

A 10-Year Journey at Cal

How I left then found my way back to Berkeley

Alex Krentsel, 4/21/2024



Full Circle Moment



Me, at this same (!!) Regents' Alumni Reception, in 2016

Outline

- Prelude: Heading West
- Act 1: A Cal Cub is Born
- Act 2: Young Bear Leaves the Nest
- Act 3: Cal Bear Comes Home
- Lessons Learned

Prelude: Heading West

Immigrant parents from Ukraine and Russia.

Grew up curious and indecisive:

- Chemistry? Lawyer?
Translator? Diplomat?
- No clue where I'd end up...



Getting into Cal

- Ended up at Cal somewhat-accidentally
 - Hadn't even *heard* of R&C when I got it, pure luck.
 - Interviewer: Prof. Scott Shenker from the CS department.
- One of 5 kids from the *entire state of Kentucky* in Class of 2019.



Scott Shenker



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- One of 5 kids from the *entire state of Kentucky* in Class of 2019.
- One of 1 kids from anywhere near my town in upstate New York.



Scott Shenker

Act 1: A Cal Cub is Born

Early Memories

A New World

- Moved into Foothill
- Huge, overwhelming school
 - Ask me my student ID...
- Late-night waffle-fries
- Messy, messy dorm room



(First) 4 Years at Berkeley

Searching for Community

- Freshman Years: (unsuccessfully) trying to fit in
 - Tried clubs I was “supposed to”
 - Turned to passions to look for community
- 2nd-4th Years: Finding Community
 - Music (UCB Symphony Orchestra, Carillonist)
 - R&C
 - Teaching (Course Staff, BEAM)
 - Plenty of Other Failed Attempts



R&C at Berkeley

Not involved in RCSA proper, but...

- ROHP Committee '15-'16
- TEDxBerkeley Committee '18-'19



2015-2016 ROHP

Constant Support in the Background

- Confidence and belonging
- Class registration/housing perks
 - (my college best friend)
- Supportive advising staff

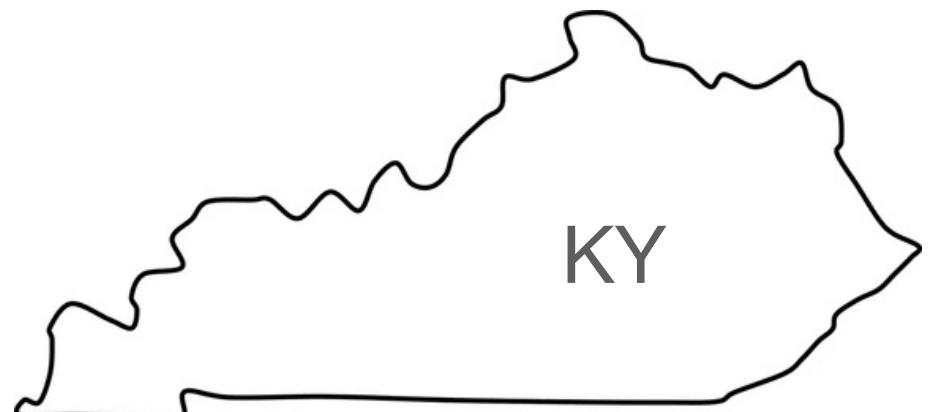


2018-2019: TEDx Berkeley

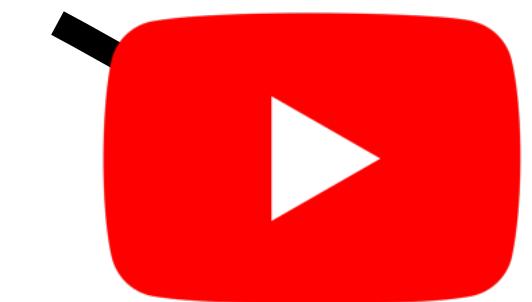
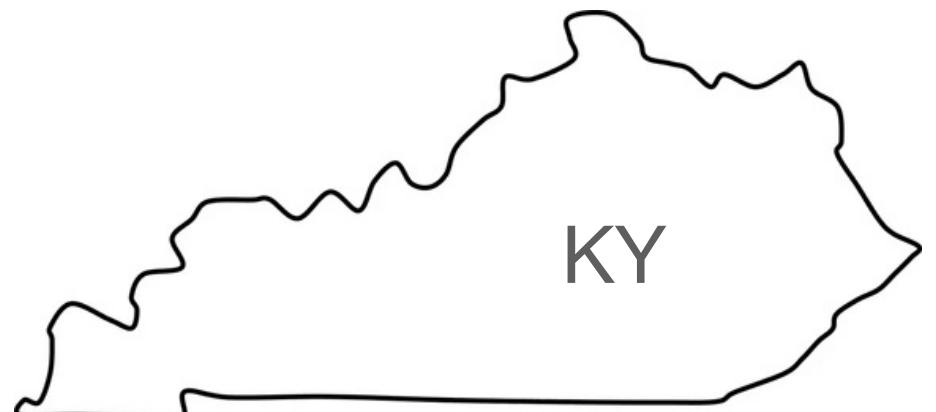
Act 2: Leaving the Nest



