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To all the Productivity Hacks I've Known Before: Managing Executive Dysfunction at Work

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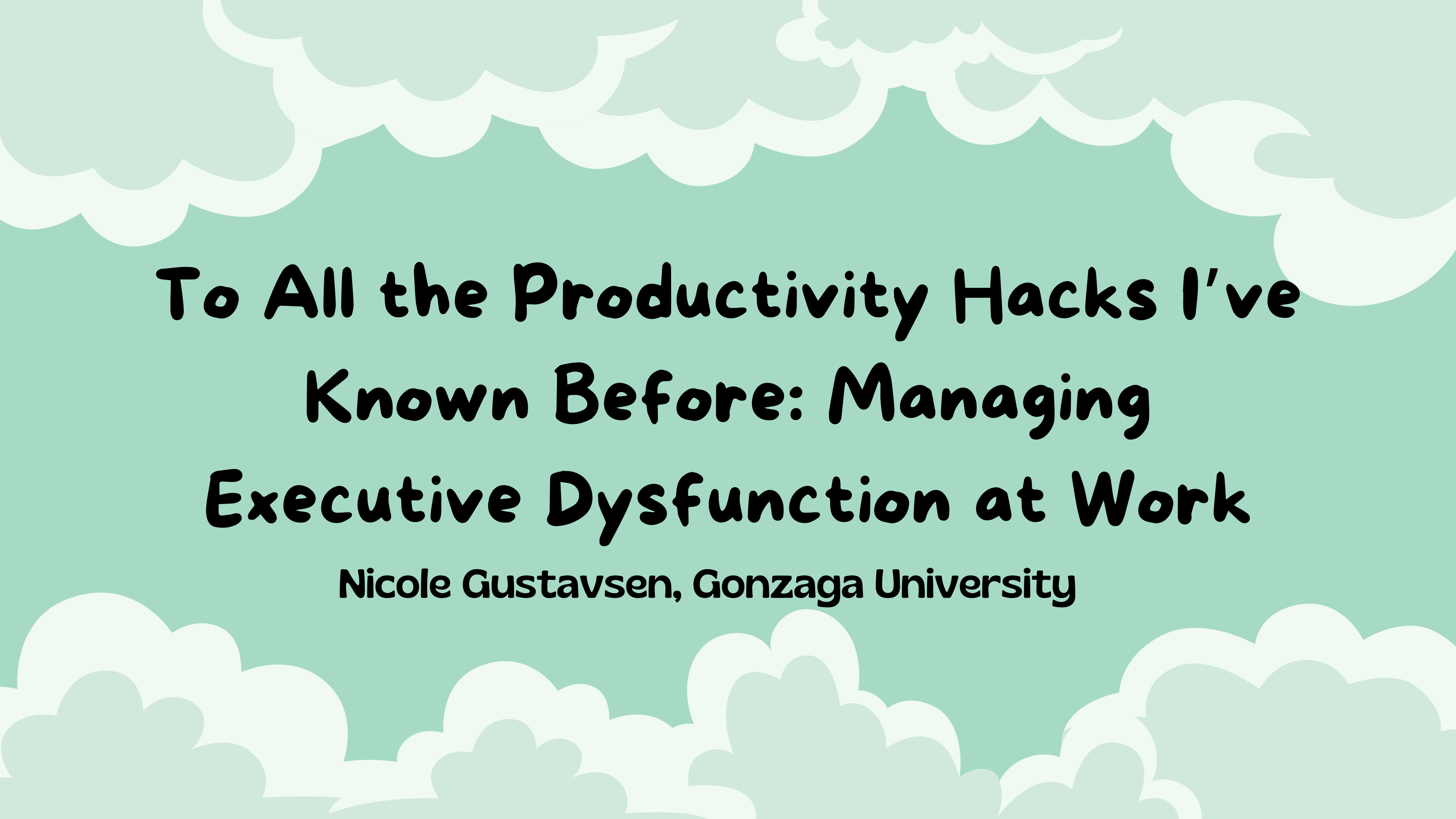
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**To All the Productivity Hacks I've
Known Before: Managing
Executive Dysfunction at Work**

Nicole Gustavsen, Gonzaga University

DEFINITIONS

EXECUTIVE DYSFUNCTION

The temporary or persistent breakdown of executive functions:

- procrastination
- time management issues
- short-term memory and word recall problems
- And so many more!

