

BOOK SUMMARY

THE 20% DOCTRINE

By Ryan Tate





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How Tinkering, Goofing Off, and Breaking the Rules at Work Drive Success in Business

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

In this bold business title, journalist Ryan Tate offers new insight for CEOs and employees alike, revealing how innovation is being fueled by passionate workers and the companies that give them the time to explore what they care about most. At companies like Google, employees are encouraged to spend 20 percent of their work time on projects they're personally interested in, producing, over the years, incredibly successful new products such as Gmail and AdSense. Now other companies have adopted the concept, providing a path to innovation and profits at a time of peril and uncertainty, and offering employees creative freedom at a time when many are feeling restless.

The 20% Doctrine shines a light on the thought leaders who are shaking up the corporate landscape, visionaries whose advice and experiences can deliver salvation for corporate America. With its emphasis on risk-taking and experimentation, *The 20% Doctrine* is an ambitious new road map for shareholders, CEOs, and every worker who is critical to his or her company's success.

YOU WILL LEARN:

- How to provide creative freedom to develop successful new projects.
- How to complete projects with limited time and resources.
- How the reuse of old systems can launch innovative products.
- Why fast iteration of innovations is key to success.
- How to connect with people's passions to drive innovation.
- A new process to recruit people to your 20 percent project.

INTRODUCTION

It's time for a change, and everyone knows it. The crises that have undermined the priesthood of American business are empowering what was once the underclass: the rebellious, the young, and the marginalized.

Businesses have begun to do things differently, and you can take advantage of that change. It first requires an understanding of Google's "20 percent time" policy.

So, what is 20 percent time? It was invented at Google and works like this: Employees at the Internet company are allowed, and sometimes encouraged, to devote one-fifth of their time to projects they

dreamed up themselves. It could be a day each week, four days each month, or two-and-a-half months each year. There are no hard-and-fast rules; the Googlers and ex-Googlers I've spoken to all made it clear that 20 percent time is, above all else, an *idea*, a practice that exists more as a widespread understanding than as a written policy.

3M was known for its "15 percent time" policy before Google was even incorporated. The policy was instituted after a 3M engineer defied an order from the company president to stop trying to create a superior "Scotch" masking tape. In 1925, the engineer finished Scotch Masking Tape, which would become one of the company's most iconic products.

Google's adaptation of 3M's 15 percent time is helping it flourish throughout Silicon Valley and well beyond. More and more organizations are experimenting with ways to empower individual workers to experiment, hoping to benefit from their innovative ideas in the process.

So-called Hack Days, where corporate programmers are encouraged to create a software prototype of their choosing within 24 hours, began as an attempt to spark 20 percent-style projects on the cheap. They have become wildly popular over the past five years, spreading to Google, Facebook, Twitter, eBay and other Silicon Valley powerhouses.

In another twist on the original 20 percent concept, some companies invite outsiders to participate in internal side projects, for example, by accepting open-source software patches from independent programmers, by inviting passionate citizens to become "citizen journalists," and by soliciting outside engineers to participate in company coding marathons.

After surveying an array of companies acting in the spirit of 20 percent time, I decided to home in on some of the more recent and successful among them, with an eye toward assembling a collection from a diverse cross-section of industries. Among them, I noticed a set of common tenets, which I'll refer to as the 20 Percent Doctrine:

Provide creative freedom. At their most basic level, systems like 20 percent time are about liberating people from the management structures that dictate their tasks the other 80 percent of the time. They provide mechanisms by which employees can develop ideas normally deemed outside the scope of their job or which are otherwise stifled.

Connect with people's passions. The things people are enthusiastic about and the things they work on every day sometimes diverge, to put it mildly. Twenty percent-style projects are a way to let employees work on projects they find emotionally resonant. Customers tend to notice when a product is built with passion by someone who cares.

