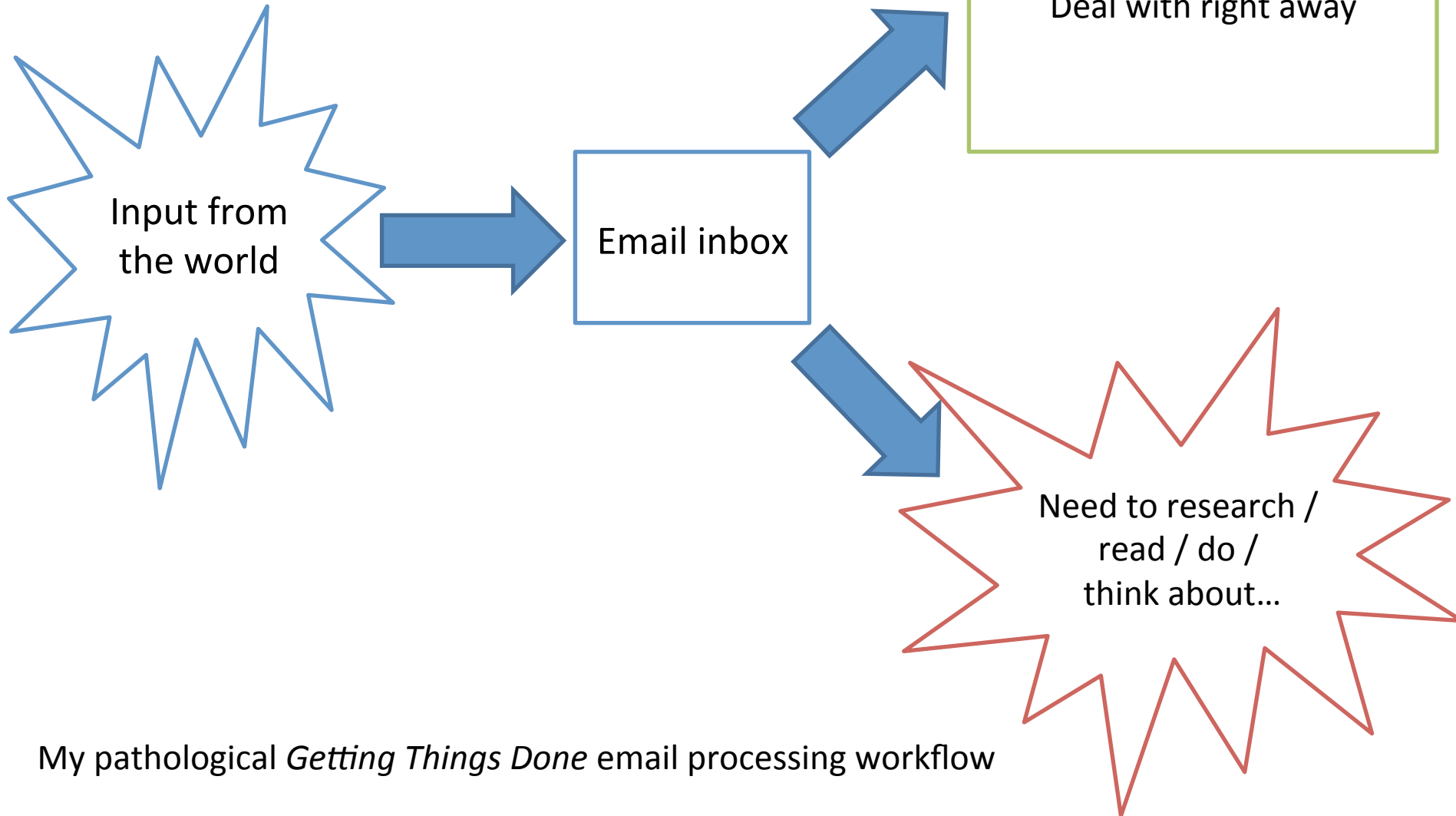


Three Years of Logging My Inbox Count

Mark Wilson

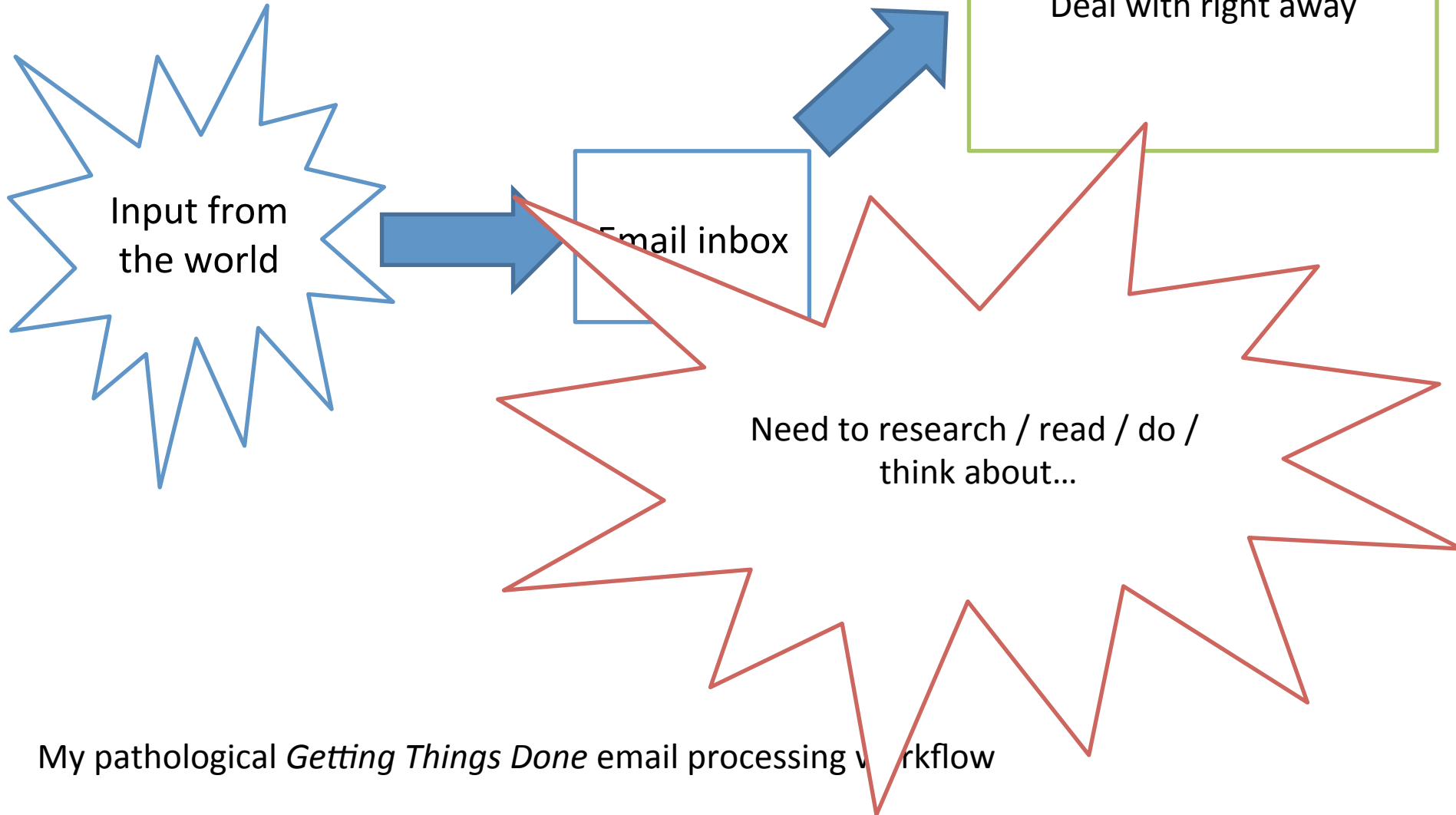
mark@warkmilson.com

Why?



My pathological *Getting Things Done* email processing workflow

Why?



Why?

