

Tanner Wortham

# What the Corps Calls Leading Marines We Call Agility



<https://worth.am>

# Who am I?

Started in tech in 2006

Began writing and speaking in 2016

Established my own practice in 2023



Who am I?



Who am I?



# *Corps Business*

**Make tempo a weapon.** Controlling the pace can exhaust and demoralize the competition.

**Aim for the 70% solution.** It's better to decide quickly on an imperfect plan than to roll out a perfect plan after it's too late.

**Focus on the small team.** Most critical tasks are accomplished at the lowest levels. Anything done to make them more effective have a large payoff.



slido



**Do you believe the Marine Corps has something to teach us about agility?**

① Click **Present with Slido** or install our [Chrome extension](#) to activate this poll while presenting.

# Why Does It Matter?

Everything is connected to everything else.



<https://worth.am>

# Why Does It Matter?





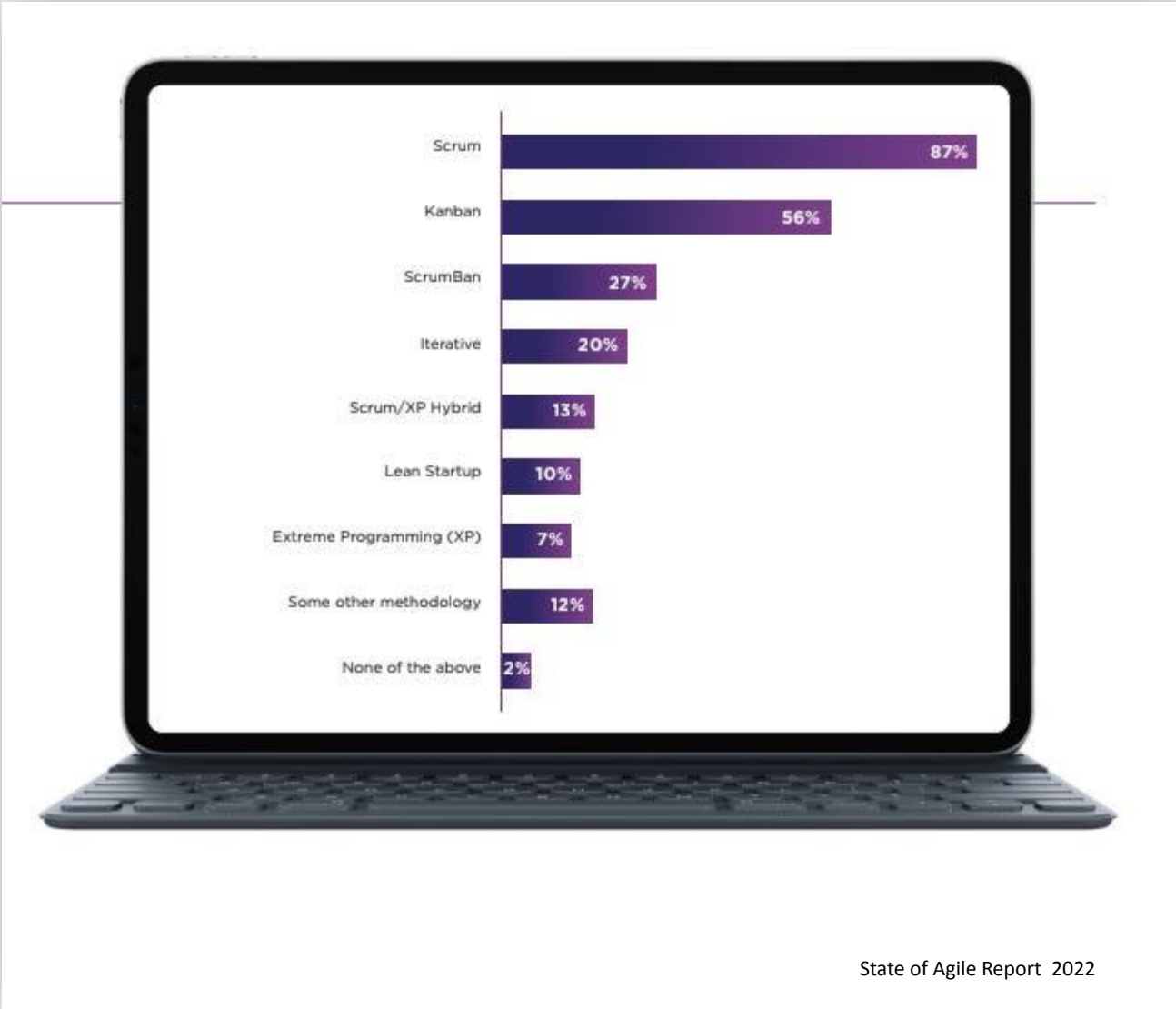
# Why Does It Matter?

