



One Thing Workshop

by Scott Decker

The crime which bankrupts men and states is  
that of job-work: declining from your main  
design to serve a turn here or there.

- RALPH WALDO EMERSON

# The goal of today's workshop is to define, document, and implement our One Thing

- We'll start by explaining how lack of focus affects us
- We'll provide some examples of One Thing
- We'll define what One Thing is
- We'll create our own One Thing
- We'll document our One Thing
- We'll reflect on our current position given our newly adopted One Thing
- We'll summarize and document next steps



# What is the purpose of our team?

- Take 2 minutes
- Write down the purpose of your team on the white board





# Often a project can feel like this...



- We're going to make our Widgets API super fast
- And we need to support xml
- And we need a new UI for the administrative component
- And we need to migrate off JBoss
- And we need to add a few new fields
- And we need to integrate with 5 new partners
- And we need to improve our unit and integration tests
- And...







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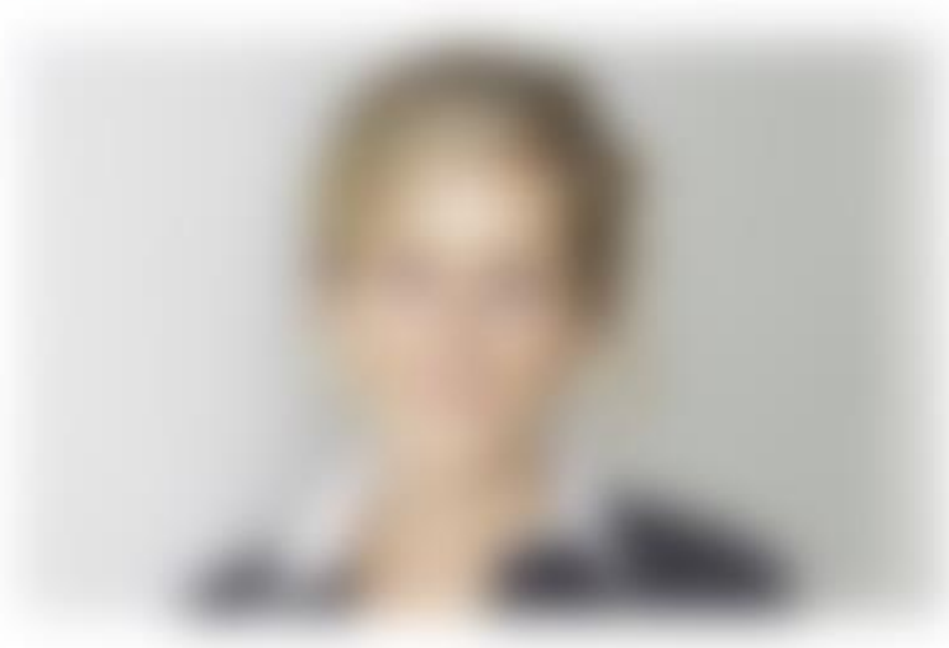


1. The first step is to identify the problem.  
2. The second step is to analyze the problem.  
3. The third step is to develop a solution.

4. The fourth step is to implement the solution.



5. The fifth step is to evaluate the results.



## THE HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES

The United States has a rich and diverse history, shaped by the experiences of its many peoples. From the early days of exploration and settlement to the present day, the nation has grown and changed in remarkable ways. The story of the United States is a story of resilience, innovation, and the pursuit of a better life for all.

THE HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES



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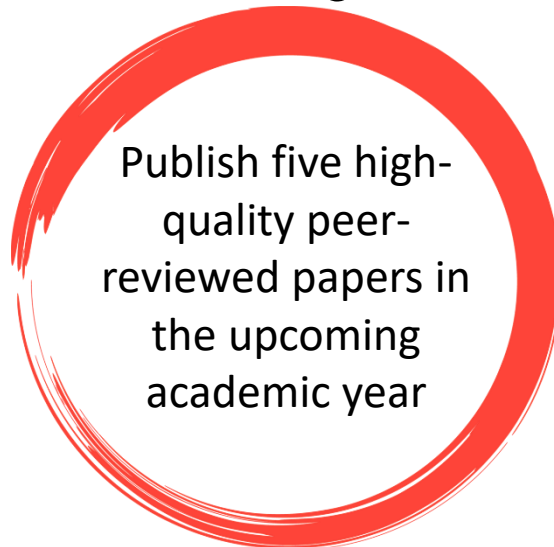


# Cal Newport Grad School Example

- Cal Newport, best-selling author of *Deep Work*, *Digital Minimalism*, and five other books
- C.S. Professor at Georgetown University
- What purpose statement would you create for Ph.D student in his 3<sup>rd</sup> year at MIT?