PRODUCTIVITY HACKS

The cultural concept that promises you can overcome productivity limitations for good by using a special new tool or tech or process.

Separate from the legitimate study of organizational behavior.

PRODUCTIVITY HACKS ARE...

LIFE-CHANGING

You'll be better,
forever, if only you use
This One Trick!
Chumbox logic.

OPTIMIZING

Working harder,
better, faster,
stronger™ in pursuit of
total productivity.

AT THE INTERSECTION OF EXECUTIVE DYSFUNCTION AND PRODUCTIVITY HACKS...

Personal:

- I have ADHD and several other brain-based conditions
- I spend huge amounts of time navigating executive dysfunction at work
- I've tried every productivity hack out there, and I have sharable knowledge now, so watch out world

AT THE INTERSECTION OF EXECUTIVE DYSFUNCTION AND PRODUCTIVITY HACKS...

Political:

- Everyone wants to find better ways to work, but...
- People living with pervasive executive dysfunction have extra incentive. We want to keep our jobs! We want those jobs to not be a constant misery!
- The toxicity of productivity hacks as a concept is located at this intersection.



TIME TO HACK!

HACK 1: BULLET JOURNALING

WHAT IT IS:

- Combo journal/planner/calendar/everything
- Hand-written
- Flexible format

MY EXPERIENCE:

- Used religiously for years
- Dropped it briefly
- Couldn't get back up the learning curve again