America does not need a Marine Corps. It wants one.



<https://worth.am>

## Sentiment in 2022:



## Sentiment in 2024:



**63%**

According to this year's survey, a resounding majority of team-level Agile users — 63% — follow the Scrum methodology. That's hardly surprising: since our first survey in 2006, Scrum has been the most popular Agile methodology.

State of Agile Report 2024



<https://worth.am>

# Principle #1

Build Authority On Demand Into the Hierarchy



<https://worth.am>

U.S. Department of Defense

News Multimedia Spotlights About


# FIRE TEAM

Commanded By:



**CORPORAL**

Includes three Marines and a team leader, usually a corporal.



Navigation arrows: < >

Left sidebar menu:

- FIRE TEAM
- SQUAD
- PLATOON
- COMPANY
- BATTALION
- REGIMENT
- MARINE DIVISION
- MARINE CORPS



# How's This Rule of Three Useful?

Offers an abstraction for faster decision making

Establishes a mentorship pyramid



# Five Paragraph Order

Situation

Mission

Execution

Administration & Logistics

Command & Signals



# Five Paragraph Order

What is important?  
Who is important?  
Why is it important?



## What's Important?

1st Squad: on order, attack and destroy the enemy observation post SW of the objective to prevent the enemy from interfering with the company's assault. You are the main effort.





## Who's Important?

1st Squad: on order, attack and destroy the enemy observation post SW of the objective to prevent the enemy from interfering with the company's assault. **You are the main effort.**



## Why Is It Important?

These observation posts provide critical information to the enemy that may compromise our attack. Use all necessary assets to destroy your targets quickly. The end state is the destruction of the observation posts to rob the enemy of information and distract them from the primary assault.



