

“But the light bulb has to want to change”

Why do the most serious usability problems we uncover often go unfixed?

Steve Krug and Caroline Jarrett

#upa2012 Las Vegas

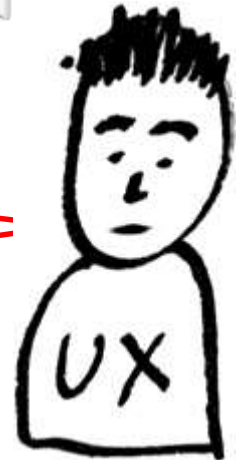
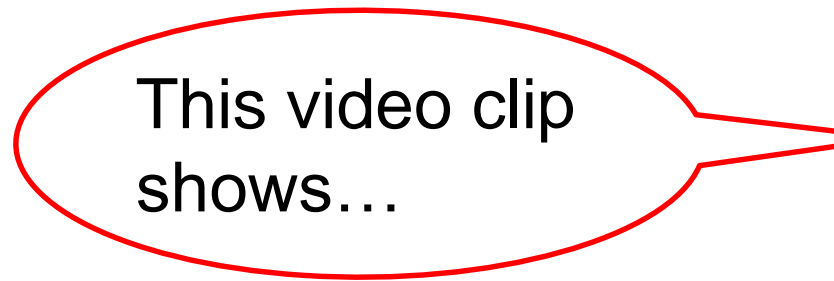


Does this seem familiar?

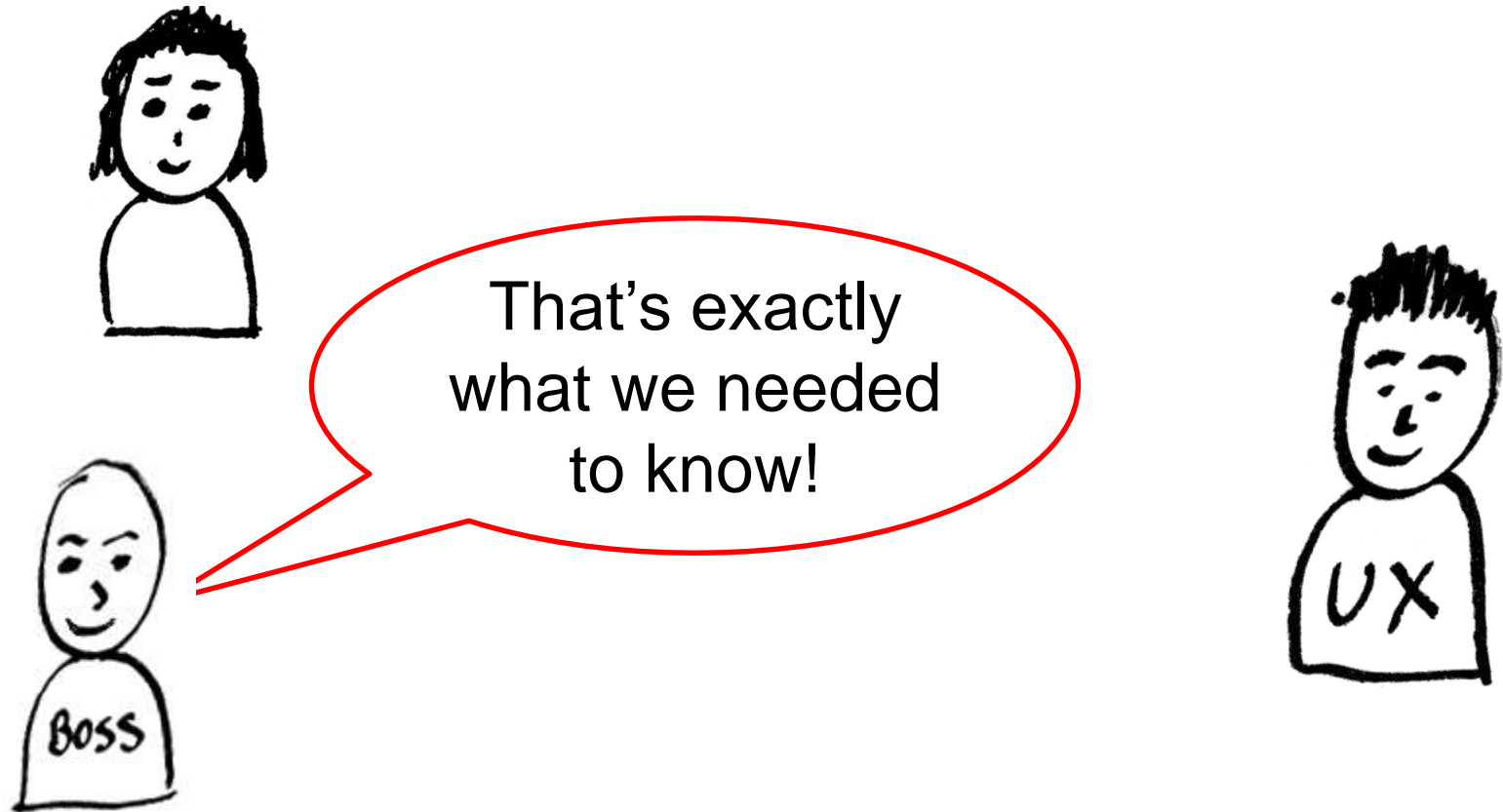
You work hard to find serious usability problems



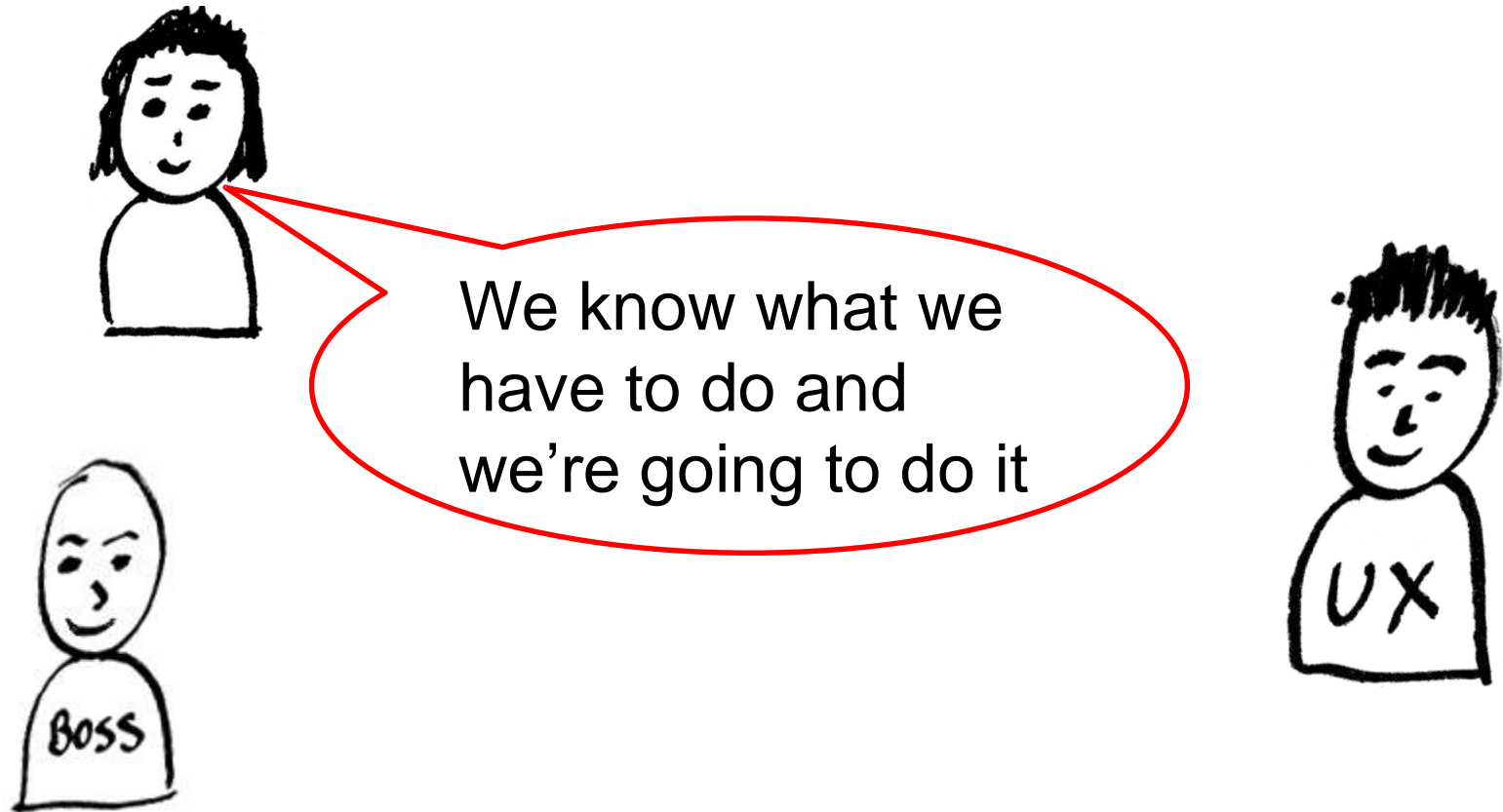
You present your findings to the client/team



They love your findings and recommendations



Everyone agrees on the changes



Months/years later, the same problems still exist

If only I could find out
where to sign in...



