

GDC[®]

The Business of Being Indie: A Production Survival Guide

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GAME DEVELOPERS CONFERENCE[®] | MARCH 19-23, 2018 | EXPO: MARCH 21-23, 2018 #GDC18



UBM



Amy Dallas

CEO / Co-Founder

ClutchPlay Games LLC



Executive Board Member at Large

Oregon Games Organization (OGO)





ClutchPlay Games LLC

Full Service Development Studio

- Clients: KIXEYE, Telltale, Glu, Intel, and many more.

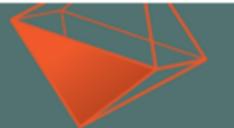
Original IP

- **Little Chomp**
 - PAX East Indie Showcase, 2012
- **“Skullduggery!”**
 - PAX 10 Indie Showcase, PAX Prime 2014
 - Editor’s Choice Worldwide
- **Skullduggery VR**
 - Tentative Release October 2019





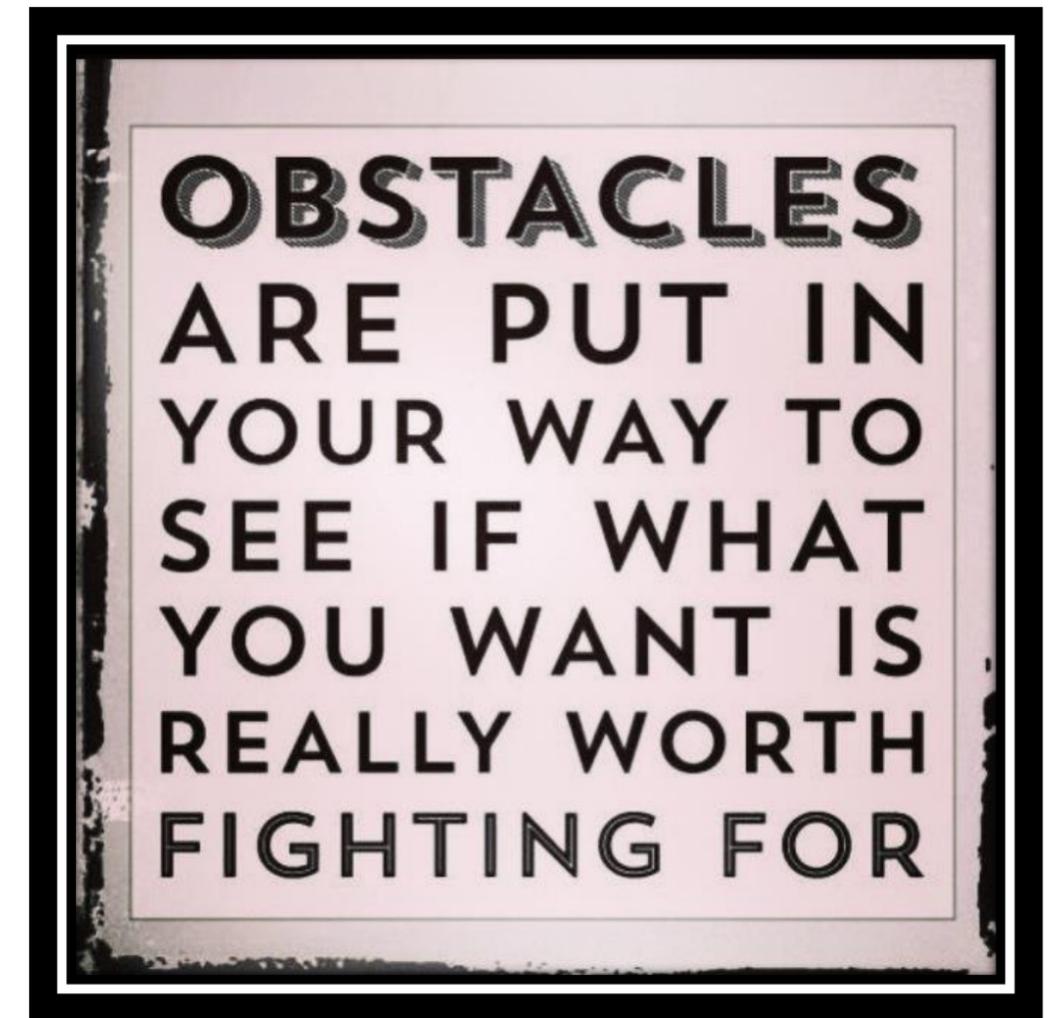
Fun Facts About Portland





Why Obstacles are Necessary

- They give us the opportunity to stop and evaluate what's truly important.
- They often force us to push ourselves to find creative ways around them.
- They often require that we find allies.
- They make us appreciate how far we've come and who helped us get there.