## The Story of Atanas

PM for a highly effective team

Critical to the team's success

Unavailable for nearly two months

Solved through deliberate delegation



Try This

Epic champions – and more than just in name



Try This

Purposefully skip a meeting where you're key



Try This

Always limit priorities to three



# Principle #2

Reward Failure



## Principle #2

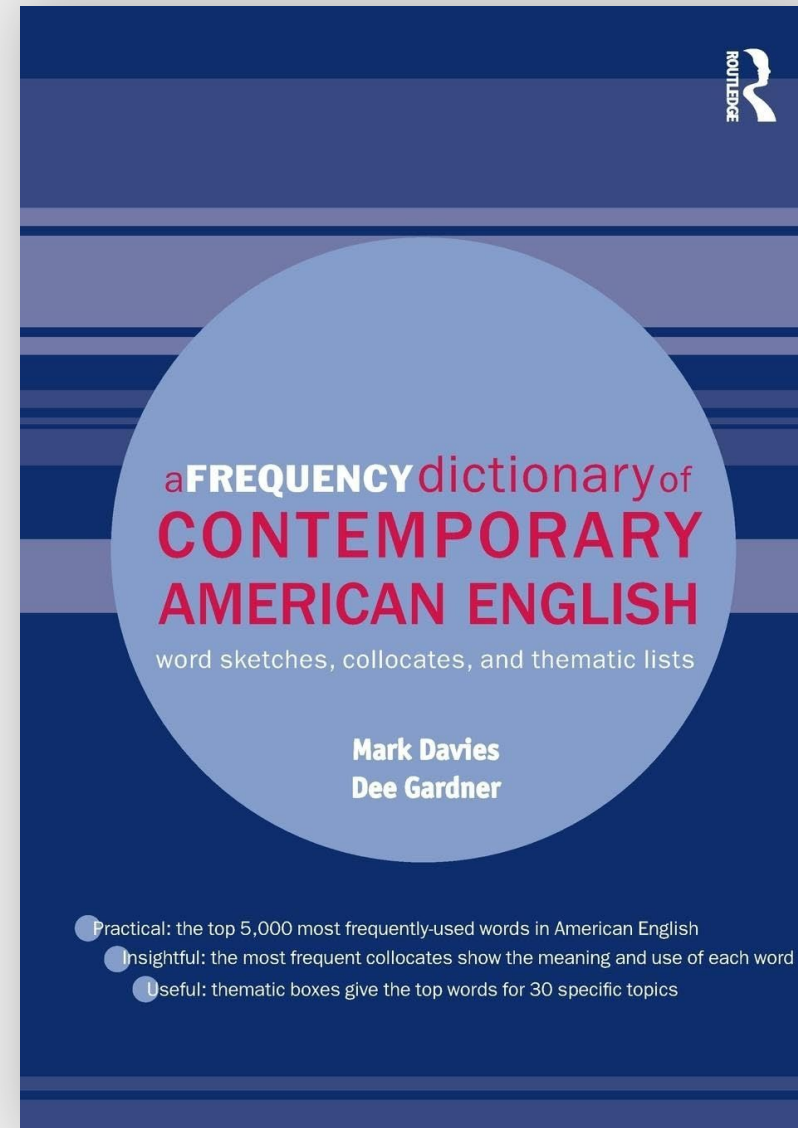
~~Reward Failure~~

Face Toward the Problem







We Say “Yes”  
More Often  
Than “No”





We Avoid  
Hard Things

	<i>Rash improved</i>	<i>Rash worsened</i>
	223	75
	107	21



We Avoid  
Hard Things

	<i>Rash improved</i>		<i>Rash worsened</i>
	223	3x	75
	107	5x	21



We Avoid  
Hard Things

	<i>Crime increased</i>	<i>Crime decreased</i>
	223	75
	107	21



Remember  
Wipeout?



# Leadership Reaction Course



No  
Obstacle  
Course?

Good initiative. Bad judgement.



