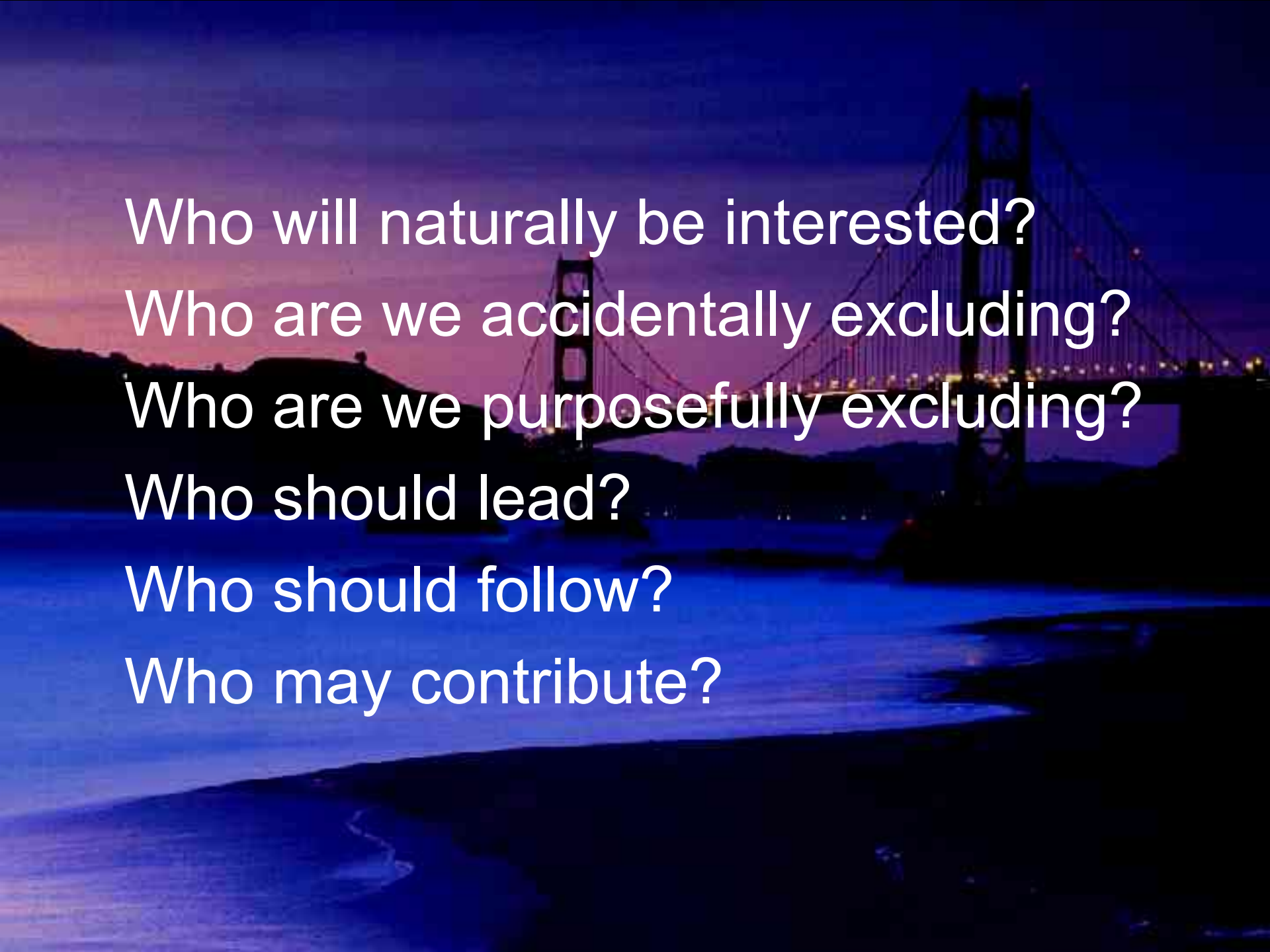