Common Obstacles to Indie Success

1. People / Process
2. Project Management
(aka 'The Dark Arts')
3. Payment



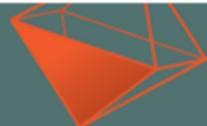
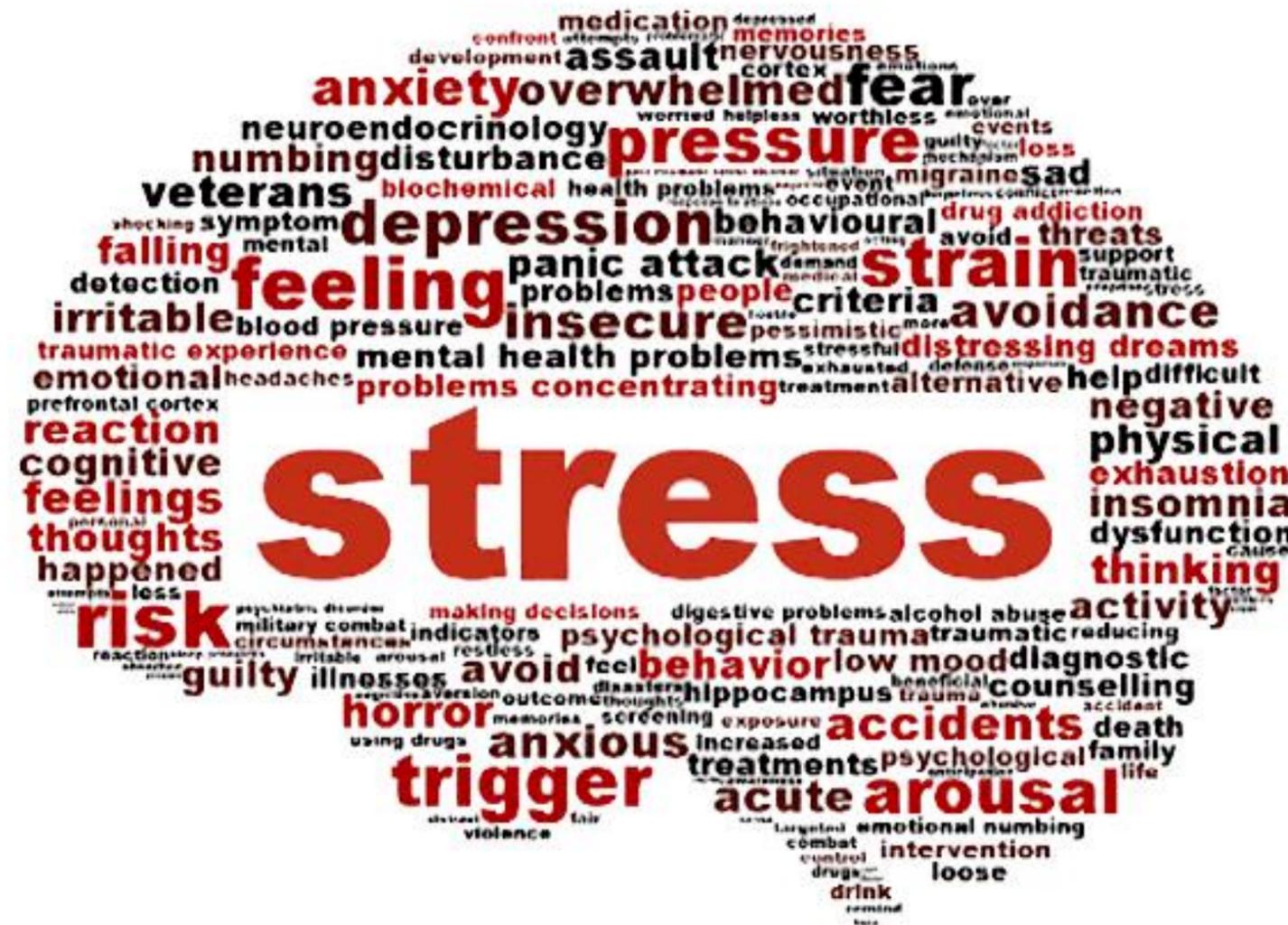