Mike  
Versus  
Padraic





Try This

Reward all who embrace their mistakes

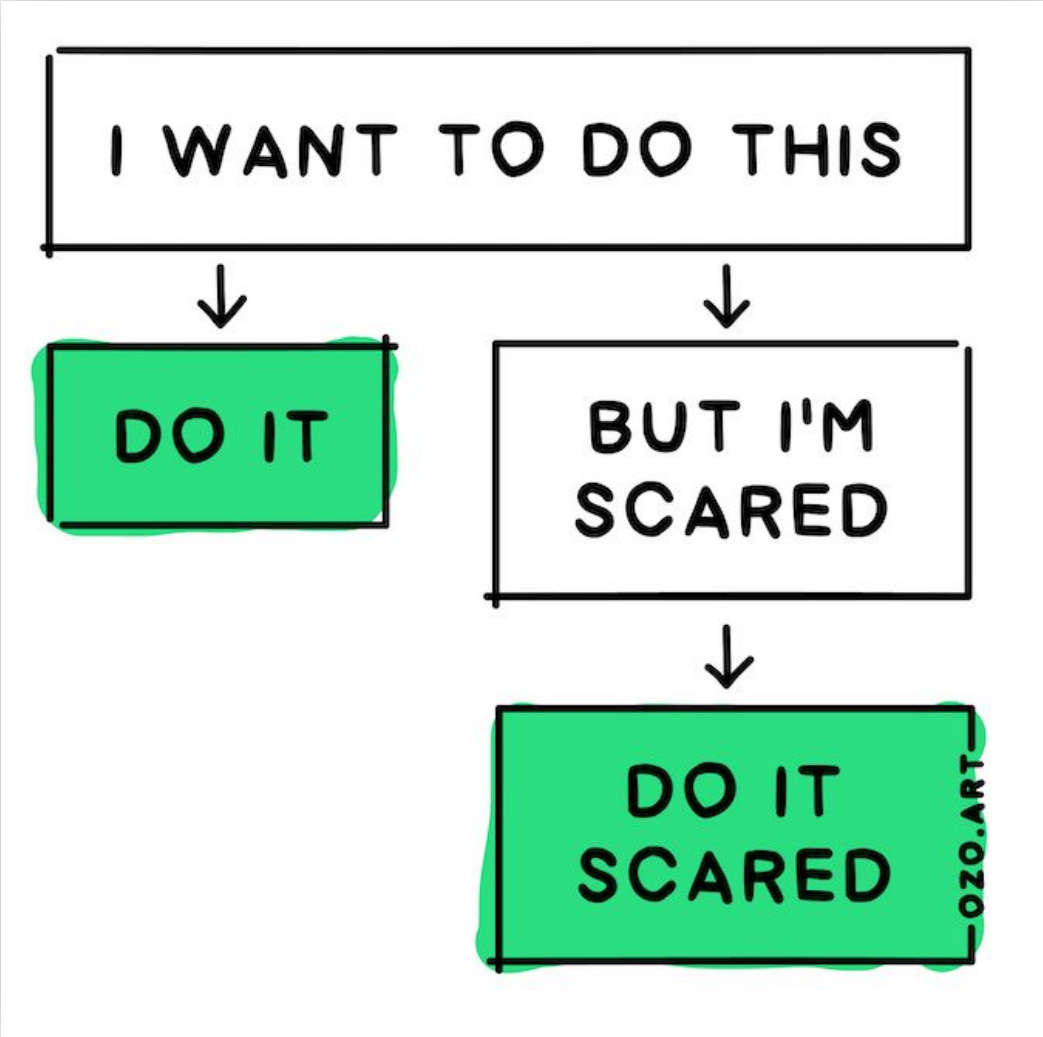


Try This

Build a habit of self-correction



Try This



# slido



If you could only have one, which would you pick?

① Click **Present with Slido** or install our [Chrome extension](#) to activate this poll while presenting.

# Principle #3

Experiment Obsessively



<https://worth.am>

# Sprint Chess





- L** FIRE TEAM
- SQUAD
- PLATOON
- COMPANY
- BATTALION
- REGIMENT
- MARINE DIVISION
- MARINE CORPS

## FIRE TEAM

Commanded By:



**CORPORAL**



Includes three Marines and a team leader, usually a corporal.



# Tet Offensive

Urban warfare dictated a change to existing tactics

Small units were required to clear rooms and buildings

The Corps lacked experience in close quarter combat and had to learn quickly





# Gary Klein

Decision-making researcher

Observed fire fighters, EMTs, doctors

Concluded the conventional models for  
decision making was wrong

But a proper model was impossible to teach



# Gary Klein Meets Warfighting

Klein: “It’s not just that I won’t do it. It’s that it can’t be done.”

Wood: “All I’m asking, son, is that you give it your best try.”



# Recognition Primed Decision Making

Generate a possible course of action  
Compare it to the constraints imposed  
Select the first course of action not rejected



# Experimenting at Scale

Build a dashboard where teams can compare  
previous self to present self

All experiments began with a hypothesis

All experiments concluded with a debrief



# The Bottom Line

Marrying data with emotion magnifies reflection

Create an expectation of continuous evolution to battle the inertia of the status quo

The people required to change should be the people who decide how to change



# One Cautionary Tale

Retros only once quarter  
Motivated to make big changes  
Then buried in the status quo

