Working out** => **happy hormones**
- Working out => **relax** + **sleep at night** without pills!



I warned those around me

What helped me

- Having previous experience trying to quit my medication
- I knew all the symptoms

I shared my plan and the risk with my manager and my QA Lead

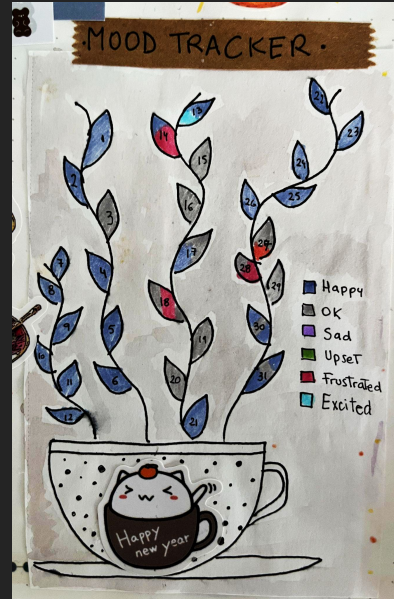


Personal records: My journals and mood trackers



Observation is key

I can't leave it all to my memory, I need notes



Other mood trackers



I track some habits too

habit tracker

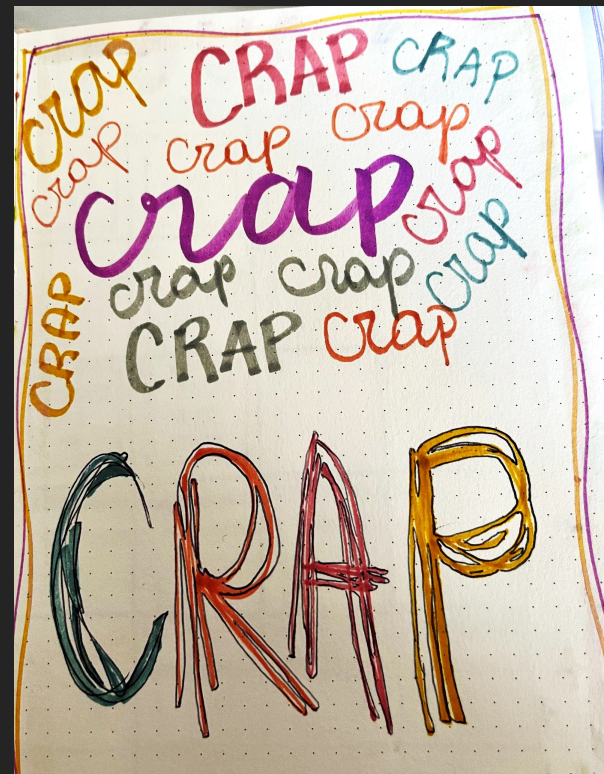
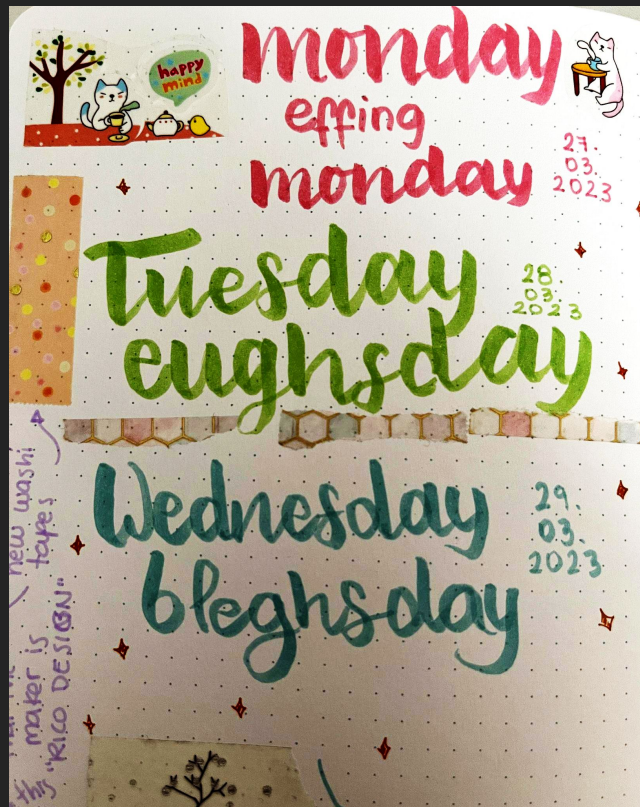
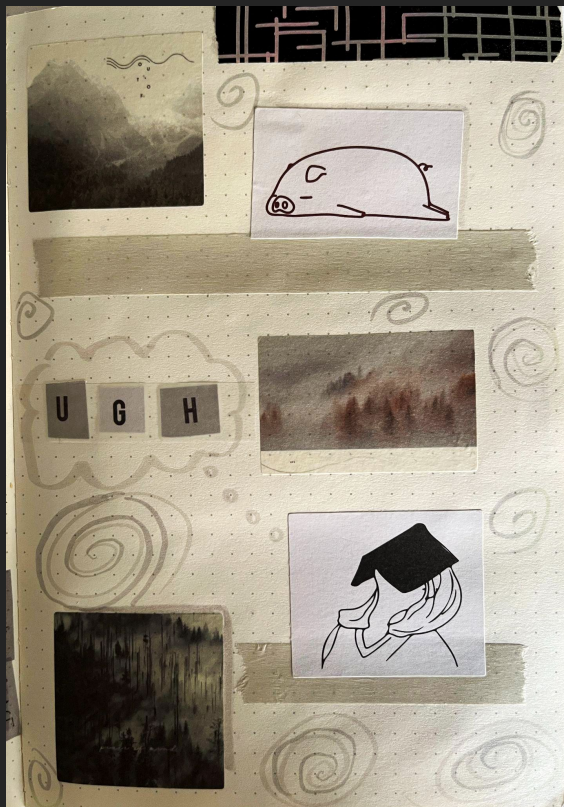
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✓ Walk Y Yoga