Obstacle #1: People & Process



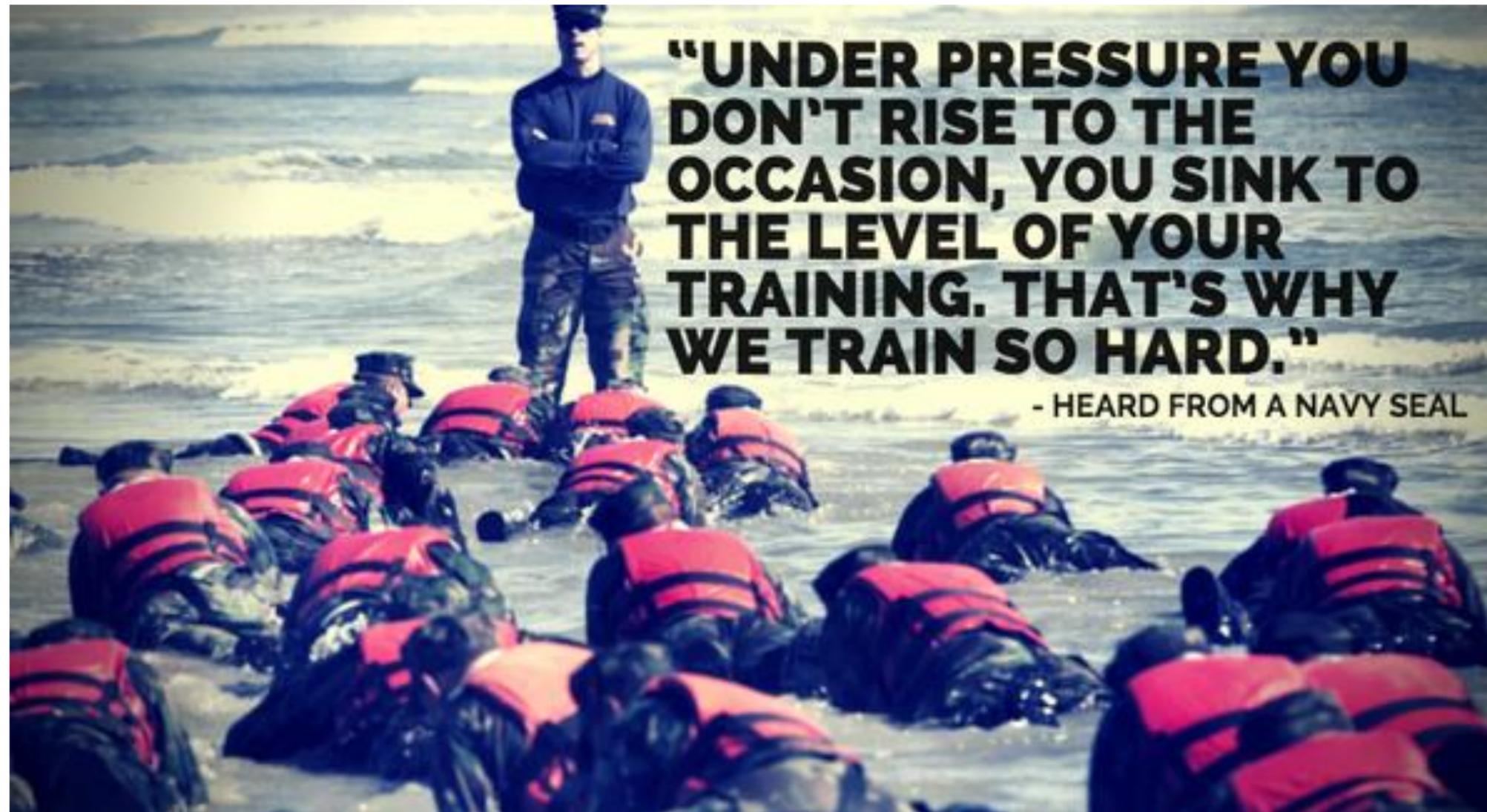


Starting Anything New is Stressful





The Lure of the Familiar





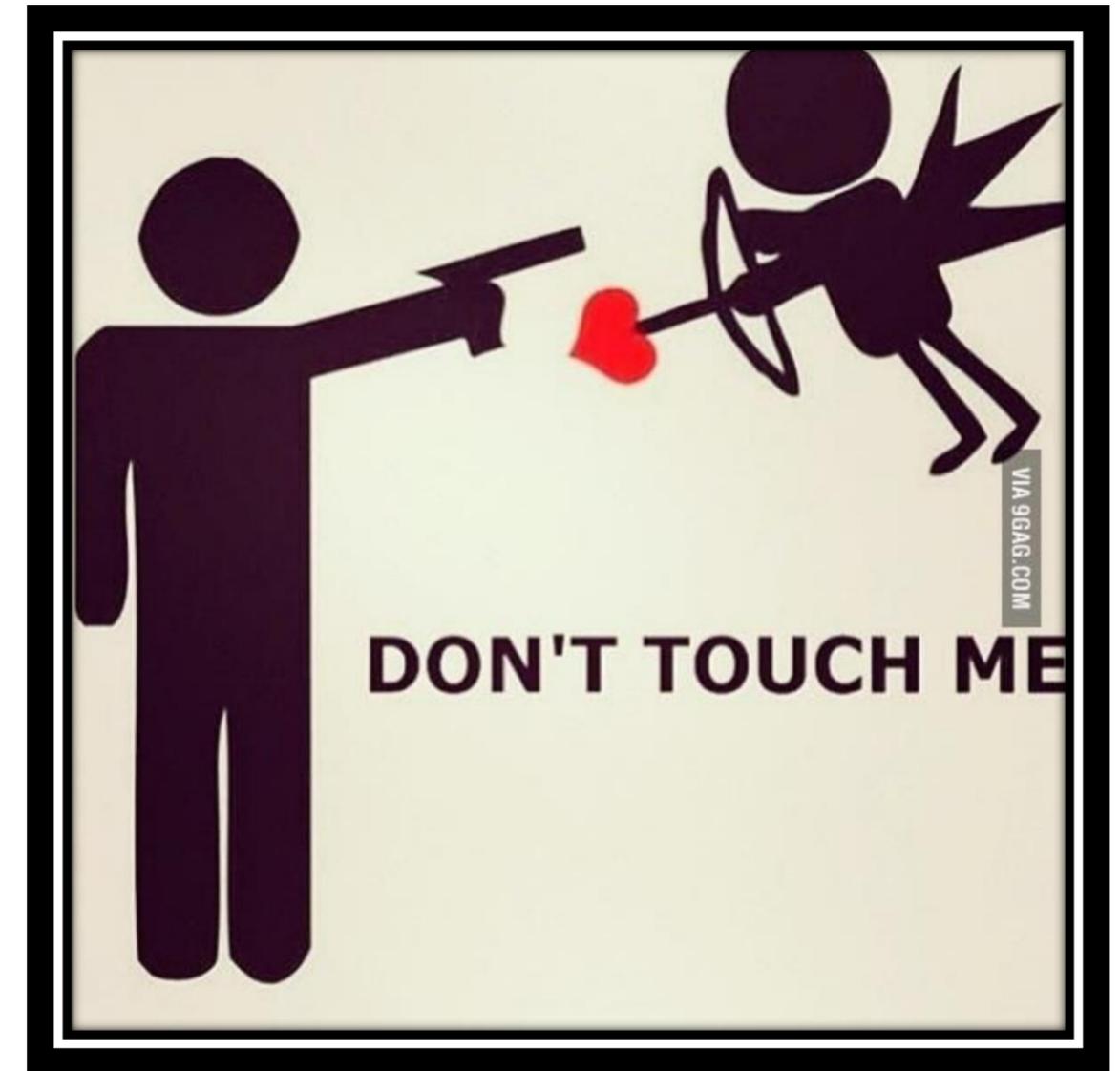
The Illusion of Shared Understanding





Breaking Up is Hard to Do

- Extracting yourself from a bad partnership is exponentially more difficult once you've released a product.
- Dissolving a partnership without the right safeguards in place can be costly and lead to unnecessary compromises.





The Solution: The Operating Agreement

Benefits:

- Forces uncomfortable conversations to happen up front.
- Ensures everyone in the team is on the same page.
- Makes provisions for both failure and success.
- Trust me, you need one.





Operating Agreements: The Hard Questions

- Initial investment of each member (Financial / Sweat Equity)





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- Under what circumstances can you remove a partner?





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- What are expectations around work time vs. time off?
- Under what circumstances can you remove a partner?
- Who is entitled to make decisions on behalf of your company?





Other Partner / Process Obstacles





Consensus Based Decision Making Model

- **Consensus:** Not always the best way to make decisions.
- **Building Consensus:** Extra hard on even numbered teams!





Little Chomp: A Case Study

Little Chomp:

A game for everyone...and no one.