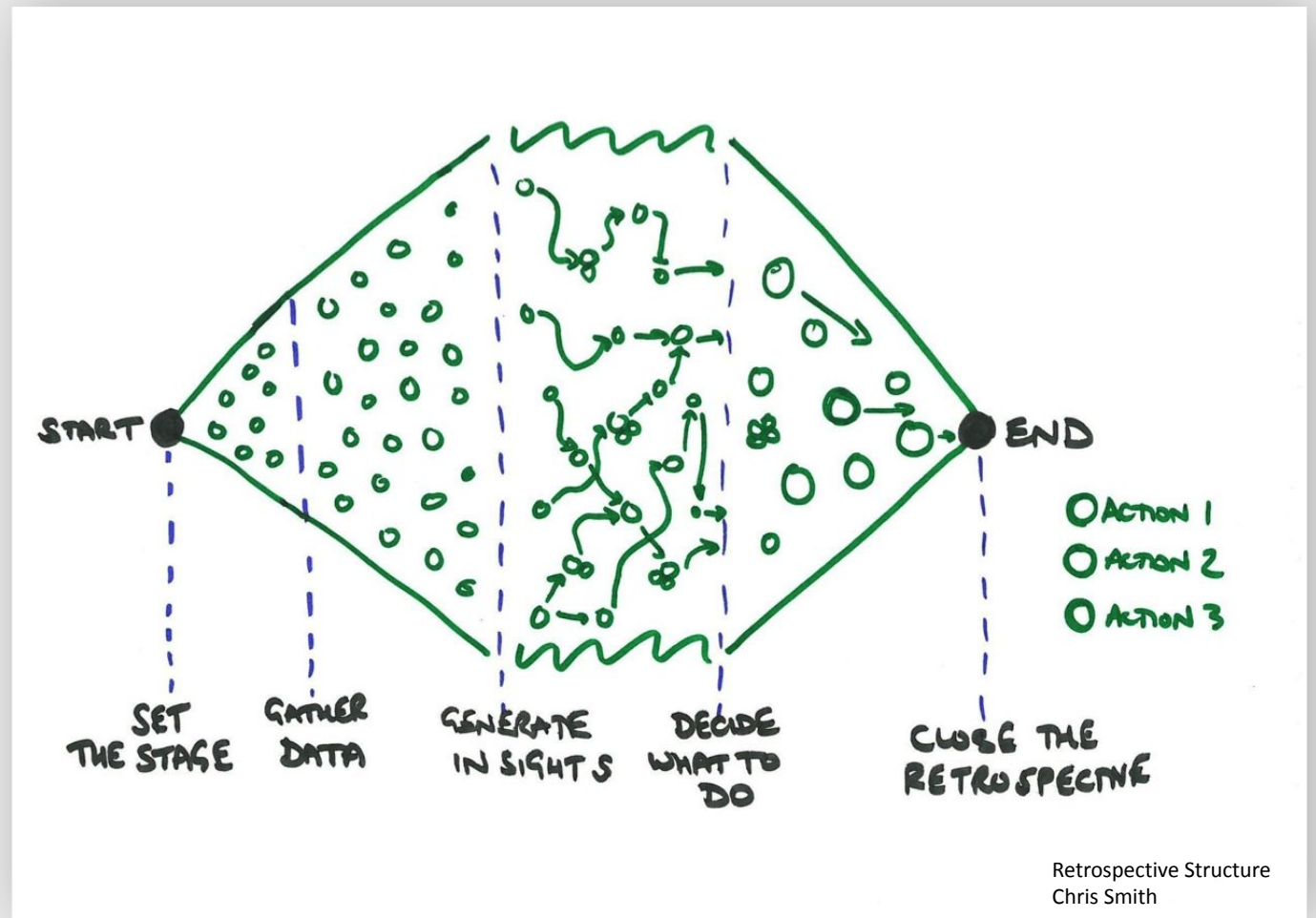


## Try This

Tell me about the last thing the team tweaked about how they worked together that really moved the needle



Try This





Try This

Emphasize the outcome of the retro rather than the actions inside it



## Try This

Agree on the litmus tests of your experiments

Purposefully small

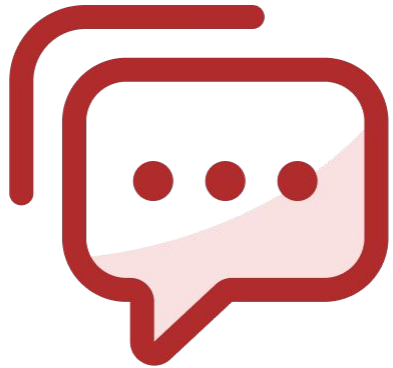
It can begin ideally immediately

We can tell when we're doing it (or not)

We collectively agree when it ends



# slido



## Audience Q&A

① Click **Present with Slido** or install our [Chrome extension](#) to show live Q&A while presenting.



**Company** Wortham Coaching And Consulting

**Website** <https://worth.am>

**LinkedIn** Tanner Wortham

**Email** [tanner@worth.am](mailto:tanner@worth.am)

# Resources

[Corps Business: The 30 Management Principles of the U.S. Marine Corps](#) by David Freedman

[Call Sign Chaos: Learning to Lead](#) by Jim Mattis

[State of Agile](#)

[Unit Structure of the U.S. Marine Corps](#) by  
Department of Defense



# Resources

[Motivated Numeracy and Enlightened Self-Government](#) by Dan Kahan

[On These Questions, Smarter People Do Worse](#) by Veritasium

[What Metrics Will My Team Find Useful](#) by Tanner Wortham

[Gary Klein](#)

[Maneuver Chess](#) by Brian Kerg



# Thank You

To [Maarten Dalmijn](#) for all his support putting these thoughts to words



<https://worth.am>