

**Blank Slide**

# Is Staff Engineering Valuable at a Small Company?



**Glen Mailer**

[@glenjamin@hachyderm.io](mailto:glenjamin@hachyderm.io)

**geckoboard**





StaffPlus

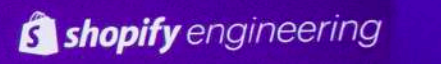
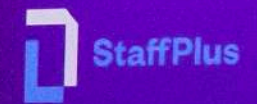
shopify engineering

## A couple of years ago...

hopefully there's some takeaways here. So, let's go back a bit. It was a rainy Thursday in Dublin in 1984. Well, a couple of years ago. So, I was promoted to staff. It was 2021. It wasn't a great time. I think we were all there. We remember. And during that year, after being promoted, there was a lot of adjusting to life, work, and a new role as well. And about a year into it I realized I was really miserable. I was irritable, in a bad mood. Taking things personally. And that dream







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**Is Staff Engineering  
Valuable at a Small  
Company?**

**It depends**

**Yes**

**Yes\***











**Do I need Staff Engineers at  
a Small Company?**

**No**

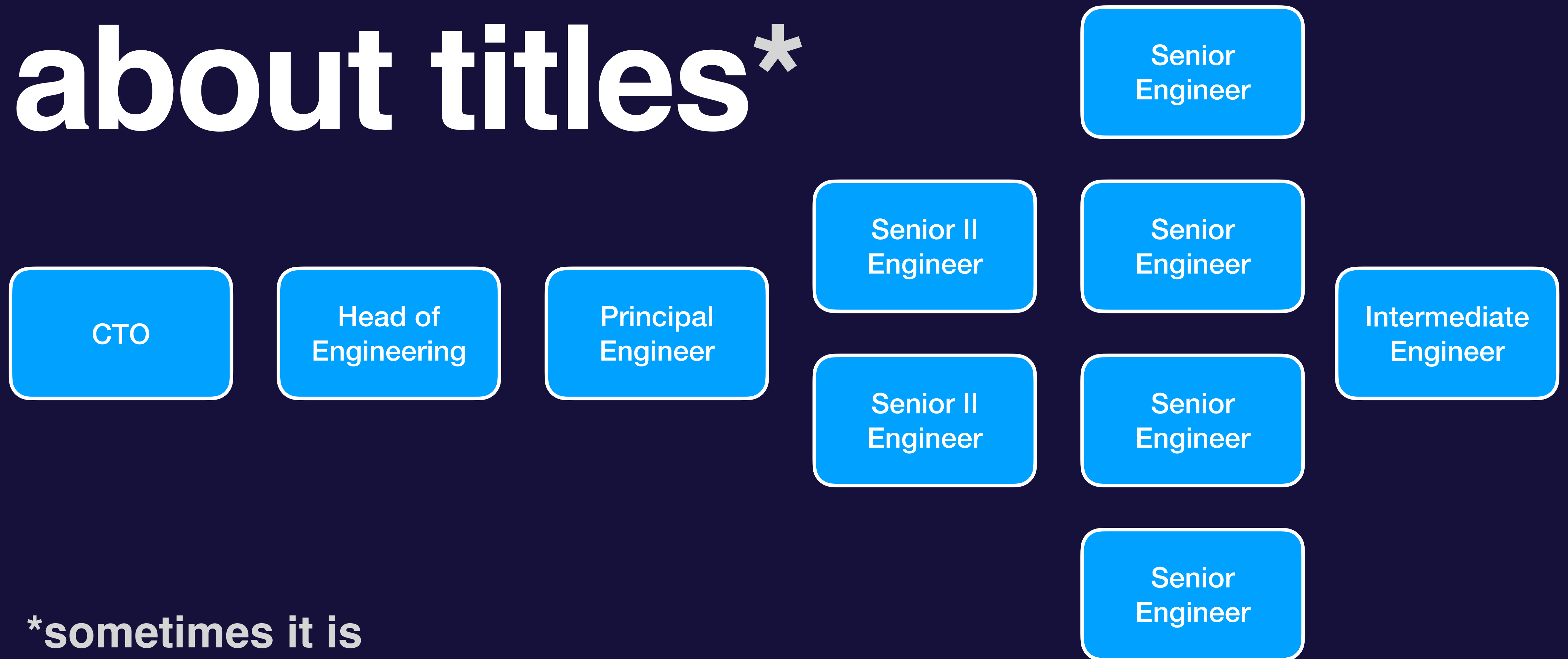