These are often the most serious issues

- Significant negative impact on
 - ▶ The users' experience
 - ▶ The effectiveness of the site or product
 - ▶ The profitability of the site or product



This happened to me (Steve)

- Didn't do long term engagements
- After a while, I wasn't surprised
- Told myself:
 - ▶ It's OK, I'm educating them
 - ▶ They'll do better in the next project/job/lifetime



This happened to me (Caroline)

- **Did** do long term engagements
- After a while
 - ▶ I was more surprised when changes did happen
 - ▶ But I was still disappointed when they didn't



Obligatory audience participation (15%)

- Have you experienced this?
 - ▶ If so, please think of an example when it happened
 - ▶ If not, feel smug or young
 - ▶ Share your thoughts with the person sitting next to you



We decided to do a survey

- It would be good to go beyond our suspicions
- Increase chances of our UPA proposal getting accepted
- Chance to practice doing a survey together



We're interested in cases where

- you ran or were part of a usability test or expert review
- based on your findings, you made a recommendation for what you considered to be an important change, and
- the client/stakeholders/team agreed, but
- the change never got made.

1. Has this ever happened to you?

- ☐ Yes, this has happened to me a lot.
- ☐ Yes, this has happened to me occasionally.
- ☐ Yes, but only rarely.
- ☐ Never. (Please skip to question 6)

Any comments?

2. Please tell us about an example when this happened to you

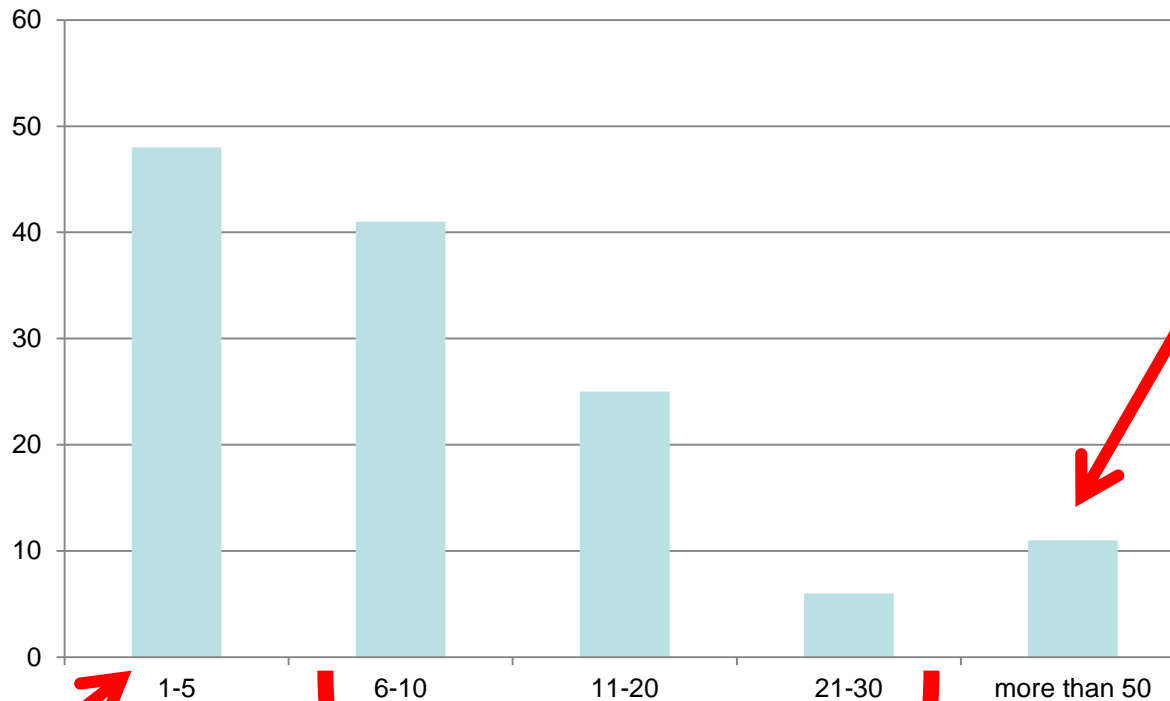
We opted for 'send and hope' – via Twitter

- Off to our followers

- ▶ @cjforms ~ 800
- ▶ @skrug ~ 8,000
- ▶ @RosenfeldMedia ~ 70,000 thanks Lou
- ▶ Of whom: ~ 500 clicked the survey link
 - Of whom: 146 filled in the survey
 - Of whom:
 - » 15 had never had this happen to them
 - » Giving us 131 responses.
 - » But we were very happy because the responses were REALLY interesting and thoughtful.

People put a lot of effort into our survey

Time to complete (minutes)



These folks must have taken a break. Glad they came back to it.

We didn't get as many comments from these (but the data is useful) (and short comments are easier to analyse)

These people worked really hard for us. Respect.

We asked people why it happened (12 options)

3. Were any of these among the reasons why the change never got made?

Please check all that apply.

- ☐ Not enough time
- ☐ Too much else to do
- ☐ Not enough resources
- ☐ Required too big a change to a business process
- ☐ Technical team said it couldn't be done
- ☐ Team did not have enough power to make it happen
- ☐ Conflicted with decision maker's belief or opinion
- ☐ No effective decision maker
- ☐ Disagreements emerged later
- ☐ Deferred until next major update/redesign
- ☐ Other events intervened before change could happen
- ☐ Legal department objected

Any other reasons or comments?

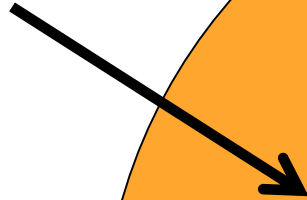
Which one do you think is the most frequent?

- Not enough time
- Too much else to do
- Not enough resources
- Required too big a change to a business process
- Technical team said it couldn't be done
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- Conflicted with decision maker's belief or opinion
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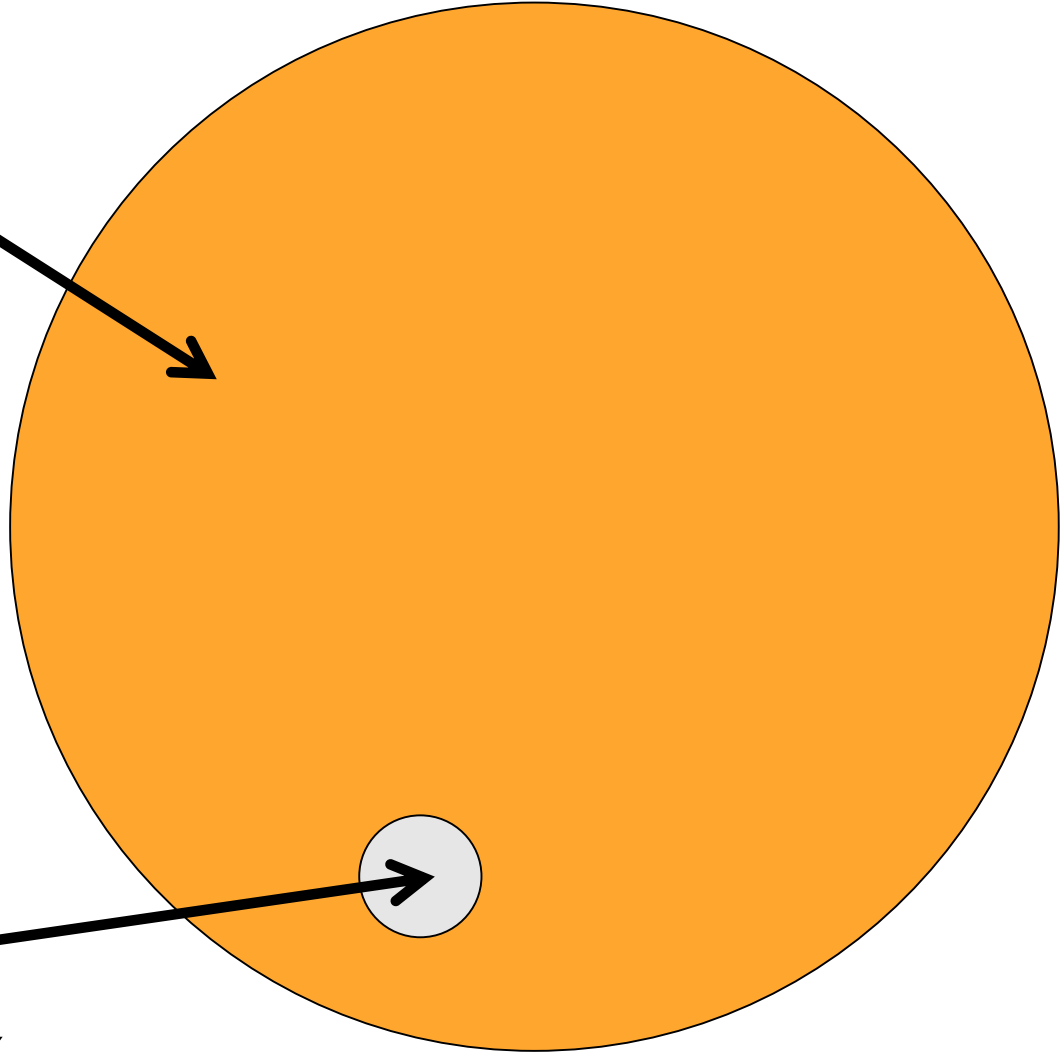


Steve's view: You can't fix everything

Problems you
can find with just
a few test
participants



Problems you
have the
resources to fix



Caroline's view: Redesign must die (thanks Lou)

Redesign is
hollow,
meaningless,
and **vain**.

