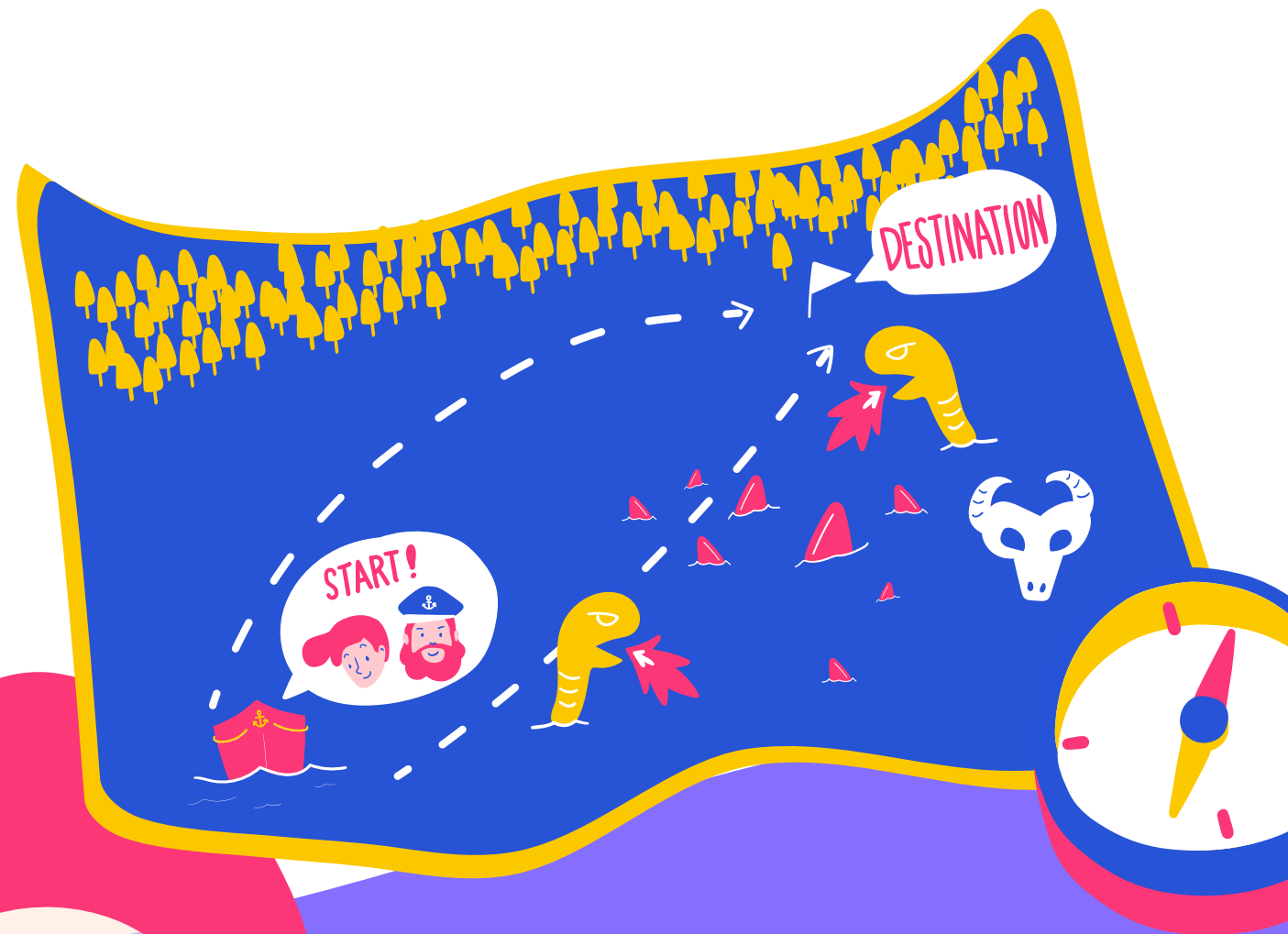
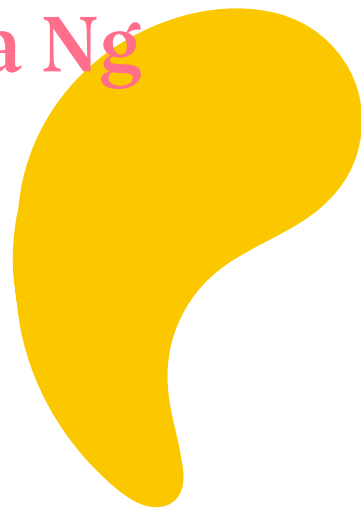
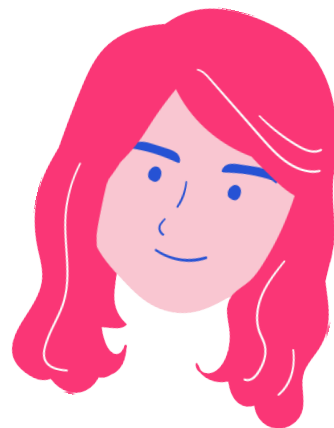