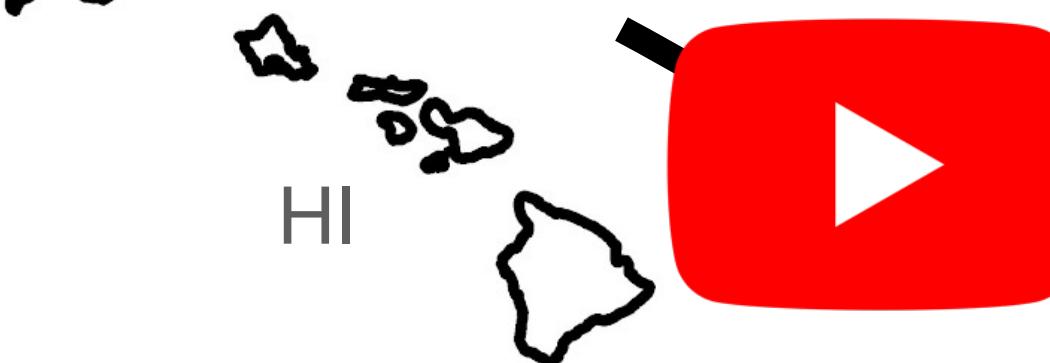
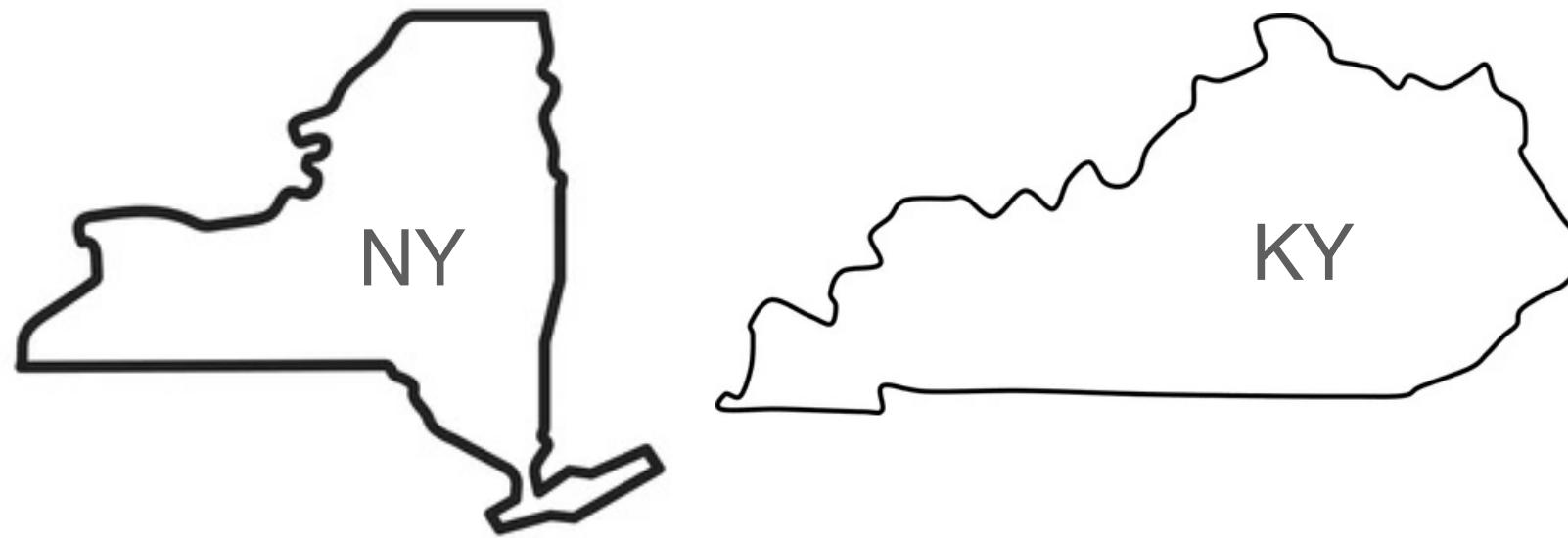
A Meandering Path



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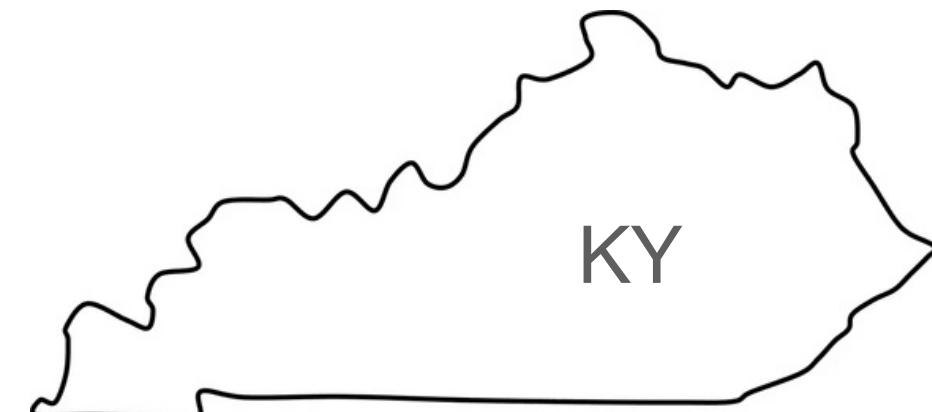