Endlessly
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Our own picks for most popular reason

- Not enough time
- Too much else to do
- Not enough resources
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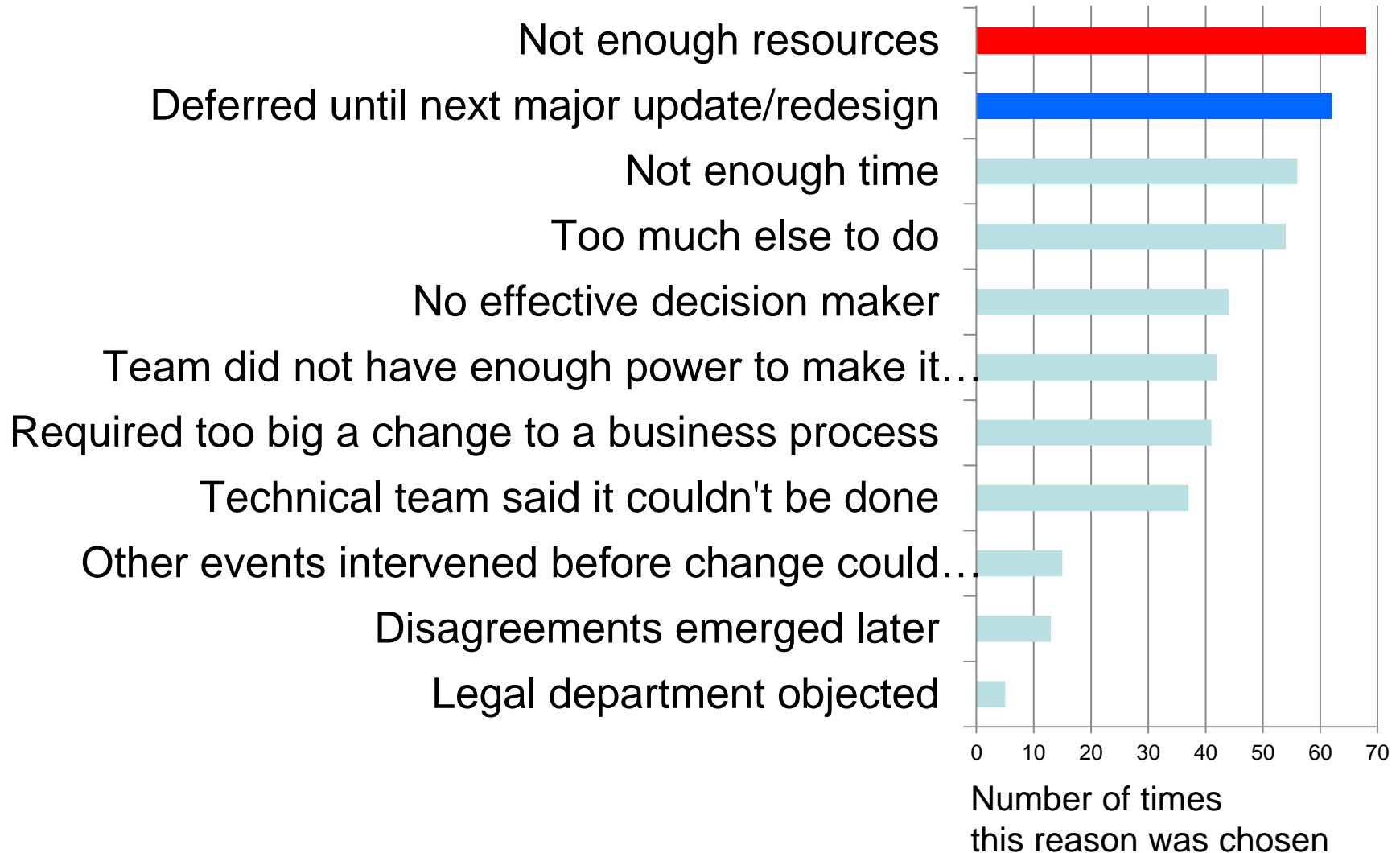
Steve



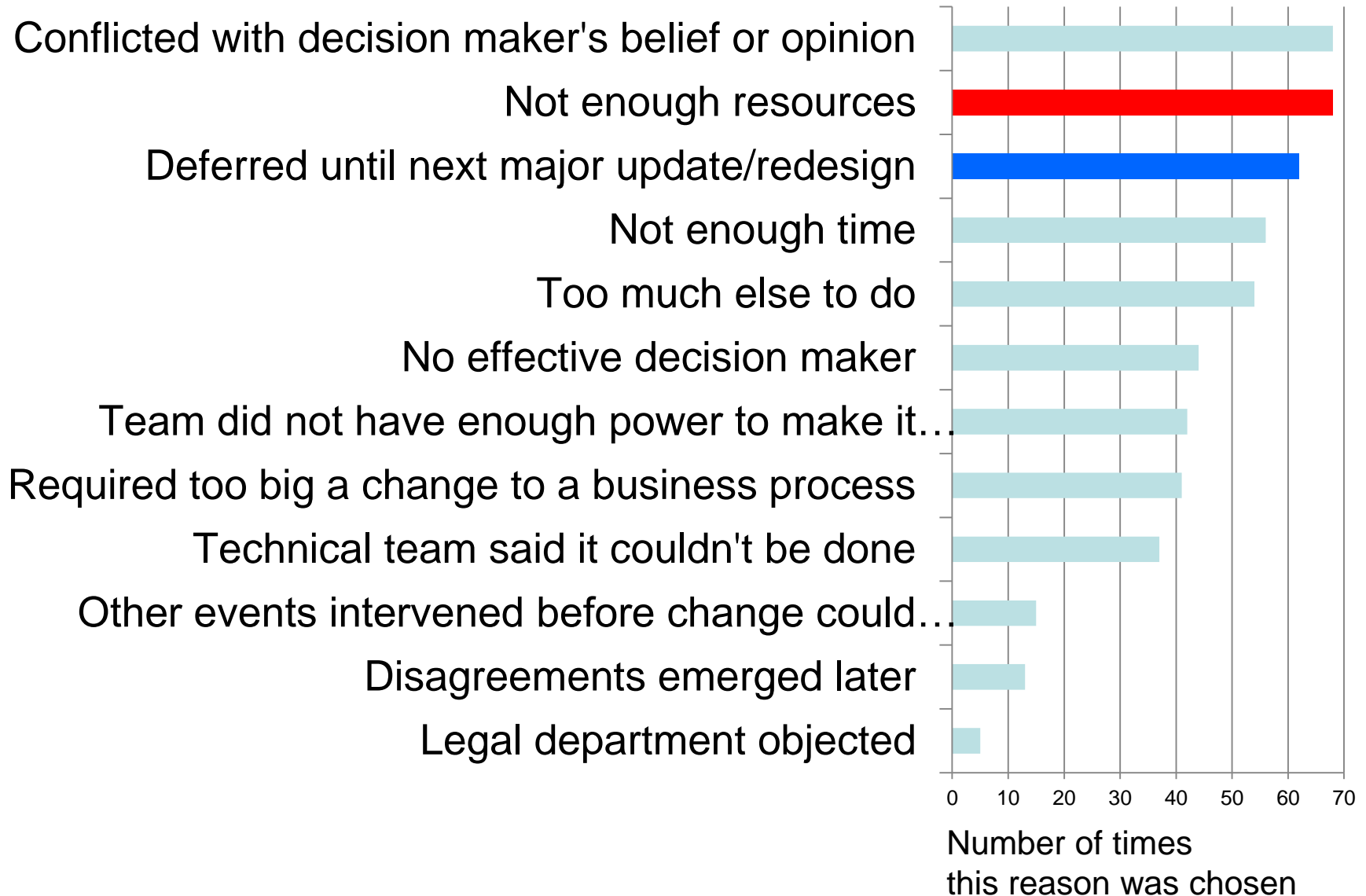
Caroline



Our instincts are good but...