Worse is better. People developing products in the margins — in the margins of their work week, in the periphery of their company — must cut some corners if they are ever going to finish anything. Time is tight. Money usually is, too. And, in the meantime, there are lots of skeptical co-workers and managers to convince. It's imperative to get something out the door. You can always improve upon it later.

Embrace reuse. Almost by definition, 20 percent projects are not about big-bang innovation. The best side projects tend to start as hacks, leveraging some existing product or technology in a clever new way.

Iterate quickly. Just as important as releasing something quickly is improving it quickly. Time and again, successful 20 percent-style projects have used iteration to snowball their way to success within the host company. Releasing a stream of improvements creates a positive feedback loop: Each improvement generates discussion, draws attention, and encourages supporters.

Communicate lessons as you learn them. The unspoken agenda of every 20 percent-style project is to become a full-blown company initiative. The creators of successful side projects are, thus, always selling. They are selling to their bosses, from whom they'd like resources; they are selling to other employees, from whom they'd like help; and they are selling to their existing helpers, whom they'd like to keep around.

Embrace outsiders. Side projects tend to be especially allergic to insular thinking and especially receptive to outside ideas. Selling and realizing a disruptive vision is not an easy thing to do, especially when the people you're selling to are the ones you're trying to disrupt. Outsiders can help. Help can come in the form of actual work, advice, publicity, or public affirmation.

SCRATCHING YOUR OWN ITCH

At 3 a.m. one day in Mountain View, Calif., a software engineer named Paul Buchheit made a promise to his manager, Google Vice President Marissa Mayer, with whom he had been working late at company headquarters. He pledged not to press forward with his idea for "creepy and weird" text ads based on the contents of one's email inbox. "I remember leaving," Mayer later said, "and when I walked out the door I stopped for a minute, and I remember I leaned back and I said, 'So, Paul, we agreed we're not exploring the whole ad thing right now, right?' And he was like, 'Yup, right.'"

Buchheit broke his word almost immediately. Over the next few hours, he hacked together a prototype of "the ad thing," a system that would read your email and automatically find a related ad to display next to it. The advertising system would fund Gmail, an advanced new email system he had invented. The next morning, his co-workers saw what he had created, and they called it blasphemy. Mayer thought about ordering Buchheit, asleep at home, to drag himself out of bed and pull the plug on his creation.

Luckily, she didn't. Buchheit's system, called AdSense, makes Google around \$10 billion in revenue each year. You've probably seen AdSense's trademark blue-and-white ads in page margins all over the Web.

From Rogue Project to Public Demand

Through his long struggle to launch AdSense and its companion product, Gmail, which boasts hundreds of millions of users, Buchheit transformed Google from a company narrowly focused on

search to one with a bigger vision of itself, a company expanding quickly into new markets by following the passions of its employees. The mild-mannered engineer proved to Google high command the value of letting programmers push the company into new markets, a practice codified internally as "20 percent time" and now widely emulated.

Gmail and AdSense addressed issues that, first and foremost, bothered Buchheit. Slowly but surely, they grew to address the needs of Buchheit's immediate co-workers. Then Buchheit set a goal of making 100 Googlers happy with his creations. Only later were they released to the public. By putting himself at the center of his development process, Buchheit created products beloved by millions of users to say nothing of Google's shareholders.

Build for Yourself

If you're trying to launch your own side project, the takeaway from Gmail and AdSense is that before you can sell the project to your boss, you first need to make something you yourself would buy into. Scratching your own itch provides the motivation to work on something above and beyond your regular duties.

It took just six months to launch AdSense to the public. The ad platform debuted in June 2003 as a stand-alone product and advertising widget that any publisher — from a lone blogger to a giant media company — could attach to any Web page. It generates around \$10 billion per year, making it Google's second-biggest source of revenue after AdWords. AdSense's original reason for being, Gmail, launched on April 1, 2004, after a total of two-and-a-half years of development. Gmail became the fastest-growing Webmail service and now claims upwards of 200 million users. All because one determined engineer wanted to solve a problem he was having around the office.