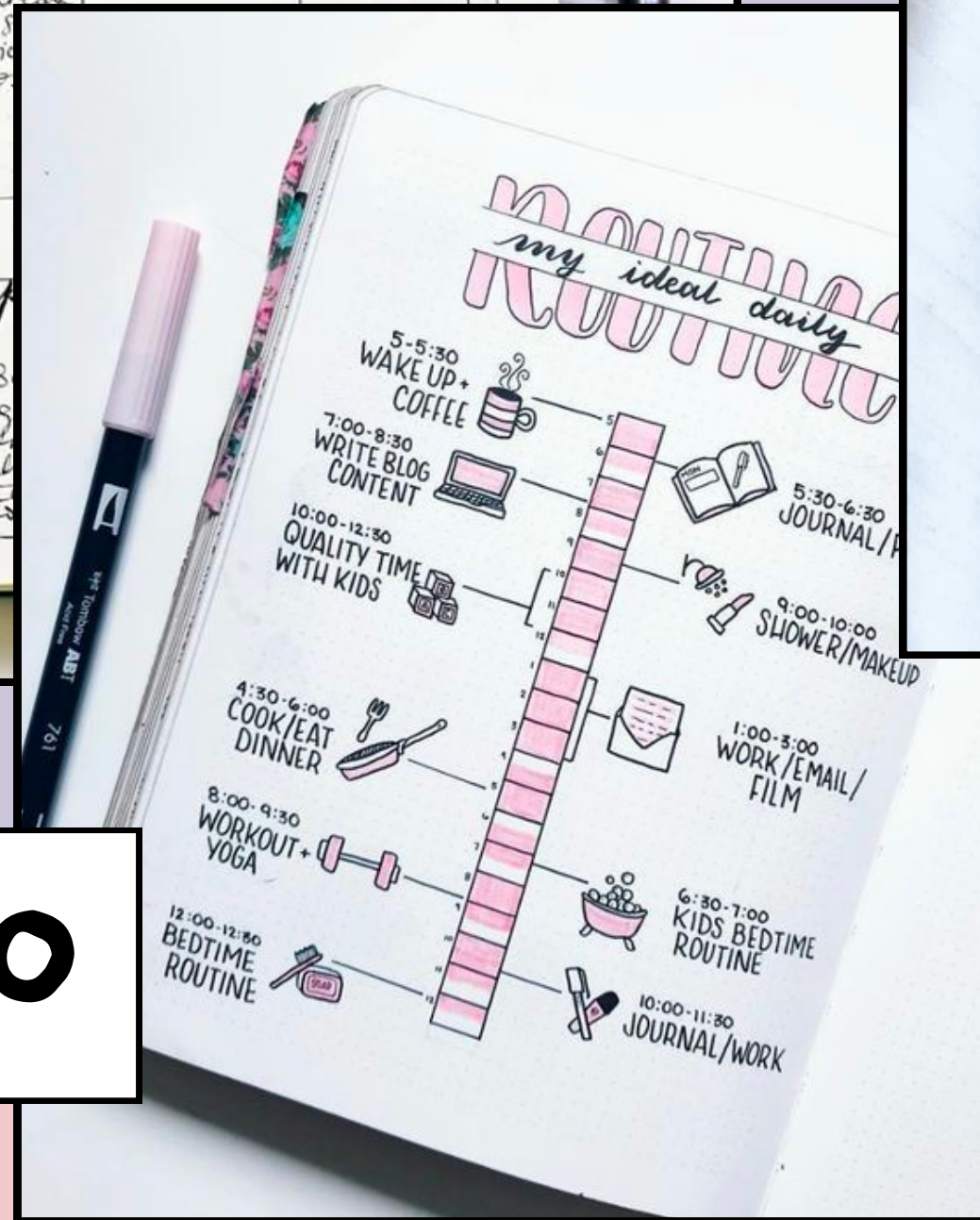
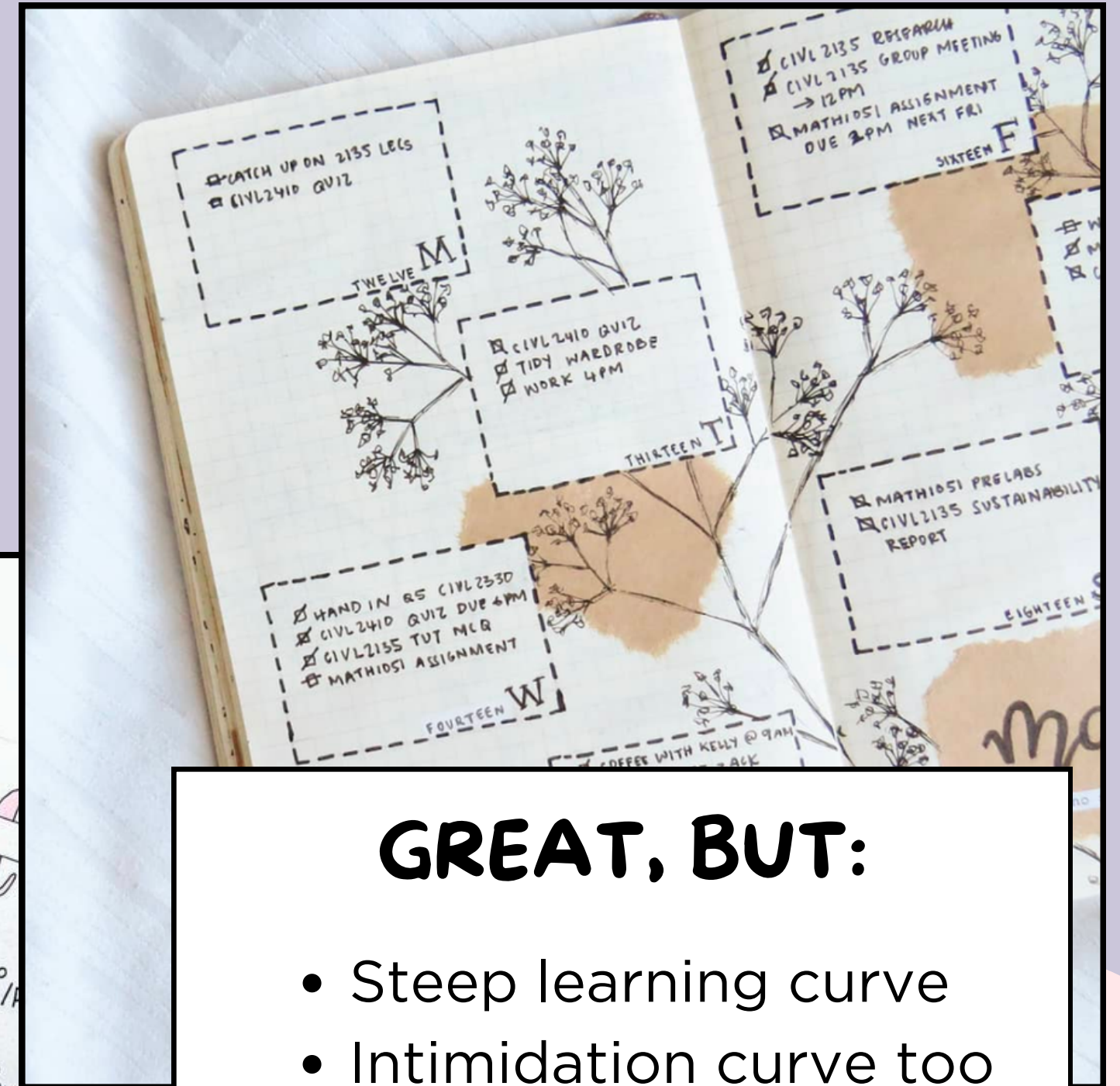
MONTH LOG : JAN 2016