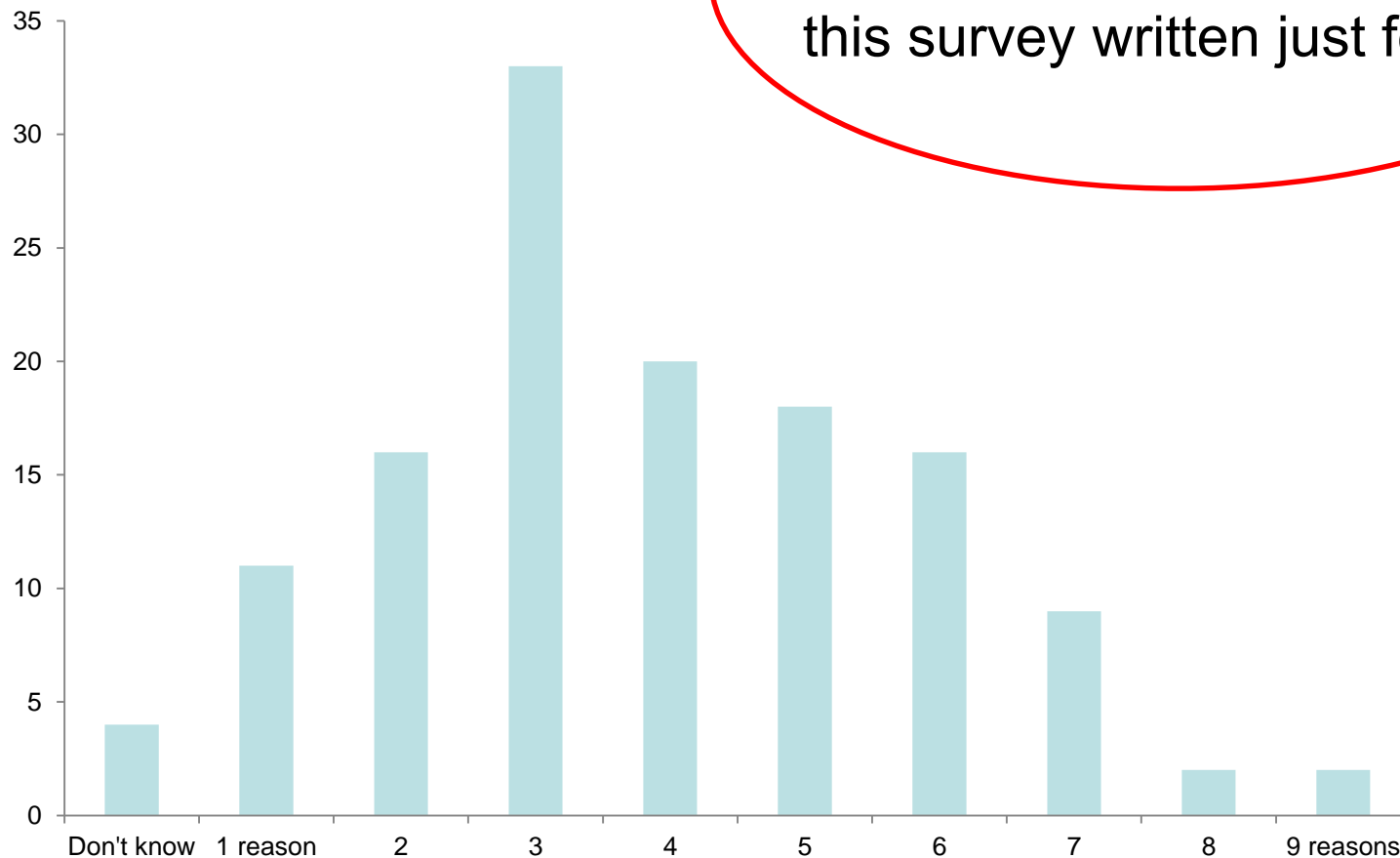


We underestimated the politics



Most people chose lots of reasons

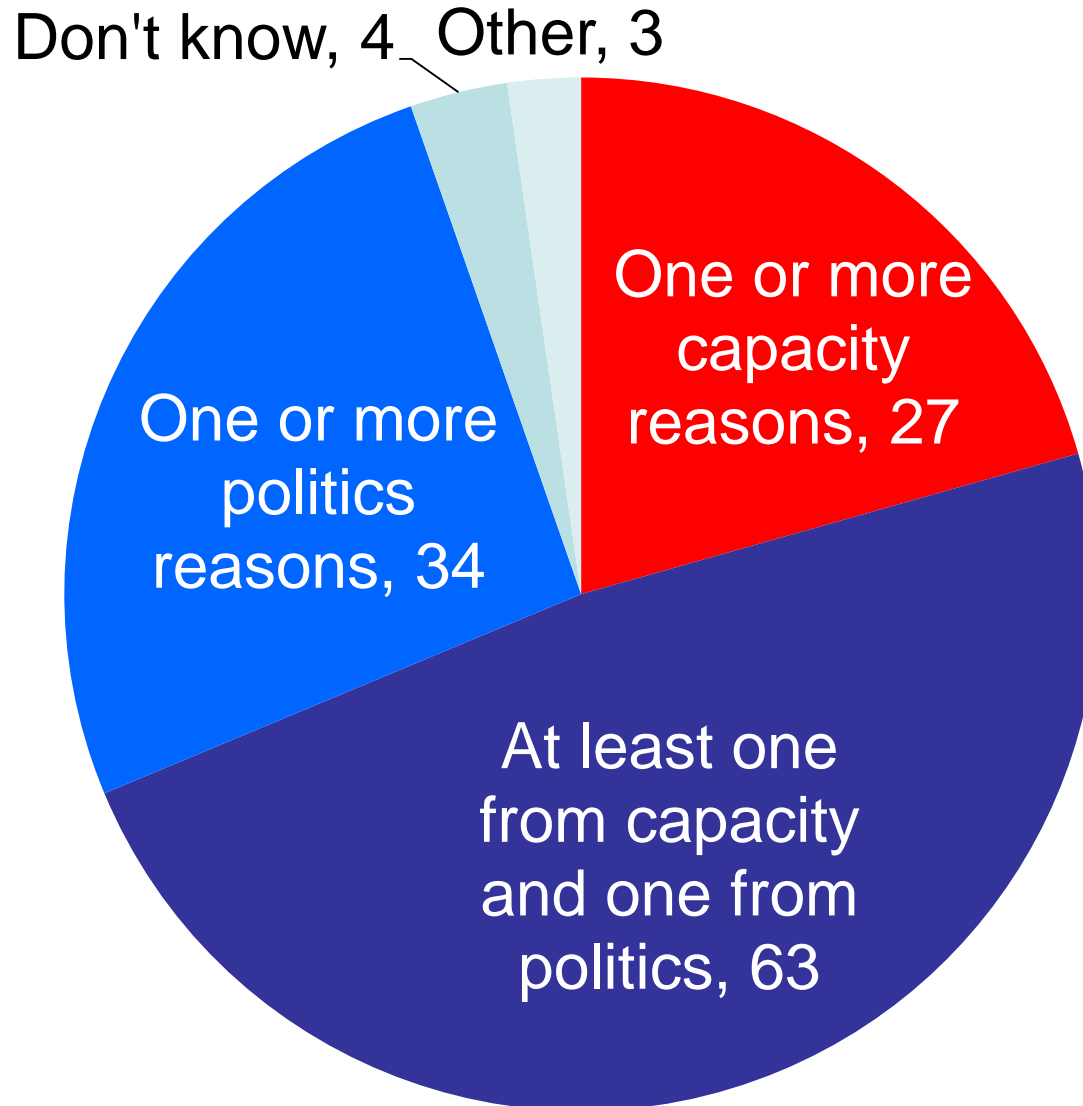
“I could have checked off just about every one of these. Was this survey written just for me?”



Two groups of reasons came up a lot

- Not enough time
 - Too much else to do
 - Not enough resources
 - Required too big a change to a business process
 - Technical team said it couldn't be done
 - Team did not have enough power to make it happen
 - Conflicted with decision maker's belief or opinion
 - No effective decision maker
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 - Legal department objected
- “Capacity”
- “Politics”

Almost everyone chose capacity and/or politics

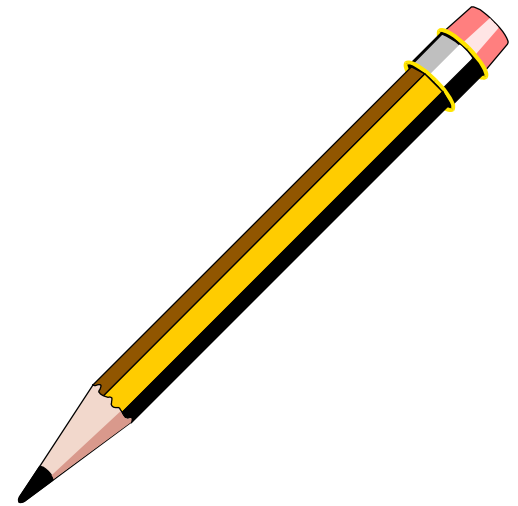


So, what can we do?

