
INFT2000 SUMMARY REPORT

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FROM: WILLIAM MATHESON, 0229152
SUBJECT: "TAKING TIME TO THINK"
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Michael Lopp¹ writes in his blog *Rands In Repose* about the importance of taking time to think. He speaks to our own experiences of why we can't think when we're busy – we're too busy reacting to things. In panic mode, everything is a reaction: even "Rands" sage reply about how he handled things when the sky was falling before isn't thinking, it's a canned response. He is also suspicious of the supposed creativity that appears in a crunch: If your hair is on fire, are you going to consider all options or just stick your head in the nearest bucket of water? We need to have these reaction instincts, but our coping resources will diminish until they're spent unless we take the time to think.

Thinking is hard to do at work because we're in a familiar situation and it is also something we have to give ourselves permission to do in part because "time is money", thinking has no constraints, and we bump into uncomfortable realities. In spite of this, Rands suggests that we can shoehorn in some deep thinking after a major release. All of the problems from the release are at the forefront, but there is also some time to breathe.

Rands recommends against using offsite retreats to think, as even though people like field trips, the day is illusory. We should get used to thinking in our ordinary settings.

The article becomes highly specific at this point in order to establish Rand's ideal meeting structure – two meetings a week, the first for brainstorming and the second for prototyping. There shouldn't be too many people at the meetings, or nothing will get done. You want to have the right people at these meetings.

The first meeting could be just therapeutic venting, but the meeting should produce some "hot topics" that the attendees want to address. The second meeting can be about wireframing the ideas from the first meeting, but it's critical that there be written evidence of what happened at that first meeting.

Rands goes over some questions the reader can ask to determine whether this brainstorm-prototyping meeting structure is working. He suggests that the people involved should be changing to reflect the diversity of thought in the company. The to-do list should grow in the beginning, but shrink near the end of a design phase. "Better is the enemy of done." The team should be facing at least one difficult decision each meeting, otherwise it is just chatting. The meetings will die off as design gives way to development, as development should be more about answering questions than creating new ones.

Rands closes by mentioning that Google (at the time this article was written) allowed its developers to spend 20% of their at-work time on personal projects (Gmail started out this way²) and praises them for "creating a culture of thinking". However, that experiment and perk may now be history³.

Source: "Taking Time to Think", Michael Lopp, *Rands In Repose*, August 30th, 2008 ::
http://www.randsinrepose.com/archives/2005/08/30/taking_time_to_think.html

¹ - On Amazon, the listing for *Being Geek: The Software Developer's Career Handbook* reveals his name; "Rands" acknowledges being its author. See also: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rands>

² - "Google Gets the Message, Launches Gmail", Google Inc. Press Release, April 1st, 2004 - <http://googlepress.blogspot.ca/2004/04/google-gets-message-launches-gmail.html>

³ - "Ex-Google Employee Blasts Management, Says 20% Time Is Dead", Matt Lynley, *Business Insider*, March 14th, 2012 - http://articles.businessinsider.com/2012-03-14/tech/31163139_1_google-engineer-google-project-larry-page