Emails to self

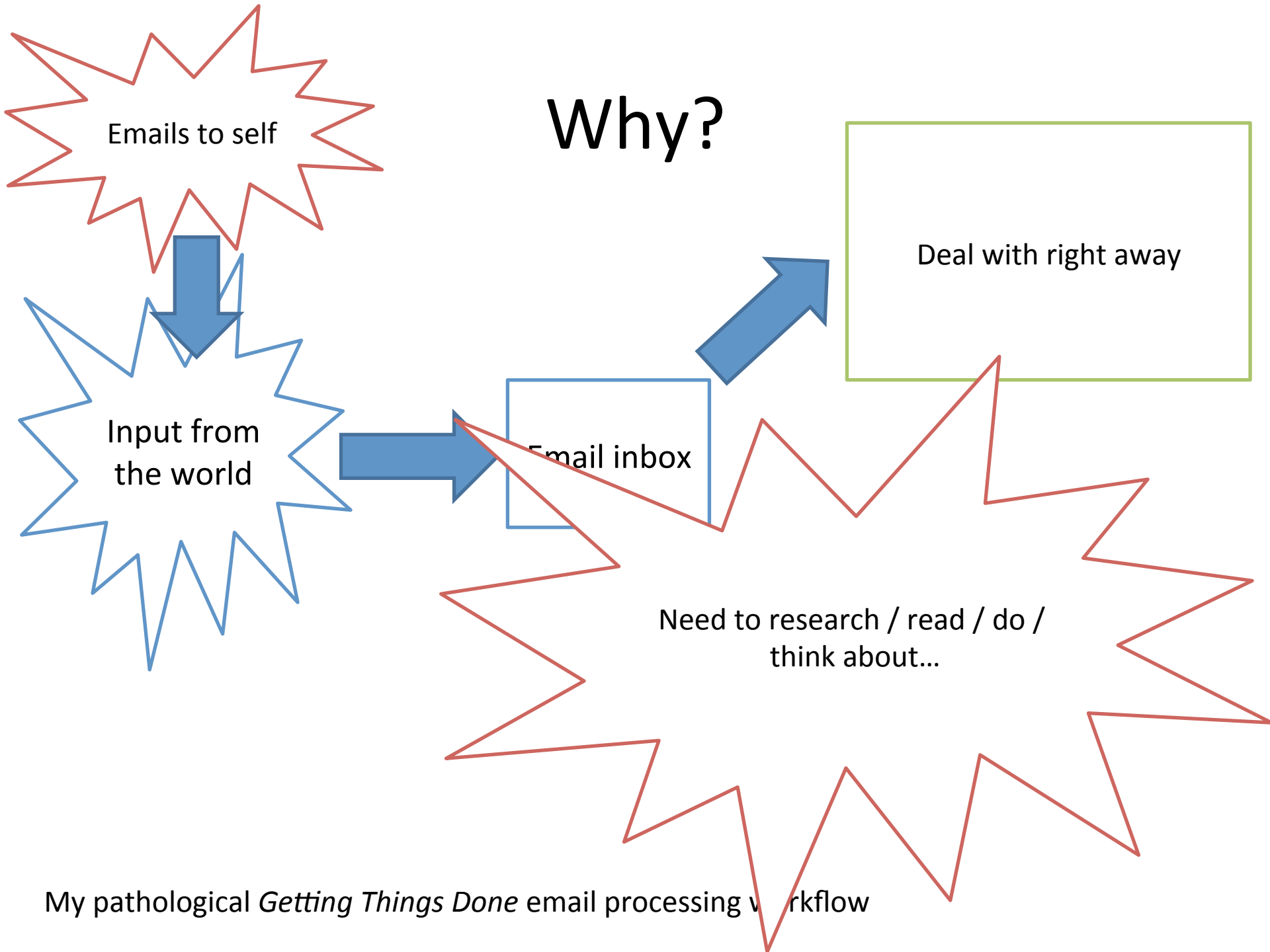
Input from
the world

Email inbox

Deal with right away

Need to research / read / do /
think about...

My pathological *Getting Things Done* email processing workflow



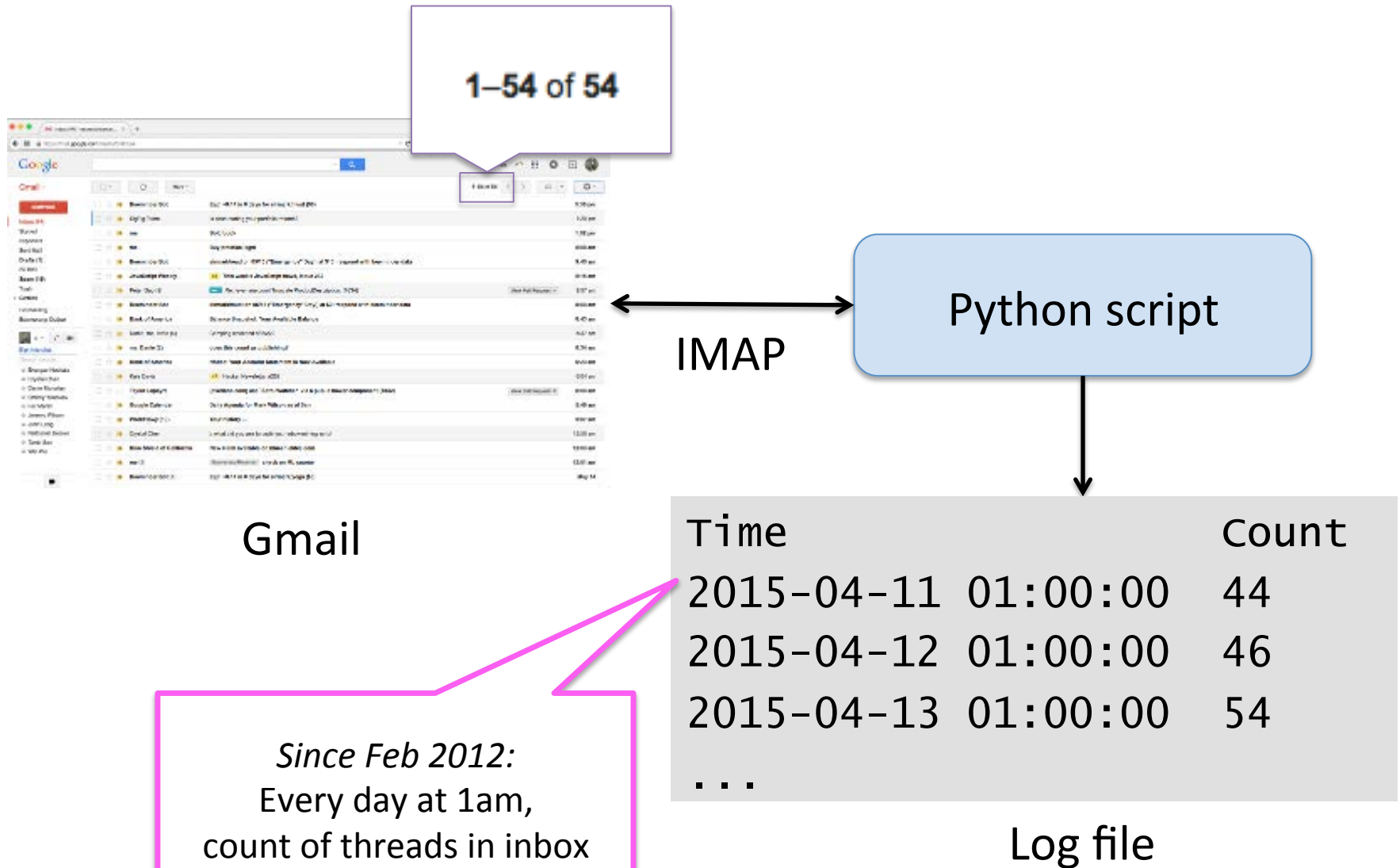
Why?