Think about your ideas for a moment

Survey question 4:

“If something like that happened again,
what would you do differently
to ensure that the changes got made?”



Ideas from our survey respondents – in themes

Theme: Do nothing

- Accept the situation
 - ▶ “Sometimes recommendations don't get realized.”
 - ▶ “Clients don’t have to follow our advice”
 - ▶ “I'll chant some Oms”



Theme: Choose better clients or a better job

- “Become more efficient at choosing who I accept as clients”
- “Work for a company that gave a fig about UX”



Theme: Do basic UX better

- Do testing earlier
- Make stakeholders watch the sessions
- Present results better
 - ▶ More explanations
 - ▶ Use video clips



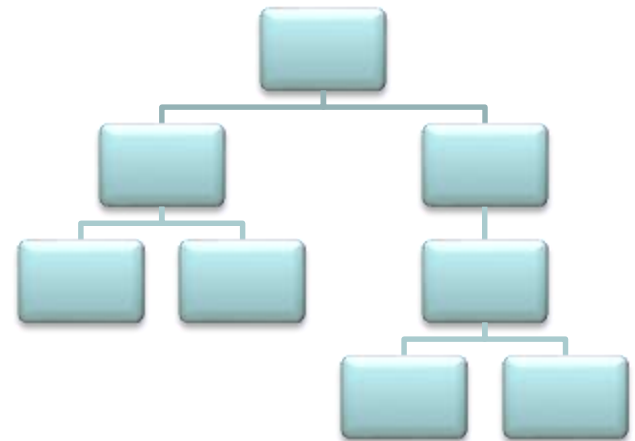
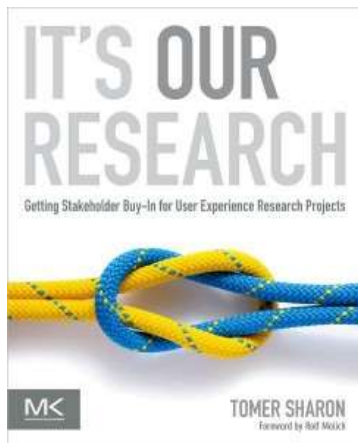
Theme: Think about the impact on developers

- “redefine problem as interaction bug”
- “have a role in the implementation team”
- “don’t spring surprises on them”



Theme: Get better at politics

- Get decision-maker support
- Understand priorities
- “Get more buy-in. Explain changes to a sponsor. Argue the case. Make it harder to NOT do the change”.



How can we keep this
from happening? (Steve)

Go ahead. Follow the conventional wisdom...

- Be more politic if you want
 - ▶ It probably won't hurt
- Understand their priorities
 - ▶ It probably won't hurt
- Learn to speak their language
 - ▶ It probably won't hurt
- Make an ROI case
 - ▶ Feel free, if you have a spare month or three
- I encourage you to do all of these things
- Do I think it will solve the problem?
 - ▶ Probably not

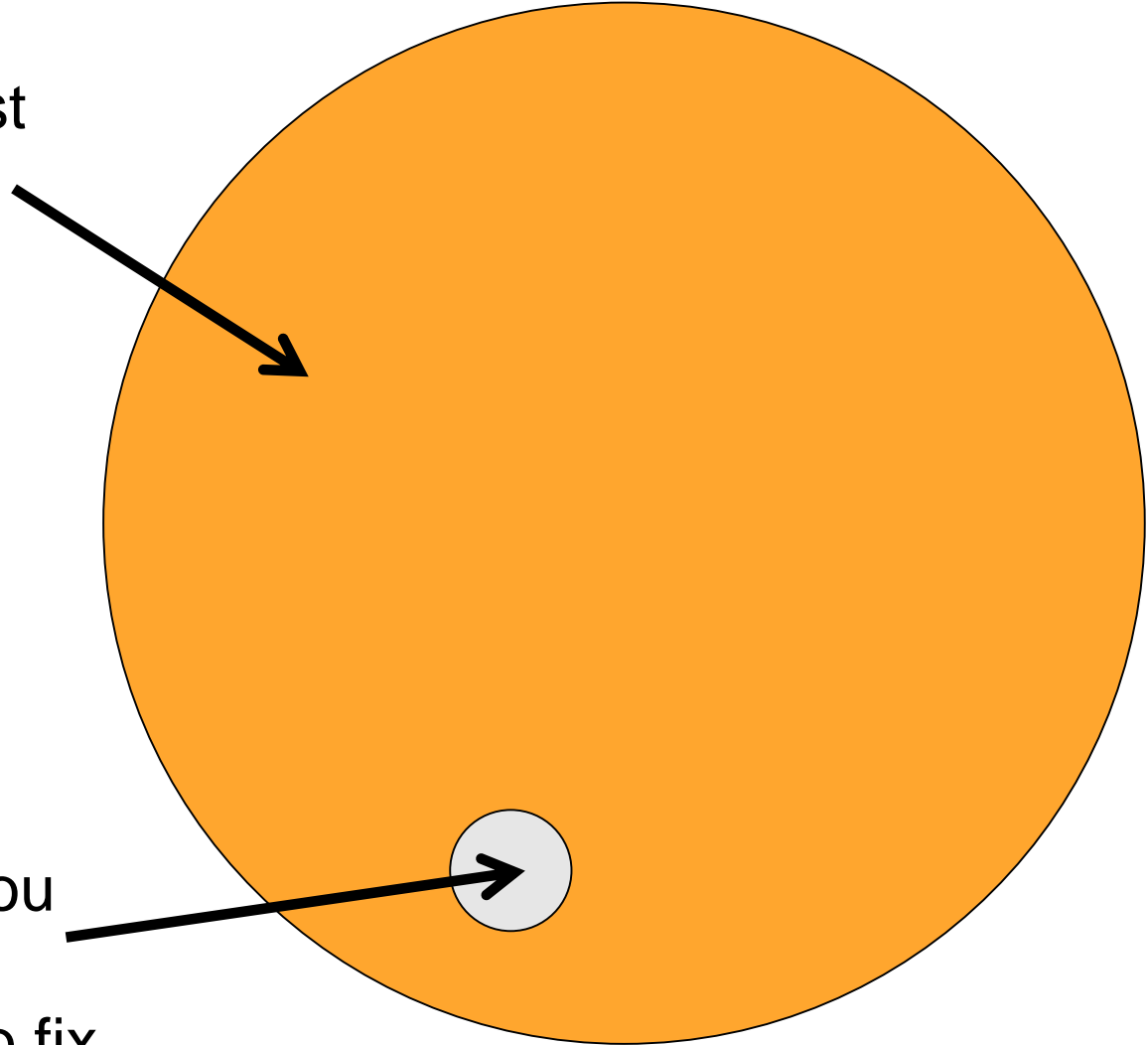
Why not, you may ask?

- Because I think there are four real reasons why serious problems don't get fixed

1. Since you can't fix everything, you have to prioritize

Problems you
can find with just
a few test
participants

Problems you
have the
resources to fix

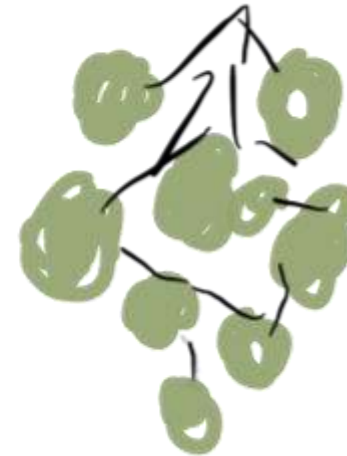


...and we don't necessarily prioritize well

If you were a developer, which would you work on?



One very hard-to-solve
(perhaps impossible)
problem



A large quantity of
low-hanging fruit

2. The elephants have been in the room a long time

- Serious problems are often *familiar* problems
- Their longevity makes people assume they'll be hard to fix
- “If there was a simple solution, we would have fixed it.”

3. The siren song of redesign

- “It will be fixed in the next redesign” is very seductive because it sounds true
- Allows you to stamp the file “Case Closed!”
- Makes everyone happy
 - ▶ Except, of course, the users
- Oh, and then there’s the fact that it never happens

4. The absent father holds the trump card

- Often someone *not in the room* later disagrees
- What he says, goes
 - ▶ (Let's face it: they're usually men)
 - ▶ (Especially the ones who make arbitrary decisions)

So, what's a girl to do?

