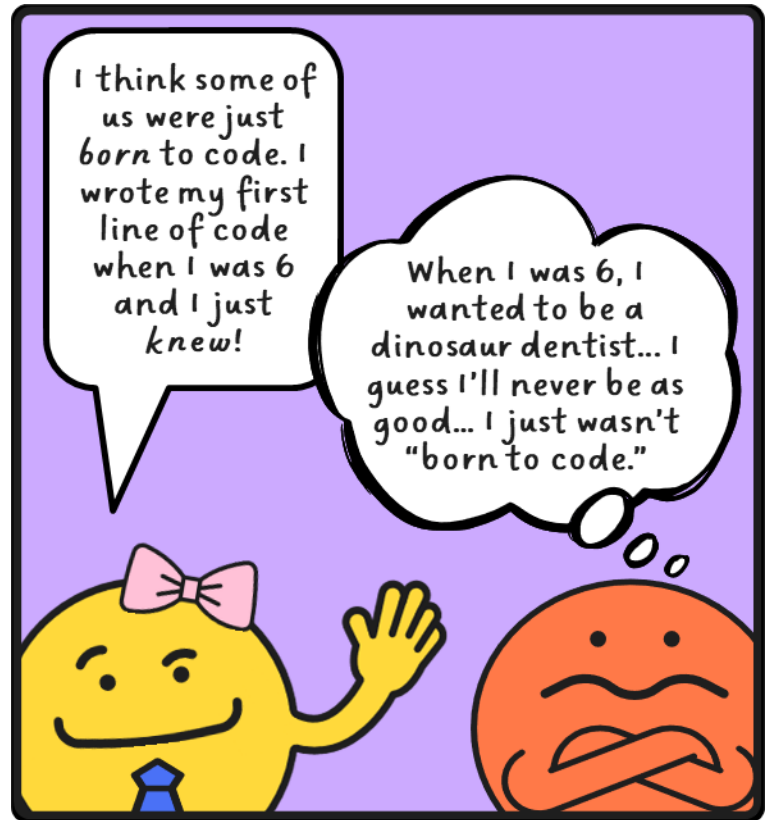The Developer Success Lab Presents...
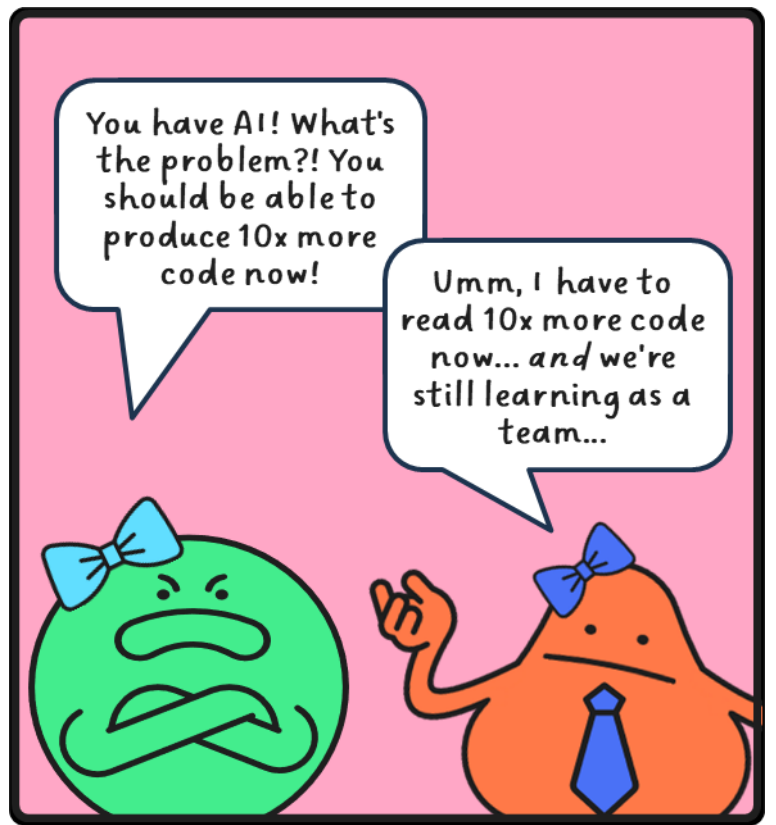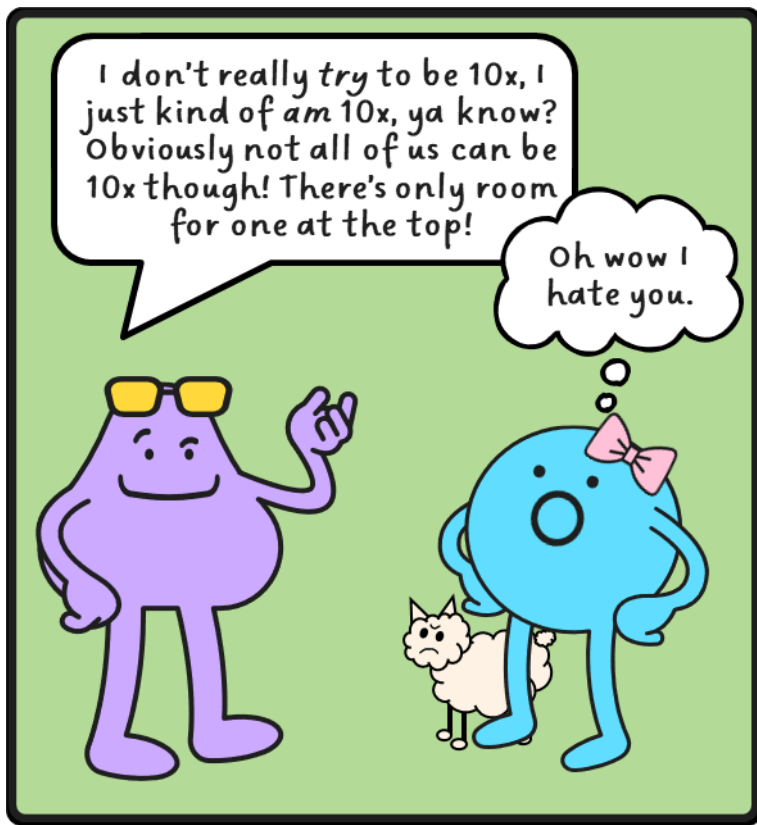
"Brilliant" Blobs