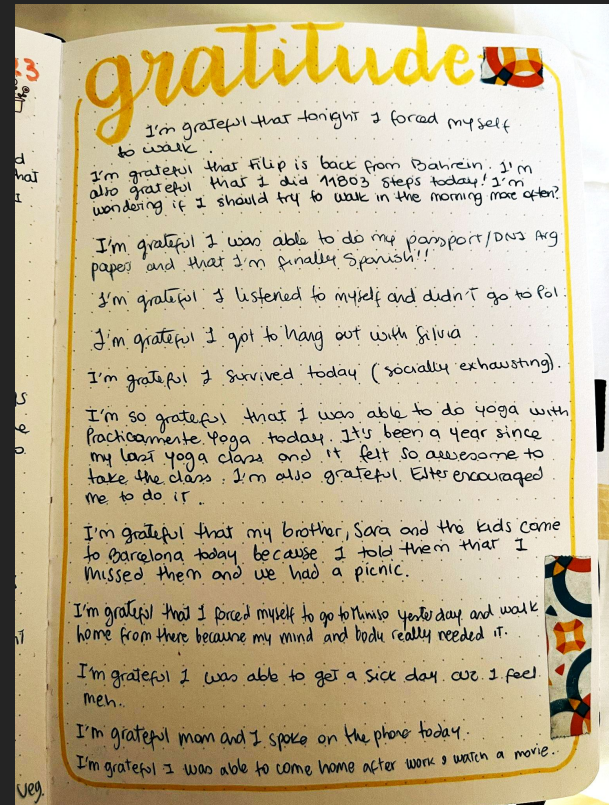
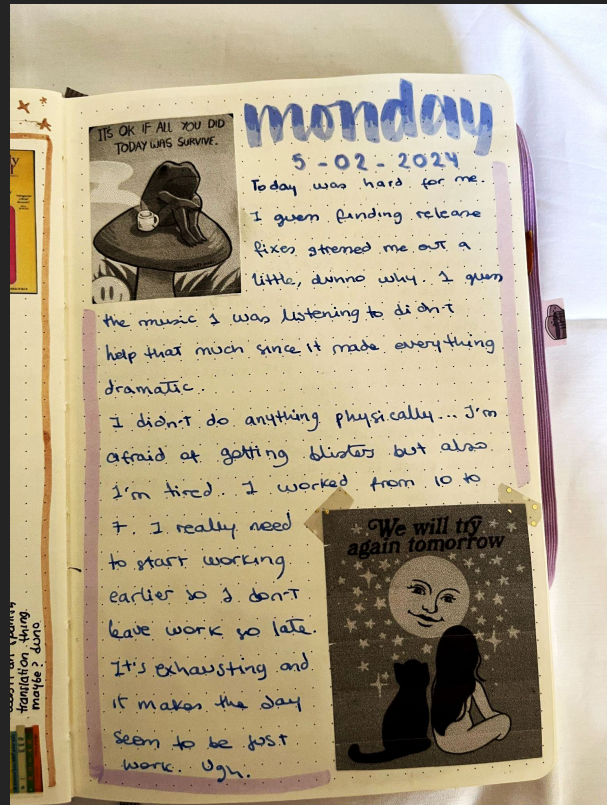
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W Walking Y Yoga S Stretching bands ST Stepper & podcast