# Navigating choppy waters

Words by David Wieland

Graphics by Chelsea Ng



**Navigating  
choppy waters**

*Clients are people too —  
they need love like  
everyone else*

**Navigating  
choppy waters**

**Explaining design to  
non-designers is an  
*underrated skill***

**Navigating  
choppy waters**

**Web design is people  
all the way down**

**Navigating  
choppy waters**

# Tussling with strangers

**Navigating  
choppy waters**

**I heard you guys like  
frameworks**

**Navigating  
choppy waters**

# Setting sail



**Navigating  
choppy waters**



- 1. Assembling the crew**
- 2. The calm before the storm**
- 3. Navigating choppy waters**
- 4. Disembarking**



**Navigating  
choppy waters**

# Assembling the crew

*“Seamen learn to get to know  
each other during a storm.”*



**Assembling  
the crew**

**Why is my client not  
compatible with my  
methods?**



*Because—*  
Clients aren't trained  
to think or work like  
designers!

**Assembling  
the crew**

Why is my client not  
compatible with my  
methods?



*Stay vigilant!*

*Show and tell each other  
how you do your work!*

**Assembling  
the crew**



**Spotting  
red flags**

## SPOTTING RED FLAGS

“We don’t really have a budget, that’s why we’re asking you.”



*Captain’s tip!*



**Try fishing for one!**

## SPOTTING RED FLAGS

“We need a fixed price, but some stuff isn’t final yet.”



*Jennifer Nopez!*



Something's  
gotta give, kid!

## SPOTTING RED FLAGS

“This project  
must be launched  
by DD-MM-YY.”



*Try this!*



**Avoid fixed deadlines!**



## SPOTTING RED FLAGS

“You won’t be in  
contact with  
decision makers.”



*That’s dumb!*



Hope you like playing  
*Chinese Whispers!*

## SPOTTING RED FLAGS

“Our management  
wants to see an  
upfront design.”



*That's cute!*



So you want us to  
design your website  
before we design  
your website?

**Assembling  
the crew**

**“Our management  
wants to see an  
upfront design.”**

*Share this with your client!*

**In a design pitch, no one wins**

JARIJN NIJKAMP

→ [http://bit.ly/grayscale\\_pitch](http://bit.ly/grayscale_pitch)