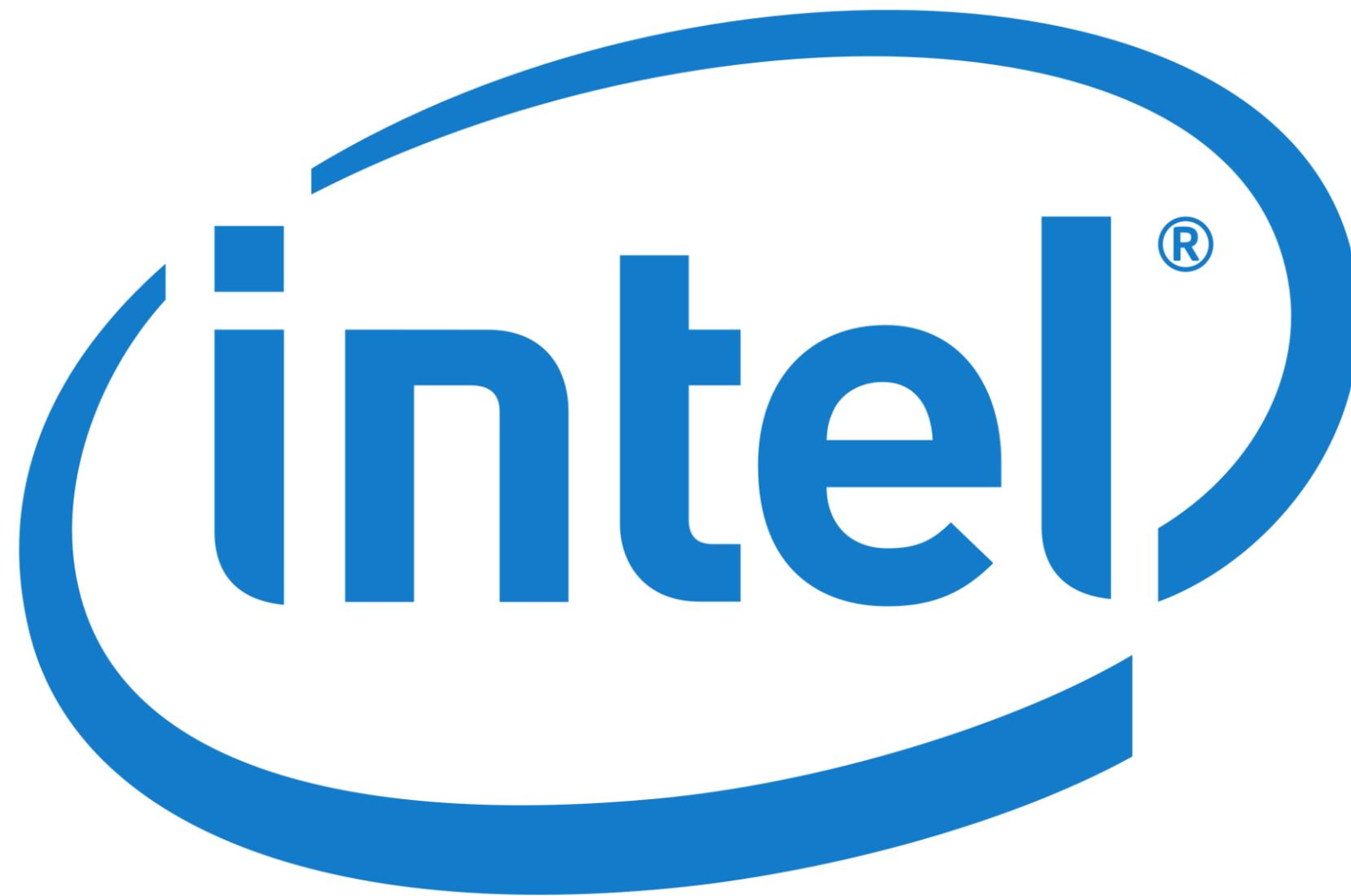
The Answer: Role Clarity

Role clarity first, role clarity always.





The Intel Model: Disagree and Commit





Obstacle #2: Project Management Woes

A scenic landscape photograph of a lake at sunset, with mountains in the background and rocky shores in the foreground. The sky is a mix of orange, pink, and blue.

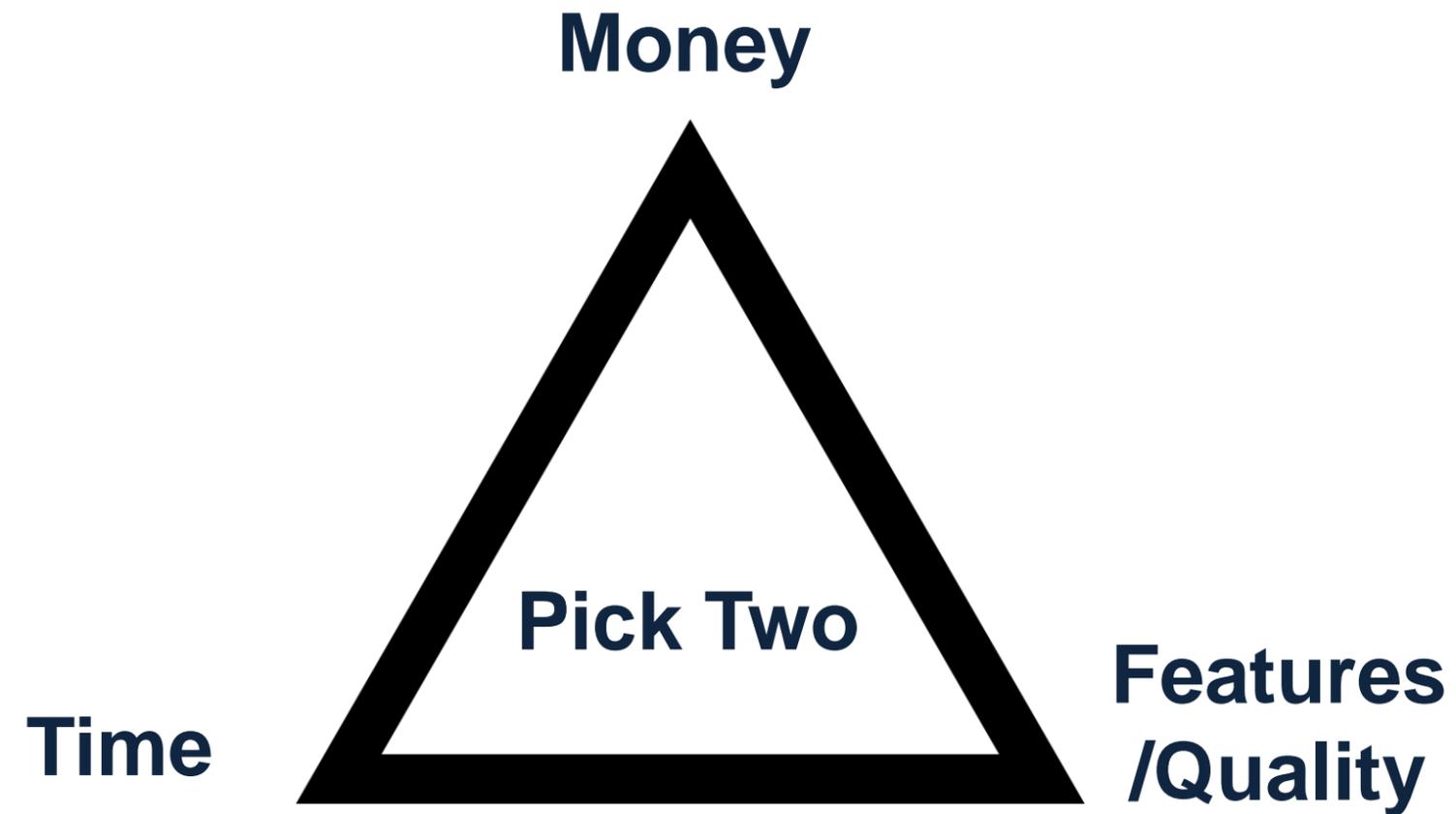
Your life can't go according
to plan if you have no plan.