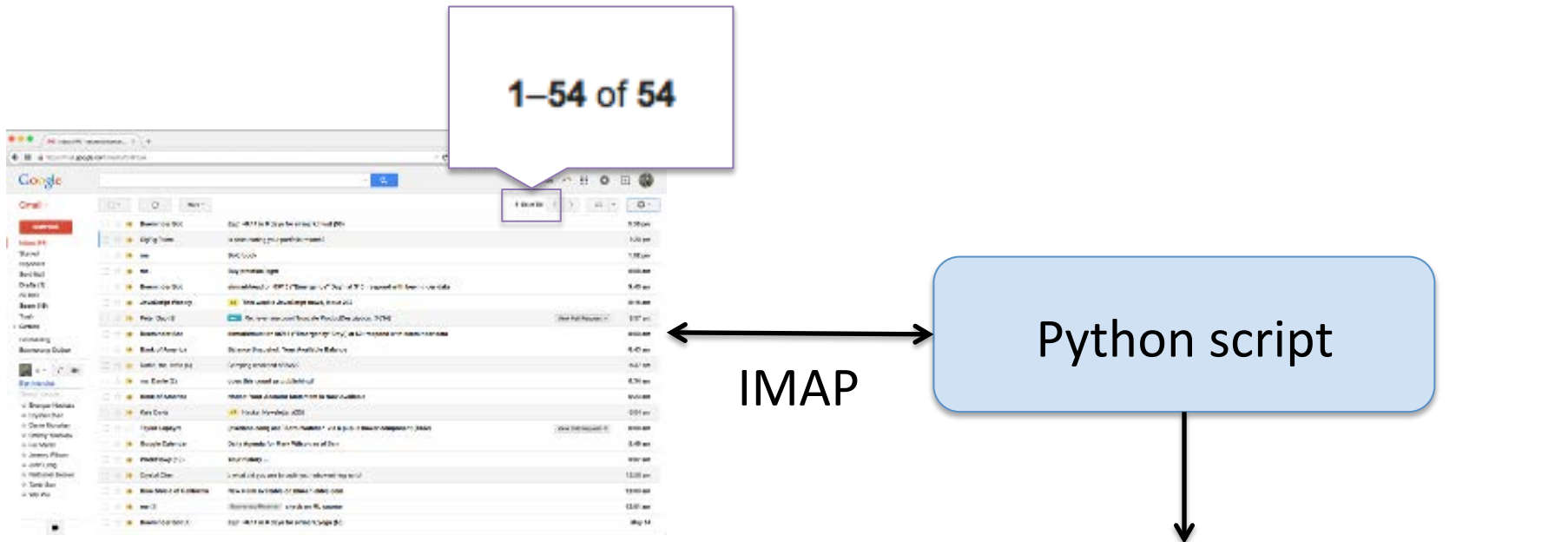
Inbox count \approx “unaddressed things in my life” \approx stress



What I Did



What I Did



Gmail

Time

Threads

2015-04-11 10:00:00

email #1, #2, #3...

2015-04-11 11:00:00

email #1, #3, #4, #5...

2015-04-11 12:00:00

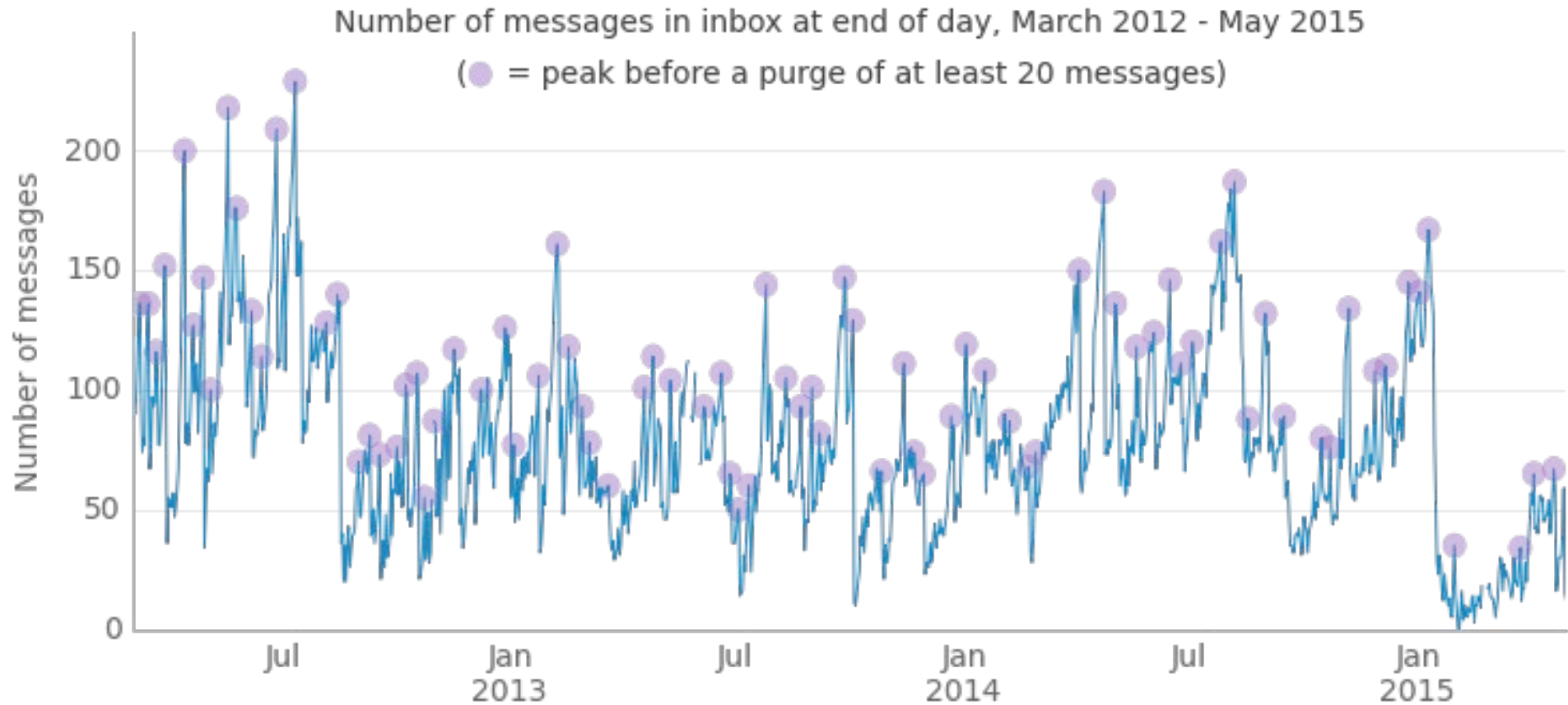
email #1, #3, #4, #5...

...