- 1 F O NEW YEARS DAY !
- 2 S - SET UP NEW BUJO
- 3 S
- 4 M
- 5 T
- 6 W
- 7 T
- 8 F
- 9 S
- 10 S - BOUGHT NEW SHOES
- 11 M O CISK WIP1
- 12 T
- 13 W O CISK WIP2
- 14 T O DENTIST
- 15 F O CISK WIP3
- 16 S
- 17 S
- 18 M O CISK W2P1 - GUESTING BY A BLE
- 19 T
- 20 W O CISK W2P2
- 21 T
- 22 F O CISK W2P3
- 23 S
- 24 S
- 25 M O CISK W3P1
- 26 T
- 27 W O CISK W3P2
- 28 T
- 29 F O CISK W3P3
- 30 S
- 31 S

MONTH TASKS : JAN 2016

- ORGANIZE PHOTOS
- NEW SHOES
- CLEAN GARAGE
- SEND LETTERS
- PRACTICE GUITAR
- CREATE ONE LARGE-SCALE DRAWING

CLASSIC BUJO



INSTAGRAM BUJO

- GREAT, BUT:**
- Steep learning curve
 - Intimidation curve too
 - Can be very time-intensive
 - Potentially expensive

HAND-TO-EYE COORDINATION

BRAIN-BASED:

- Handwriting is beneficial for memory
- Summarizing and repetition are also great for cognition

MORE REALISTIC:

- Keeping a less stylistic journal
- Drawing or sketching
- Intentional summarizing

HACK 2: OBSIDIAN/ZETTELKASTEN

WHAT IT IS:

- Journaling & knowledge management application/system
- Creating associations between notes allows for novel connections
- Writing down your thoughts, creating an “external brain”

MY EXPERIENCE:

- I’ve tried for years to actually start this one...
- Too intimidated by the learning curve!

The screenshot shows the Obsidian desktop application with two windows open. The left window displays a note titled "Writing is telepathy" with a "#evergreen" tag. The right window shows the graph view of the same note, with "Writing is telepathy" as the central node. The graph includes nodes for "Books", "On Writing", "Calmness is a superpower", "Everything is a remix", "Creativity is combinatorial uniqueness", "Evergreen notes", "Company is a superorganism", "Chasm", and "Evolution to your former self".

Writing is telepathy

#evergreen

From [On Writing](#)

Ideas can travel through time and space

Ideas can travel through time and space without being uttered out loud. The process of telepathy requires two places:

- A **sending place**, a transmission place — where the writer sends ideas, such as a desk
- A **receiving place** — where the reader receives the ideas/imagery such as a couch, a comfortable chair, in bed

Quote

Look, here's a table covered with red cloth. On it is a cage the size of a small fish aquarium. In the cage is a white rabbit with a pink nose and pink-rimmed ears. The ink, is