*Remember, kids!*

*Saying “No”  
is always an option.*



**Assembling  
the crew**

# Unmasking shadow stakeholders

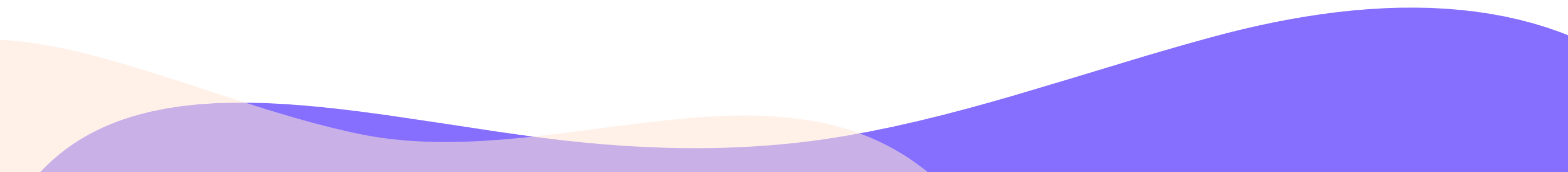


## UNMASKING SHADOW STAKEHOLDERS

**Who can terminate the project?**

**Who are the loose cannons?**

**Any signs of internal turbulence?**



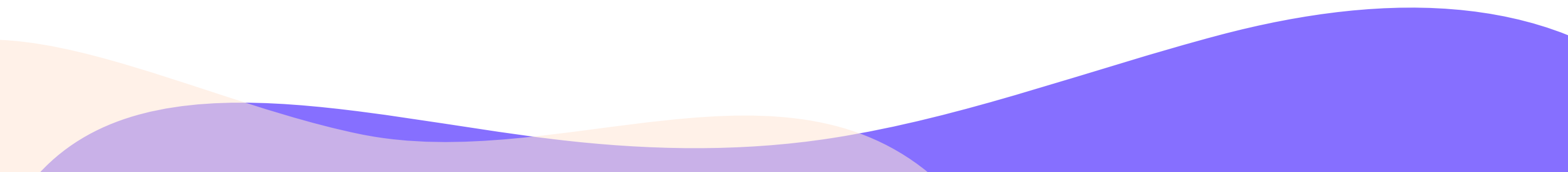
*Try this!*

*Tell horror stories of what  
happens when you don't  
involve management*

**Navigating  
choppy waters**

# **The calm before the storm**

*When the sea is calm, every ship  
has a good captain.*





**The calm  
before the storm**

Accept what you  
don't know



**The calm  
before the storm**

Accept what you  
don't know

*Try this!*

*Determine if your client can  
drive the project for you*

**The calm  
before the storm**



When things are  
going too well

**The calm  
before the storm**

When things are  
going too well

*Stay vigilant!*

*Projects risk total collapse  
during a feign lull*

**The calm  
before the storm**



**Taking  
criticism**

## TAKING CRITICISM

“When facing criticism, stop and ask  
yourself:

Is this helpful or not helpful?”

— *Chappell Ellison*

[http://bit.ly/chappell\\_criticism](http://bit.ly/chappell_criticism)



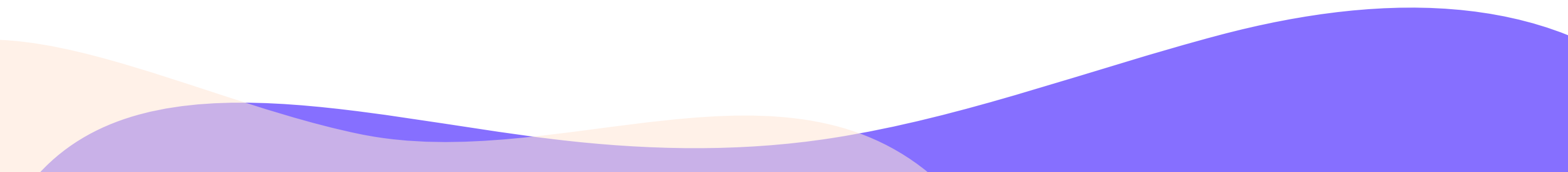
## TRANSLATING CRITICISM

**Not helpful**

“Looks like  
something my kids  
bring home from  
school.”

**Helpful**

“I can’t relate to  
what you’re  
giving us.”