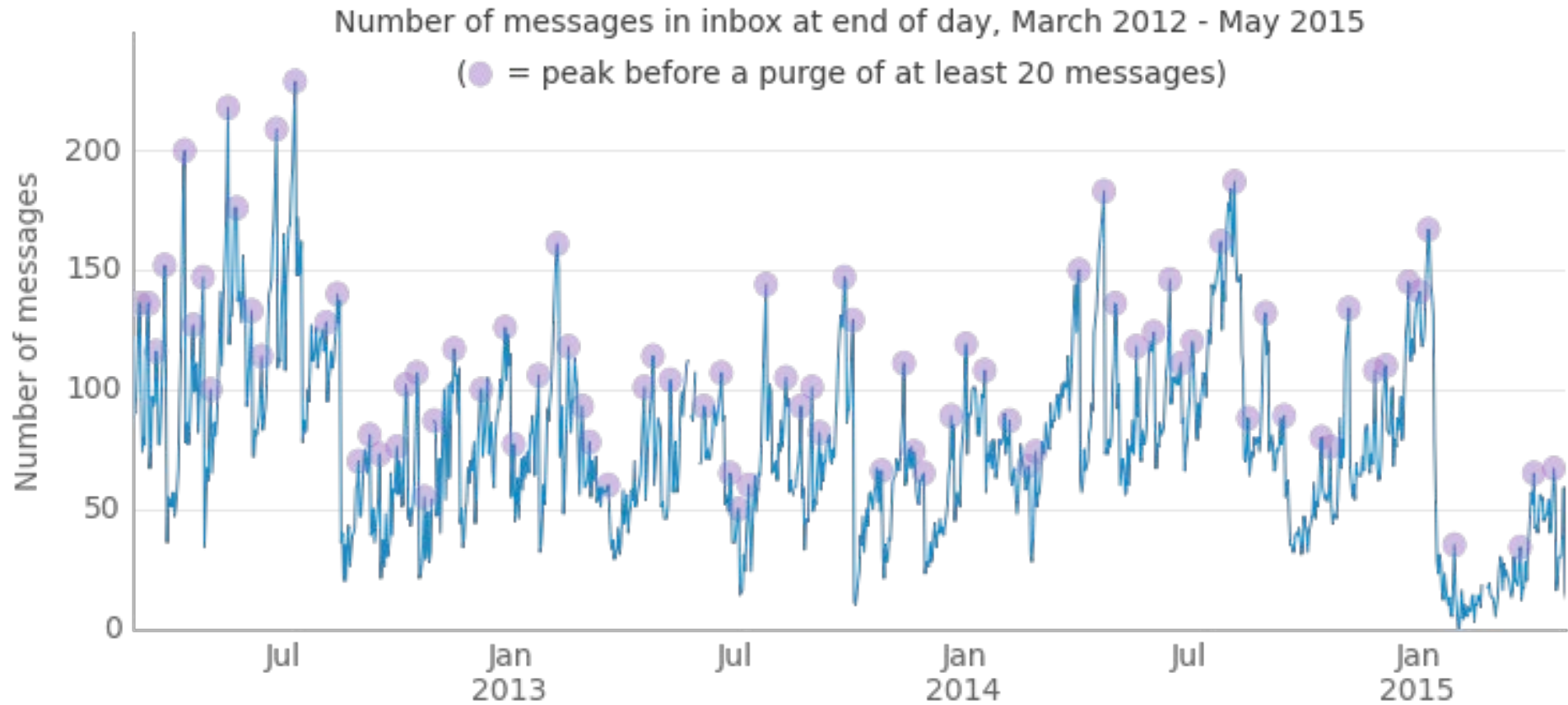
Starting recently:
Every hour,
detailed info about messages

Log file

Looking back on three years for the first time...



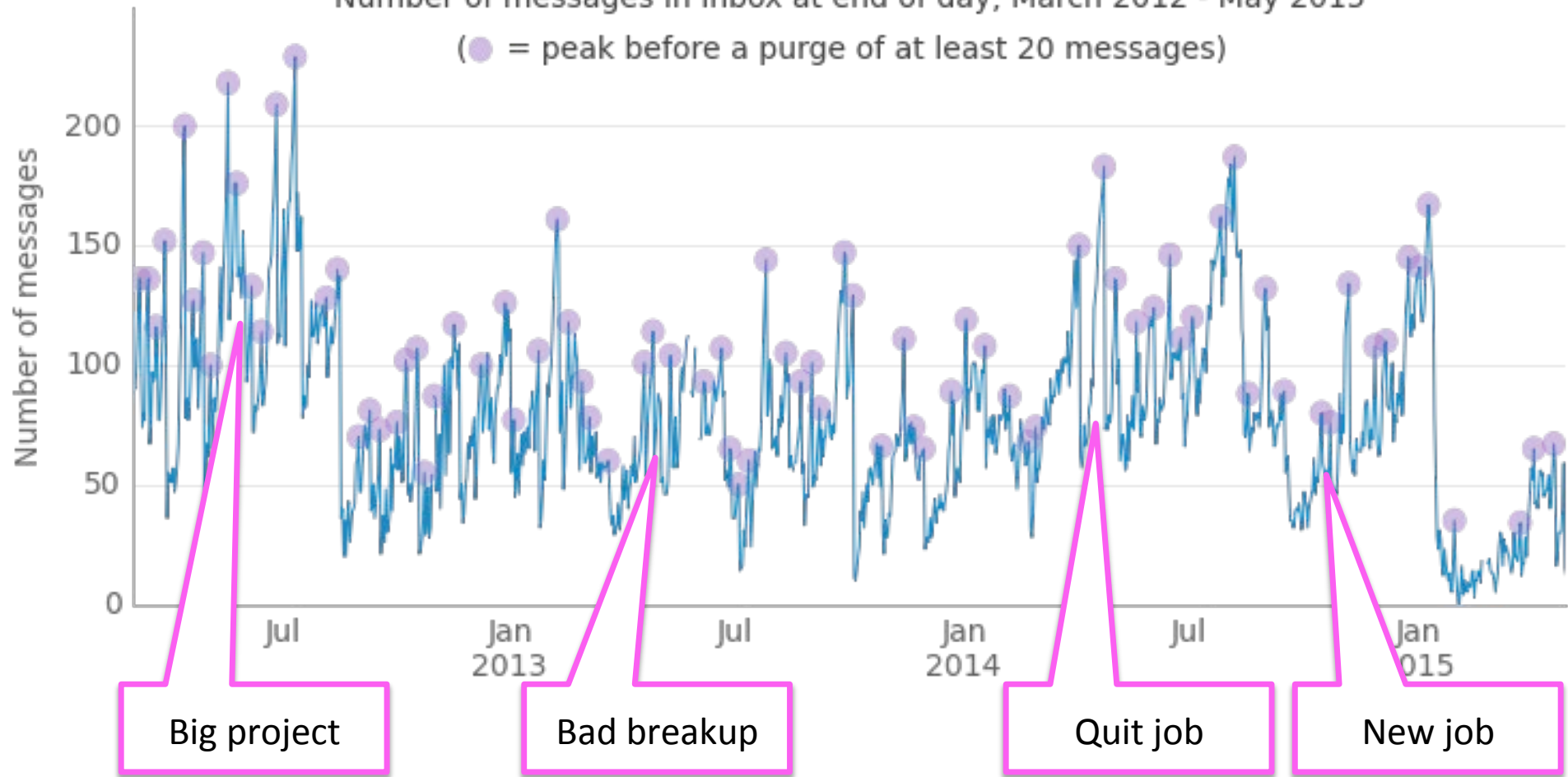
Purges happen regularly.



Assumption: “my inbox passively tells the story of what else is going on in my life.”

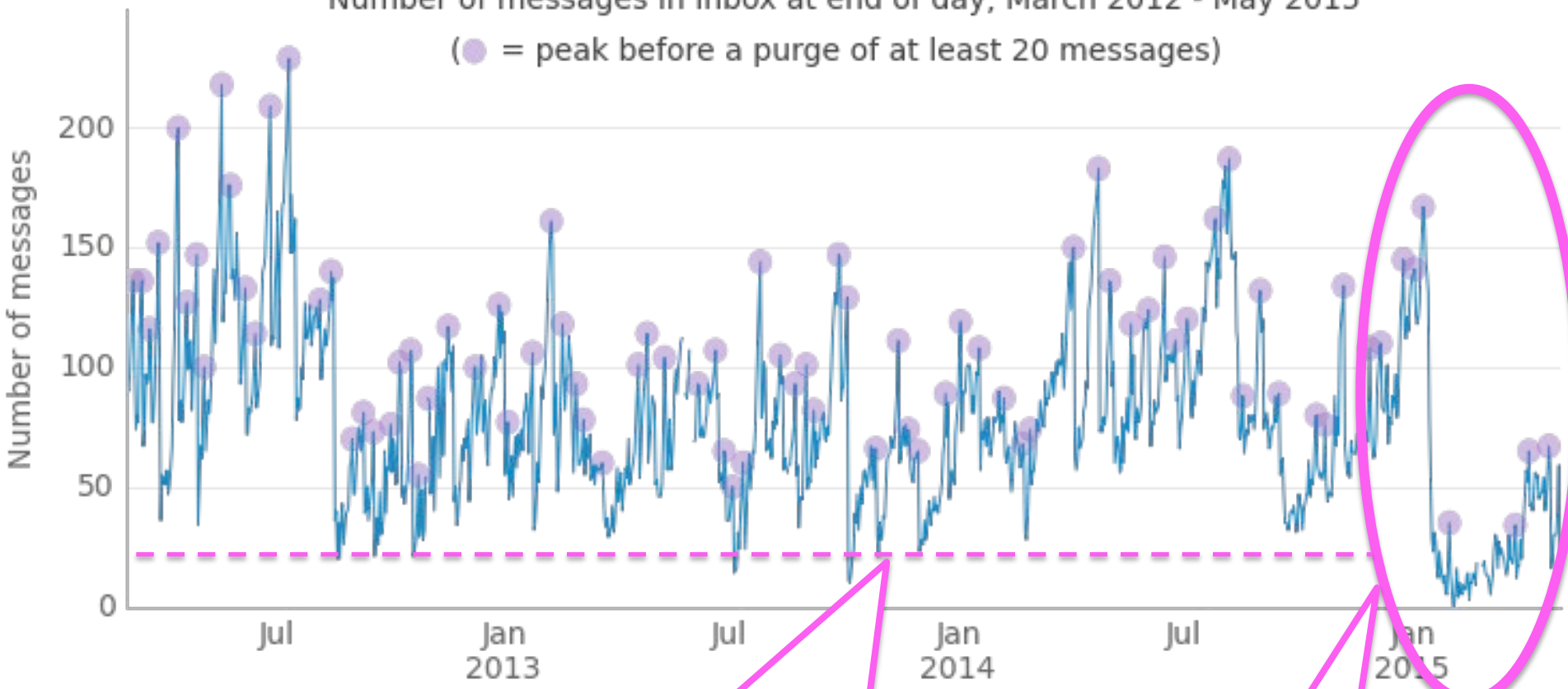
Number of messages in inbox at end of day, March 2012 - May 2015