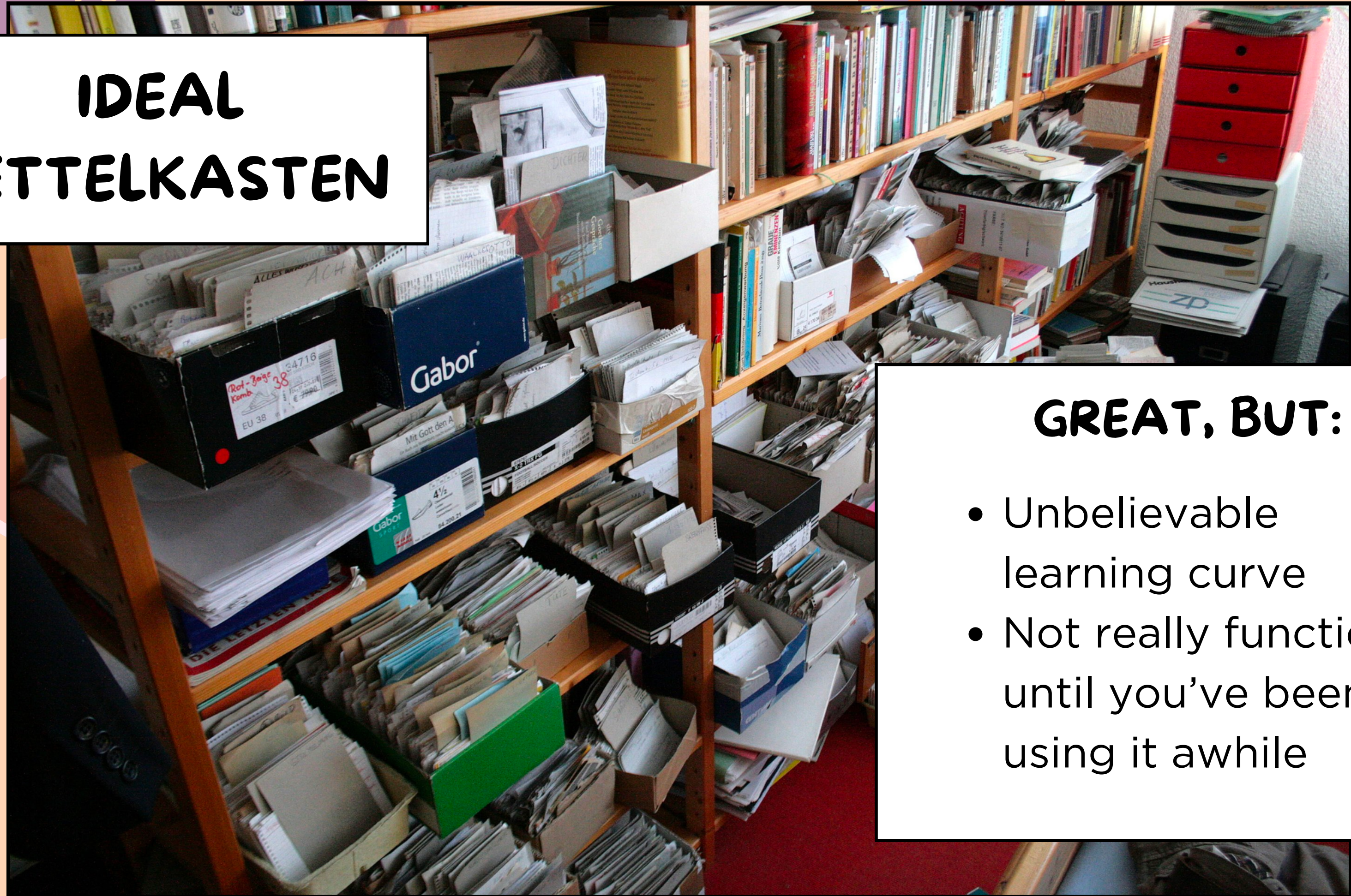
The screenshot shows the Obsidian mobile application interface. At the top, it displays the time "18:20" and the project name "Projects / 2023 Japan Trip Planning". The main content is a to-do list with the following items:

- Schedule flights
- Ask for recommendations
 - Keiko
 - Andrew
 - Garrett
- Research ryokans in [\[\[Kyoto\]\]](#)
- Itinerary

At the bottom, there is a keyboard with various editing icons and a microphone icon.

OBSIDIAN

IDEAL ZETTELKASTEN



GREAT, BUT:

- Unbelievable learning curve
- Not really functional until you've been using it awhile

OFFLOADING!