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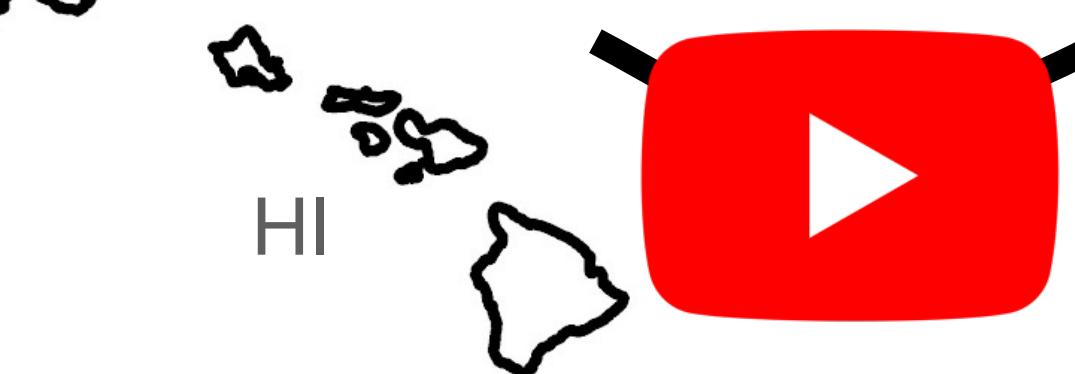
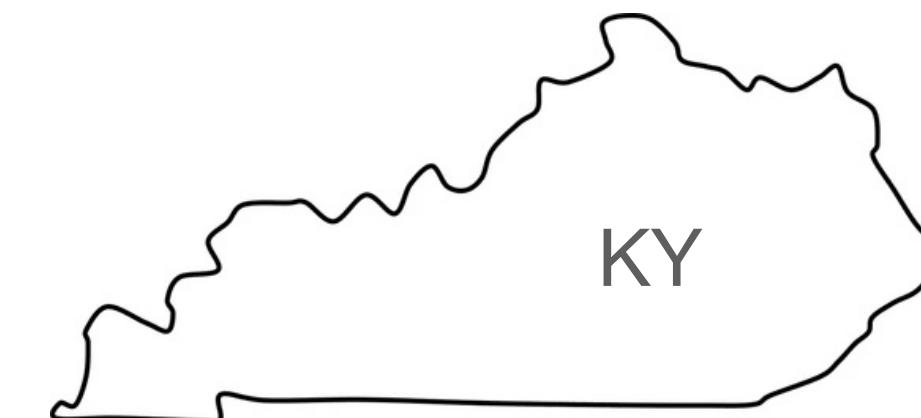


A collage of images. At the top left is a photo of two men smiling outdoors. To its right is a photo of two men indoors, one in a blue hoodie and the other in a yellow hoodie pointing at the camera. Below these are three YouTube Premium trial offer cards. The first card shows the YouTube logo and says "YouTube Premium Get YouTube without the ads" with "Skip trial" and "1 month free" buttons. The second card has a large "nium" watermark over it and asks "Wish videos kept playing when you closed the app?" with "Get background play with YouTube Premium" and "SKIP TRIAL" and "1 MONTH FREE" buttons. The third card shows a hand holding a smartphone displaying a similar offer with the same buttons. The bottom right corner of the collage contains the name "Mark Rober".

A Meandering Path



A Meandering Path



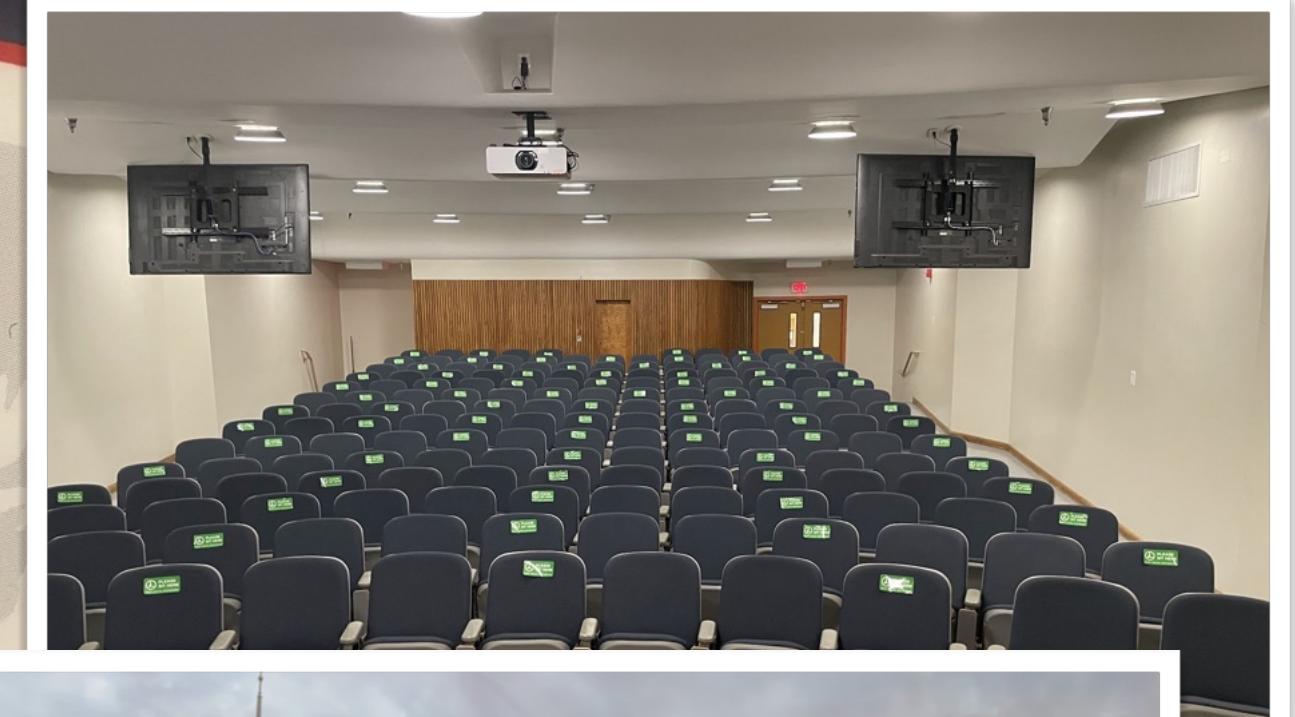
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Calendar
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Mock Interviews
Schedule
Staff
Syllabus

This site uses [Just the Docs](#), a documentation theme for Jekyll.

See the [Syllabus page](#) for more details on course policies.