And I'm honest, I don't judge myself on my journal



Coming clean with my own feelings



My successes spreadsheet

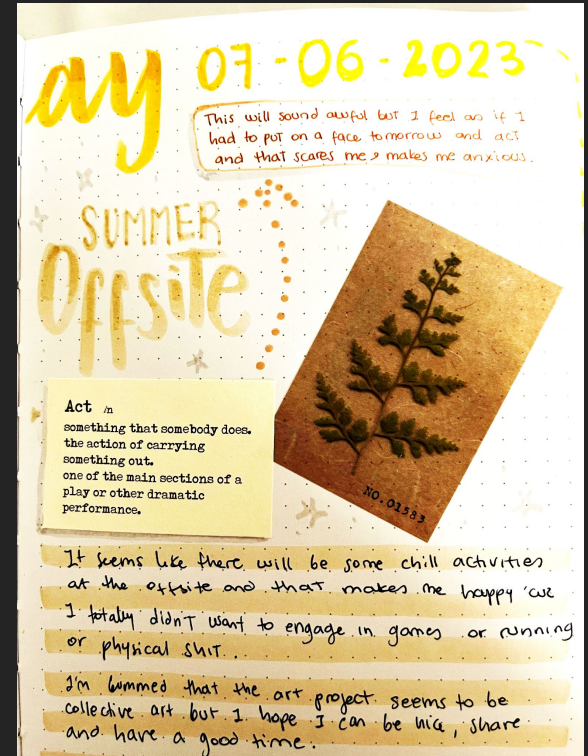


Leaving feelgood breadcrumbs just in case

A	B	C
Date	Type	Why it makes me happy
09/08/2022	Find reproduction steps for https://	Because my steps helped fix it, thus proving me that my contribution to the team is not just "social"/influence.
10/08/2022	Give /... links of documentation that has made an improvement in our team work	Because it allows me to see the value in what I've done.
19/08/2022	I was calm during my performance review and didn't enter the meeting afraid	Because it makes me feel calm and to "wait and see" rather than be anxious in advance. Facts are reality, not my anxiety/impressions.
25/08/2022	Giving emotional support to ... even when I was ill with Covid.	Because it means I'm able to identify stress and anxiety on other people - makes me feel that my core skills are important.
04/10/2022	... was very anxious and worried regarding the shift left maturity model and I was able	Because I was able to bring facts to calm someone down as opposed to offering my help/my time in things I cannot change.
6/10/2022	Starting the regression from the RC boards.	Because experimenting new ways of doing things is enriching and can bring good results.
17/10/2022	I allowed myself to express what I wanted and what I didn't want. E.g. ...'s role.	Because I identify my needs and wants and I think I was assertive receiving and appreciating the feedback even if I don't want to apply it
25/10/2022	I pointed out that our naming convention isn't being respected (but phrased it differently)	Because I didn't need to wait for a meeting or a retro to discuss it, I simply spotted the issue and tried to act on it and reach an agreement
29/10/2022	I shared in #random a picture from Barcelona Expats where someone was expressing di	Because I have the #oneTeam value at all times, even at home when using Facebook in my free time.
23/11/2022	I had the courage to propose that we iterate the price transparency thing in front of every	Because I had courage to speak up and I knew that it was a good mediation to comply to legal requirements and be on the release train
28/11/2022	I covered the ... bug labelling process	Because I don't have to wait for others when I can get things moving by myself and just leave for review the things I don't know.
14/12/2022	Our D&I Code of Conduct was finally shared with the C level.	Because I wrote it along with other people and it's my chance to contribute to make our company a better place.
		Because we made it happen. Because my colleagues enjoyed the talks I selected and we had rich discussions after each talk. I saw the eyes of my colleagues while watching the talks and how they identified themselves with some parts and I think that was key in trying to
22/12/2022	L&D Session with QA Chapter to watch two talks, one about Quality Coaching 101 and c	Be more active in the testing community, inside and outside of our company.
24/05/2024	Organized and facilitated qA chapter exploratory testing session upload gc all stacks	Because I see that my colleagues enjoyed it and so did I. I love helping people re-gain their love for our craft and also use my creativity