**Do I need Staff Engineering  
at a Small Company?**

**Yes**



# It's not about titles\*



\*sometimes it is

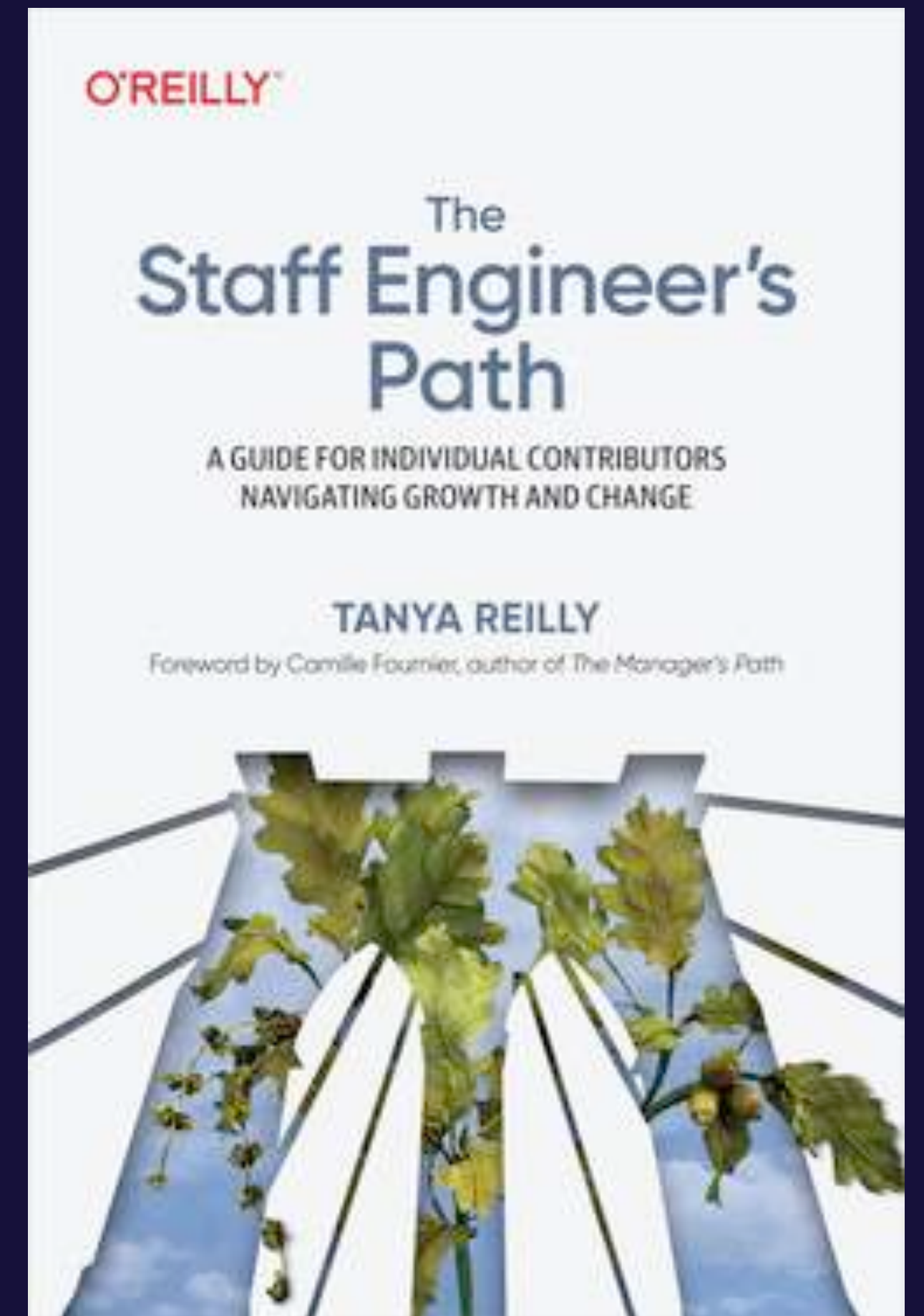


**So what *is*  
it about?**



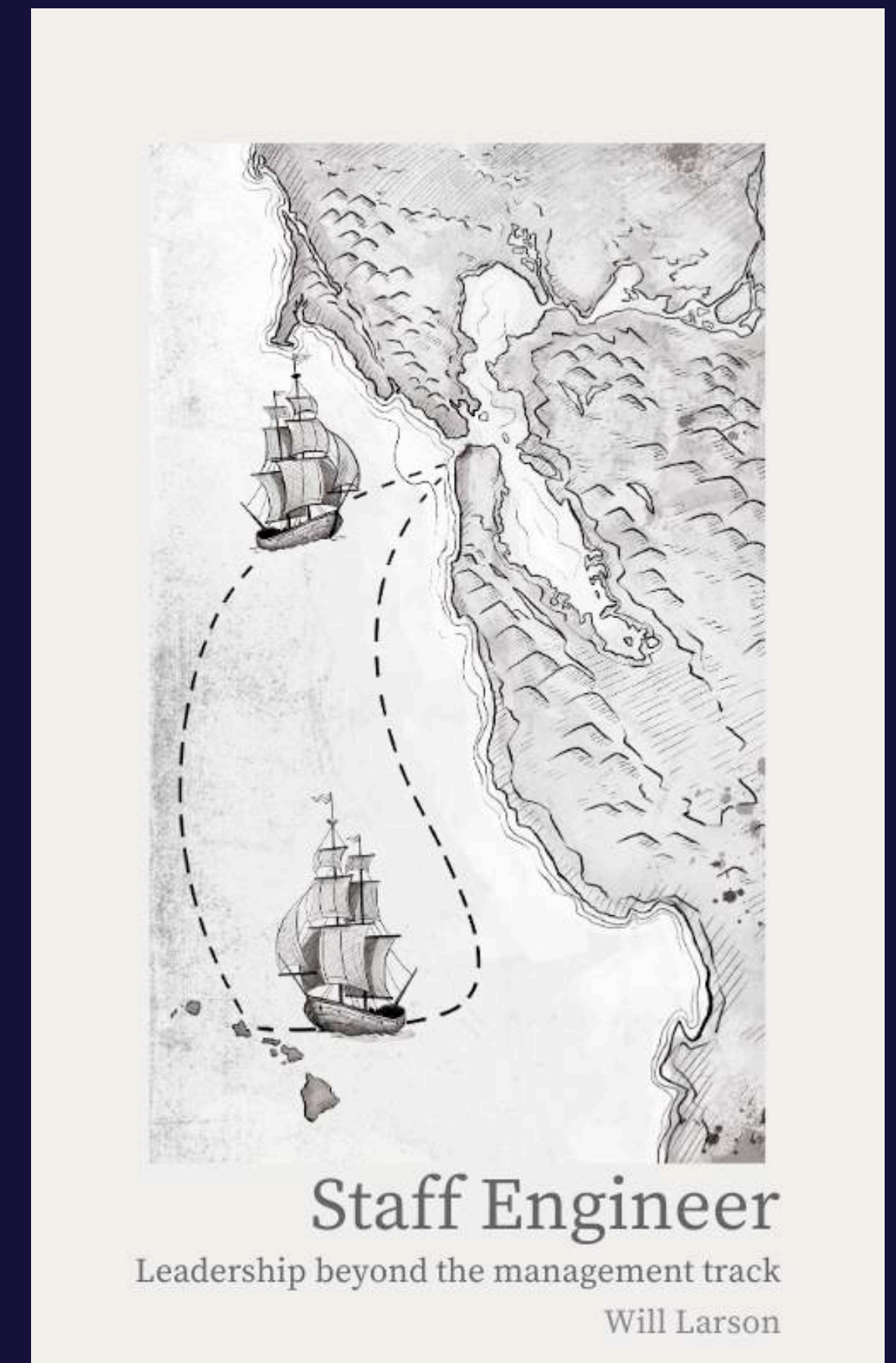
# According to Tanya Reilly

- **Big Picture Thinking**
- **Execution of Projects**
- **Levelling up Engineers**



# According to Will Larson

- **Setting Technical Direction**
- **Mentorship and Sponsorship**
- **Providing Engineering Perspective**
- **Exploration**