Scott Re-emerges

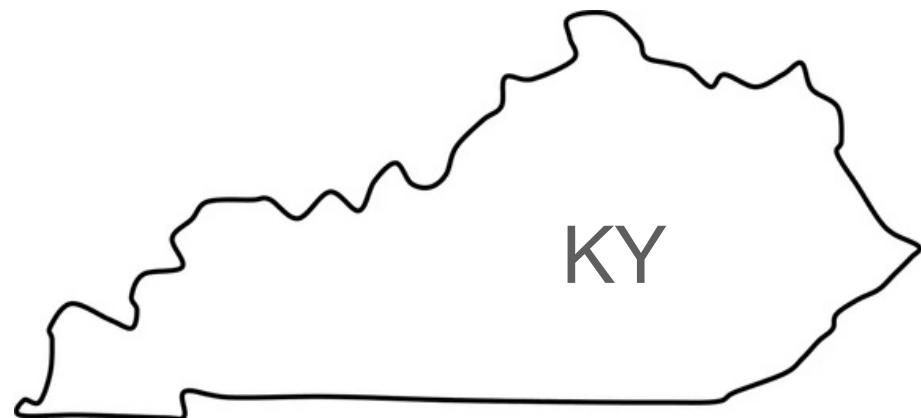
Sent a Merry Christmas email to Scott, mentioning being disillusioned with work.

Scott replied back encouraging me to try research at work, mentioned a group.

I started helping out a few hours a week in spare time.



A Meandering Path



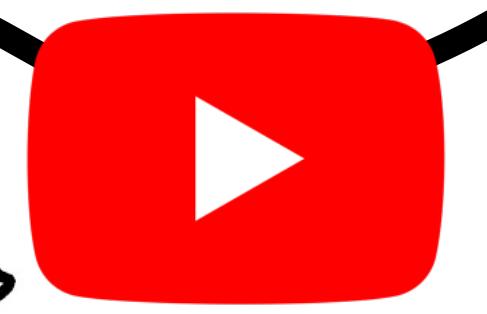
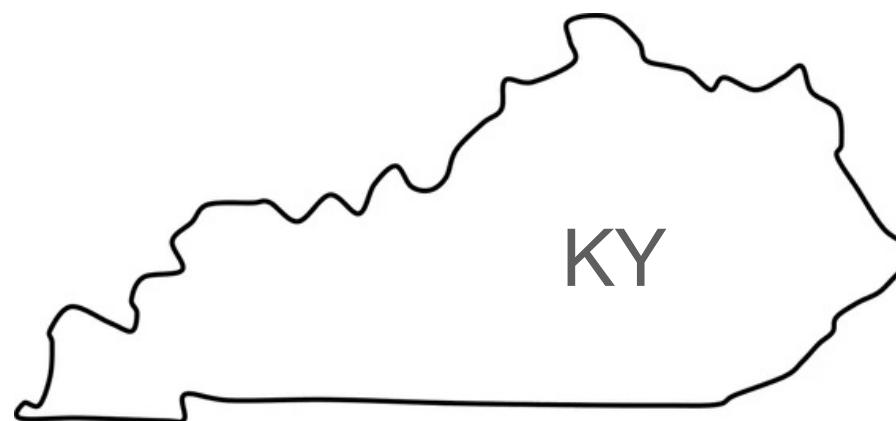
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Research at Google

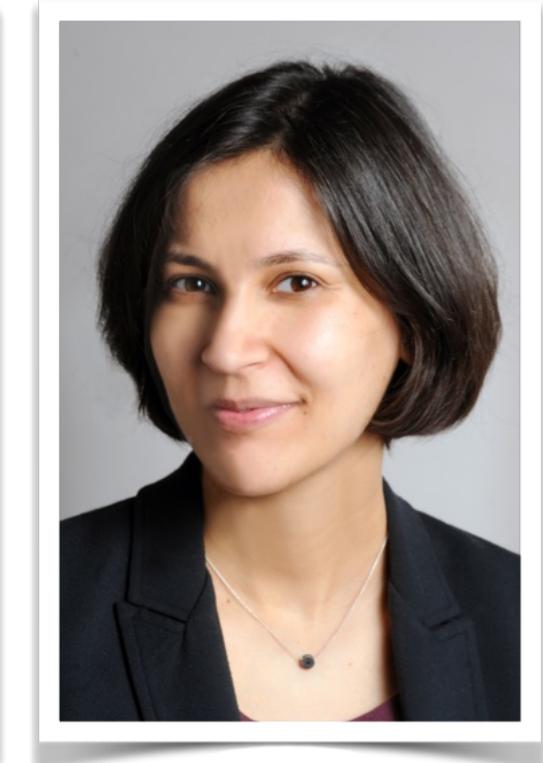
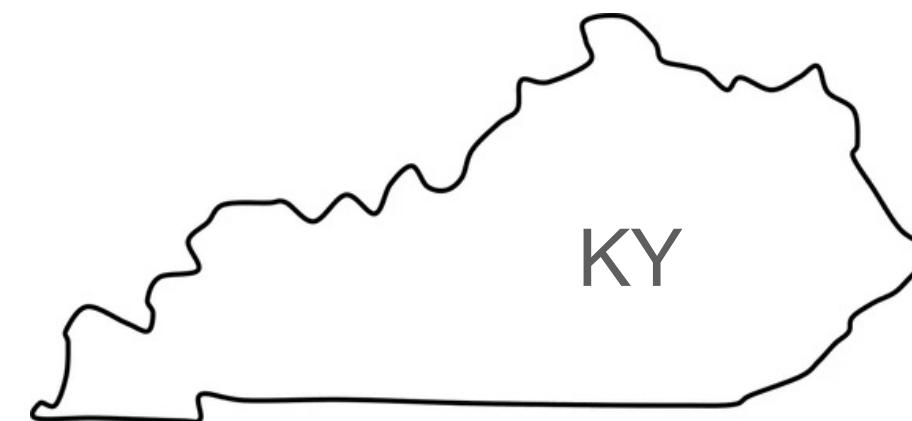
Act 3: Cal Bear Comes Home

A Meandering Path



Research at Google

A Meandering Path



Research at Google

PhD at UC Berkeley

Déjà Vu...