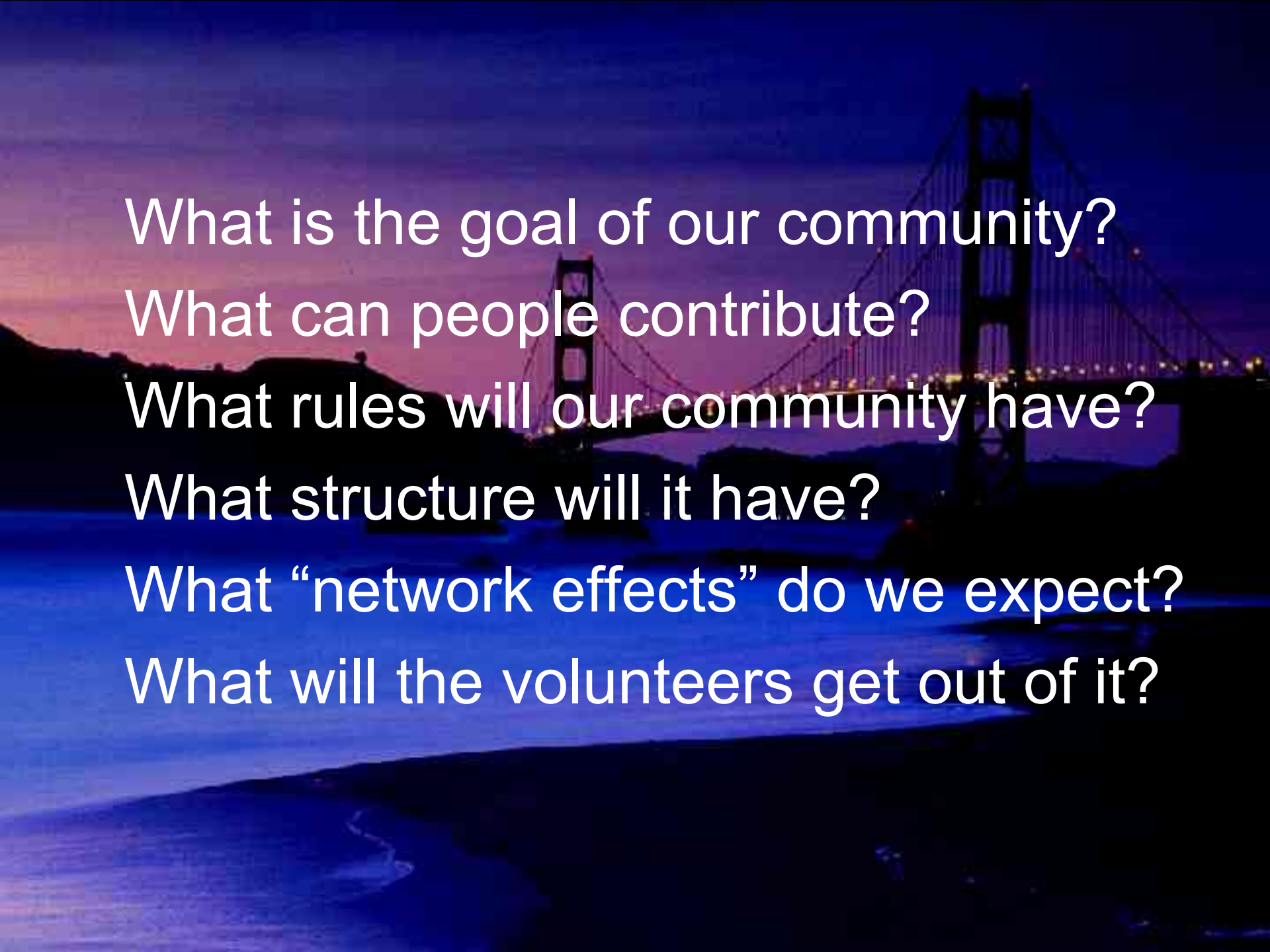
Building Open Source Communities