Zig Ziglar





The Iron Triangle of Project Management





The Answer: Focus on Budget First

Money





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Money





Which Inspired My Indie Soapbox Rant

GDC¹⁶

Indie Soapbox:

Make a F*cking Budget, for F*ck's Sake!

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ClutchPlay Games LLC
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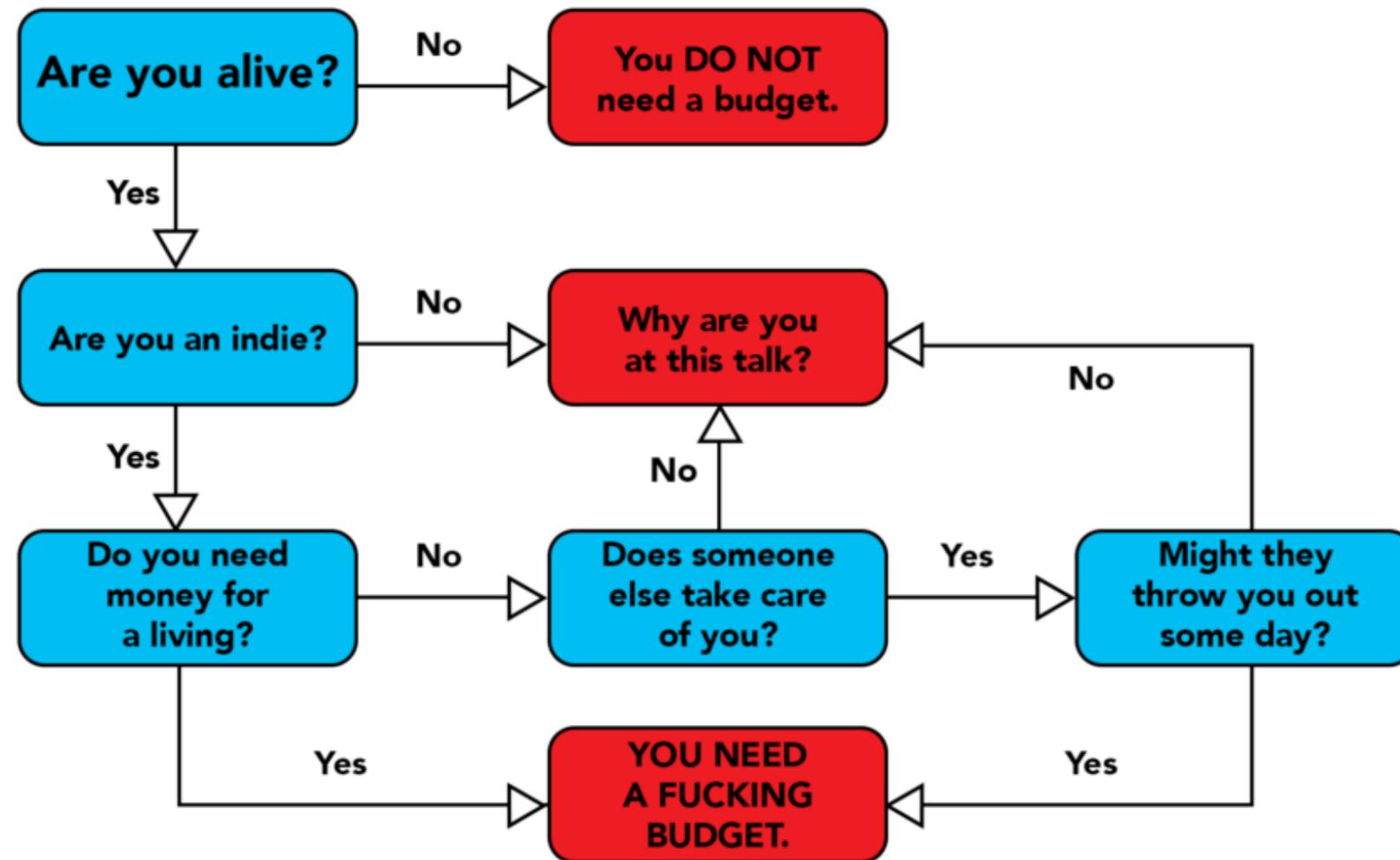
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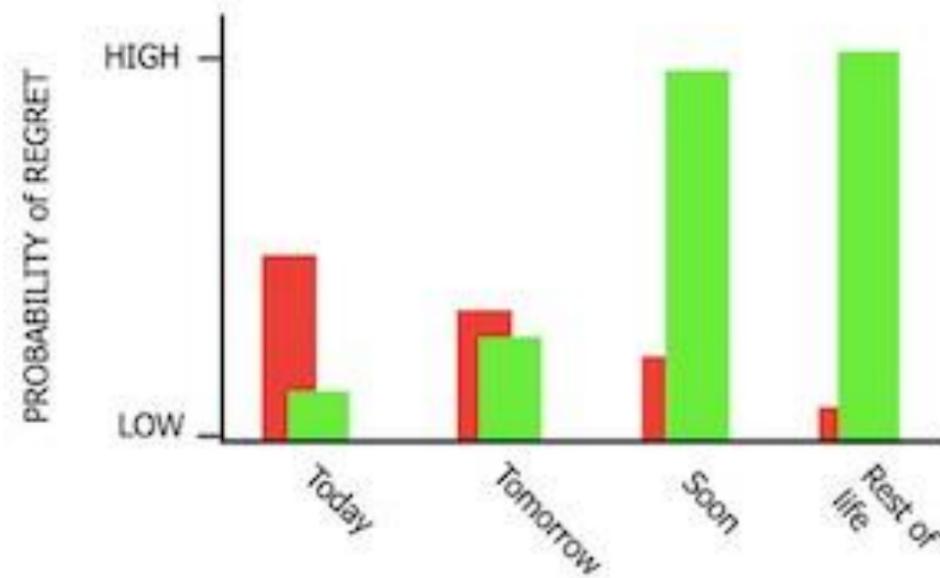


The Indie Budget Test





Let's Talk About Budgets





Why Indies Are Budget Averse

- We don't feel we need them



BUDGETING

(for People Who **HATE** Budgets)





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- We don't always know how to value our time.