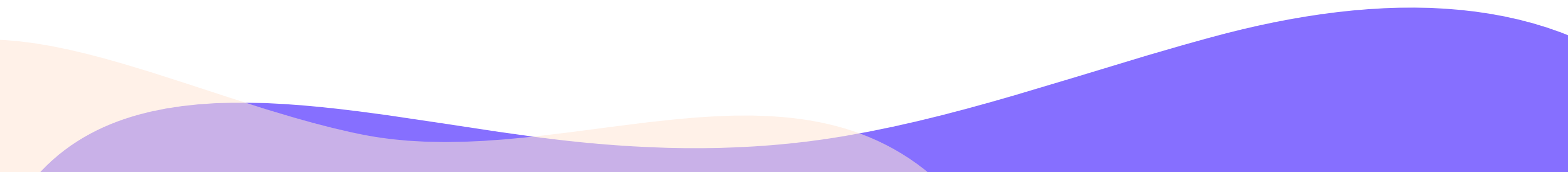
## TRANSLATING CRITICISM

**Not helpful**

“I just don’t like it.”

**Helpful**

“I’m missing something, but I don’t know how to tell you.”





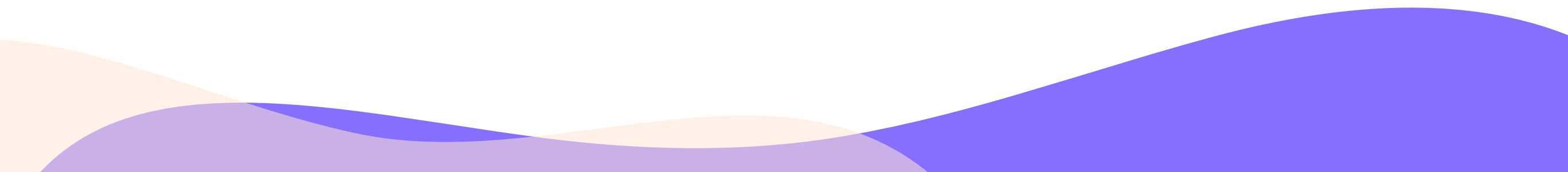
## TRANSLATING CRITICISM

**Not helpful**

“It’s very...  
interesting.”

**Helpful**

“Boy, this is a huge  
departure and I  
need some time to  
process this.”



**The calm  
before the storm**

Everything is  
going great —  
*until it isn't*



WHEN THINGS GO HORRIBLY WRONG

There's a set of rules we live by.  
Rule One is simply:  
“Don't adopt anxiety.”

— *Mike Monteiro*

→ [http://bit.ly/mike\\_anxiety](http://bit.ly/mike_anxiety)



## HANDLING ANXIOUS CLIENTS

Take a deep breath

Don't get defensive

Listen carefully

Don't assign blame

Say you'll look into it

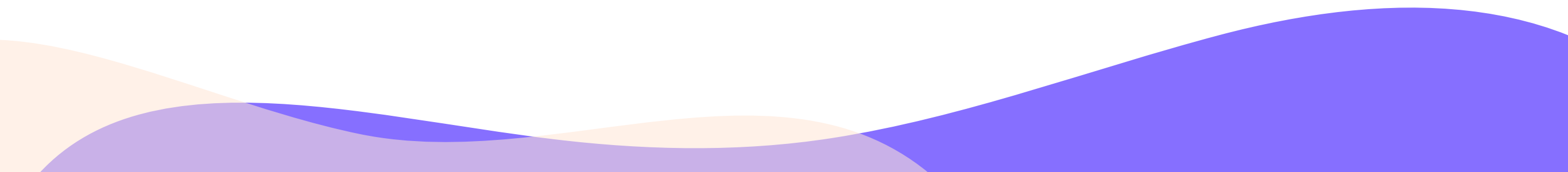
**Don't promise anything else**

Discuss with your team

**Navigating  
choppy waters**

# **Navigating choppy waters**

*Hope for the best,  
but prepare for the worst.*



**Navigating  
choppy waters**

# Handling progressive insight



## LIST OF PLACES WE'VE ALL BEEN TO BEFORE

“Now that I look at it again...”

“Could you try something totally different?”

“Our marketing team wants...”

“We should use our corporate font though.”

“I thought that...?”

“I asked my wife/neighbor/cat and they said...”



