

# Letting Go: Creating Self-Managed, Self-Directed Teams

Travis S. George, Sr. Producer @ Riot Games











# Travis George

*Travis George functions as the Lead Producer on League of Legends.*

## At Riot Games

-  Product owner for League of Legends
-  Oversees League of Legends live development, feature and content production
-  Led team that produced League of Legends: Dominion

## Prior to Riot

-  Game designer at Activision
-  Worked on the *X-Men* franchise
-  Perpetual Entertainment

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# Riot Games

*Established in 2006 Riot Games is an award winning developer and publisher of Premium Online Experiences*

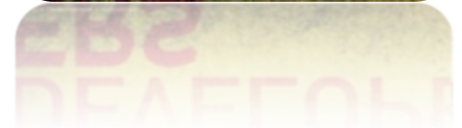
## About Riot

-  Offices: Los Angeles, St. Louis, Dublin & Seoul
-  ~ 400 employees
-  World class development team
-  Premier online game (*League of Legends*)

## Games as a service publishing expertise

-  Direct to consumer
-  Adaptive development
-  Player focused

game**developer**





# Overview

Too often as producers and leaders, we feel the need to be involved in every aspect of our team's success, but this can limit us, our teams, and ultimately our results.

The leadership philosophy of Team Empowerment can increase the quality of your game, ownership of your teams, and ultimately allow you to contribute more to the organization as a leader.



# Overview

- 👊 Preface / Disclaimers
- 👊 The Typical Pattern of Behaviors
- 👊 Steps to Create Self Managed Teams
- 👊 Roadblocks
- 👊 Your Actual Role and Challenges
- 👊 Traits of an Empowered Team

# Preface

- ✊ Producers in this context are “Product Managers” in development
  - These people define the shape, scope and timeline of your game or feature. They are far less concerned with the “how” of the equation
- ✊ You *actually* hire great people
  - We all say we want to, but making sure that your organization is filled with people who are self-starters and great team members is essential

# Habits of Producers

👊 These all sound like good ideas...

- Write all the tasks and documentation
- Identify and mitigate all the risks
- Resolve all the conflicts
- Define all the details of the end result
- Go find all the answers



👊 But these are BAD Habits...

# Habits of Producers

No one REALLY thinks they should do all of that, but often times we do





# How Does it Start?

# The Typical Production Career

✊ Start off as an assistant...

- Everyone has to start somewhere!
- This teaches you how to be very tactical and follow orders.

✊ Then grow into a real person...

- You're now moving up! You're probably an Associate somewhere helping to develop a feature or maybe fulfilling the role of a Scrum Master.
- You're learning that the more problems you help solve, the more you get noticed. This seems good.

# The Typical Production Career

✊ You get noticed amongst the crowd...

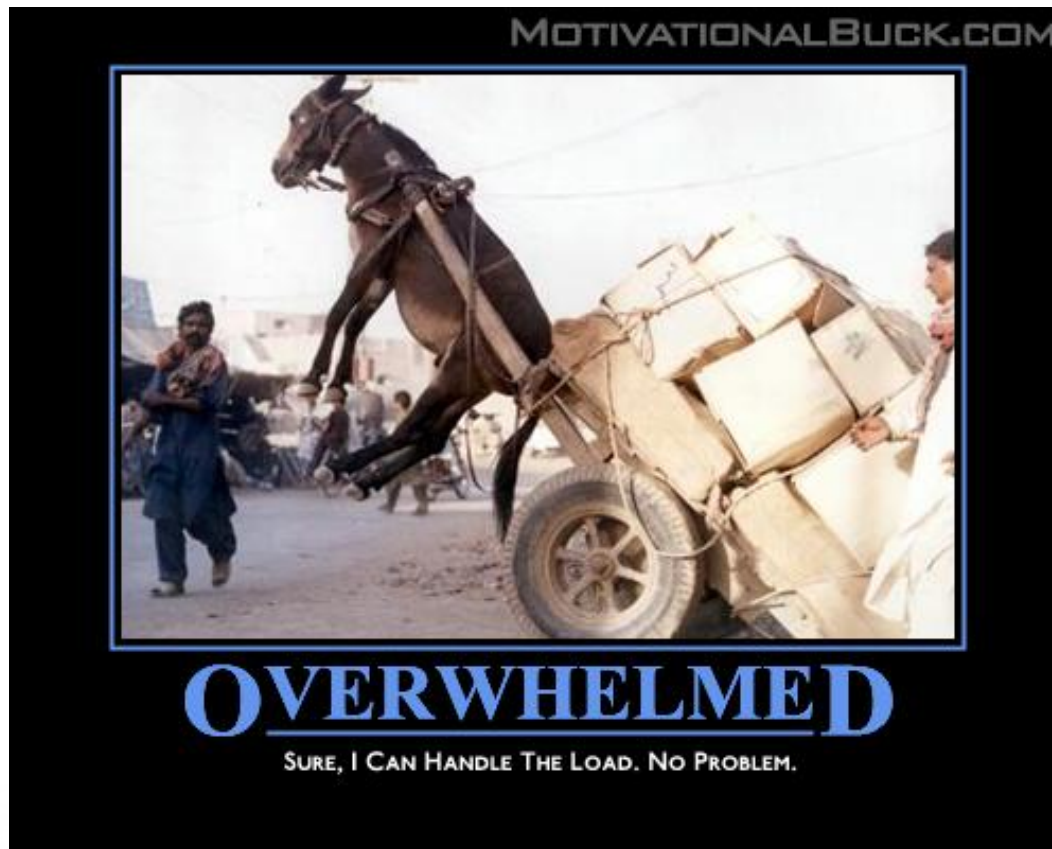
- “Smart, problem solvers” are often rewarded with more responsibility, but the way they’ve been working probably doesn’t scale.