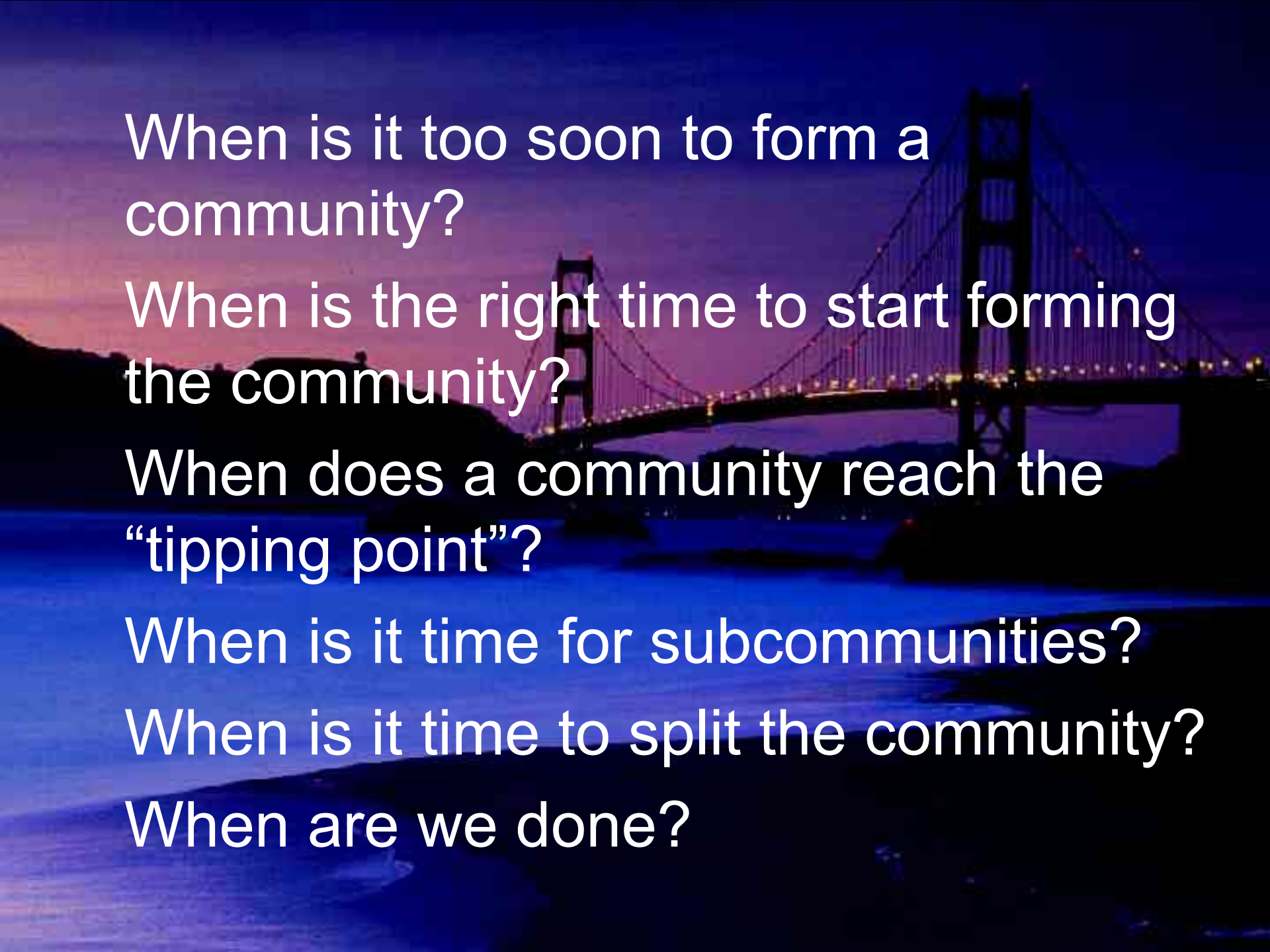
Larry Wall

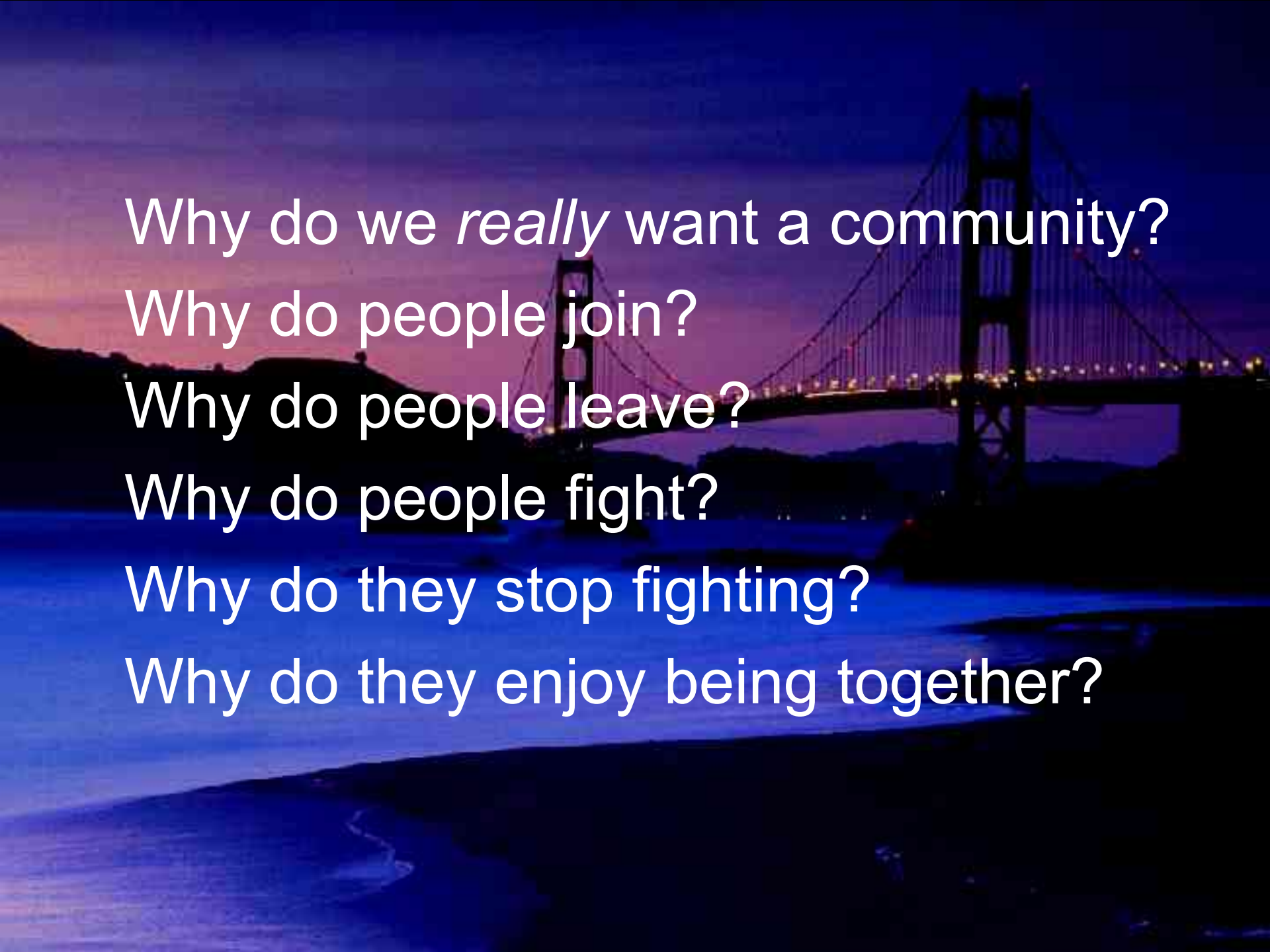
Asking the right questions
Who?
What?
Where?
When?
Why?
How?


Who will naturally be interested?
Who are we accidentally excluding?
Who are we purposefully excluding?
Who should lead?
Who should follow?
Who may contribute?