(● = peak before a purge of at least 20 messages)



...but why is my baseline “stress” so high?

Number of messages in inbox at end of day, March 2012 - May 2015
(● = peak before a purge of at least 20 messages)



Baseline level of things still stressing me out

...until this purge

A dramatic purge



0 hours 50 minutes
2015-01-16_15.38.07

114

0:07 / 4:31

This video frame shows a computer screen with a file explorer window. A large number '114' is overlaid on the bottom left. A person wearing headphones is visible in a small video inset on the bottom right. The video player controls at the bottom show a progress bar at 0:07 / 4:31.

6 hours 32 minutes
2015-01-17_23.45.05

73

1:00 / 4:31

This video frame shows a computer screen with a document or code editor window. A large number '73' is overlaid on the bottom left. A person wearing headphones is visible in a small video inset on the bottom right. The video player controls at the bottom show a progress bar at 1:00 / 4:31.

13 hours 47 minutes
2015-01-18_22.24.39

39

2:07 / 4:31

This video frame shows a computer screen with a document or code editor window. A large number '39' is overlaid on the bottom left. A person wearing headphones is visible in a small video inset on the bottom right. The video player controls at the bottom show a progress bar at 2:07 / 4:31.

27 hours 48 minutes
2015-01-22_17.05.39

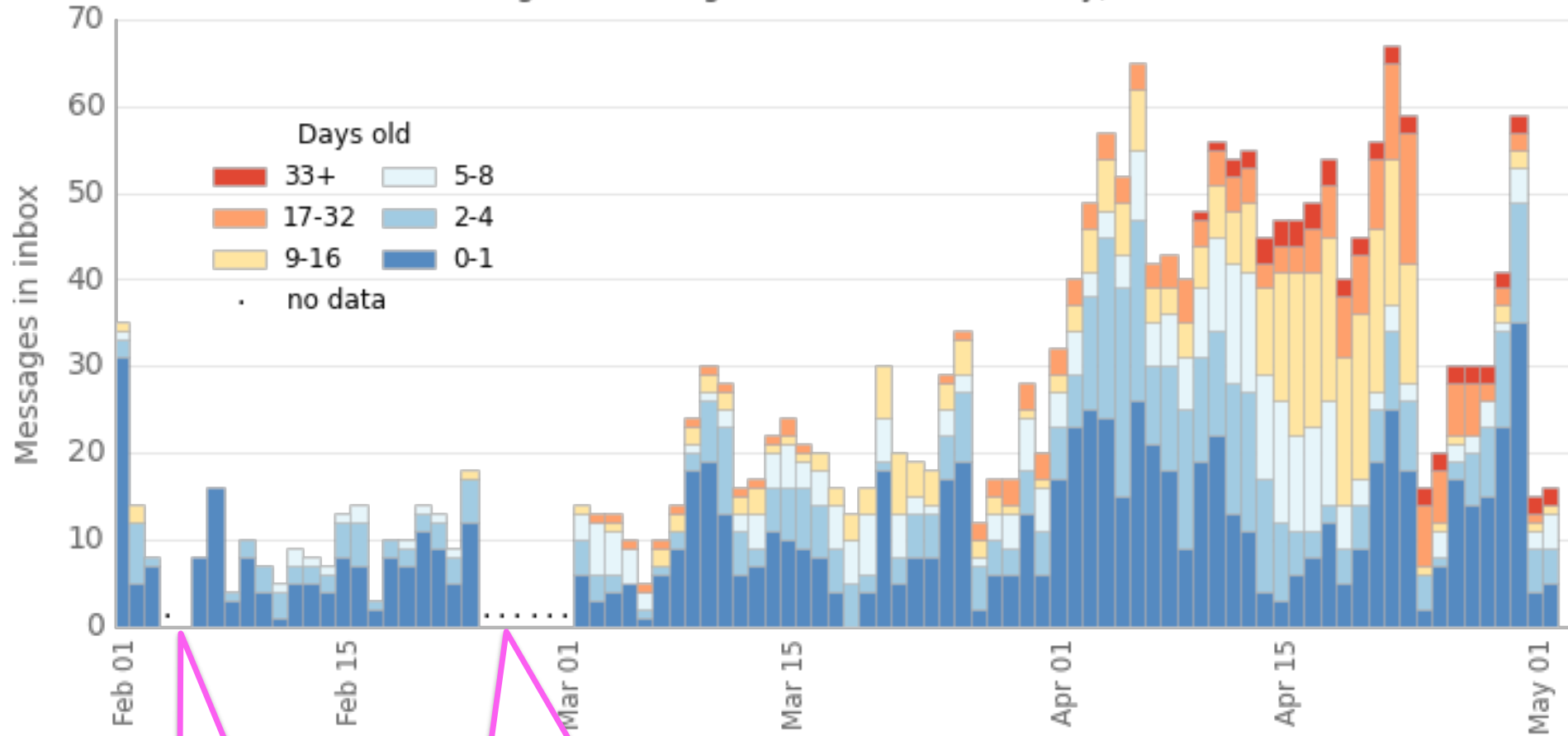
23

4:16 / 4:31

This video frame shows a computer screen with a file explorer window. A large number '23' is overlaid on the bottom left. A person wearing headphones is visible in a small video inset on the bottom right. The video player controls at the bottom show a progress bar at 4:16 / 4:31.