Another thing Buchheit did was to manage horizontally rather than just up the chain of command. In other words, he effectively reached out to his peers for ideas, feedback, and support, and he recruited some of them to his cause.

On the one hand, sell your vision and the awesomeness of whatever you're working on. On the other hand, don't hide the fact that you need some help. Your best potential allies won't be scared off by that; they'll be excited.

20 PERCENT ON THE CHEAP

Today, there's no doubt Flickr is a brilliant product; the world's first big photo website, it is home to more than 6 billion pictures and made a reported \$30 million for its creators. But Flickr was almost shot down before it could take off. "The vote was actually tied," said Caterina Fake, remembering the referendum she and partner Stewart Butterfield called to determine whether their broke start-up should build what became Flickr. "There were six of us voting, but Stewart and I guilted Eric Costello into voting with us, so we got him to switch sides. ... There was one guy who didn't like the Flickr idea and had voted against it, so he went to work on another [company] similar to classmates.com."

The divisive Flickr vote is just one illustration of how much more contentious it can be to launch a 20 percent-style project at a start-up: Resources are constrained; there is no capital, staff, or time to spare; and there is no margin for wrong turns. By consuming precious attention, Flickr represented both hope and a potentially lethal challenge to the Canadian video game company where it was born.

But tight resources ended up being precisely what made Flickr successful. An almost desperate hunger to win and win quickly, to accumulate users and revenue, motivated the Flickr team to listen closely to their users. A lack of money and a lack of other advantages opened them to the ad hoc and unconventional. The masterful way they turned desperation into a new beginning has since been given a name, "pivoting," and it has been widely embraced among Silicon Valley start-ups, including by the people who built Twitter.

Flickr was born as a last resort. "We were out of money," Fake told me.

She had begun her start-up a year and a half prior, with husband Stewart Butterfield and their programmer friend Jason Classon. Fake and Butterfield's honeymoon had just ended, and a sense of revelry suffused their new venture, which they dubbed "Ludicorp," after ludus, the Latin word for "play."

Ludicorp's sole product, a social Web adventure called Game Neverending, was inspired by the Internet games Fake and Butterfield had played as research for a kids' website Butterfield built for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.

Game Neverending was a tough sell; people weren't yet used to Web games or nonlinear adventures. But venture capitalists were even more confused by Game Neverending than were consumers. Most games were sold on CDs or cartridges; Game Neverending was web-based. Most games involved straightforward missions and goals; Game Neverending was nonlinear and exploratory. Fundraising was as grueling as it was fruitless.

But there was an idea floating around the office of how the company might be saved. From their boredom, an idea emerged: Why not spin out the instant-messaging technology already baked into Game Neverending and do something novel with it? Instant-messaging programs were, at the time, all about text. There seemed to be a need for a program that transplanted Game Neverending's immersively graphical way of socializing into the real world. This idea, which ultimately evolved into Flickr, was the basis for Ludicorp's fateful referendum.

The Pivot

What Flickr was considering with its referendum was a "pivot" — a complete reorientation of a company around a new product or idea. The concept of the pivot has gained currency in Silicon Valley in recent years as tech advances continue to push down the cost of retooling. It's unlikely you'll be able to get your company to pivot, especially if (unlike Ludicorp) it's got more than a handful of employees. But the idea is still valuable. You should be willing to pivot your side project when the conditions are right; if you're getting nowhere with your old idea and seem to have stumbled across



one that's better. A side project pivot is especially well advised if you've attracted a significant number of team members and if they're enthusiastic about the change. As Fake and Butterfield showed, there are few better ways to get behind the creative freedom of your team than to put your future direction in their hands.

Reuse

Just as Buchheit had done with Gmail and AdSense, the Flickr team was adapting old work in a new and innovative way. This ethic of reuse is common among 20 percent-style projects. That's why the 20 Percent Doctrine says to build a prototype quickly ("worse is better") and to iterate new versions fast. Existing work contributes directly to the former by giving you a head start and to the latter because it's easier to work on and improve something you're already deeply familiar with.