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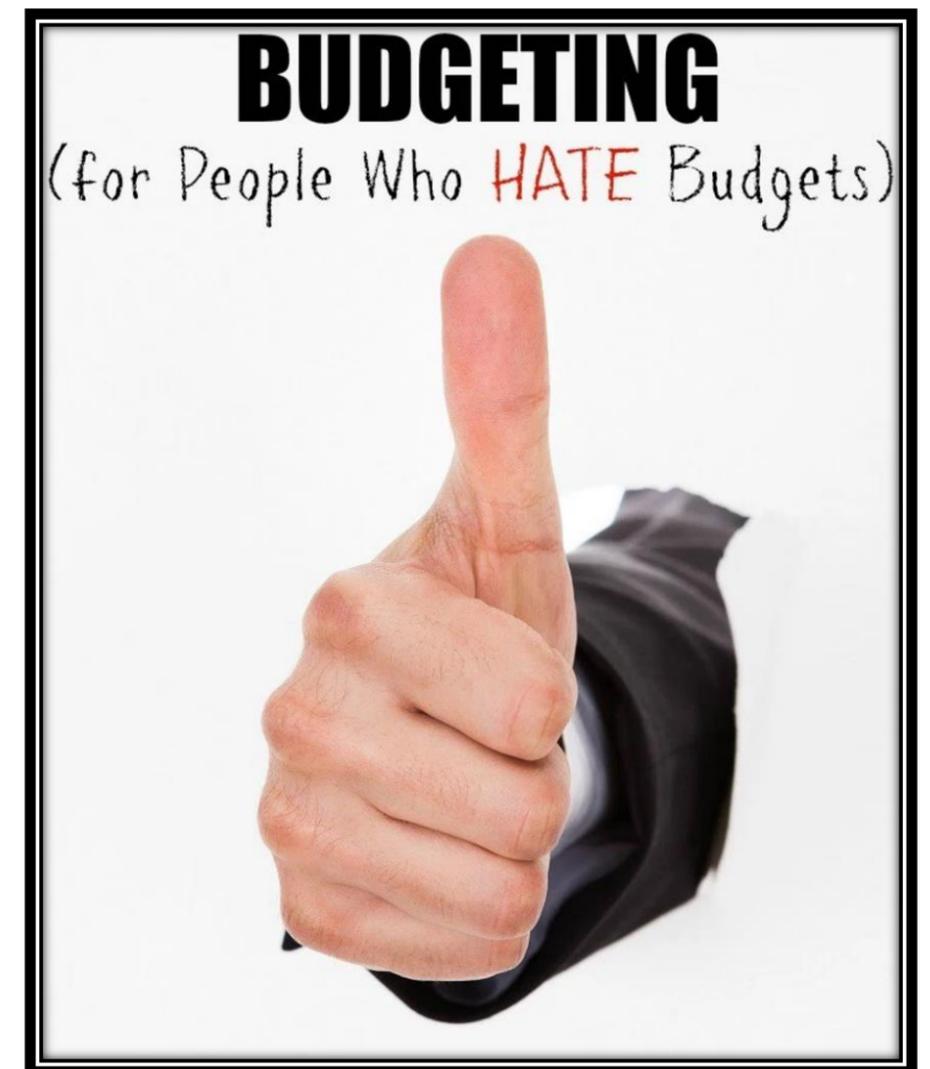
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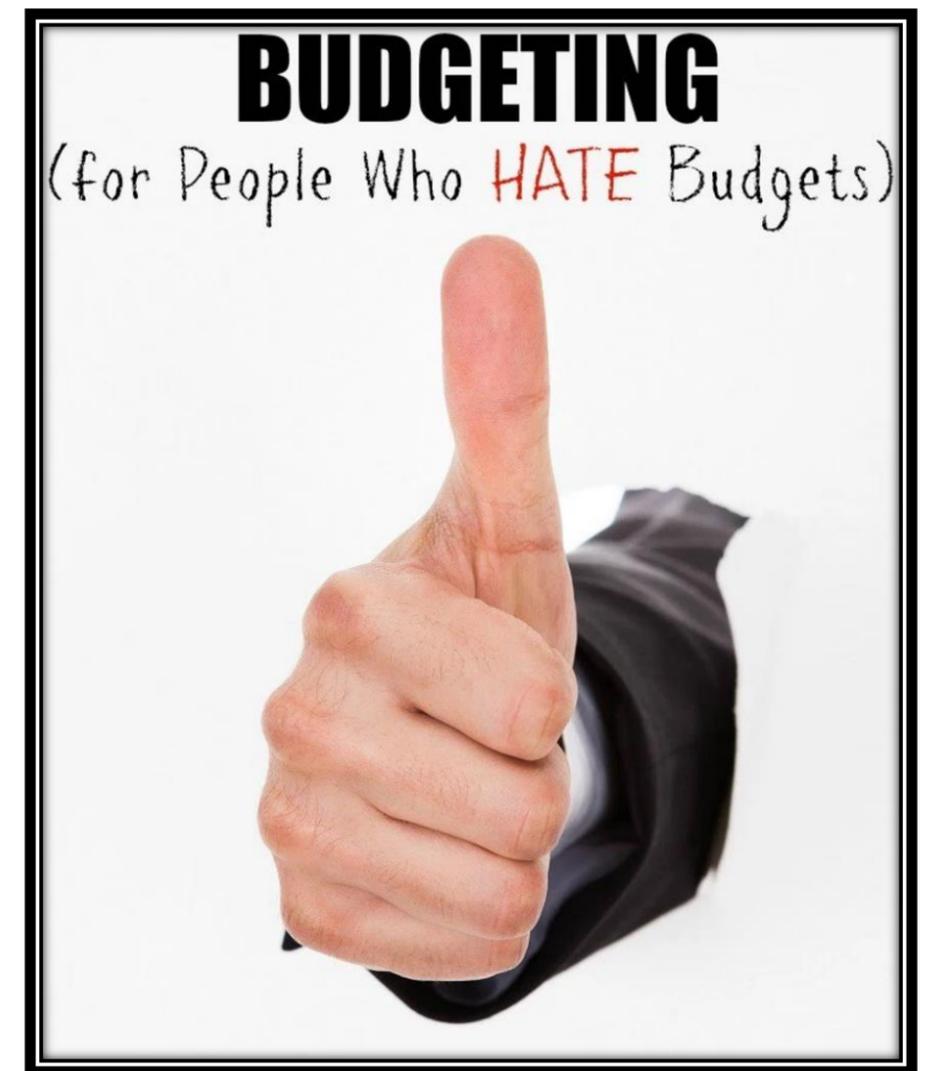
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- How much money to we REALLY need?





Why Indies Are Budget Averse

- We don't feel we need them
- We don't always know how to value our time.
- We believe focusing on making money devalues our art
- Budgets force us to look at things we might not want to look at.
- How much money do we REALLY need?
- How much do we stand to lose on our investment?