The dynamics of my inbox growth starting from zero

Age of messages in inbox at end of day, 2015

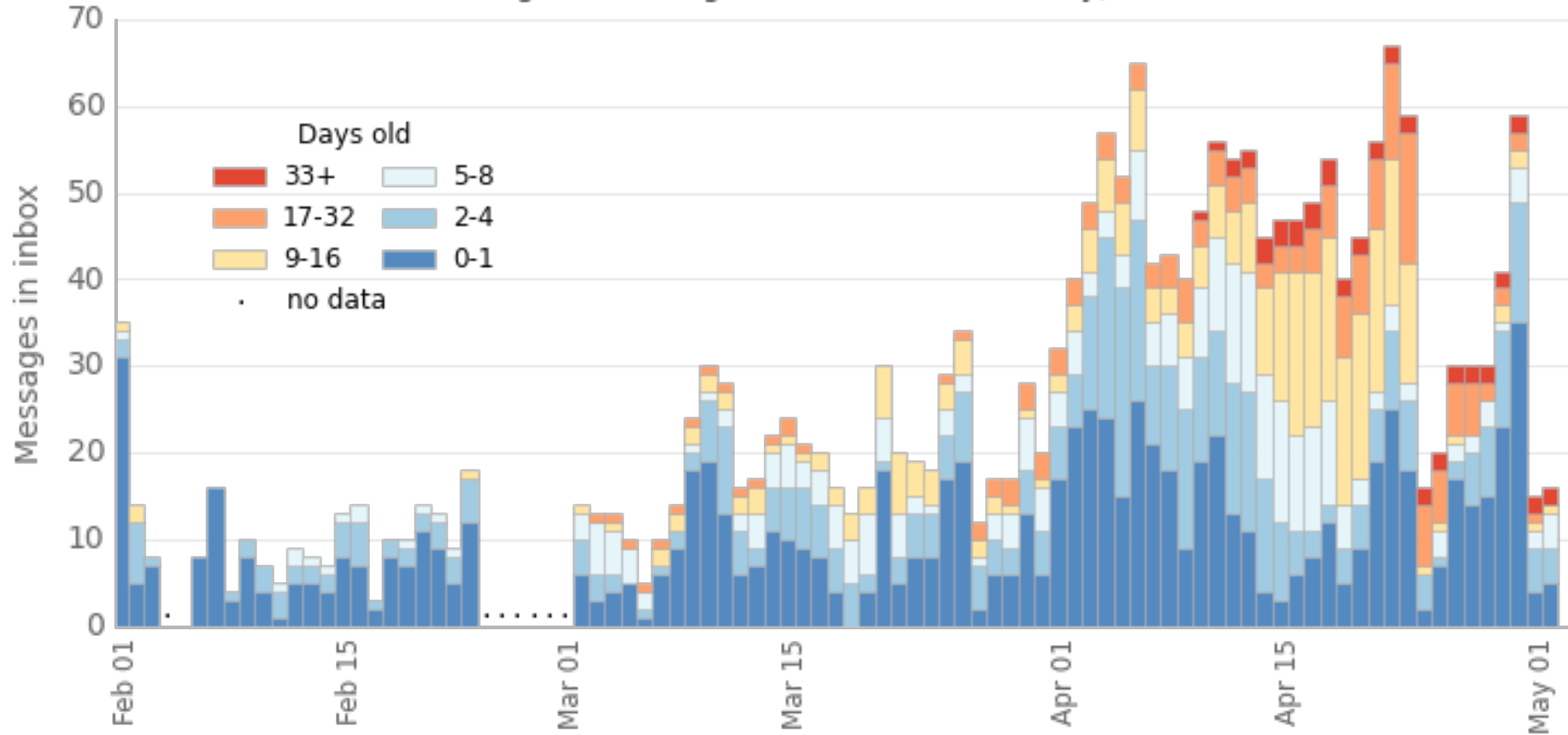


Inbox zero

(missing data: a bug in my code)

The dynamics of my inbox growth starting from zero

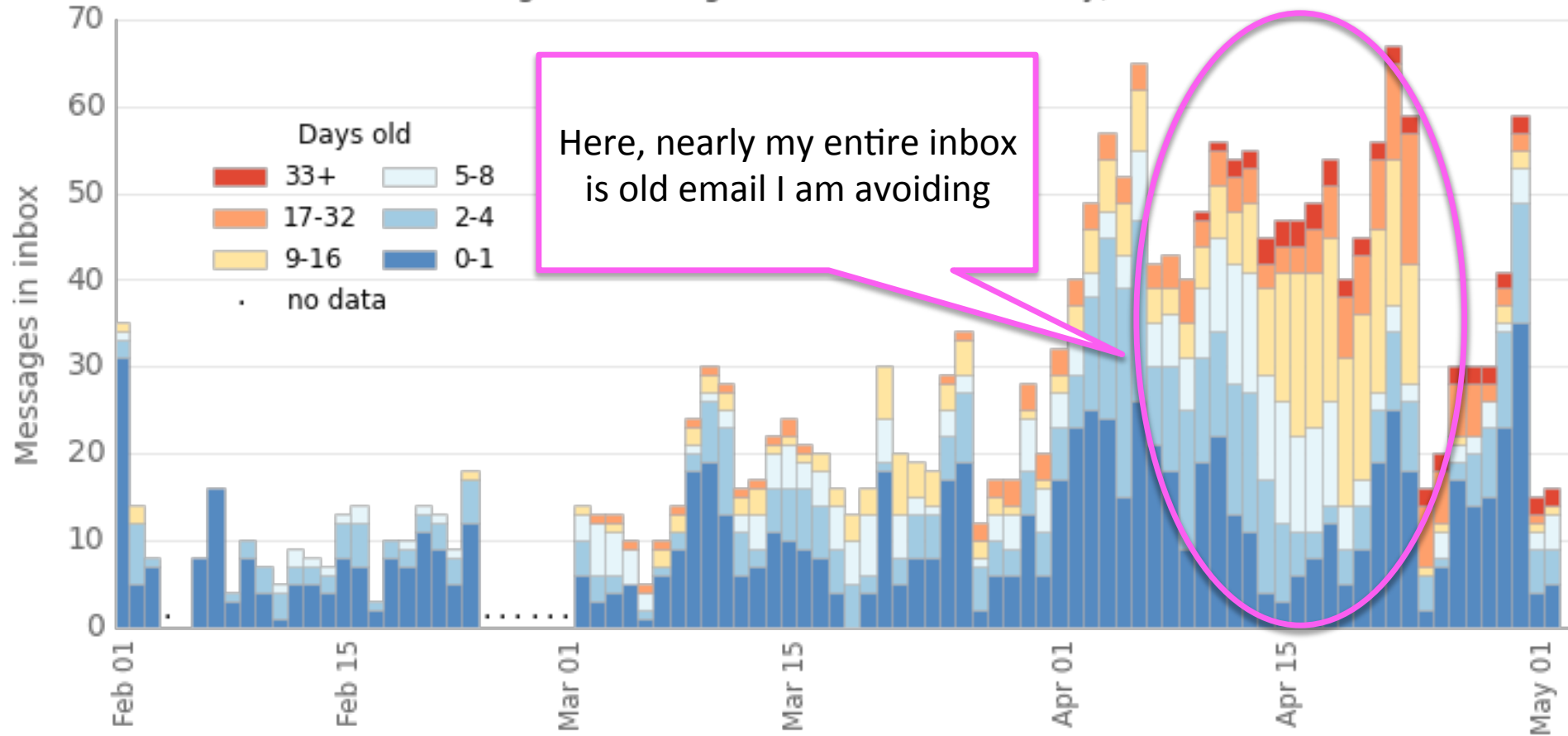
Age of messages in inbox at end of day, 2015



I stay on top of recent emails while consciously avoiding older, important ones.

The dynamics of my inbox growth starting from zero

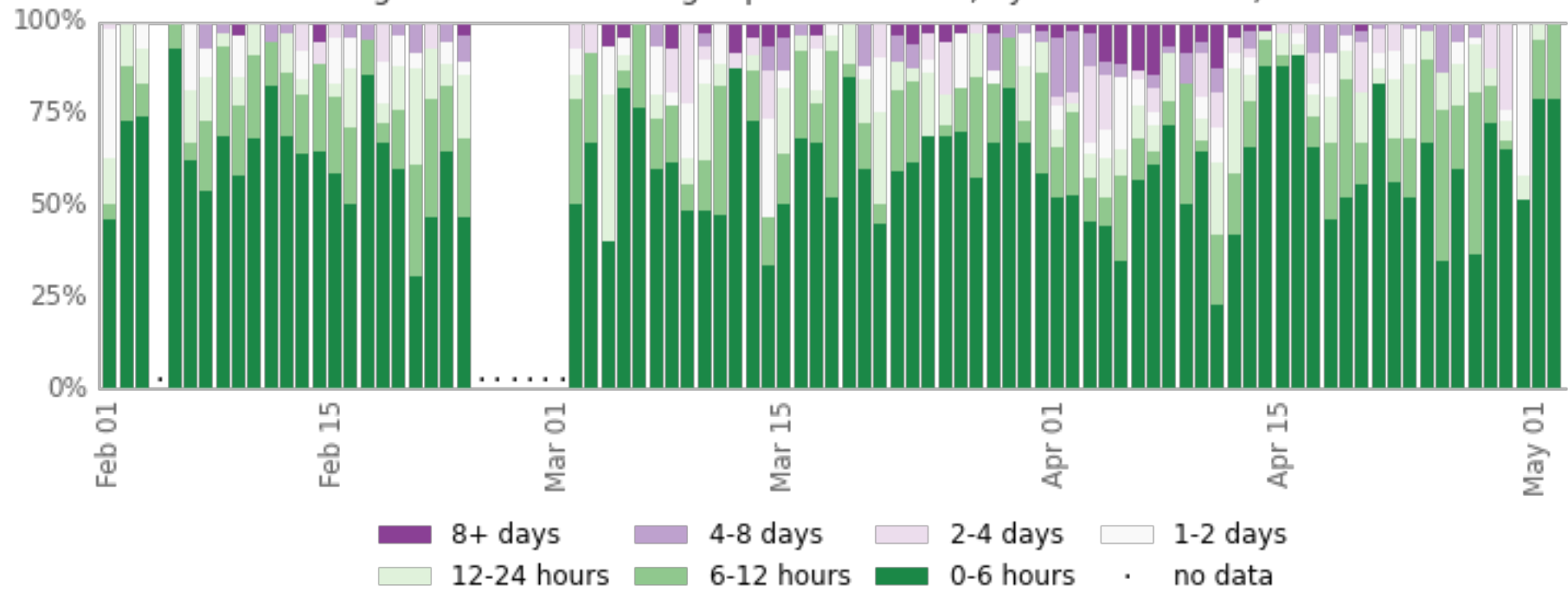
Age of messages in inbox at end of day, 2015