- Office in Soda Hall
- Research in Systems
 - Internet Architecture
 - Anything to do with How the Internet Works
 - Formal Verification
 - Proving that a system will *always* behave
 - Teaching CS
 - Lectured Intro to CS in Ethiopia last summer
 - Part-time work at Google as a Systems Researcher



Lessons Learned

The Challenges Don't Stop After Upperdivs

The Real World...

The transition to the real world:

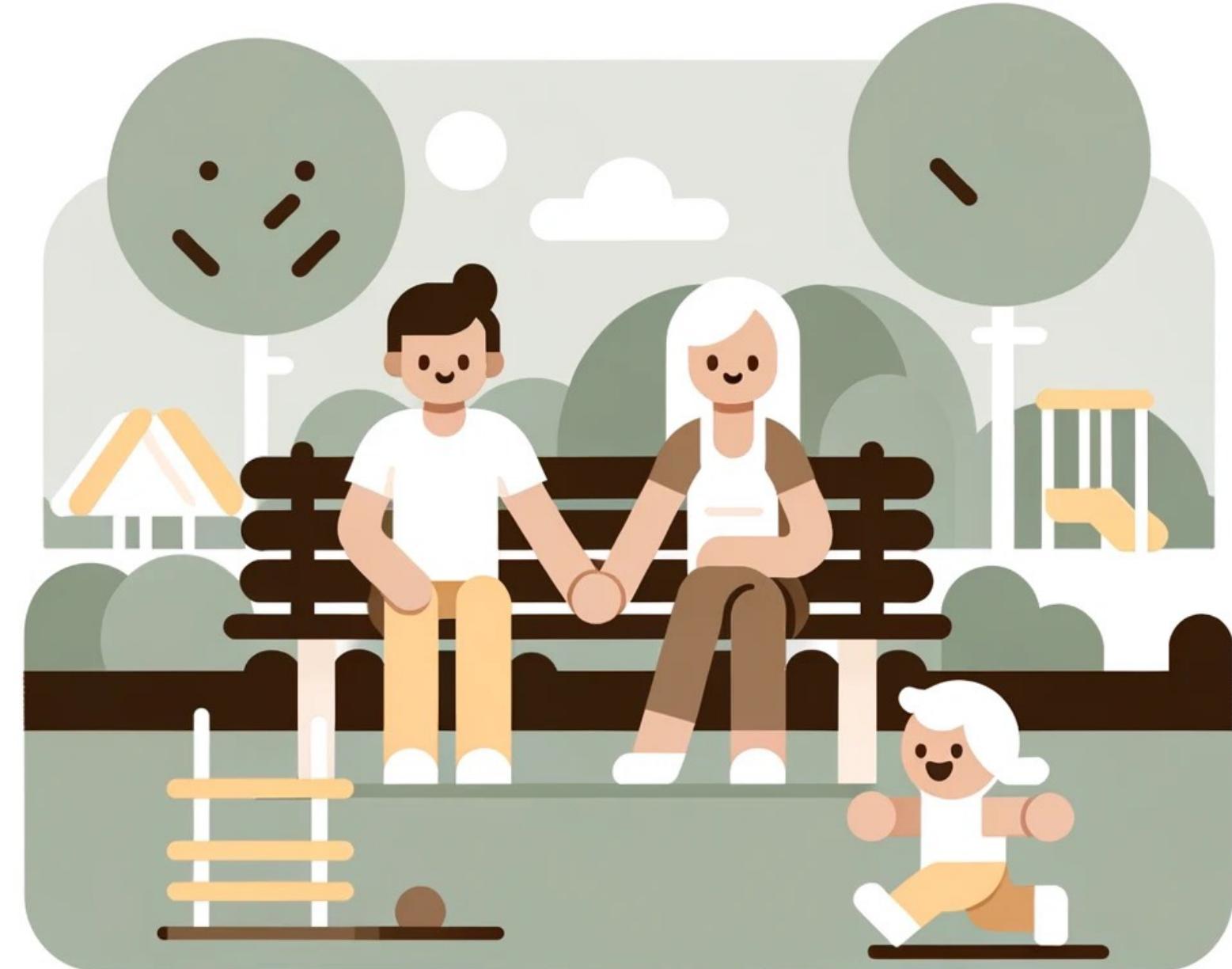
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 - Seductive at first, then difficult
 - Double edged sword; you can do anything, including nothing