Little Chomp: A Case Study





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- **Total Revenue: \$10K**





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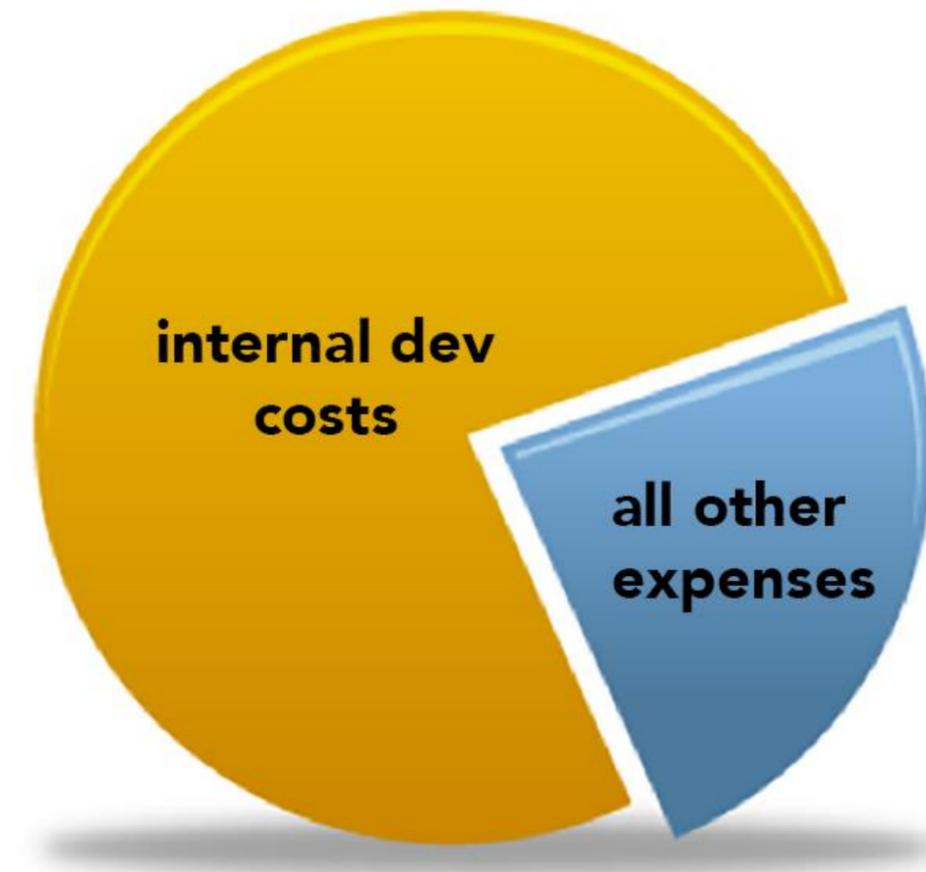
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- **The Ugly Math: $\$2,500 \div 1600$ hours**
- **Revenue per Hour: \$1.56 / hr.**
- **Minimum Wage in Oregon 2012: \$8.80 / hr.**





More About Budgets

- Budgets cover more than your external costs.
- The biggest part of your budget will be your own time.
- Which means, you have to figure out what your time is worth.





The Answer: Know the Value of Your Time





Timesheets: A Necessary Evil



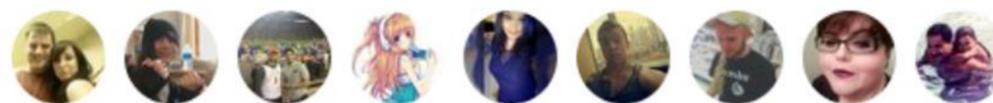
keet 🐣 🥔
@KeetPotato

Following

my boss: [whispering into my coffin] "you haven't submitted your timesheet"

6:28 AM - 3 Feb 2016

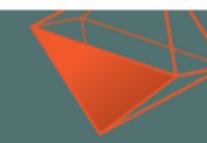
1,185 Retweets 1,791 Likes



19

1.2K

1.8K





Factors for Determining Your Budget

- How much money does each member need as an individual?
- How much money does the company need?
- How much money could you be making if you got a day job with a steady paycheck?
- What is the relative value of your professional skillset?
- How much money do you need to complete your product?
- How long will it take?
- What additional resources are needed?
- How much money can you make from your product?
- Do you have that money available right now?