I stay on top of recent emails while consciously avoiding older, important ones.

My responsiveness to emails

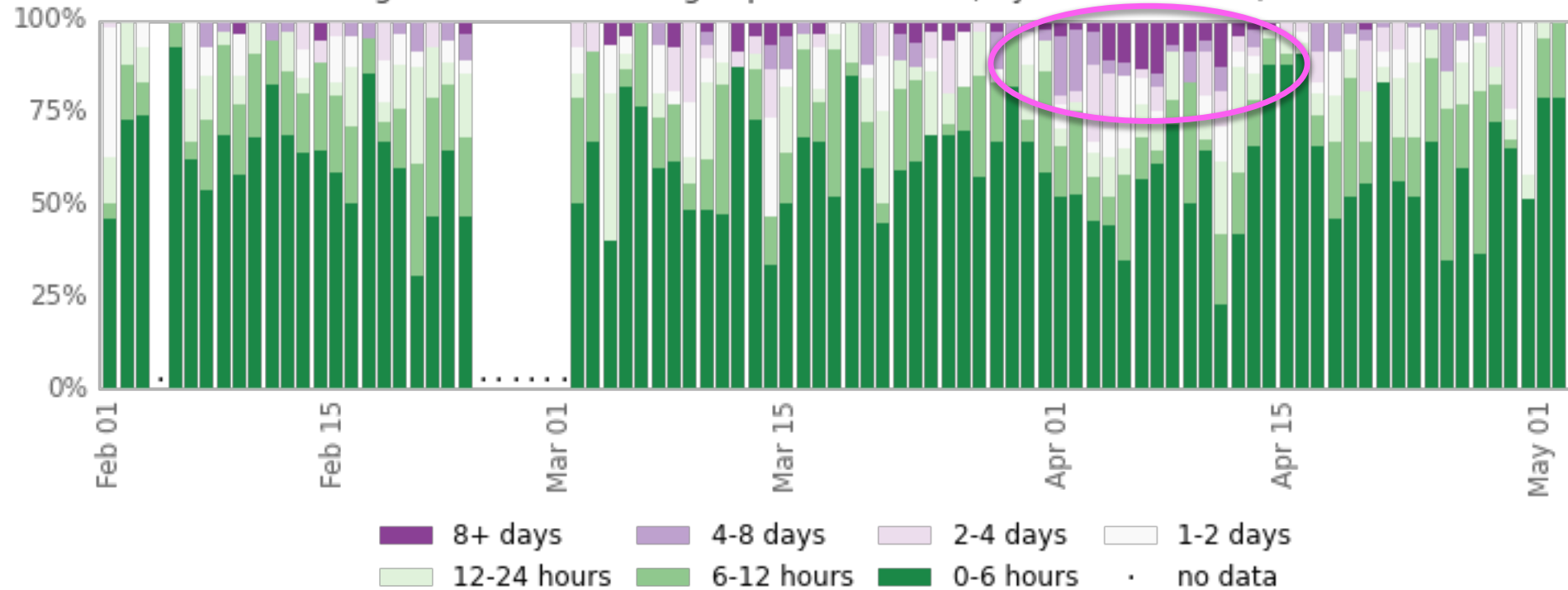
Length of time a message spends in inbox, by date of arrival, 2015