BRAIN-BASED:

- Getting excess thoughts out of your head helps your brain “cool off”
- Keeping them organized can have secondary benefits for creativity as well
- Automating via tech can help with memory issues

OTHER OPTIONS:

- Free notetaking and calendar apps
- Sticky notes
- Whiteboard
- Sand

HACK 3: KANBAN BOARDS/TRELLO

WHAT IT IS:

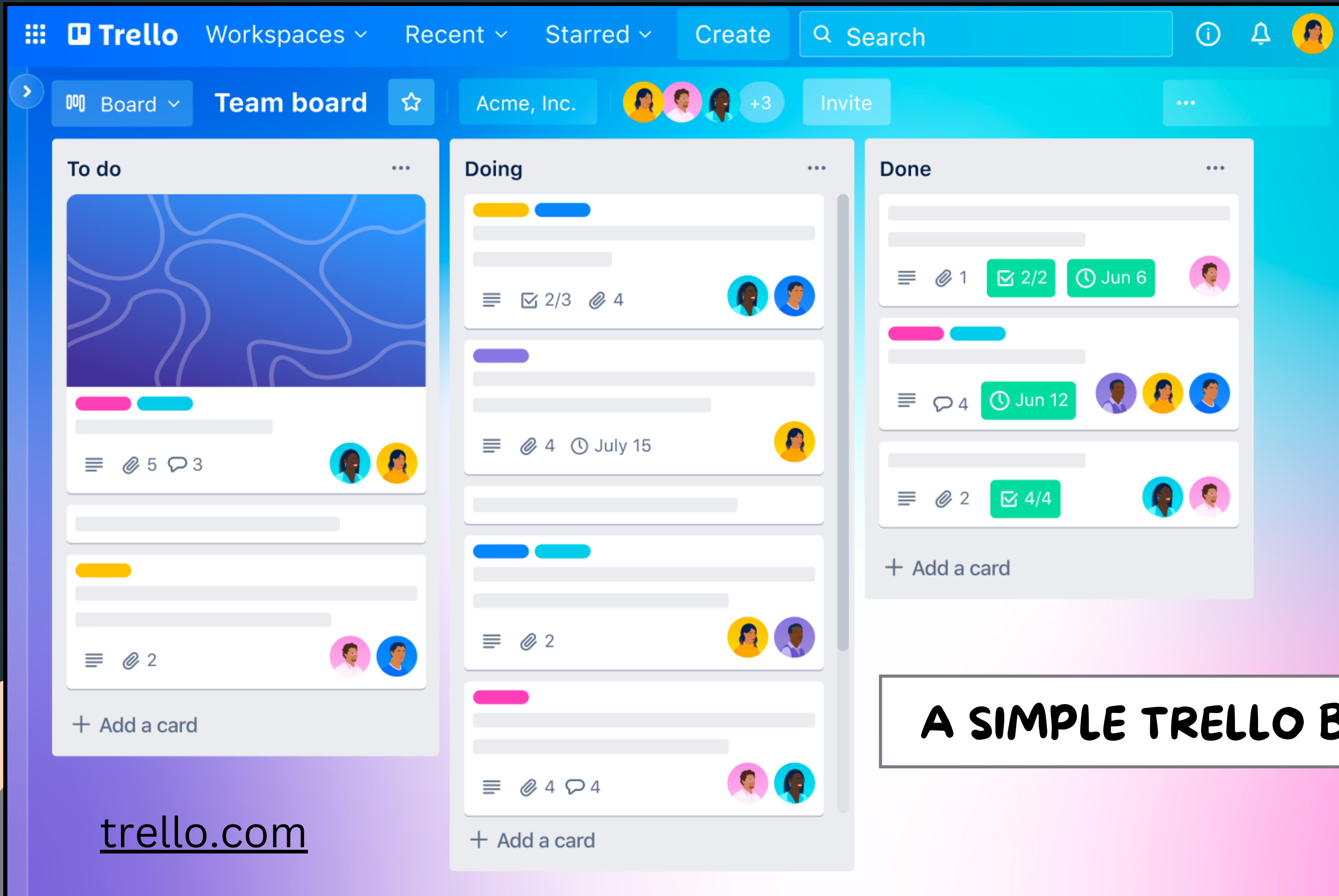
- Japanese engineering management system
- Used to visualize production steps, break down tasks, and track progress
- Whether physical or virtual, meant to catch attention

MY EXPERIENCE:

- Easily the most usable!
- I use Trello, and I keep it on its own monitor at work so I can always see it
- Does cost money, sadly