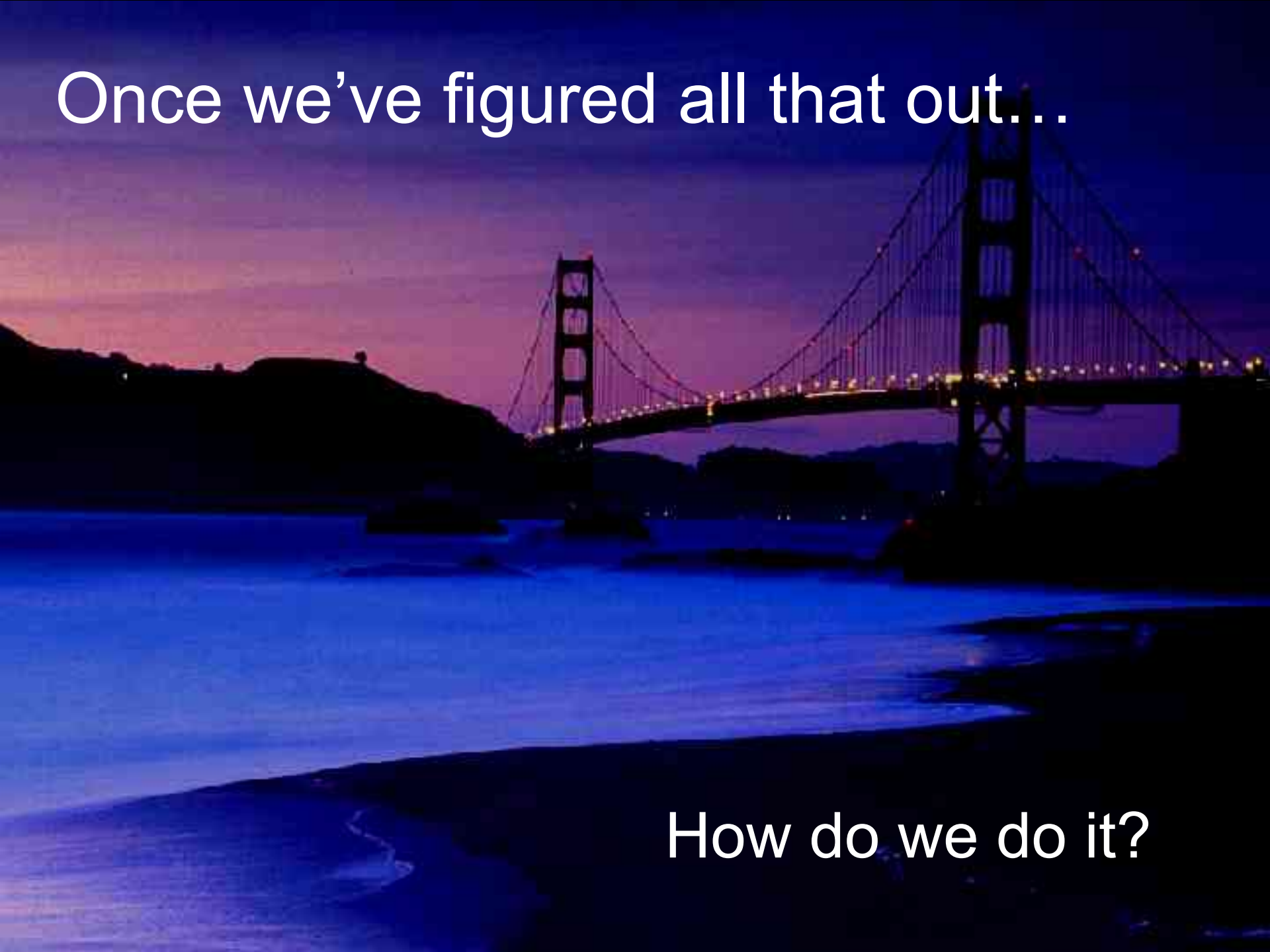

What is the goal of our community?
What can people contribute?
What rules will our community have?
What structure will it have?
What “network effects” do we expect?
What will the volunteers get out of it?

Where will our community meet in cyberspace?
Where will our community meet in physical space?
Where might we encourage subcommunities to form?
Where will they form spontaneously?


When is it too soon to form a community?
When is the right time to start forming the community?
When does a community reach the “tipping point”?
When is it time for subcommunities?
When is it time to split the community?
When are we done?