My responsiveness to e

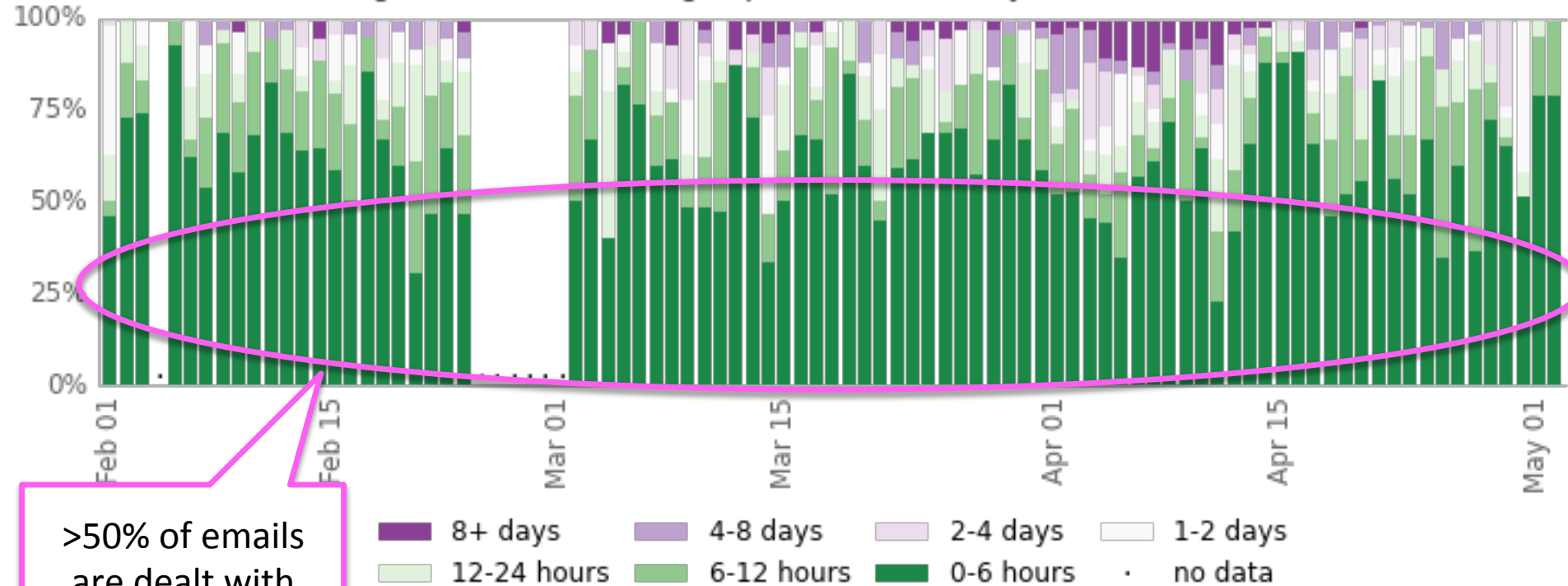
Many emails not dealt with for 4+ days

Length of time a message spends in inbox, by date of arrival, 2015



My responsiveness to emails

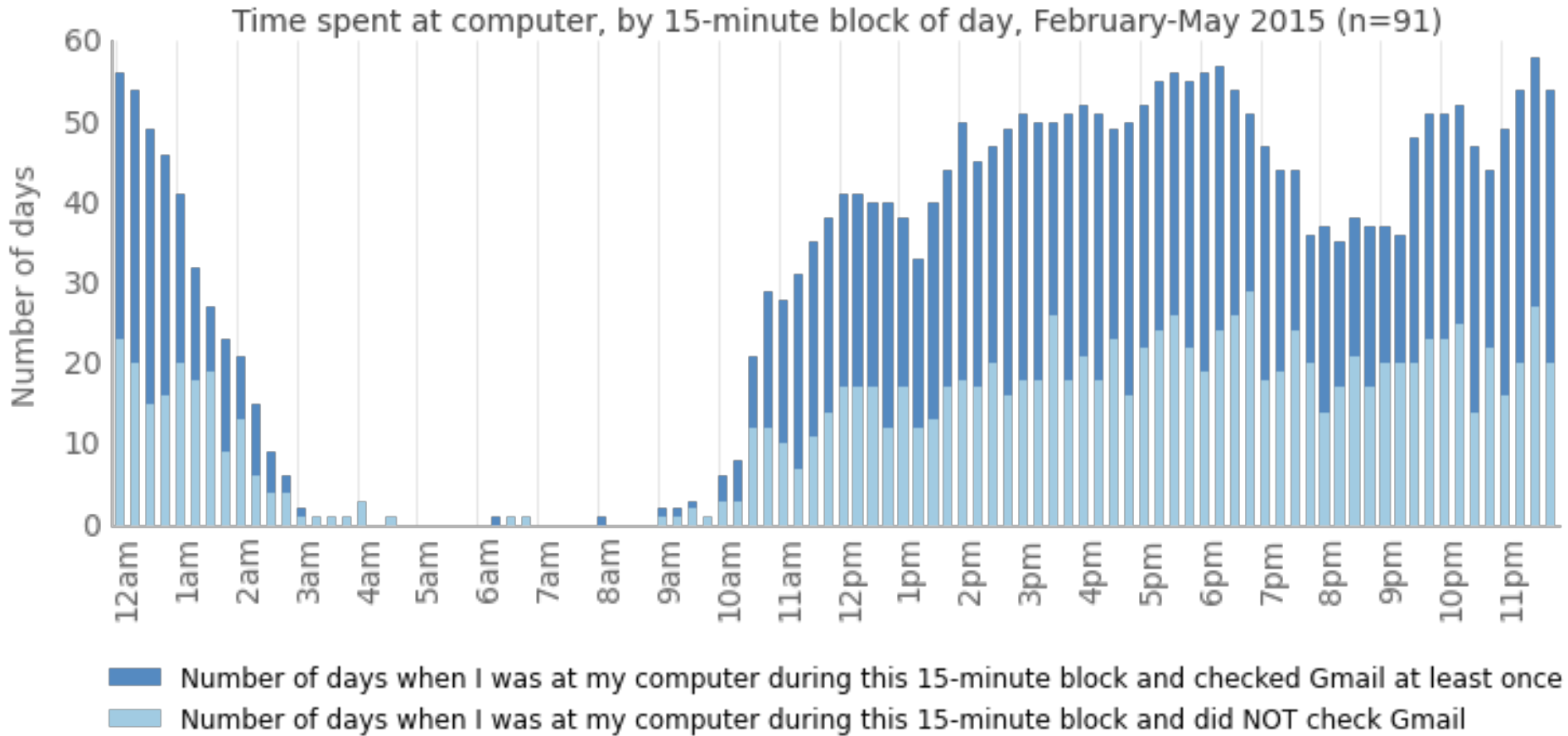
Length of time a message spends in inbox, by date of arrival, 2015



>50% of emails are dealt with within 6 hours!

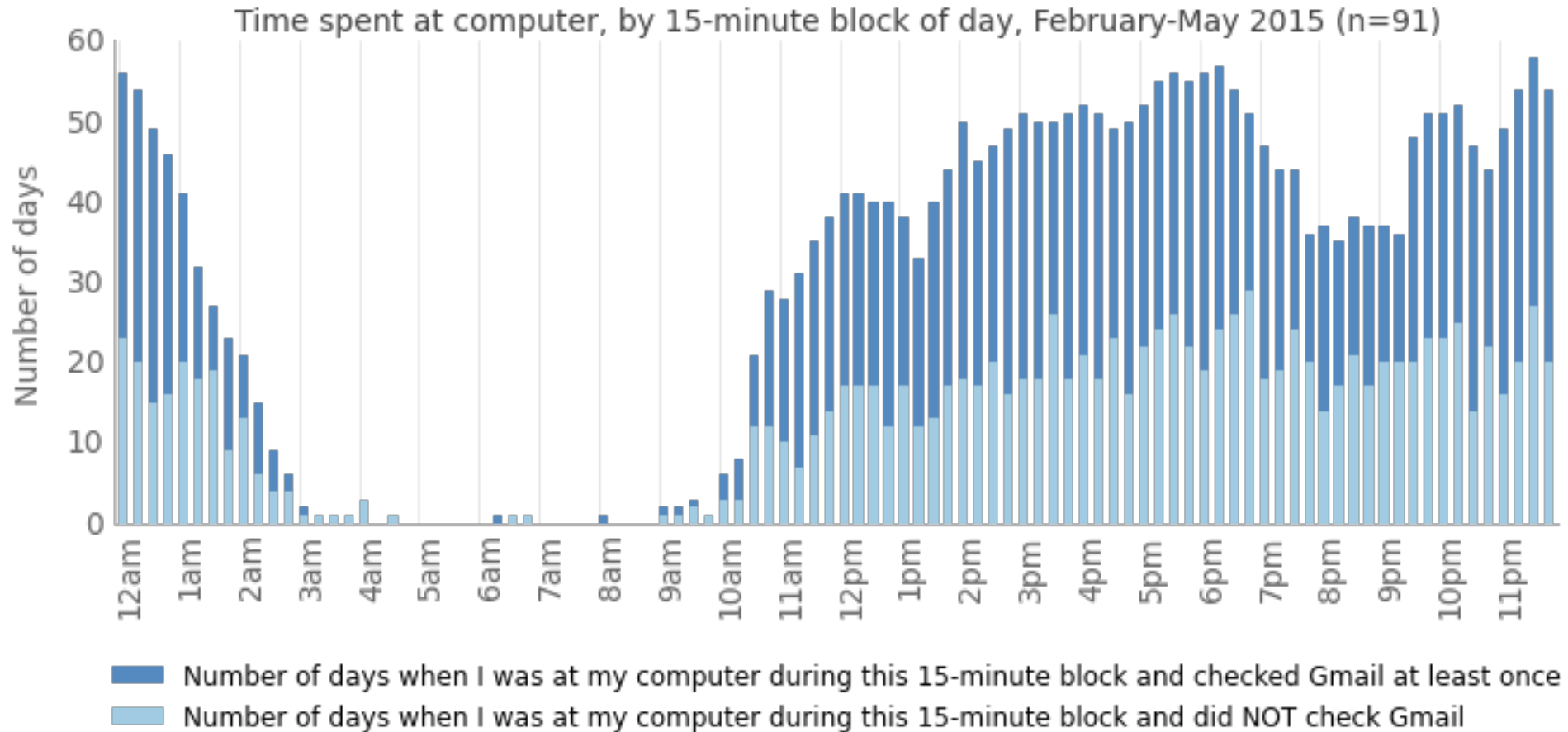
I am depressingly responsive in dealing with trivial emails at the same time that I am procrastinating on anything that requires effort.

Time spent checking email



Computer usage data from *Time Sink*

Time spent checking email



Checking email has become a compulsive routine.

Overturning my assumptions

Assumption:

Inbox count as a passive
record of my stress

Reality:

My email habits *enable* my
inbox count to cause stress

Overturning my assumptions

Assumption:

Inbox count as a passive record of my stress

Gathered more detailed data to make cool time lapse

Reality:

My email habits *enable* my inbox count to cause stress

More detailed data shows alarming truths about my relationship with email

Overturning my assumptions

Assumption:

Inbox count as a passive record of my stress

Gathered more detailed data to make cool time lapse

“I’m bad at email”

Reality:

My email habits *enable* my inbox count to cause stress

More detailed data shows alarming truths about my relationship with email

I’m addicted to email

I'm addicted to email.

Time spent at computer, by 15-minute block of day, February-May 2015 (n=91)