# Being Glue

<https://noidea.dog/glue>

Tanya Reilly



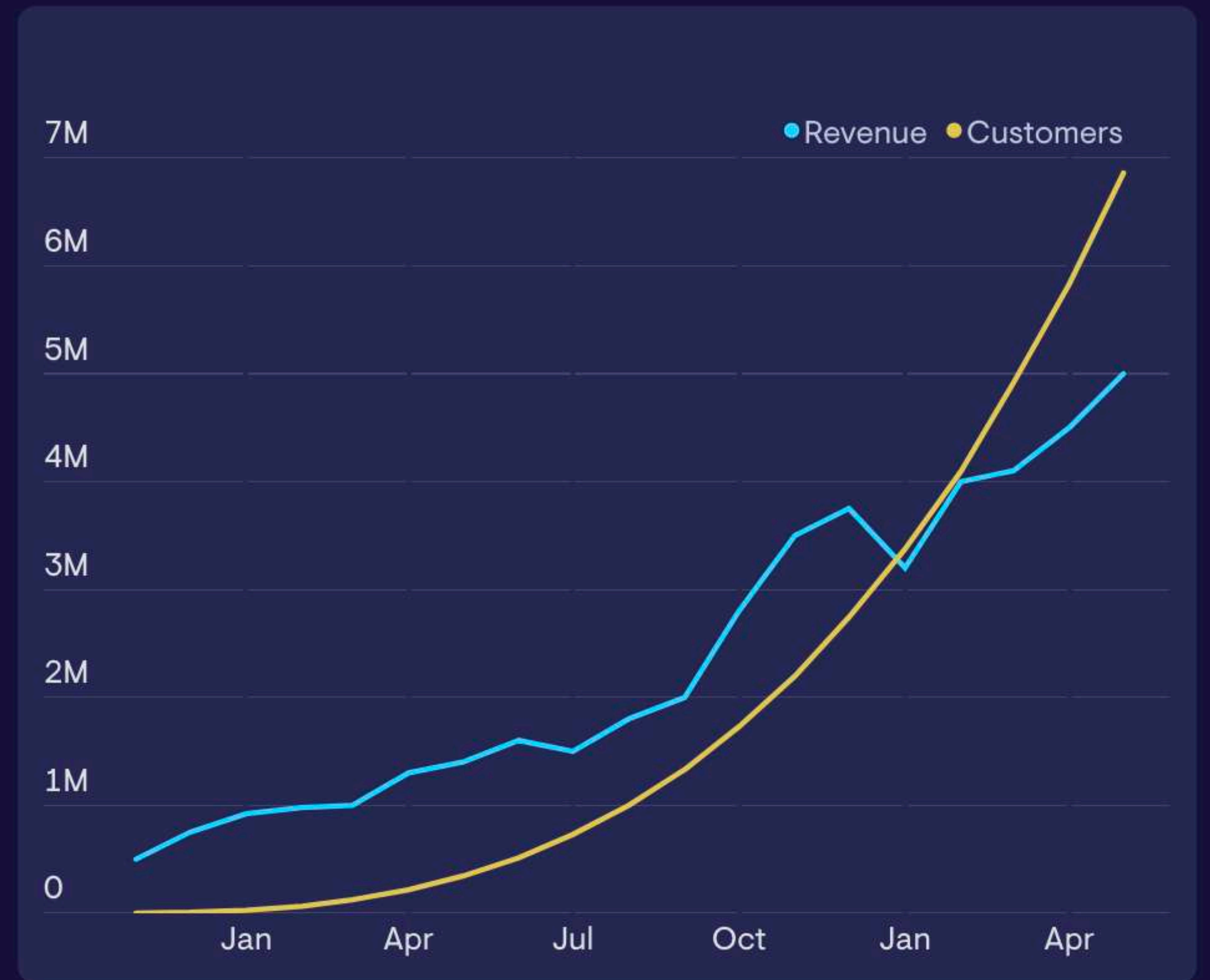




# Big Company Thinking



# Engineering for Company Success



**10. Find out what's important**

**20. Find a way to make it better**

**30 . GOTO 10**



**Not Resume Driven**

**Not Promo\* Driven**

**Not Cool-Tech Driven**

**Not Fashion Driven**

**What does**  
***SmallCo* Staff**  
**look like in practice?**



# Remaining part of a Dev Team





$$\text{Effectiveness} = W \times N$$

**W = waste ratio**

**N = number of people**





# Managing an Inventory of Spinning Plates



# Avoiding Specialisation





# Shaping the System

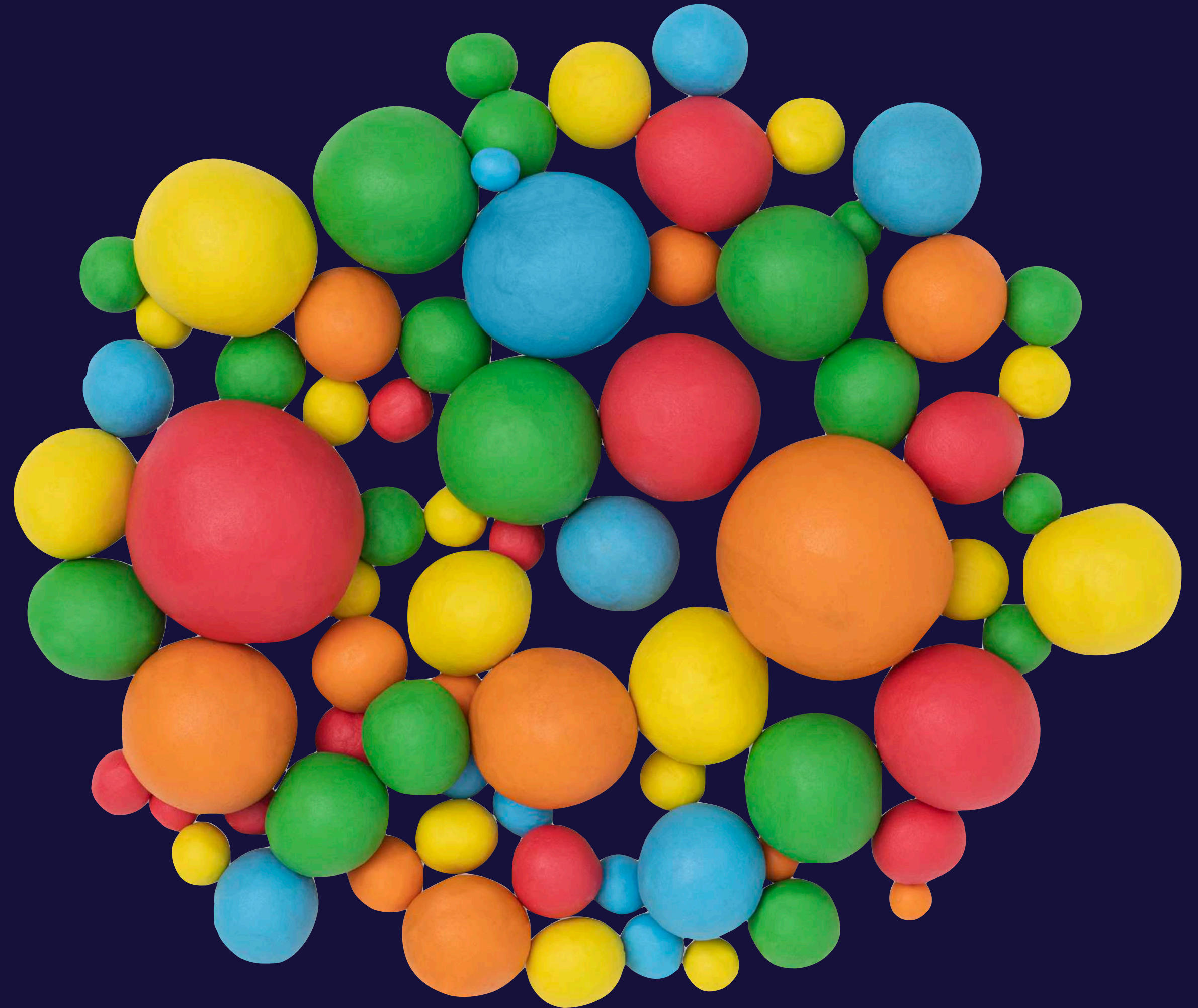


Image by rawpixel.com on Freepik



**Also known  
as...**

**Architecture**





**Also known  
as...**

**Architecture**







# Fighting the FAANG FOMO

**Focus on Problem Definition**



# Problem Definition

# Problem Definition



**What is the problem?**

**Why is it important?