How to Protect Your Open Source Project From Poisonous People
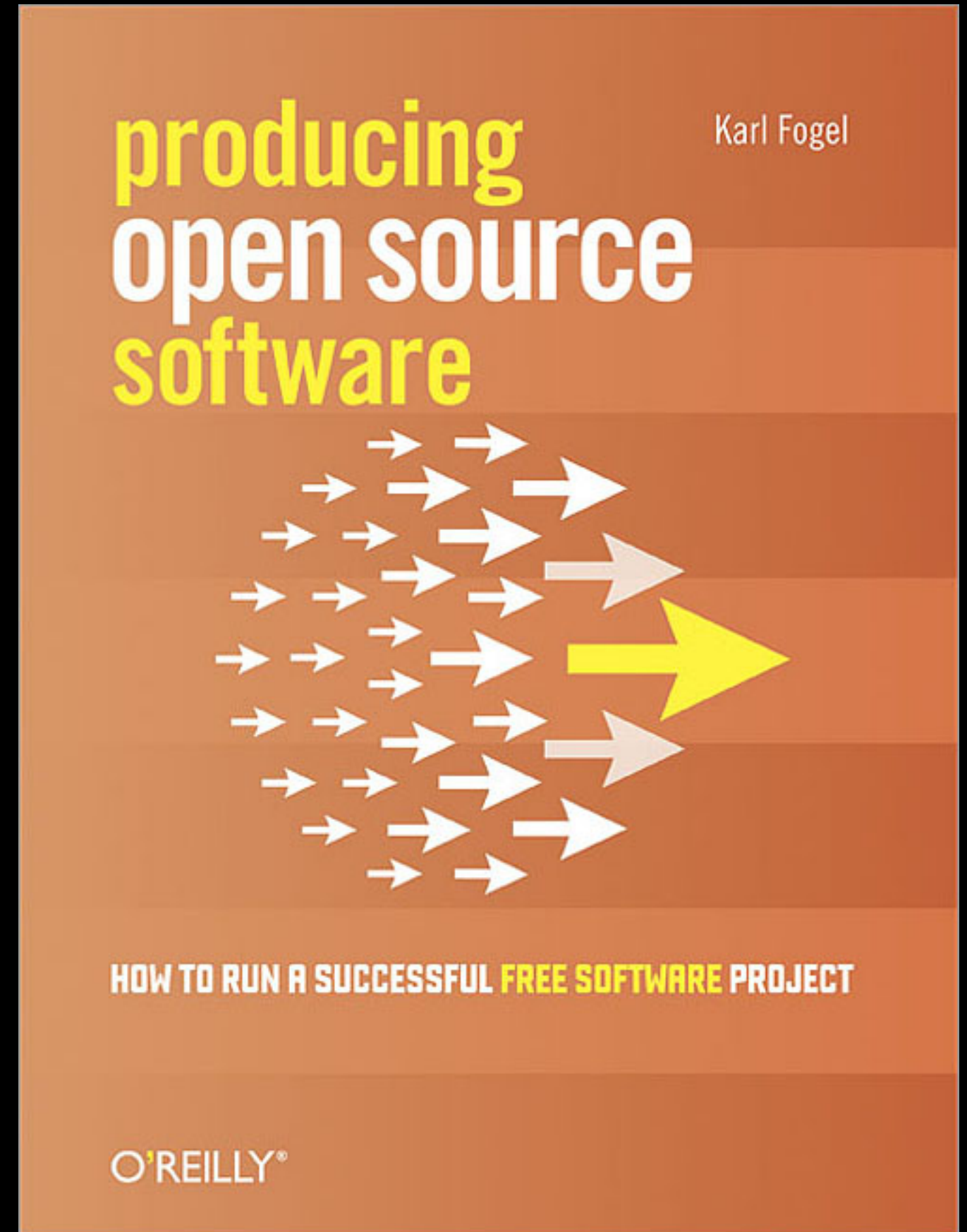
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Introduction

Who am I?

By The Way

- These are my opinions
- There's more than one way to run a community
- Based on my experiences...
- ... and Karl's book...
- ...which are both based on experiences with Subversion

Overview

- Understanding the Threat
- Fortifying Against the Threat
- Identifying Poisonous People
- Dealing with Infection

The Threat

Attention
and
Focus

These are your scarcest resources

You must protect them

Poisonous people can:

- Distract
- Emotionally drain your community
- Cause needless infighting

You Need to Avoid Paralysis

- OCD people can derail forward progress
  - Perfectionists
  - People obsessed with process
- Even nice guys can do this unintentionally!
  - "The perfect is the enemy of the good"
  - [Example]

Fortifying Against the Threat

Build a Strong Community Based On

- Politeness
- Respect
- Trust
- Humility

Best Practices

Mailing List Etiquette

- Don't rehash old discussions:
  - Send 'em to the mail archives
- Don't reply to **every** message in a thread:
  - Reply to a summary
  - [Example: Email filibustering]

Document Your Project's History

- Design decisions
- Bug fixes
- Mistakes
- Code Changes (ChangeLog)

If you don't document your project's history, you will be condemned to repeat it...
...over and over again

Have healthy code-collaboration policies

- Send commit emails, encourage email reviews
- Do big changes on branches for easier review
  - "Power plants" slow progress
- Be generous with branches
- Increase your project's "bus-factor" on components
- Don't allow names in files
  - [Example]

Have Well-defined Processes

- Releasing software
  - Backport bugs
  - Test and Release tarballs
- Accepting and reviewing patches
- Admitting new committers
  - The community founders establish the culture
  - The culture becomes self-selecting

Voting is a last resort

- A healthy community should rarely need to vote
  - [Example]

Detecting Poisonous People

The warning signs that you should look out for

...also known as...

When to flip the "bozo bit"

Communications Annoyances

- Uses silly nicknames
- Uses multiple nicknames in different media
- Overuses CAPITAL LETTERS
- Uses excessive punctuation!!!1!!1!!
- OMG WTF!?!?!

General Lack of Clue

- Unable to pick up on the "mood"

- Doesn't understand common goals of the community.

- Asks incessant RTFM questions

Hostility

- Insults the status quo

- Angrily demands help

- Attempts to blackmail

- Attempts to deliberately rile people

- Makes accusations of conspiracy (paranoia)

Conceit

- Refuses to argue with other opinions
- Makes sweeping claims
  - Usually about the project's future success
- Re-opens topics that are long settled
  - Without reading the archives

Lack of Cooperation

- Willing to complain, but not help fix anything
- Unwilling to discuss design
- Too insecure to take criticism

Dealing With infection

Assess the Damage

Ask Yourself **Two Critical Questions**

- Is this person draining attention and focus?
  - If so, is the person really likely to benefit the project?
- Is this person paralyzing the project?
  - Is the dispute likely to finish soon?

Don't

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- Feed the energy creature! (old usenet adage)
- Give assholes "purchase"
- Engage them
- Get emotional
  - [Example]

Do

Do

- Pay careful attention to a newcomer
  - Even if they're annoying at first
- Look for the fact under the emotion
- Extract a real bug report, if possible
  - [Example]
- Know when to give up and ignore them
  - [Example]
- Know when to forcibly boot them from community
  - [Example]
- Repel trolls with niceness!!
  - [Example]

Summary

- Understand the threat:
  - Preserve attention and focus
- Fortify against the threat:
  - Build a healthy community
- Identify poisonous people:
  - Look for tell-tale signs
- Deal with infection:
  - Maintain calm and stand your ground

Q&A

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