Testing different real-life situations that affected my mental health

- **Office parties:** To drink or not to drink
- **Meeting strangers:** My hyperhidrosis and handshaking
- **Spending time with friends:** Adapt or compromise?



Back to my genius plan...



December 2023 (3 months into the experiment)

- I noticed I was **irritable and angry**.
- I was easily **frustrated**.
- I **couldn't sleep** at night and I was still on my sleep meds!
- I was **eating my feelings**.
- I had **panic attacks**.
- I was in a **dark place**.



My support network was key

A support network doesn't necessarily need to include super close friends that you see all the time.

- **My “food therapist” and nutritionist** were there for me. Plus my food therapist reminded me of my letter to myself!
- **My best friend from Argentina** (we whatsapp a lot) was there for me.
- **Some friends who live nearby** were there for me to some extent.
- **My mom** was there for me (remotely).
- **My husband** was there for me.



A contingency plan



“What happens if my brain warps reality?” I wrote myself a letter

To the Anto on a lower dose of meds

(Translation from letter written on August 3rd 2023 12:54pm)

Firstly, thank you for putting up with the effects of the decisions that I, past Anto, have made. Even if it's not easy to make some decisions, I know it's not my present self who will have to deal with the effects but rather my future self.

I want you to read this and don't let your mind trick you: I'm happy. I love my house, my job and my colleagues. I love Filip and I see myself with him in the future.

[...]

Choose your tools

Psychologists, therapists, coaches, psychiatrists... can help you or not help you at all. It's OK **not to continue** your treatment with someone if it isn't working out for you. It has to work out **for you**.

- Psychoanalyst
- Gestalt psychologist
- Counsellor &
Therapeutic Coach
- Cognitive Behavioral
Therapist (current)



What the doctor prescribed: Rest

- My plan had failed. **I had failed.**
- I was **embarrassed** of being unwell, unreliable.
- I felt that I was **failing the team**, the company, myself.
- I felt very guilty for everything, especially for being told to rest if **I didn't deserve it.**



Talking about mental health at work



- I had to tell my boss that I had to get sick leave indefinitely and why (I didn't know I could keep this to myself by law! oh well)
- I had to tell my QA Lead that I had to get sick leave

While I cried, they both reminded me which was the priority right then and there...me

Disclaimer: I haven't mastered the art of speaking about this with others but it is a work in progress. Just keep trying.

Use your role at work to support a colleague in need

What you can do depends on your role and whether they report to you or not

Are you in a “position of power”?

Yes

No

- **Listen actively**
- **Don't judge**
- **Don't give unwanted advice**
- **Ask how you can help**

Use your role at work to support a colleague in need

Is the company a safe space?