**

**What should we do about it?**



**What is the problem?**

**Why is it important?**

**What should we do about it?**



# SmallCo Exclusive Staff+ Behaviours



**Things that  
don't scale**



**Talk to everyone**

**EVERYONE!**



**Talk to everyone**


**EVERYONE!**








# Follow the change feed

- ( ): you're up to deploy polecat.  
( ): you've been queued for the deployment of gazebo. You are next.  
( ): you're up to deploy gazebo.
- 17:04 **cake-bot** APP ( ) you have received a 🍰 for [polecat#10744](#) - Add Leaderboard auto-wrapping
- 17:05 **Deployer** APP ( ) has successfully deployed gazebo to staging. (edited)  
| Completed - [Buildkite logs](#) / [Traces](#)
- 17:05 **cake-bot** APP ( ) you have received some feedback on [gazebo#1149](#) - Remove activies required filters
- 17:10 **cake-bot** APP @glen you have been asked by ( ) to review [gecko-chef#2938](#) - Make Campus-replicator use service discovery  
 1 reply 1 day ago
- 17:11 **Deployer** APP ( ) has successfully deployed gazebo to production. (edited)  
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- 17:12 **cake-bot** APP @glen you have received a 🍰 for [test\\_scripts#51](#) - shopify: bump gems and api version to latest
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- 17:35 **cake-bot** APP @glen you have been asked by ( ) to review [gazebo#1150](#) - Add test around activity stage  
@glen you have been asked by ( ) to review [gecko-chef#2939](#) - Also update Campus to not call management-api directly  
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# **Making room for Senior Engineers**



**Is Staff Engineering  
Valuable at a Small  
Company?**

**/ think so**

**Is all that stuff you talked  
about really Staff  
Engineering?**

**Probably**



**Engineer for  
Company Success**

***\*and take your cut***

# Thanks

**Glen Mailer**

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