Cal Newport's One Thing:



*What's different about his purpose statement?*





# One Thing is crucial to team success

*The results of this research were startling: when there was a high level of clarity of purpose, the team and the people in it overwhelmingly thrived... "**Clarity equals success.**"*

*-Essentialism by Greg McKeown*

*"The more you try to do, the less you actually accomplish."*

*-The 4 Disciplines of Execution*

*"If you want to win the war for attention, don't try to say 'no' to trivial distractions you find on the information smorgasbord; **try to say 'yes' to the subject that arouses a terrifying longing**, and let the terrifying longing crowd out everything else."*

*-The Art of Focus by David Brooks*

- One Thing must...
  - be inspirational (motivating, arouse a terrifying longing) and concrete (measurable)
  - empower team members to evaluate the merit of a new idea or request
  - Be an *outcome* not an *output*
- One Thing is one decision that eliminates an infinite number of other options













Let's document our decision

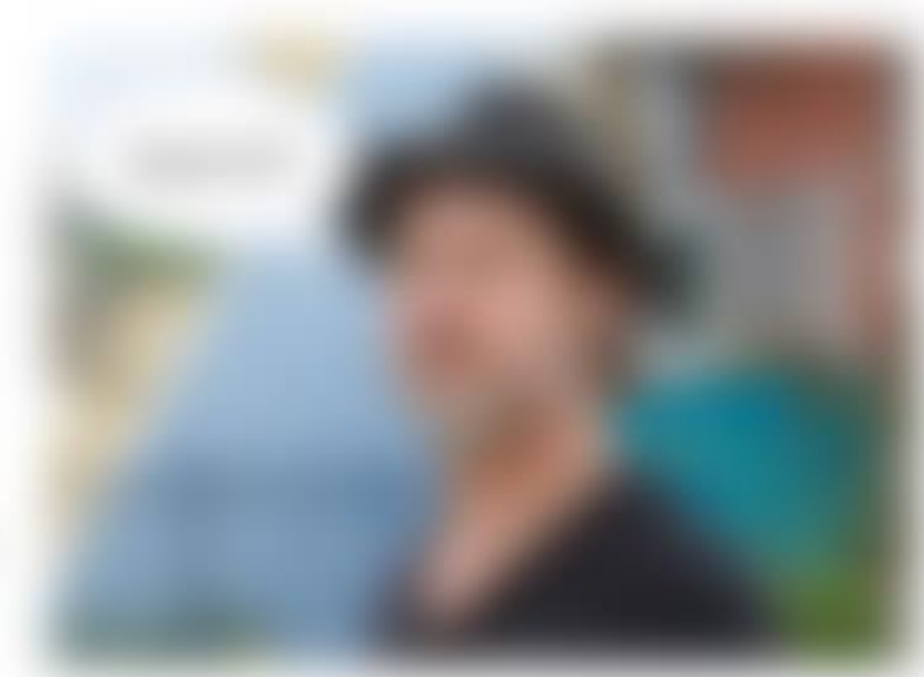




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THE HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES



# We have One Thing. What does this change for the Product Manager?

## Product Manager now has:

- a gutting north up to determine what's priority
- an objective reason when saying their requests from other teams
- a responsibility to drive the team towards the goal
  - With it as a reason, customer success team can't do the Product Manager's responsibility to drive the up north up to responsibility

It doesn't matter how good your engineering team is if they aren't given something worthwhile to build

Steve Jobs, 1995



# We have One Thing. What does this change for the team members?

- Members of the dev team...
  - know their overall objective
  - know how their success will be measured
  - can feel a pride in accomplishing a defined goal
  - can speak to the objective of their application
  - are empowered to ask, "Does this support our One Thing?" and "If we don't do this, would it hurt our One Thing?"

*"We need teams of missionaries, not teams of mercenaries."*

-John Doerr, Venture Capitalist



# Introduction to the Theory of Computation

This course introduces the fundamental concepts and results of the theory of computation, including automata theory, formal languages, and computability theory.

- Automata Theory: Finite Automata, Pushdown Automata, Turing Machines
- Formal Languages: Regular Languages, Context-Free Languages, Recursively Enumerable Languages
- Computability Theory: The Limits of Computation, Undecidable Problems





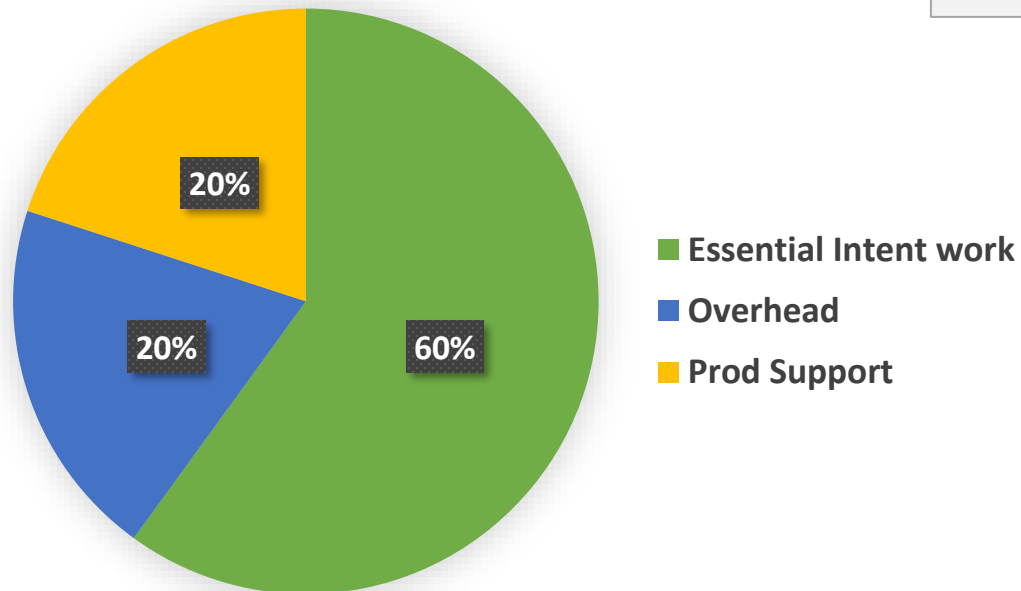
# What can't we do with One Thing?