- Partner with wellbeing apps that offer therapy too
- Have talks at work about diverse topics including mental health
- Normalize sick days if you haven't
- Foster progress, not perfection
- Be creative - do your research

Ask how you can help **ONLY** if you mean it

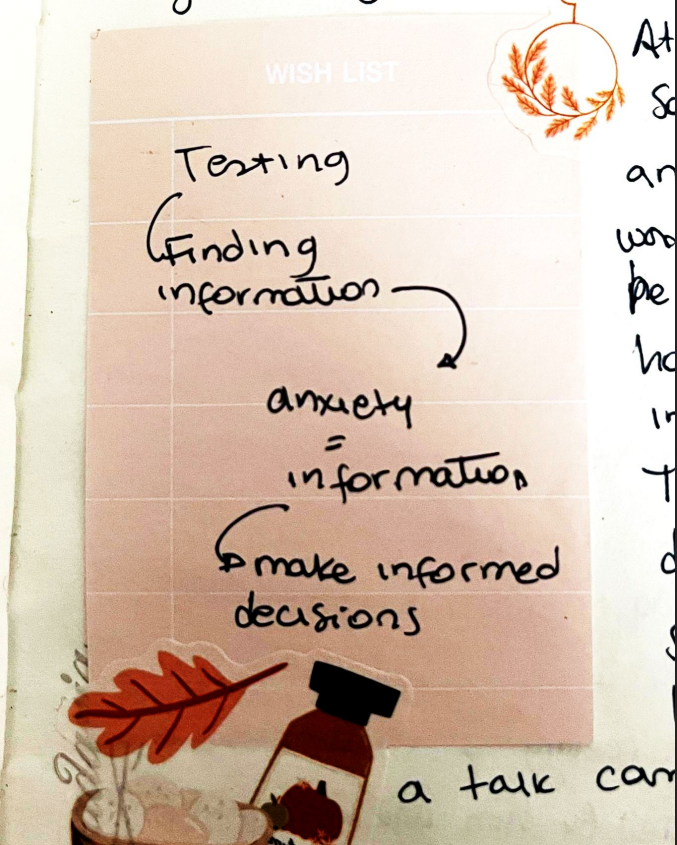
- Be authentic in your interest in people's wellbeing
- Be understanding, not condescending
- **Ask them what THEY need:** e.g. less tasks, more time to complete them, etc - no two people need the same things



**So how did it go after I
sought help?**



My eureka moment!



Asking for help takes courage

It makes us **stronger** and it means we want out of the pit.

I'm grateful for my critical thinking because it saved me!



Some final thoughts

- I understand that we're all different. **This is my experience.**
- My "tips" don't work with **ALL the people** I interact or work with.
- Some countries have more labor laws than others. **Sick leave is a privilege.**
- It is my understanding that what I have is a part of me and **I can learn to manage it.**
- **This is a cycle** (in my case).



Special thanks to those people who...

Encouraged me to speak

Reviewed my abstract

Helped me practice this talk

Trusted me to deliver this talk

Were there for me throughout the years

Have my back

Companies that offer accessible therapy

Especially, thank **YOU** for listening to my story 🧡



Thank you!

**You can find me on LinkedIn as Antonella Scaravilli
Instagram: @therookiesketchnoter**



Mental health resources I've used

Betterhelp: <https://betterhelp.com/livingwithlk> (English - This link has 10% discount AND you can apply for a subsidy though you have to be comfortable sharing some salary info with them) I had a great experience with them in December and I was able to benefit from an affiliate link I used. 🚨 A friend said they record their sessions??? According to their Privacy Policy statement they don't, **BUT PLEASE DO YOUR RESEARCH**

Proyecto Kintsugi <https://www.proyektokintsugi.org/faq> (Spanish - I've had weekly sessions for 2.5 months so far and I'm enjoying them. Prices go from €30 per session or less if you purchase a session pack.)

Resources used for this presentation

- My [lovely icons](#) live here
- [Milanote](#) helped me organize my ideas
- My own records, because I'm a little scientist and you can be one too!
- MoT (and Ady Stokes) for [this amazing guide](#) on how to make accessible slides

Links that you may like

- Ryder Carroll created the “bullet journal method”. He is active on Instagram and Youtube, and he also posts information in the official “Bullet Journal” accounts too. [This is a good video to understand the method and why he came up with it.](#)
- Jashii Corin is a content creator from New Zealand. She asked different content creators to contribute to this video, which shows 18 ideas for bullet journaling. I think [this video can be a good source of inspiration to learn how powerful journaling can be.](#)