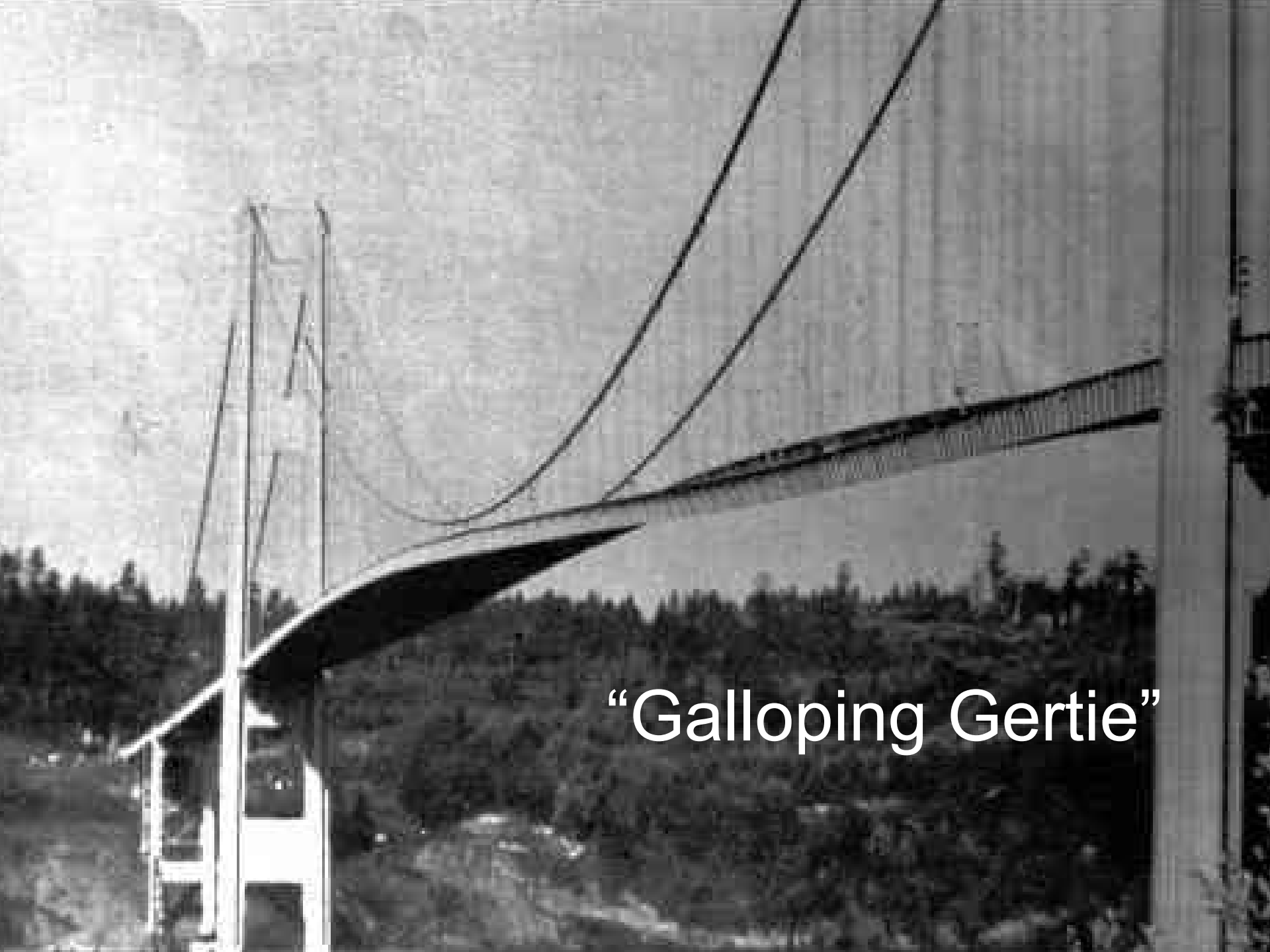

Why do we *really* want a community?
Why do people join?
Why do people leave?
Why do people fight?
Why do they stop fighting?
Why do they enjoy being together?