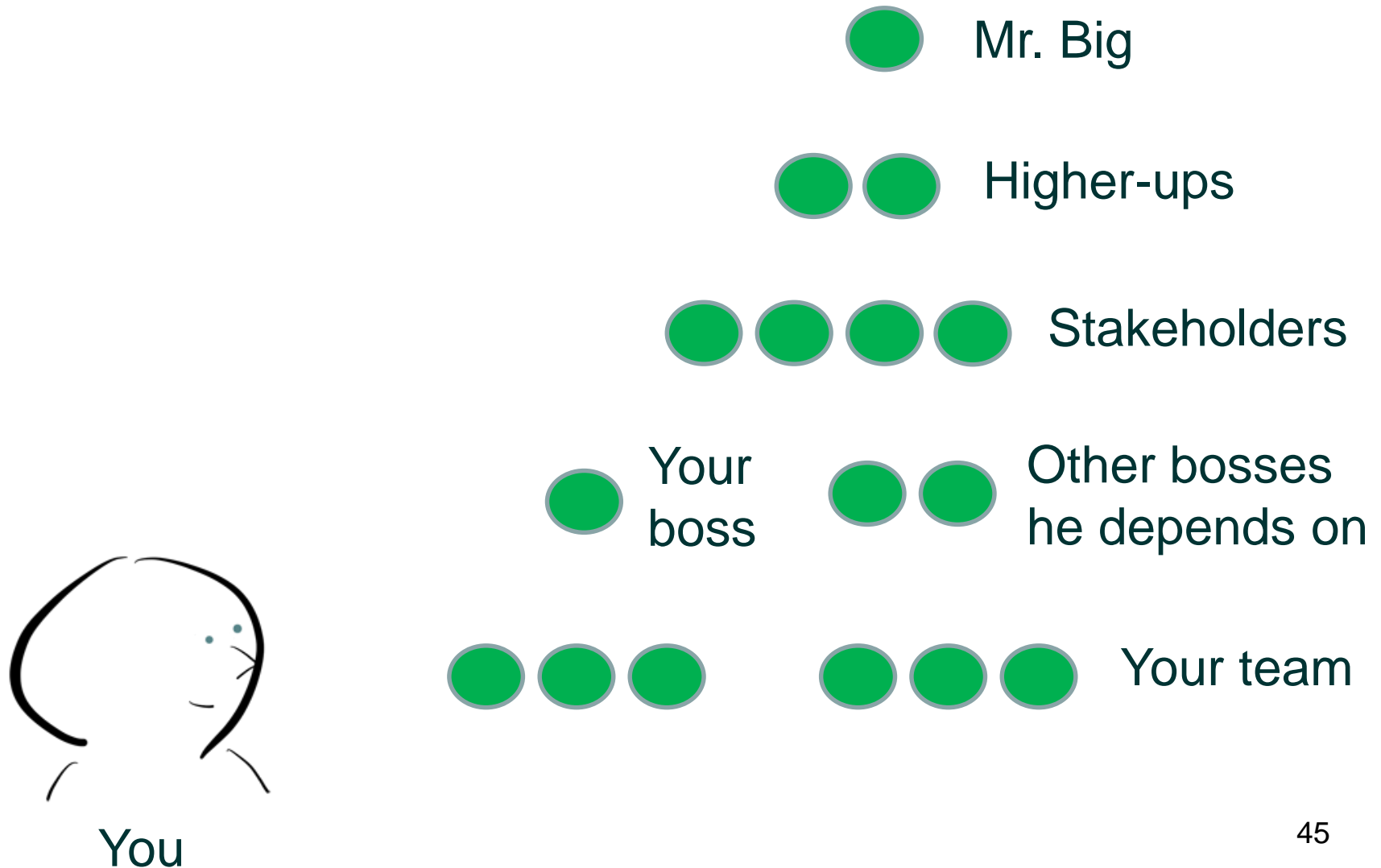
Accept that the absent father may never love you

- Forget about convincing the Don
- You probably can't get to him
- And even if you can, you probably can't change his mind
 - ▶ Either he's nuts (96 point type!)
 - ▶ Or he believes you're too small to see the big picture

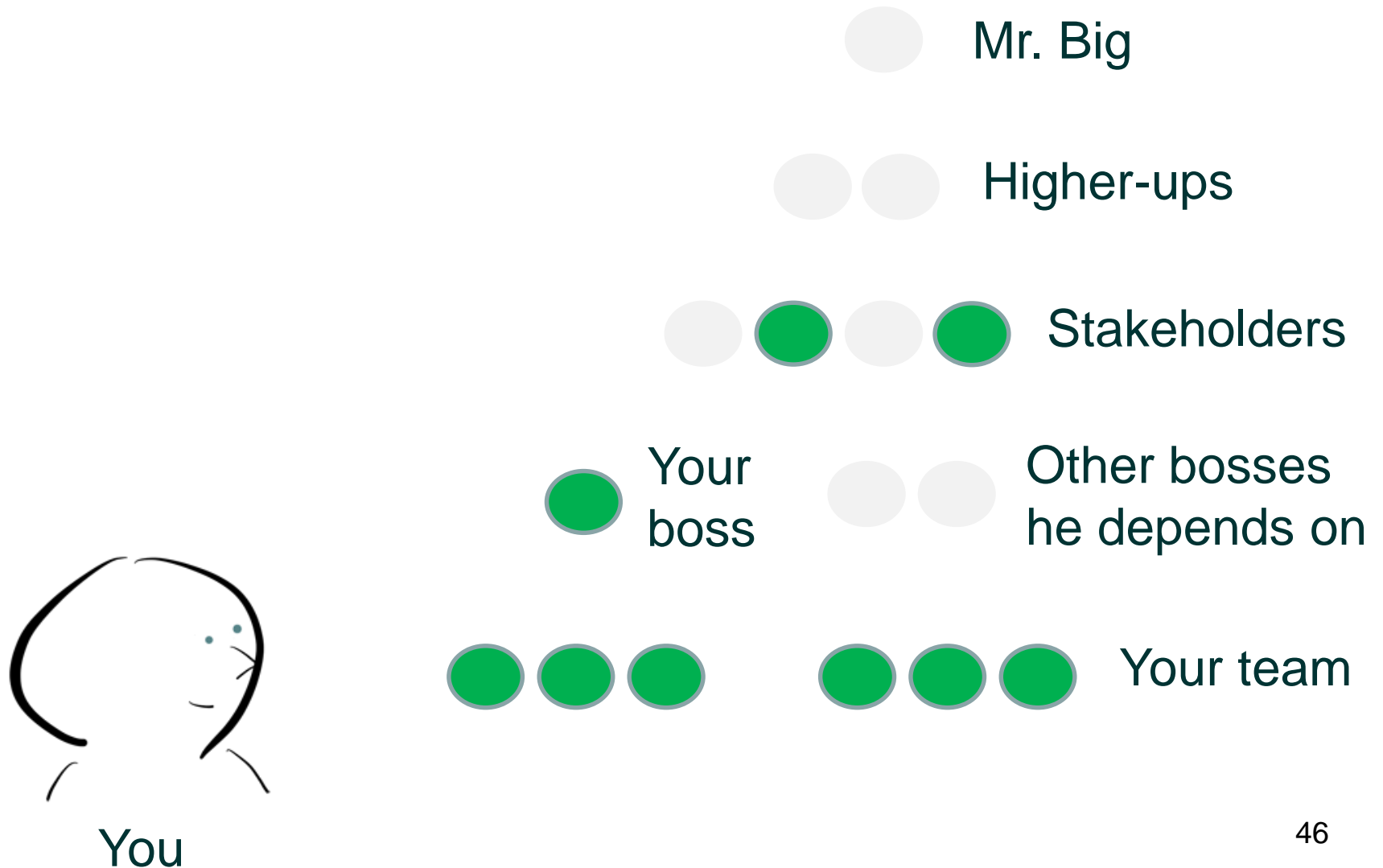
Don't raise the bridge; lower the water

- Instead of trying to work the political game and convince everyone, just *make it easier for the changes to be made*
- Commit to fixing a small number of the most serious problems each month
- Keep the solutions simple, so
 - ▶ They get done!
 - ▶ They get done quickly
 - ▶ The higher-ups don't have to be involved

Don't try to convince everybody



Ideally...



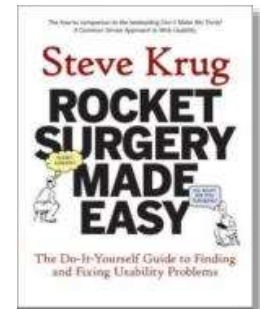
i.e., the people you can get in an observation room



Keep them focused on the worst problems



Focus ruthlessly on a small number of the most important problems.



Top Three Usability Problems

After each test session, list the three most serious usability problems you noticed.

Participant #1

1.
2.
3.

Participant #2

1.

Top Three Usability Problems

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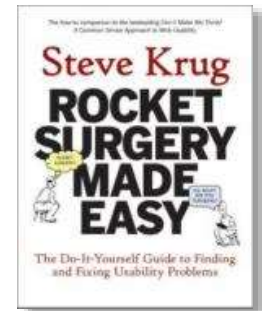
Participant #3

1.
2.
3.