**KANBAN IN ACTION AT TOYOTA'S
MOTOMACHI PLANT, 1963**



trello.com

A SIMPLE TRELLO BOARD

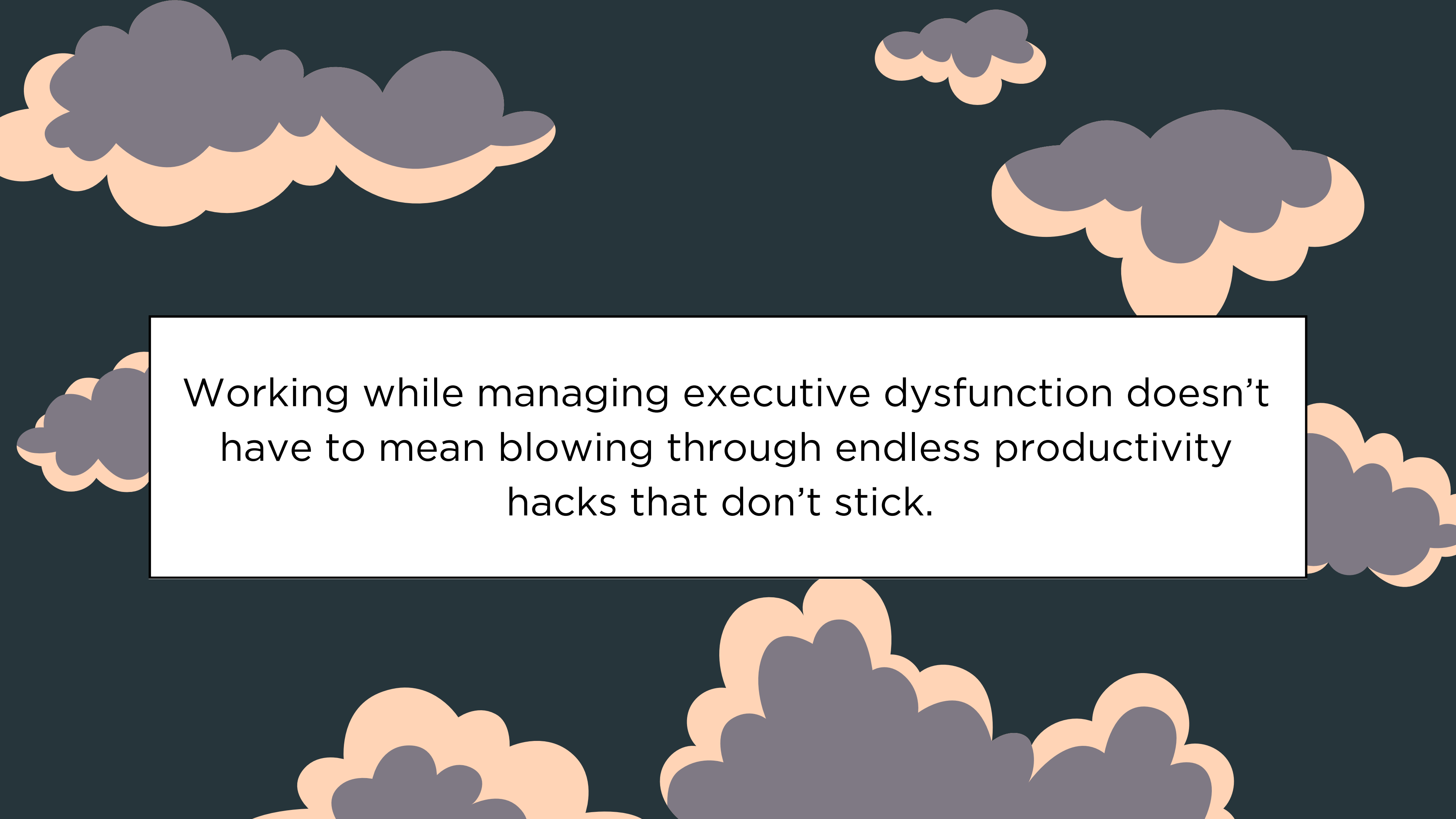
"CLOSE AT HAND, CLOSE TO MIND"

BRAIN-BASED:

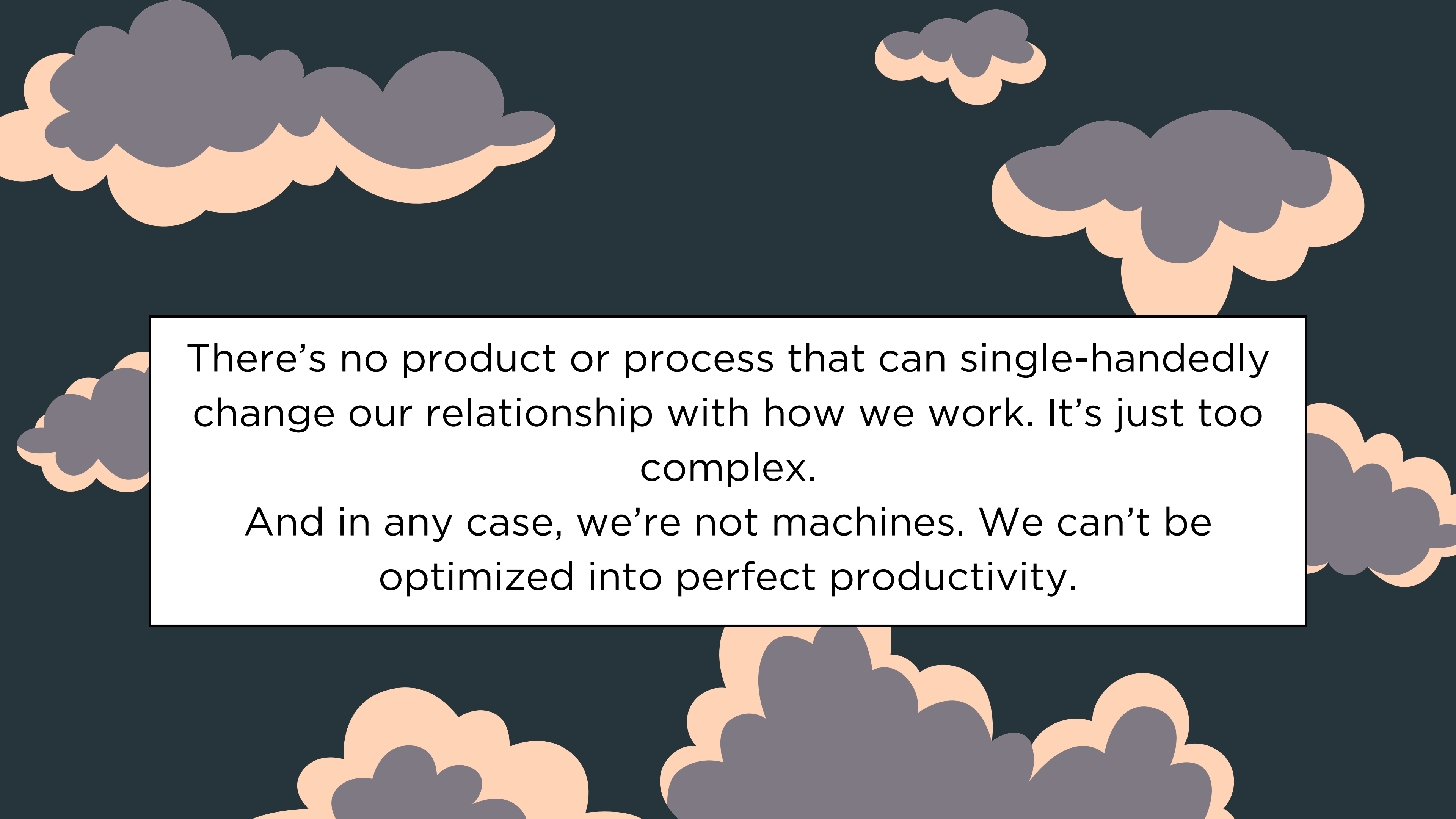
- Visualize and track processes
- Get it all out in front of you
- Take advantage of whatever your brain pays attention to (bright colors, looming boards, sounds)

OTHER OPTIONS

- Cork board, whiteboard
- Brightly colored sticker tags
- A bowl by the door



Working while managing executive dysfunction doesn't have to mean blowing through endless productivity hacks that don't stick.



There's no product or process that can single-handedly change our relationship with how we work. It's just too complex.

And in any case, we're not machines. We can't be optimized into perfect productivity.

SO WHAT DID I LEARN?

...to listen to my executive dysfunctions, rather than papering them over with hacks.

...to buy fewer expensive pen and paper products.

...to accept that I don't need to be a perfect worker in order to be a good librarian.

FURTHER READING



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