**Navigating  
choppy waters**



**Document  
*everything***



**Navigating  
choppy waters**

Document  
*everything*

*If only to make sure you're not insane*

*Keep written records of  
any decision a client  
might backtrack on.*

DOCUMENT EVERYTHING

Remember kids— the difference  
between screwing around and  
science is writing it down.

— *Adam Savage*



**Navigating  
choppy waters**

**Too many captains  
will sink any ship**



THAT FEELING WHEN

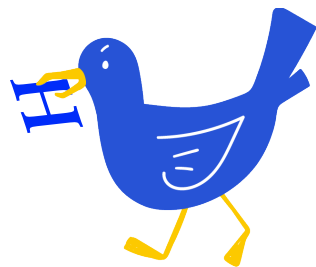
**You're reporting to several  
departments and they directly  
contradict each other**



## SEAGULL MANAGER

They swoop in,  
make a lot of noise,  
crap on people,  
maybe eat their lunch,  
and fly away.

— *James    unter*



**Navigating  
choppy waters**



**Design mutiny**

## DESIGN MUTINY

When your client takes  
matters in *their own hands*



## WHEN THEY BE LIKE

Imma let you finish, but this is  
what we came up with so why  
don't you try and work with that



*Watch out!*

*Could be indicative you've  
completely misread them*

Navigating  
choosy waters



BYE~



# Revolving door stakeholders



## REVOLVING-DOOR STAKEHOLDERS

**What begins as a website  
project, often ends up as a  
corporate restructuring**

*Ancient Chinese proverb*

The bottom of the slide features decorative wavy lines in shades of orange, purple, and blue.

FLASH BACK!!

Navigating  
choppy waters

Document  
*everything*



# FLASH BACK!!

**Navigating  
choppy waters**

Document  
***everything***

*If only to make sure you're not insane*

*Keep written records of  
any decision a client  
might backtrack on.*

@davidwieland



# **INTERVENTION TIME!**

**Review current blockers**

**Reassess project goals**

**Reassign individual responsibilities**

**Suspend the project**

## INTERVENTION TIME: NUCLEAR EDITION!

Being a pawn in your political tug-of-war  
is a) mentally exhausting  
and b) imminently detrimental to your  
project quality,  
so either cut this energy-draining bullshit,  
or we're walking away