THE RISE OF HACK DAY

In early 2005, a start-up called JotSpot found itself with a serous case of Google envy. The maker of corporate wiki software badly wanted to emulate 20 percent time — to empower employees to follow their passions, to make the workplace more intrinsically rewarding, and to figure out radical new ways of helping its customers. But JotSpot was just seven months old, small and perpetually shorthanded. All its efforts fizzled. "In a start-up, it's very hard to introduce 20 percent time," former JotSpot VP and current Googler Kevin Norton told me. "You're always under the gun, and everybody's doing a little bit of everything, so 20 percent time ends up being 0 percent time, even with the best of intentions." JotSpot tried a bunch of different things; none of them worked. It seemed like every time the company allocated time for experimentation, something urgent would come up at the last minute.

JotSpot's Google envy persisted unabated until CEO Joe Kraus spotted an intriguing blog post out of Sydney, Australia. Like Kraus, Mike Cannon-Brookes ran a small software company, Atlassian. And like Kraus, he was fascinated by 20 percent time. "It's very intriguing," he wrote, but "letting your engineers run around wild one day a week is very scary indeed to any manager." So the Aussie entrepreneur came up with a compromise with his staff over lunch one day: His engineers could run wild once rather than one day per week, creating a prototype in eight hours and demonstrating it to the rest of the company. It would be a pressure cooker version of 20 percent time. Referencing the concept of one-day delivery, Cannon-Brookes called his event "FedEx Day — a mini, experimental, heavily bastardized version of Google's 20 percent playtime." He was thrilled with the results, he said, which included a task list maker, a flowchart generator, and tools for updating and debugging Atlassian's software suite.

Krause was sold, and less than two weeks after Cannon-Brookes's blog post, JotSpot staged its version of the event, rechristened as a "hackathon."

Hack days are like 20 percent time on crack. They are cheaper, higher-pressure venues for employees to work on their own ideas.

For your own side project, Hack Days, as we'll see, provide a great environment for getting an initial design off the ground and for collecting feedback and inspiration. They give you a hard deadline and a shot of adrenaline when you need a burst of creativity. They can also help you get perspective and support from people outside your company.

A SIDE PROJECT: SCHOOL RISES IN THE BRONX

There wasn't much structure in Joan Sullivan's household. With 10 children in her semirural New Jersey family, things could get chaotic. Sullivan's eccentric father actively encouraged this; the Jesuit priest turned Gestalt psychologist turned high-stakes poker player didn't believe in setting rules. There was no bedtime. He didn't believe in traditional schools, either, reasoning that they stifled creativity. He encouraged the kids to attend an anarchic "free school" and romp around on the homestead farm the family tended near Princeton. "He was constantly trying to remove me from school," Sullivan told me.

Sullivan's father didn't succeed in making her allergic to schools, but he did give her a free spirit, a sharp mind, and an ability to meet intricate challenges in an anarchic environment. She would go on, starting at 29 years of age, to create one of New York's most successful high schools right in America's poorest congressional district.

Breaking Constraints of Bureaucracy

Sullivan's school, the Bronx Academy of Letters, stands as an example of how a large organization can graduate beyond conventional 20 percent time, creating a pipeline that allows gifted employees to turn their experimental ideas into stand-alone organizations within the larger institution. The New York City school system looks very different from Google, but under reform-minded schools chancellor Joel Klein it pursued a similar management philosophy. Klein facilitated the creation of many small schools with a diverse array of academic themes and clustered these schools in the city's poorest neighborhoods, not unlike Google's multitude of small fluid teams, its broad range of projects, 20 percent, and otherwise.