- It isn't a means to say "No" to work you don't feel like doing
- It doesn't eliminate the need to support Prod environments or carry out necessary overhead tasks
- It isn't to be changed with every shift in the wind
  - Changes to One Thing need to be agreed upon by the entire team including Product Manager

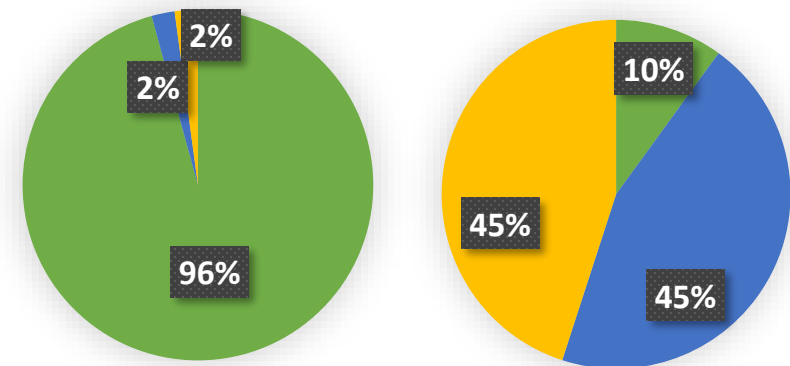
*"Realize that there are sometimes strategic reasons for doing specific product work, such as support a partnership. If it happens a lot, that's a different issue, but it's usually infrequent. If that's the case, don't stress over it. Just give the team as much context as you can."*

-Marty Cagan, *Inspired*

## % of Capacity - Healthy Example



## Unhealthy Examples



## How to use the data

1. Identify the data  
2. Analyse the data

3. Interpret the data  
4. Present the data  
5. Evaluate the data

6. Draw conclusions

7. Communicate the results





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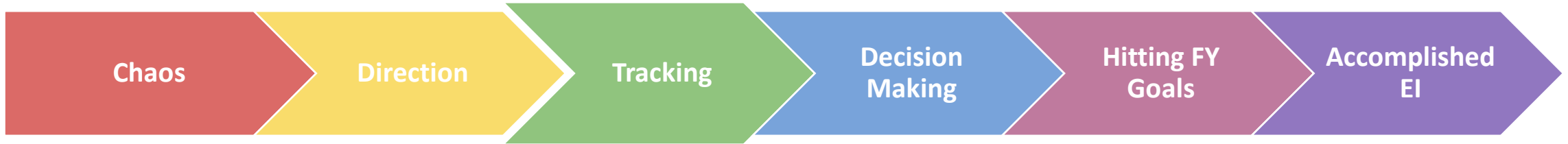




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# Here is where we stand in the EI maturity model



## Tracking

You have One Thing, you're tracking your KPIs and how much capacity is going towards your EI, but you aren't yet making decisions based on any of this new information. Time for the culture change! Up to this point, this was largely a theoretical exercise, but now the rubber meets the road. Will you stay the course or be tossed by the waves? Will you learn to protect the mission and capacity of the team or cave to every request that comes in?

### Action items:

1. Verify everyone on the team (from jr developer to chief Product Manager) is getting the reports on the KPIs
2. Verify everyone on the team (from jr developer to chief Product Manager) is aware of how much capacity is going to EI vs non-EI work each sprint
3. Go thru the backlog as a team and reprioritize based on EI. Make this a regular part of each backlog grooming session.
4. If more than 50% of the team capacity is repeatedly going towards non-EI work, escalate this risk. The team is unlikely to hit their fiscal year goal if they are continuously pulled in other directions.
5. Everyone should get in the habit of asking "Does this story support our One Thing? If we don't do this story, will it set us back in reaching our fiscal year goal?"





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## Summary

- One Thing must:
  - be measurable and concrete
  - empower team members to achieve the next step or new idea or concept
- One Thing leads to increased clarity of purpose and increased productivity
- Each team should review their One Thing on a weekly basis
- Each team should generate a final year goal to ensure they're taking material steps forward towards their final goal