**Navigating  
choppy waters**

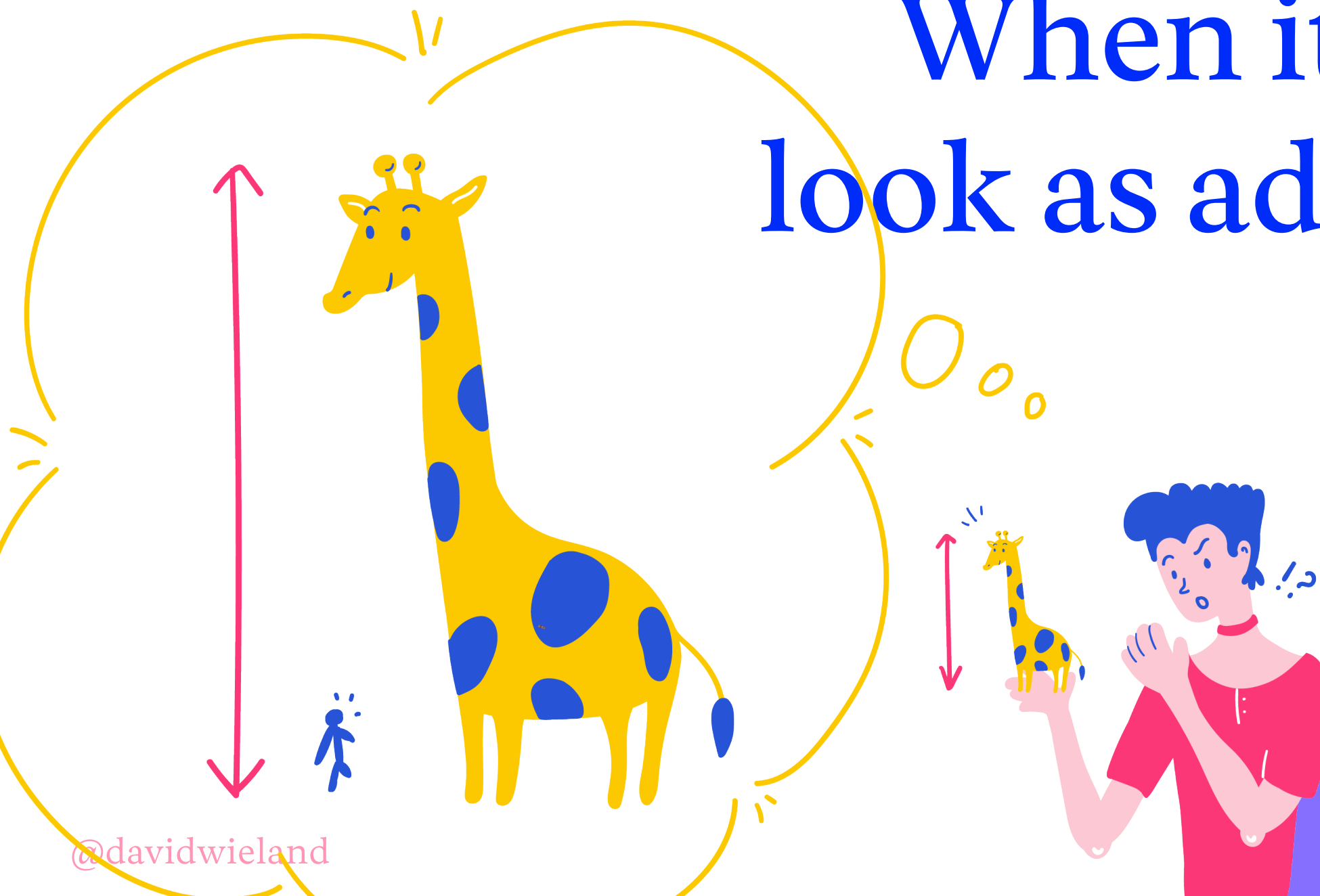
# Disembarking

*After the ship has sunk,  
everyone knows how she might  
have been saved.*

The bottom of the slide features several overlapping, wavy shapes in shades of purple and blue, creating a decorative, abstract background.