✊ You’re running a team!

- Maybe you’re a Product Owner or the Lead on a Feature now.
- You still have just enough scope that you can manage the team effectively with a lot of effort (and micro-management).

# Eventually...

- 👉 You're going to hit your limit and start to fail
  - Example case – *LoL: Dominion*





# There's a better way!

**Management      Empowerment**

# Set a Goal

- ✊ It all starts with the vision
  - Don't just state what you're doing – give context for WHY.

✊ We're going to Austin, Texas

✊ We're going to GDC Online

✊ We're going to Austin to present at GDC Online so that we can teach, learn, and meet new people to ultimately improve ourselves and make our company more successful

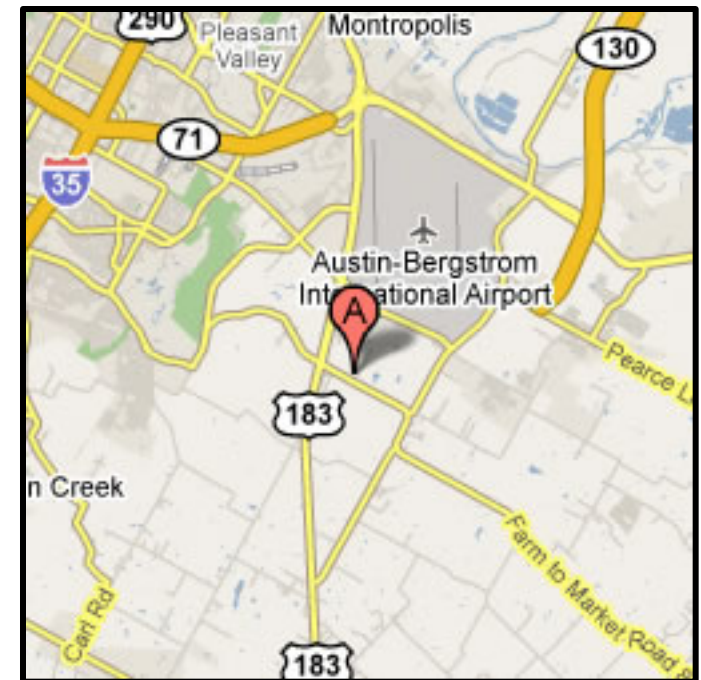


# Continuing the Analogy

# How to get there

## Too Much Guidance:

- Google Maps
- No room for interpretation or creative problem solving
- Creating games is (of course) FULL of unknowns and (also) shortcuts that you can find if you look