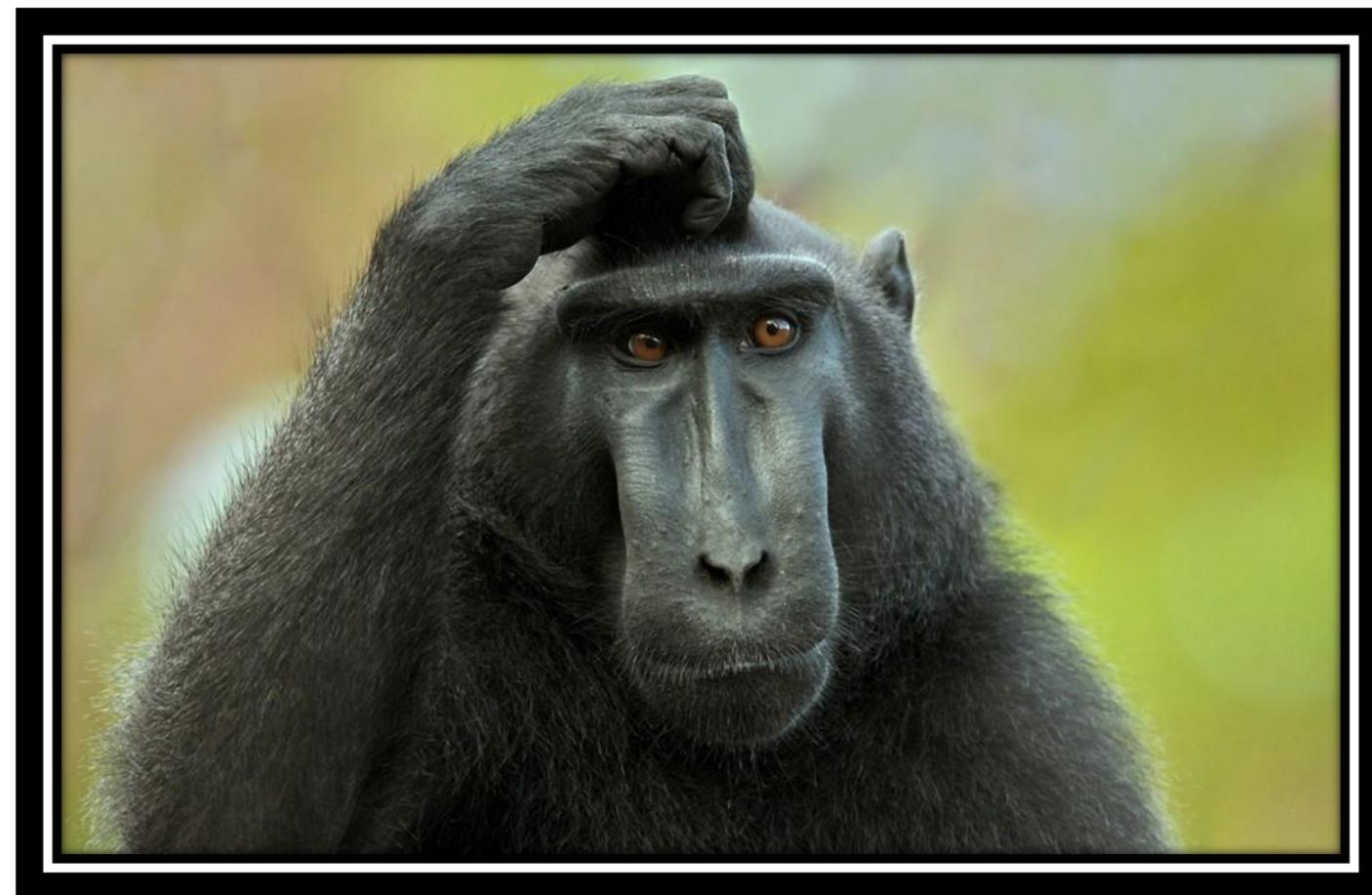
Obstacle #3: Payment





Indie Success: Why is it so hard?

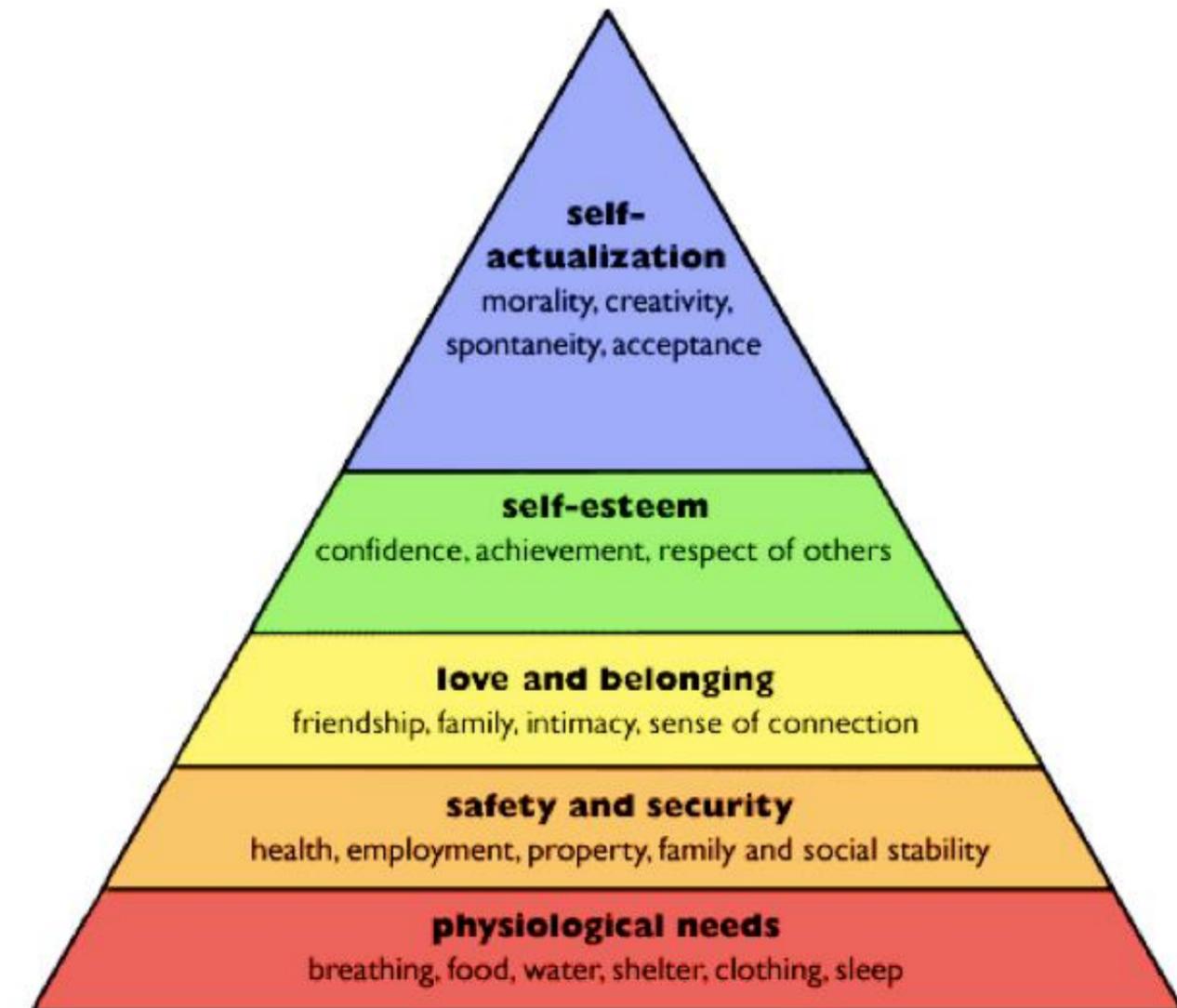
- Discoverability
- Success is often dependent on factors outside of one's control.
- There's no guaranteed return on investment.





Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs & Game Production

Fear of not meeting basic financial requirements can hamper both creativity and productivity





safety and security

health, employment, property, family and social stability

physiological needs

breathing, food, water, shelter, clothing, sleep





How Do We Meet Our Basic Needs?





The Answer: Work for Hire / Consulting





Two Choices When Confronting an Obstacle

- Give up
- Live to fight another day





Marketing Your Team as Consultants

- Be clear and candid about your team's strengths and weaknesses.





Marketing Your Team as Consultants

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- Go after jobs that play to your team's strengths.





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- Have a clear story about who you are and what makes you the right choice for the client.
- You need to price yourself according to your team's experience level and skills.
- Put yourself out there as much and as often as possible.





Questions?





Thank You!



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@amydallas