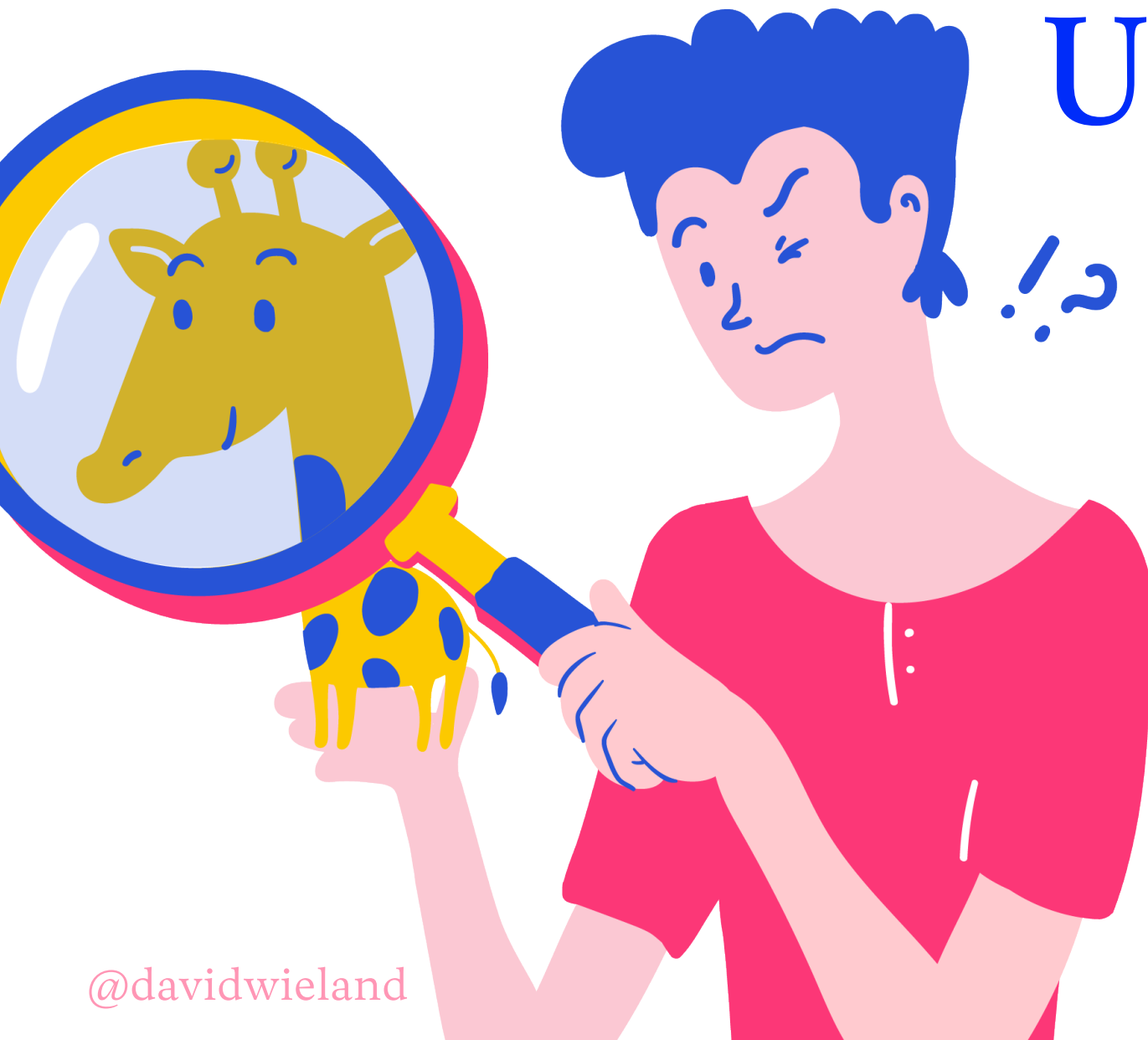
When it doesn't  
look as advertised



*Uh-oh! Someone clearly fudged it!*

*From design mockup to actual website is a **huge** step and requires strict coordination*

# Demystifying User Acceptance Testing (UAT)



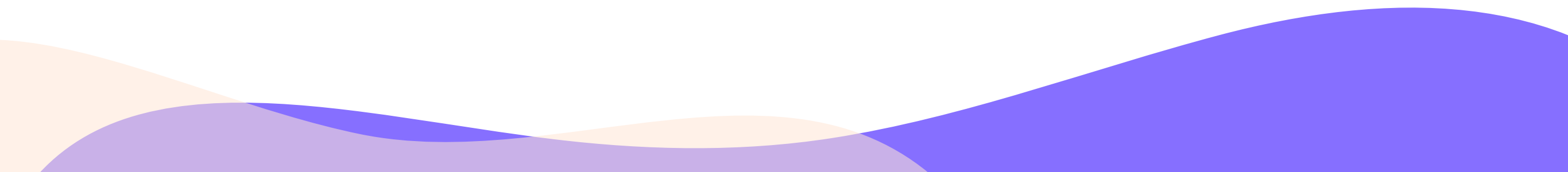
## **YOU'RE DOING UAT RIGHT WHEN**

**All teams agree what to test for**

**You treat UAT as a publication deadline**

**Client reports issues systematically**

**There's still time to address the issues**



Disembarking



Parting ways

THANK YOU!

Don't adopt other people's anxiety

[http://bit.ly/mike\\_anxiety](http://bit.ly/mike_anxiety)

Giving and taking criticism

[http://bit.ly/chappell\\_criticism](http://bit.ly/chappell_criticism)

What are Design Ops and why  
should you care?

[http://bit.ly/dave\\_designops](http://bit.ly/dave_designops)

In a design pitch, no one wins

[http://bit.ly/grayscale\\_pitch](http://bit.ly/grayscale_pitch)