Klein gave his small schools freedom to operate outside the tightly regimented rules that covered the city's older, larger schools. Much like 20 percent time projects at Google, they were driven by the visions of individuals; Klein gave principals like Sullivan wide latitude. They could hire and promote without as much regard for seniority. They could allocate their own budgets. And they could design their curriculum. Like 20 percent of project leaders at Google, his principals operated with minimal oversight. Klein held them accountable with school report cards, based on relative improvements (or lack thereof) in student test scores during the time they attended the school. "We transformed the principal from an agent of the bureaucracy to the CEO of his or her school," was how Klein put it in one interview.

Of course, the stakes were higher in the New York public schools than at Google. Children's futures were on the line. So New York took a more developed approach to hatching innovation. Principals like Sullivan worked full-time, as did their teachers; for them, the school was no 20 percent time project.

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But the staff enjoyed the same sort of devolved control that is the hallmark of 20 percent time, and as organizations, the schools were effectively side projects within the New York school system. Among its most successful was the school started by Sullivan.

Audacious Confidence

Urban Assembly, the nonprofit that set up the high school where Sullivan taught, was going to create another school. Sullivan spoke with Urban Assembly's CEO to see if she could get involved. Sure, he said. But the proposal was due in two weeks.

Sullivan hesitated. She was young, inexperienced in education, and not even legal for the job of principal. It was audacious of her, with only two years as a teacher under her belt, to try to establish a brand-new academy. The idea of starting a school was, in her words, "crazy."

The school Sullivan applied to create was focused on reading and writing. She believed deeply that having the ability to communicate was a prerequisite to other academic accomplishments. Many of the city's other schools had narrowed the curriculum, discarding or reducing elements like, say, arts and athletics. Sullivan wanted to aim higher — to emphasize not just graduating students but graduating them into top colleges and exposing them to a broad curriculum. A school of letters was just broad enough to accommodate these lofty goals while being sufficiently focused for the Urban Assembly.

Daunting as it was for a teacher with barely two years in the system to attempt to launch a new school, or for a well-connected Ivy Leaguer and member of a distinguished literary dynasty to try to do so in one of New York's roughest neighborhoods, Sullivan pressed forward. This took extraordinary boldness, a boldness that has become the hallmark of Sullivan's career and, indeed, her life. The girl who defied her father's wishes to attend primary and secondary schools, and then Yale, became the woman establishing a school playing by its own, very different set of rules. For a 29-year-old, Sullivan had tremendously outsized ambitions.

This is the sort of confidence it takes to get noticed when you're working in the margins, when you're trying something different on a small scale — Sullivan started with just one grade — in an obscure corner of a larger institution. For people who believe in their idea enough to turn it into a passion project, Sullivan's confidence should be a template. What's the point of investing all your spare moments in something and then being meek about it? You need an obvious zeal for what you're doing and the ambition to seize big, daunting opportunities if you want to make your passion inspiring and contagious.

THE HUFFINGTON POST BRINGS 20 PERCENT TO THE MASSES

Until now, we've looked at employee side projects. In this chapter, we examine something different: a project that harnessed the spare time of people far beyond the host company, of thousands of volunteer contributors across the country. It was 20 percent time on a massive scale. Participants included students, teachers, actors, and computer technicians.

The project, Huffington Post's Off the Bus, was the first instance in which the idea of citizen journalism, in which amateurs report stories for free and bring the concerns of ordinary people into the news, was made to really work. By the end of the 2008 election, Off the Bus had changed media and politics forever.

Much of the credit goes to Amanda Michel, who commanded Off the Bus's daily operations. Her real-world experience organizing Internet volunteers for two presidential candidates helped her realize the vision of countless starry-eyed citizen journalism utopians who had come before. "Amanda's work on Off the Bus helped transform journalism in two big ways," said Clay Shirky, the New York University lecturer and Internet culture expert. "First, she showed that citizen journalism was not just possible, but practical, and, second, she showed that amateurs produce different kinds of value than the pros."