An EngBlob science comic by Dr. Carol Lee

In software engineering, we tend to believe that the best developers are just innately brilliant programmers.

I think some of us were just *born* to code. I wrote my first line of code when I was 6 and I just *knew*!

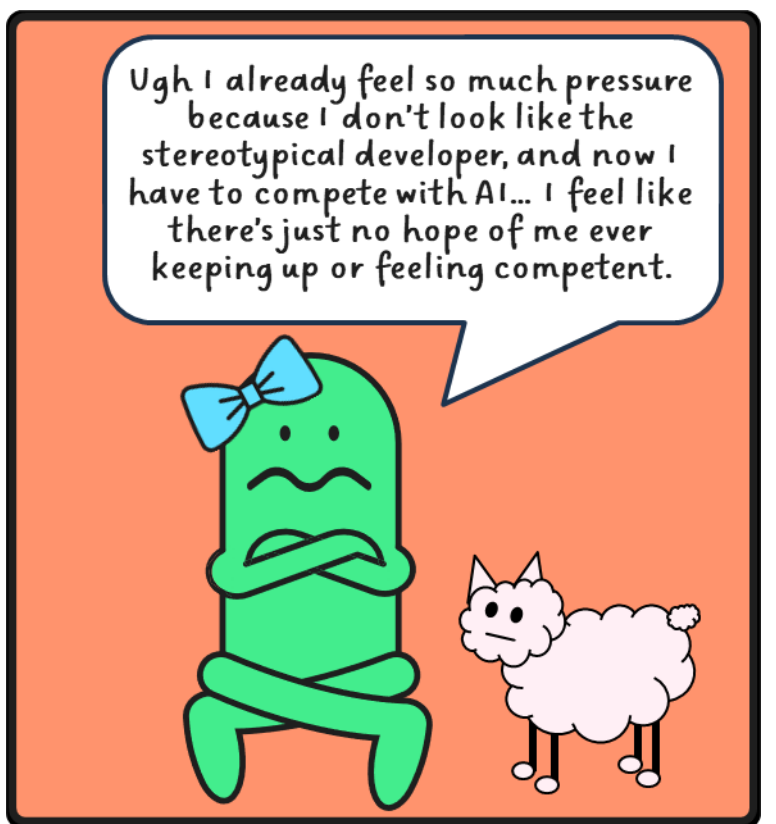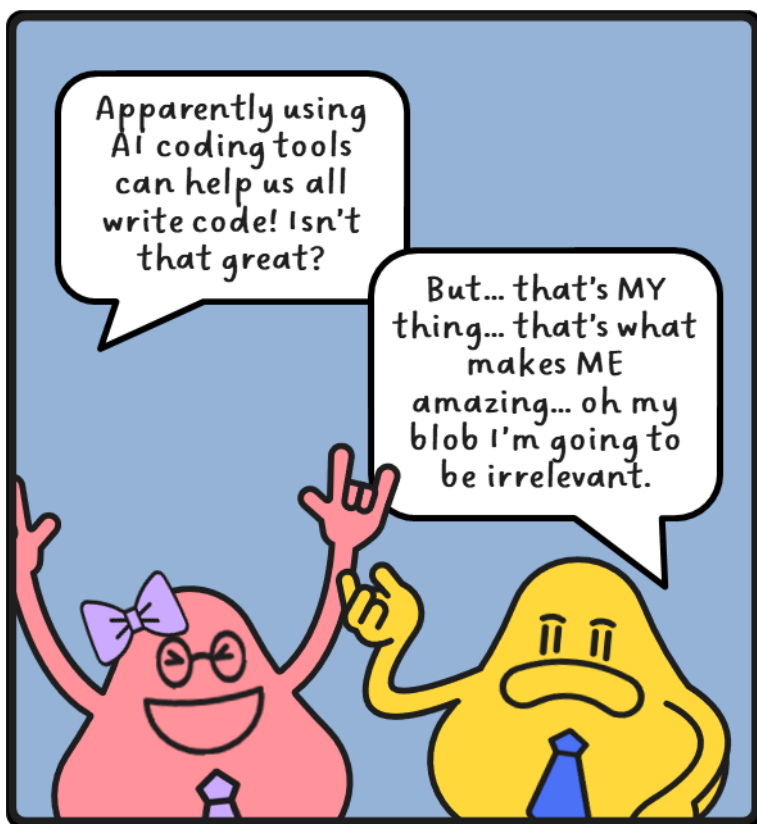When I was 6, I wanted to be a dinosaur dentist... I guess I'll never be as good... I just wasn't "born to code."