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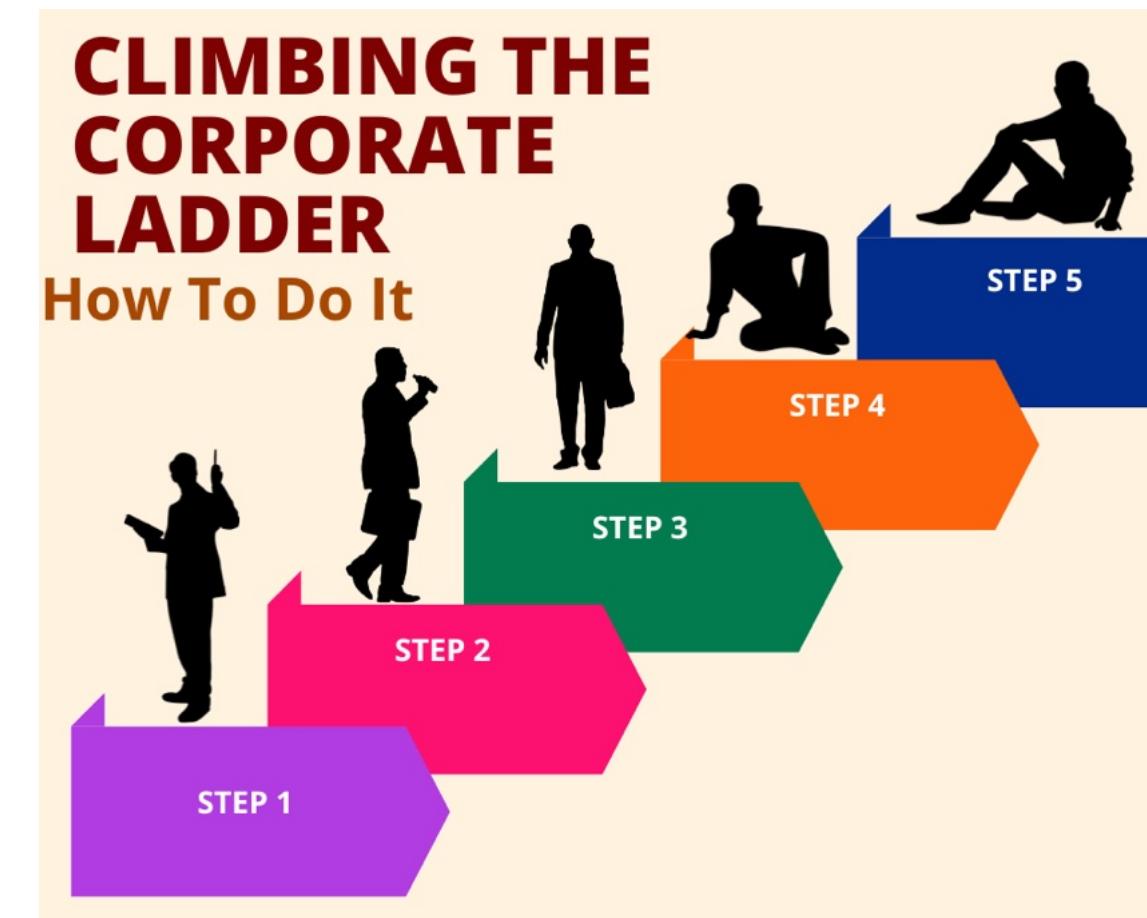
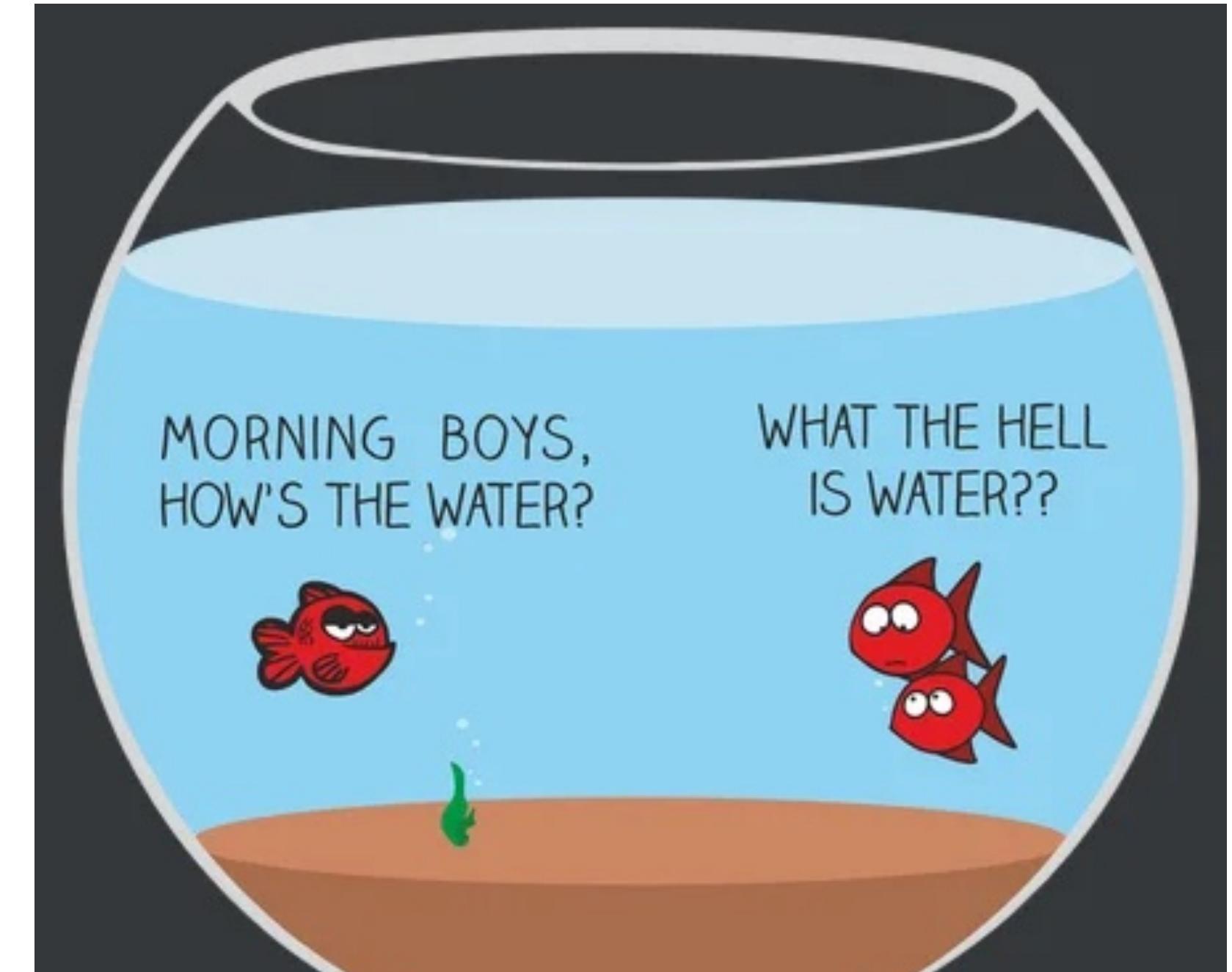