Adaptive Strategy

Michel's breakout success had a lot to do with the fact that she was a fish out of water at the Huffington Post, working in the cultural rift between journalism and politics. HuffPo's newsrooms in New York and Washington, D.C., operate in isolation from the publication's unpaid bloggers, creating stories through individual staff without coordination with outsiders. Off the Bus, in contrast, used a small handful of paid editors to orchestrate the efforts of thousands of amateur citizen journalists. Michel wanted to get as far away from the traditional newsroom model as possible. A long string of prior citizen journalism efforts had failed because they encouraged volunteers to become like unpaid full-timers, a fantasy Michel dubbed the Ideal Citizen Journalist, who can work all day, interview like a pro, turn in crystal-clear copy before deadline, and do it all for free.

Michel thought it was smarter to adapt journalism to the lives of the volunteers than to ask the volunteers to remake their lives for journalism. That was how it worked in politics, where volunteer coordination was the norm rather than the exception. Michel's vision was to break down the production of news articles into distinct phases that could accept small contributions from an array of people.

Create an Experience

The transformative spirit of the project was reflected in its odd title, Off the Bus. It was at once a nod to and a rebuke of the tight-knit culture of political journalists described in the book *The Boys on the Bus*, a behind-the-scenes look at pack journalism in the 1972 election. Unlike the boys on the bus, who rode around the country with campaign entourages, Off the Bus's correspondents would remain in their hometowns, where no carpetbagging political reporter could match their knowledge of local issues. "We wanted them to do what journalists weren't positioned to do, or were too lazy to do, or structurally couldn't do, to take advantage of opportunities not afforded to journalists," Michel said.

This emphasis on fresh voices made recruiting Off the Bus's most crucial activity. The project started with a big advantage: the Huffington Post itself. By soliciting volunteers on the HuffPo front page and throughout the site's email newsletters, Jay Rosen and Ariana Huffington bestowed upon Michel a

massive initial pool of recruits. "Immediately — literally immediately — we had a thousand people," Rosen told me.

A big pool of leads is no guarantee of success. Off the Bus wouldn't have been possible if Michel and her team hadn't created an amazing experience for their contributors. A pivotal lesson of Off the Bus is that a 20 percent project rises and falls on how well it provides such an experience.

Michel told her volunteers, repeatedly, that she didn't want them to imitate the mainstream media. Where old-school political reporters were trained to maintain a cold, objective voice and to hold the campaign at arm's length, Off the Bus contributors were instructed to be subjective, open about their feelings, and even, in the case of the Grassroots Correspondents, to get directly involved in electioneering. "We were always trying to break form," Michel told me. And she showed her volunteers how to do that, highlighting and promoting articles that embodied the fresh approach.

A Blueprint for Recruiting

Amanda Michel's recruiting process is an excellent blueprint for seducing people to help on any 20 percent-style project. In abstract terms, Michel did a handful of simple but highly effective things:

Cast a wide net. Michel didn't limit herself to people with experience in journalism or politics.

Ask specifically. Michel never beat around the bush, even when soliciting help from an audience of thousands.

Show them a good time. Michel tried to ensure all volunteers had a fun first experience, even if that meant depriving experienced volunteers of plum assignments.

Get close. Even with thousands of volunteers, Michel found ways to talk to people individually on the phone.

Corral the elite. Michel put a positive spin on asking people for additional help when she created teams with elite status.

HOW A TOP CHEF STARTED OVER

By 2006, Thomas Keller was riding high. His new restaurant in New York, Per Se, had just received three Michelin stars. His flagship restaurant in Yountville, Calif., The French Laundry, was revered as the best restaurant in the country, maybe the world. His thriving chain of French bistros, Bouchon, had spread from Napa Valley to Las Vegas. But something was missing amid the jammed reservation lines, 500-plus employees, and high-tech videoconferencing screens that linked his New York and Napa Valley kitchens.