# How to get there

## Not Enough Guidance:

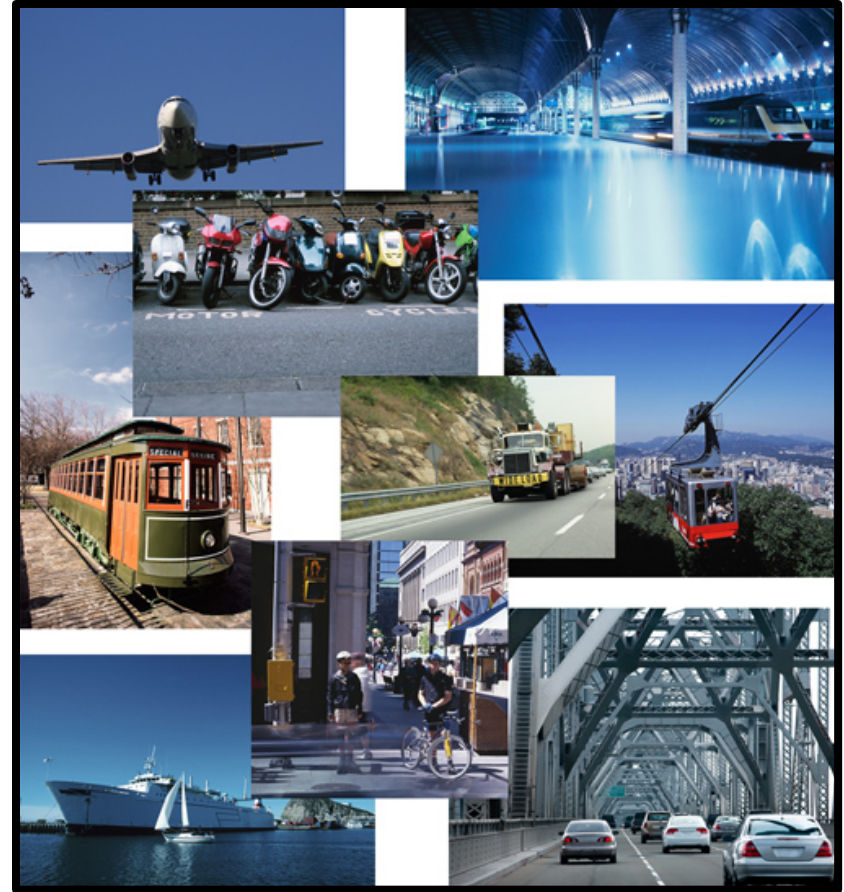
- Hand someone a compass and say go...
- Chaos
- So unmanaged you'll have wildly different outcomes all the time



# How to get there

## ✊ The Right Amount:

- We didn't say anything about driving, so maybe we can fly, take a train, etc.?
- Give your team a clear objective, context and the tools to be able to solve it themselves!
- Be in Austin by October 11<sup>th</sup> at Noon



# Align the Team

- ✊ Get input, ask for questions, and make them figure out details and the “how”
  - You should not care (within reason)
- ✊ Doing this collectively makes sure that everyone is aligned
  - Be willing and OPEN to admit you may be wrong
  - THIS IS OK!!!



# Create Accountability

- ✊ Accountability is just a clearly understood contract
- ✊ Accountability vs responsibility; a common pitfall!
- ✊ As time and trust go up, increase level of accountability and responsibility



# Measure the Progress and Results

- ✊ Personal intuition can be a valuable starting point, but use data to validate
- ✊ Teach this early and make this valuable to the team
- ✊ “That which gets measured gets done.”





A high performing, empowered team will crave this data to make informed decisions about how they adjust their behavior to increase results



# Leaders are Everywhere

- Find an artist, engineer, designer or QA team member – really anyone! – who has the ability to lead and understands the goal
- Work with them to empower them to do even more and lead from within
  - Example from *LoL: Dominion*



# You Can't Navigate and Steer

- ✊ Along the way, it's going to be REALLY tempting to fall back into old habits
- ✊ Natural instinct of smart problem solvers is to control
- ✊ If you're so focused on the minutia of getting there, who is looking ahead?
  - "The Vision Chain"





# Mistakes vs. Failure

✊ Mistakes are OK

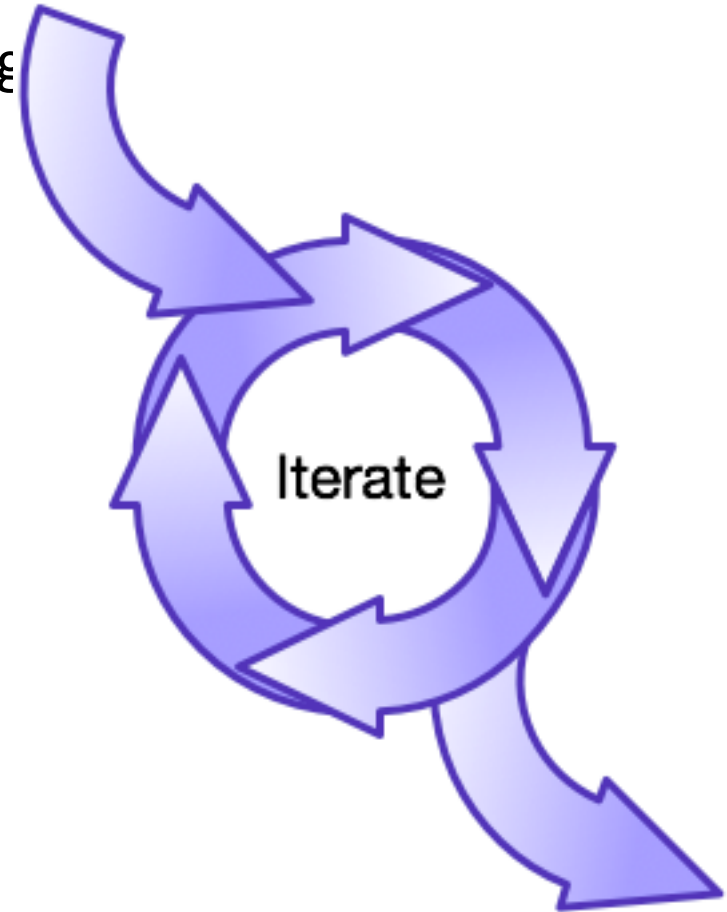
- “If we’re not making mistakes, we’re not moving fast enough.”