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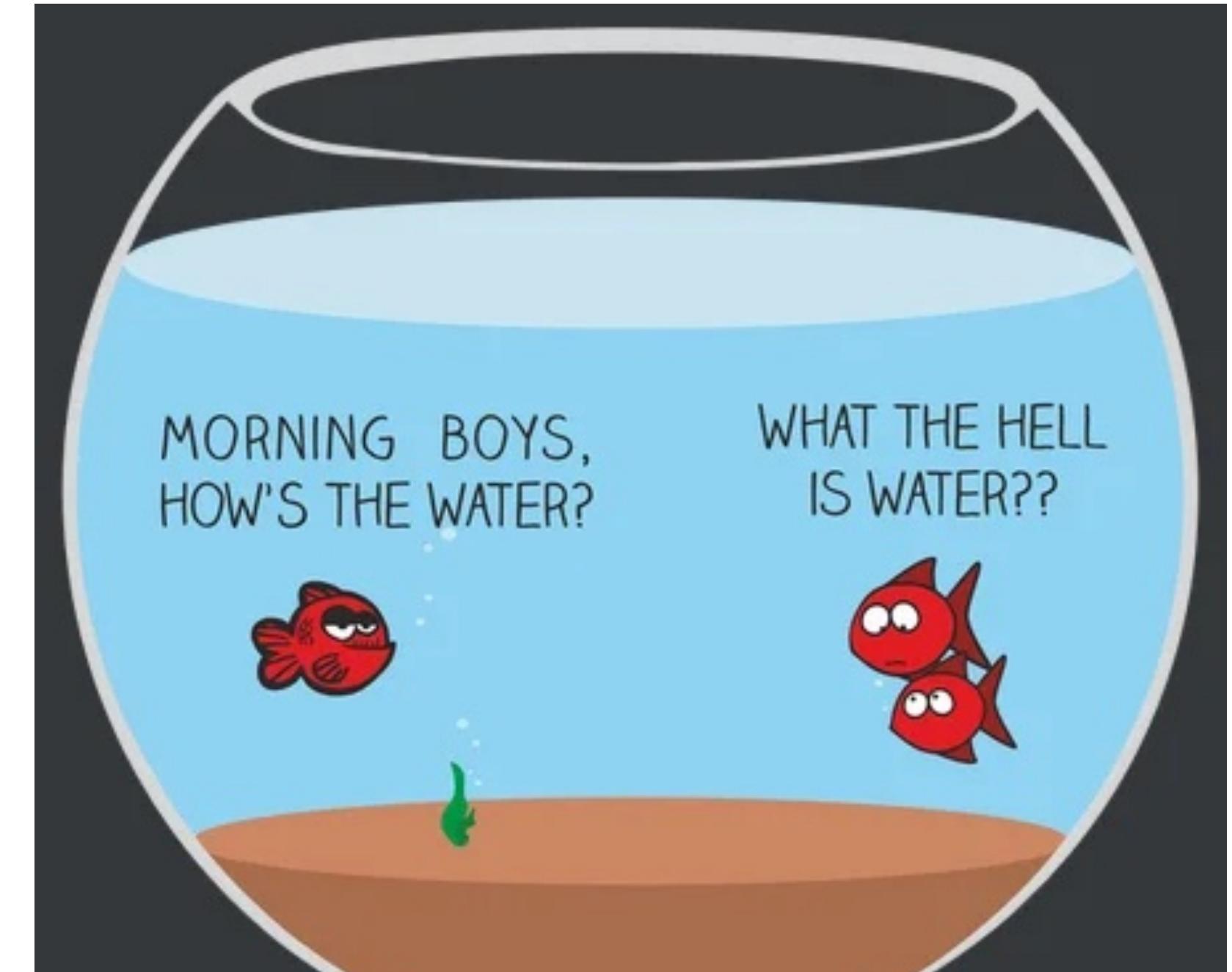


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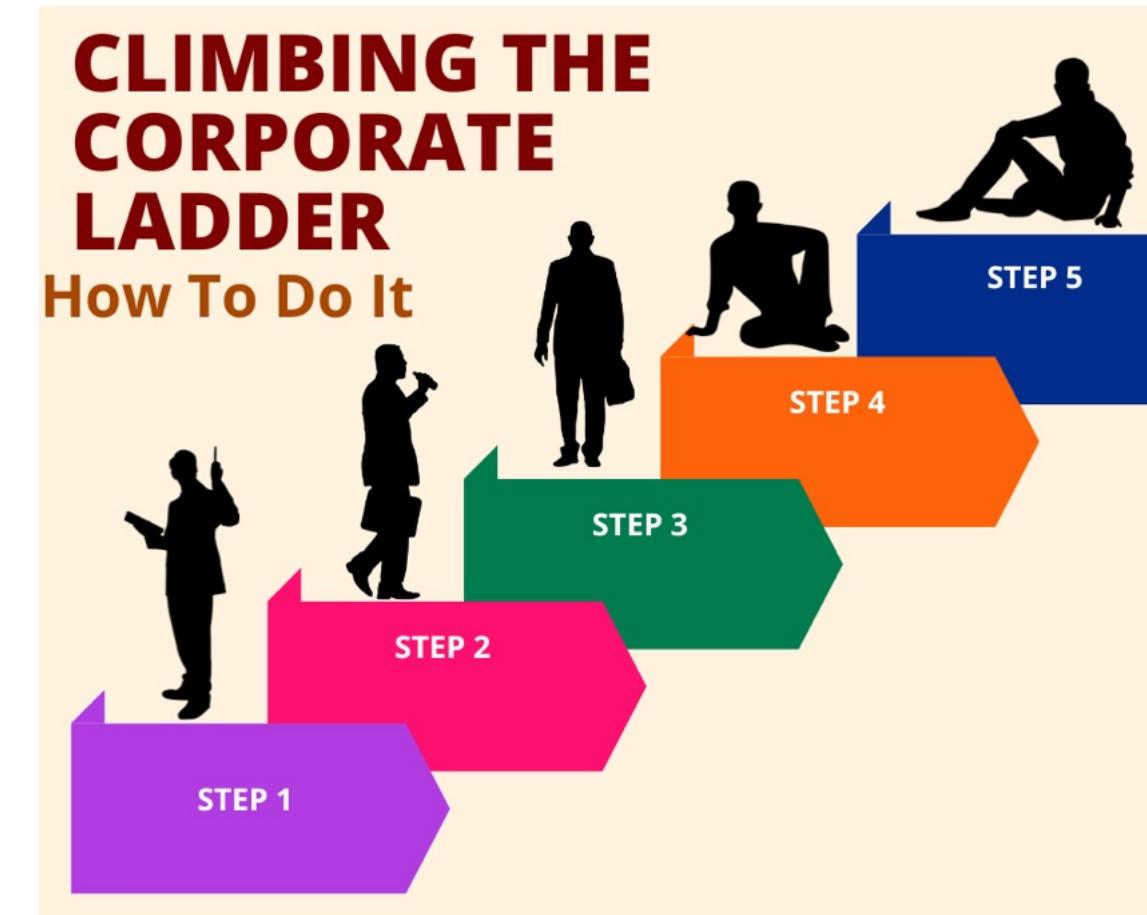
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Life becomes an exercise in figuring out *who* you are