Keller looked back fondly to his more obscure days. When The French Laundry first opened in 1994, for example, there was barely enough money for a fresh coat of paint and some scraps of carpet; the

chairs were donated, the silverware was secondhand, and the restaurant made do without a single sauté pan ("we sautéed in pots," Keller later said). He was ready for something new and, at the same time, ready for something very old. "I wanted to have a small staff that worked together and had a real bonding experience with one another," Keller told me, " a throwback to the days when a five-day-per-week restaurant was normal. ... Kind of like The French Laundry when I first bought it."

Keller's nostalgia would soon lead to the launch of a new restaurant, Ad Hoc. Intended to be a temporary side project, it flowered quickly and profitably into a mecca for California foodies and savvy wine-country tourists. Later, it became a franchise, with a line of products at Williams-Sonoma, a cookbook that sold 235,000 copies and went into 12 printings, and an eye toward expanding to other duties.

Embracing Constraints

One key takeaway from Keller's Ad Hoc experience, for other 20 percent time projects, is the importance of using constraints, especially time and financial constraints, to bust through perfectionism. Because Ad Hoc was intended to live a short time, Keller simply had to let go of certain details, no easy feat for such a famously obsessive chef. In this way, Ad Hoc had something in common with tech projects like Flickr, which were similarly energized by tight deadlines.

Hearkening back to childhood food memories and touching on fondness for family and staff camaraderie helped Keller fire up his employees. Ad Hoc succeeded in the marketplace, meanwhile, by resonating emotionally with customers. Keller and his team selected dishes by identifying "reference points" in customers' lives that dishes would touch on.

The service was stripped down, but at the same time, it added something to the mood. "It's meant to be like you're at home," Keller told me. "And you put the wine on the table and, yeah, you grab it, but you serve the person next to you and you pass it around. Same thing with the water, the food ... It's a point of social engagement."

In the dining room, Keller's team just applied a clean coat of paint and furnished it with secondhand items bought at a consignment store. Their butcher's block was an antique Keller had lying around at home; the maître d' stand was pulled out of storage, having been discarded from The French Laundry; and culinary director Jeffrey Cerciello picked up additional items at an antiques store and at a secondhand San Francisco shop named Cookin', famous for its surly service and "dusty," "dirty" and "precarious" piles of esoteric kitchen supplies, as described on Yelp.com. The bare-bones approach to Ad Hoc's interior was very much like the Spartan opening of The French Laundry.

The ethic of thrifty reuse at Ad Hoc mirrored the way Gmail, AdSense and Flickr were launched by slightly adapting old code (a discussion search engine, a porn filter and a video game chat system, respectively). Reusing old tools is a useful way to satisfy the 20 Percent Doctrine tenet of launching a prototype as quickly as possible, as Keller has discovered.



If Keller can find corners he's comfortable cutting in a pinch, you can, too. The best way to find those shortcuts is by using a forcing mechanism like the ones Keller used. Embrace small budgets, embrace tight deadlines, and embrace the idea that what you make today will soon be undone, either because it's temporary or because it will be iteratively improved into something unrecognizably better.

CONCLUSION

We're seeing the flowering of a movement toward more creative freedom in corporate workplaces.

For all that's known about how to develop a successful side project, it is early yet in the spread of the 20 Percent Doctrine. All the time, we're seeing new vehicles for tapping into workers' autonomous creativity.

More and more large organizations, like National Public Radio and Condé Nast, are finding they can successfully inject the energy and creative freedom of start-ups into their teams using 20 Percent Doctrine principles. And why couldn't they? If a massive urban school district can devolve creative freedom, certainly they can, too. If a famously meticulous, 56-year-old chef can learn the art of the hack, then they can as well. If some of Silicon Valley's most hardcore nerds can turn a bit punk rock, surely they can follow their lead. As more and more 20 Percent Doctrine projects succeed, more people will try to follow their examples, and we should end up with more innovation, creativity, emotional touchpoints, and, indeed, more humanity in the modern workplace. And that will be a true blessing.

This summary is not intended as a replacement for the original book, and all quotes are credited to the above-mentioned author and publisher.