✊ Disaster **MUST** be avoided at all costs



# Iterate on EVERYTHING

- ✊ Iterate on your approach to dealing with the team
- ✊ Iterate on your process
- ✊ Iterate on how you iterate (retrospectives)
- ✊ Again, even this should be team driven. Teach this and give them the leeway to make their own changes and improvements that meet the goals



# Roadblocks

- ✊ Don't allow for constraints!
- ✊ A team that's new to being empowered will try to block themselves at first
  - Development Examples
  - “The Authority Stick”



# Roadblocks

- ✊ Operate your team like a start up business
  - Just because you don't have X, Y or Z, are you going to allow failure?
- ✊ Lead by example and challenge your teams to push through and solve the hard problems!
- ✊ Just because there's road construction doesn't mean you can't find another way





# Your ACTUAL Role

- ✊ Create a vision and set goals
- ✊ Challenge your team to commit to success and hold them to it
- ✊ Allow them to learn when they make mistakes
- ✊ Admit when you're wrong
- ✊ Lead them when they're close to disaster
- ✊ Empower and Trust them



# The New Challenge

✊ The new challenge you face with your team is walking the line between empowerment and abandonment

✊ Leaving them on their own TOO much, especially early, can lead to disaster

- Trust but validate





# The Self Managed, Self Directed Team

- ✊ They challenge YOU
- ✊ They solve problems you didn't know about
- ✊ They refuse to be blocked
- ✊ They worry about the challenges more than you do
  - This doesn't mean you shouldn't, but when they are and you have people you trust, it will be ok!
- ✊ They learn and adapt faster
- ✊ They own their destiny and deliver results

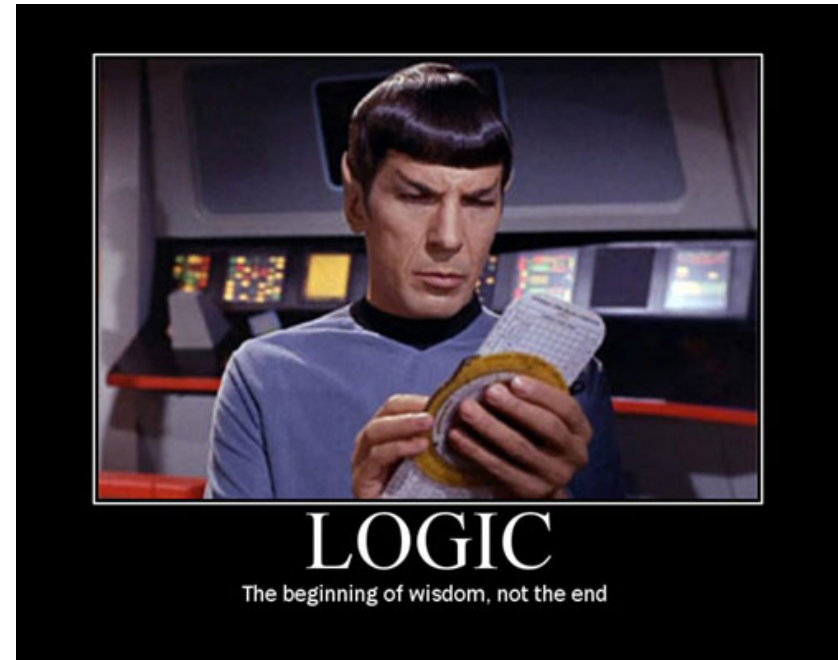


**Thank You**



## 🖱️ Why does Riot primarily use Agile / Scrum?

- Architecture vs Iteration
- Allows for natural adaptation and improvements
- Allows for accountability to be pushed down easily
- However, people & values > process & tools





# Q&A



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