Tweak, don't redesign



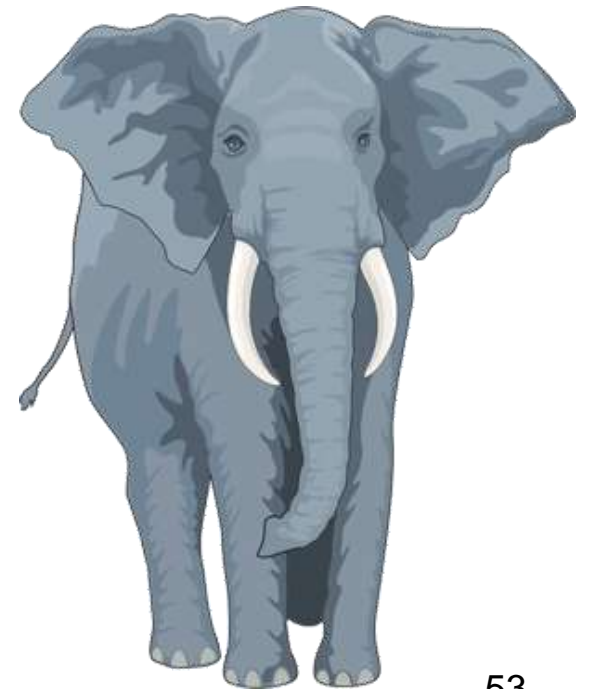
**When fixing problems,
always do the
least you can do™.**



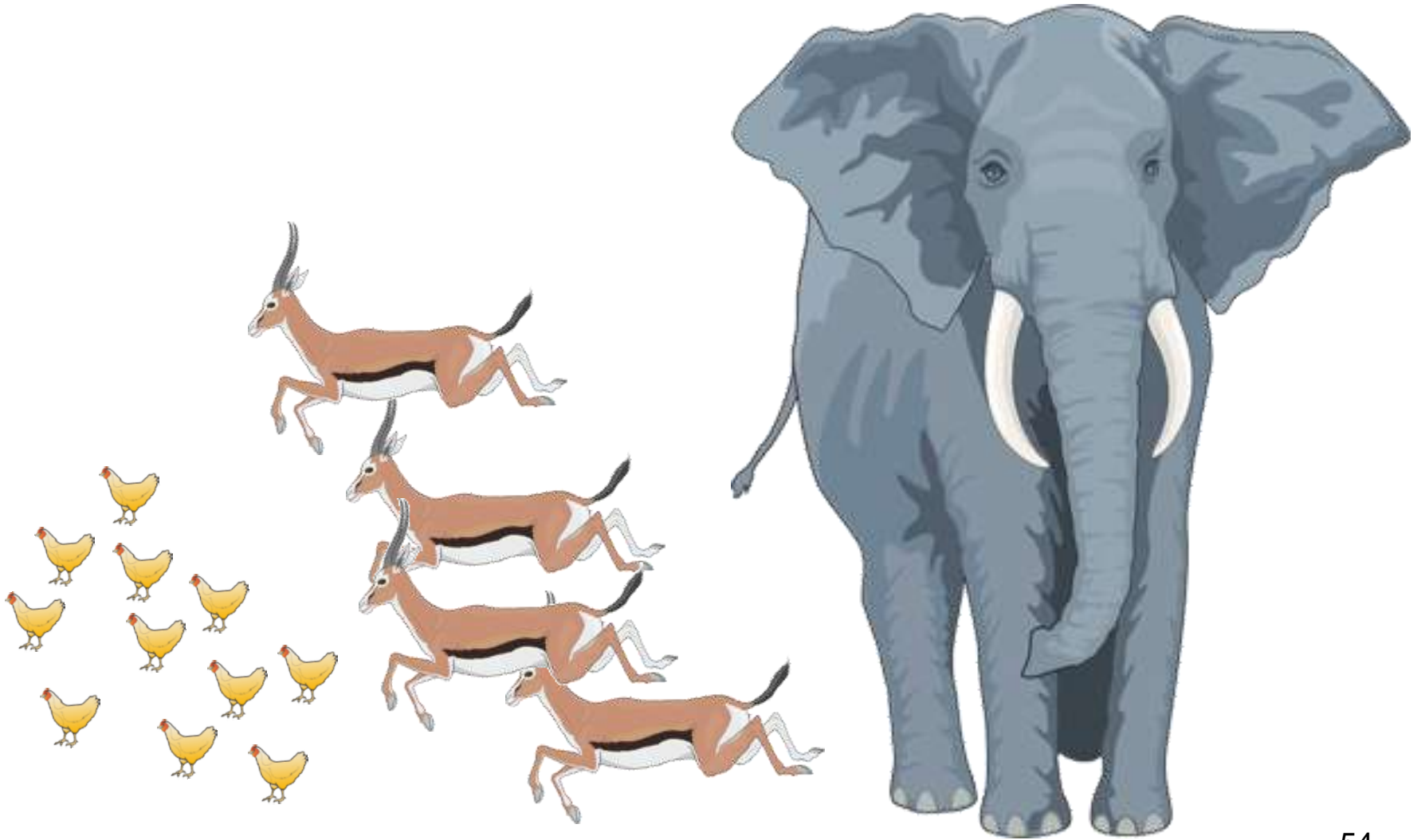
Your motto should be...

- What's the ***smallest*** change we can make that we think might solve the ***observed*** problem?
- I argue that there's always some tweak that can mitigate a serious problem
- And you should implement it ASAP

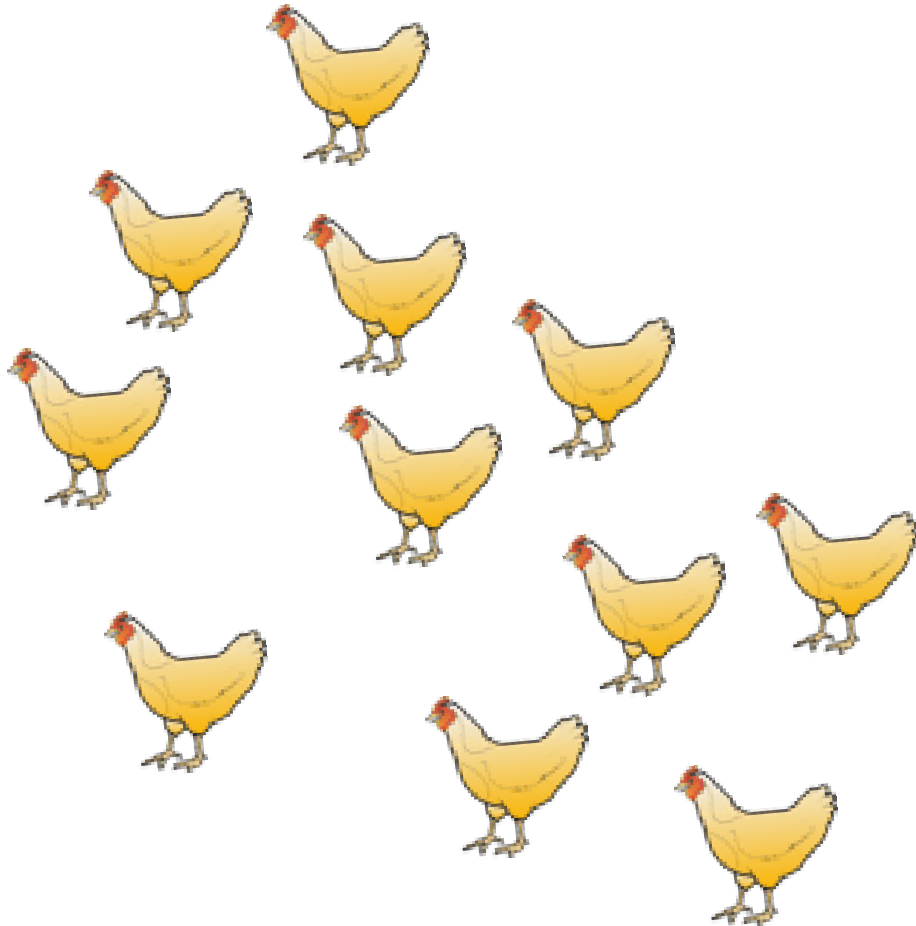
Caroline responds...
about that elephant