But these brilliance beliefs trap us into contest cultures, where we believe that we must be ruthlessly competitive to succeed.

I don't really *try* to be 10x, I just kind of *am* 10x, ya know? Obviously not all of us can be 10x though! There's only room for one at the top!

Oh wow I hate you.

Contest cultures are obnoxious AND destructive, especially during times of change. We see their impacts today as orgs integrate generative AI tools.
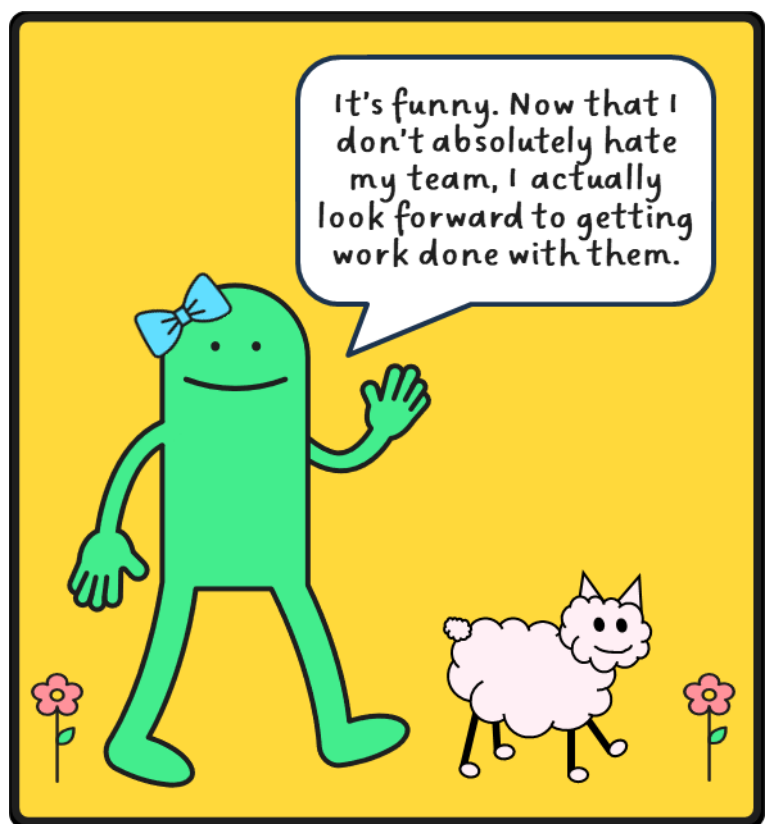
You have AI! What's the problem?! You should be able to produce 10x more code now!

Umm, I have to read 10x more code now... *and* we're still learning as a team...

Contest cultures also create AI skill threat, where devs feel stressed & threatened by rapidly changing expectations & aren't sure how their work will be seen & valued

Apparently using AI coding tools can help us all write code! Isn't that great?

But... that's MY thing... that's what makes ME amazing... oh my blob I'm going to be irrelevant.

They also create equity gaps for minoritized developers who aren't usually encouraged to be programmers.

Ugh I already feel so much pressure because I don't look like the stereotypical developer, and now I have to compete with AI... I feel like there's just no hope of me ever keeping up or feeling competent.

Luckily, we can mitigate contest cultures by creating cultures of learning and belonging instead. This helps give devs agency over how THEY want to use AI!

Well, I know I'm not the best engineer....

Oh please, we all make mistakes & bring something unique to the team. We're ALL learning every day, and we'll learn how to use AI together. Besides, I love having you on this team no matter what!

As a bonus, building a culture learning and belonging can boost teams' productivity *and* effectiveness

It's funny. Now that I don't absolutely hate my team, I actually look forward to getting work done with them.

So if you want to mitigate AI Skill Threat, create learning and belonging cultures instead of contest cultures! To learn more about the science behind this, as well as resources for how to do this, check out the QR codes below, or check out DevSuccessLab.com

Read the full report on AI Skill Threat here!

Check out our toolkit for reducing AI Skill Threat here!

Thanks for Reading!

Dr. Carol Lee is a clinical scientist in the Developer Success Lab. She leverages her expertise in mental health and thoughtful measurement to study how developers cope and thrive through stressful circumstances.