Figuring Out Who You Are

- Continue to Explore
 - Early is the time to take risks, try things
- Seek out (and maintain) mentors
- Be open to connections, stay curious
 - Search for people driven by their passions



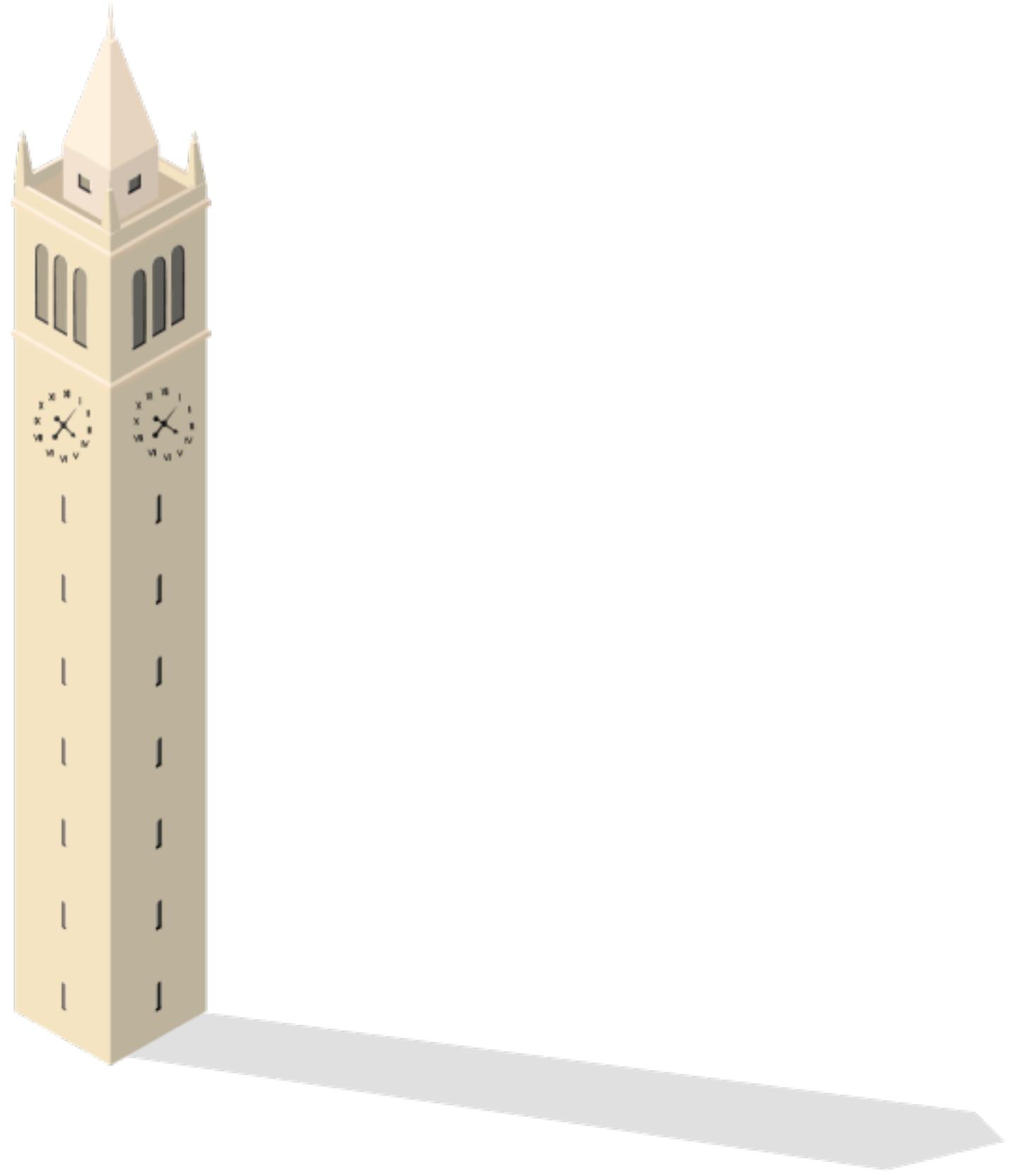
Agency is Key to Happiness

- Easy to start to feel boxed in or unhappy
 - Remember: you can make a new choice and pivot *any day*, and change your circumstances.
 - “Agency is realizing you can just DO things.”
- It’s *certainly* not too late

“The universe is 90% gates that look locked but simply push open.

The other 10% are actually locked but, if you ask nice, people will usually just let you in.”

Jake Cooper (not famous)



Go Bears!



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