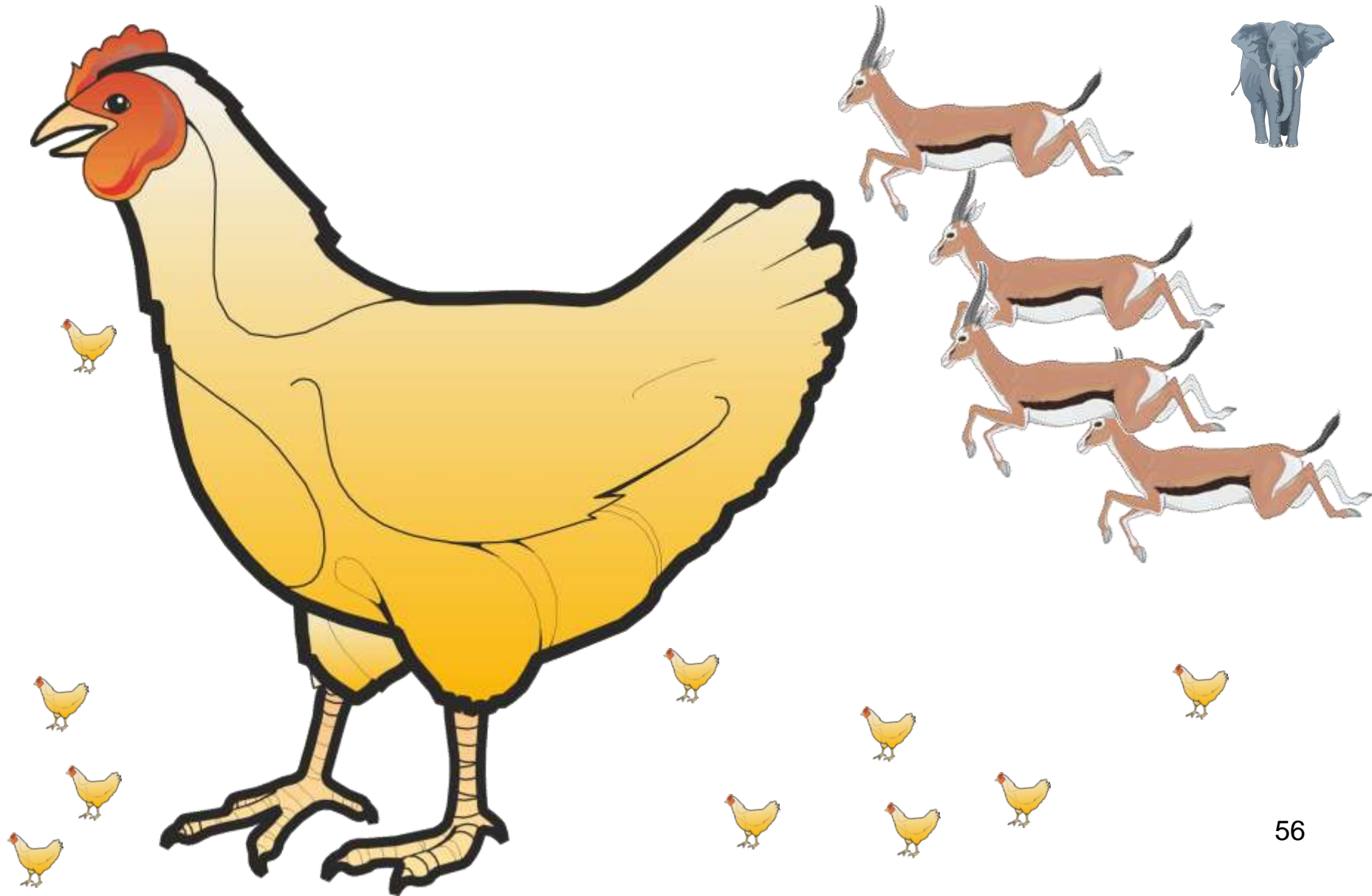
Eat now, eat soon, or eat an elephant?



Sometimes teams need a success experience



Sometimes users have a different perspective



One story struck me particularly

“This recommendation was made and added to a CI list about three years ago, and has never been implemented. The main reason was that it wasn't important enough when compared against the other CI items on the list. Now, the entire site section is up for a redesign, and the item is on hold indefinitely”

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meaningless,
and **vain**.

Endlessly
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Even the most user-focused organisations...

- Wonderful tools for the scientific community
- Very committed to user-centred design



Francis Rowland @francisrowland

24 May

Just asked one of our devs to make a small microcopy change and she replied "Technically, that's no problem". :) All right then!



Caroline Jarrett @cjforms

24 May

@francisrowland Sneak preview of one of our findings: sometimes changes don't happen because they are perceived as 'too small to matter'.



Francis Rowland @francisrowland

24 May

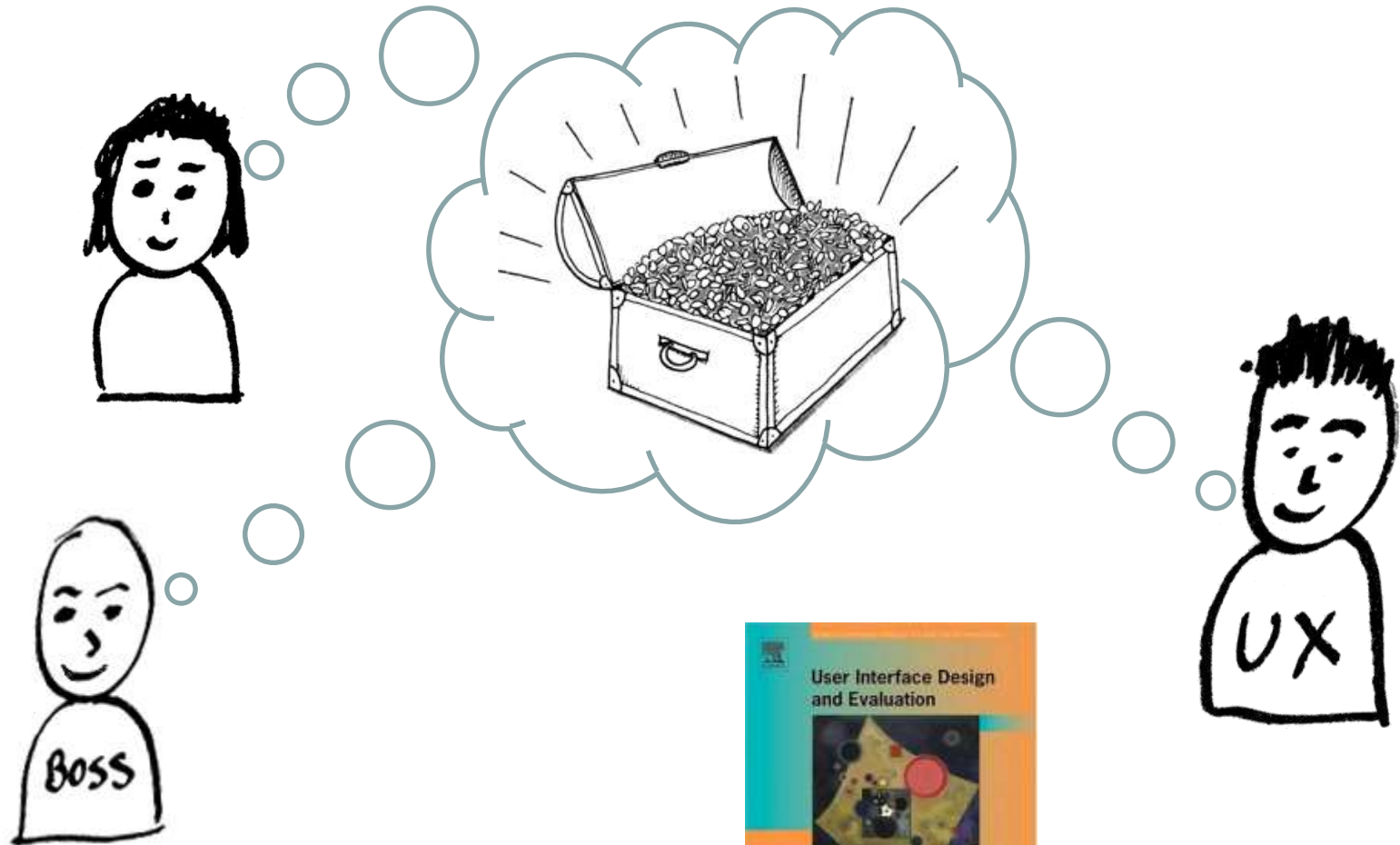
@cjforms *sob*

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We have different ideas about rewards



Look for success in everybody's terms



That light bulb reference

Q: How many psychiatrists does it take to change a light bulb?

A: Only one, but the light bulb has to want to change



Your turn

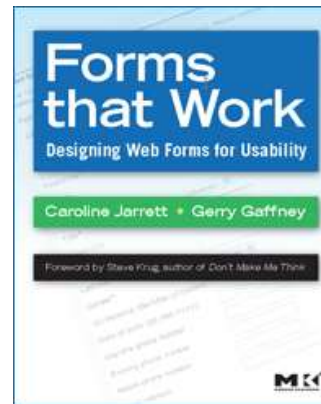
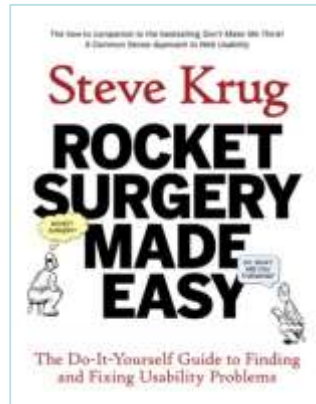
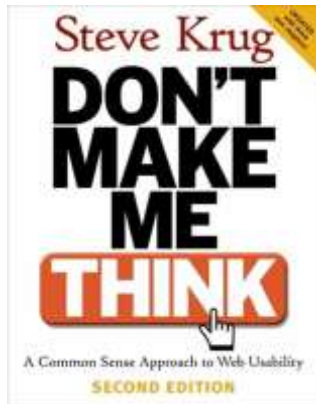
- Questions, comments, requests for a refund?

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