Once we've figured all that out…

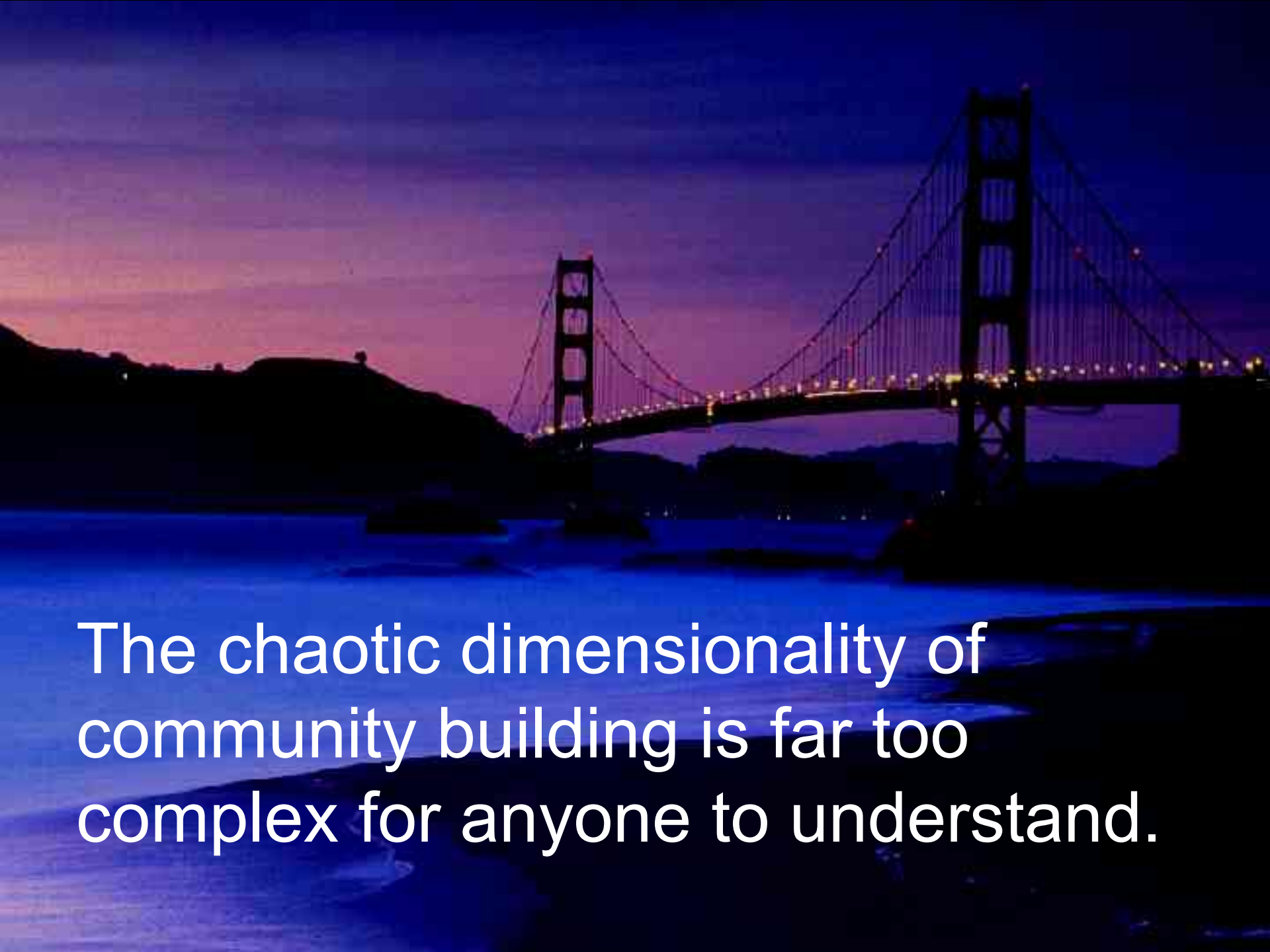


How do we do it?

Like the Golden Gate Bridge
It’s a simple matter of engineering.

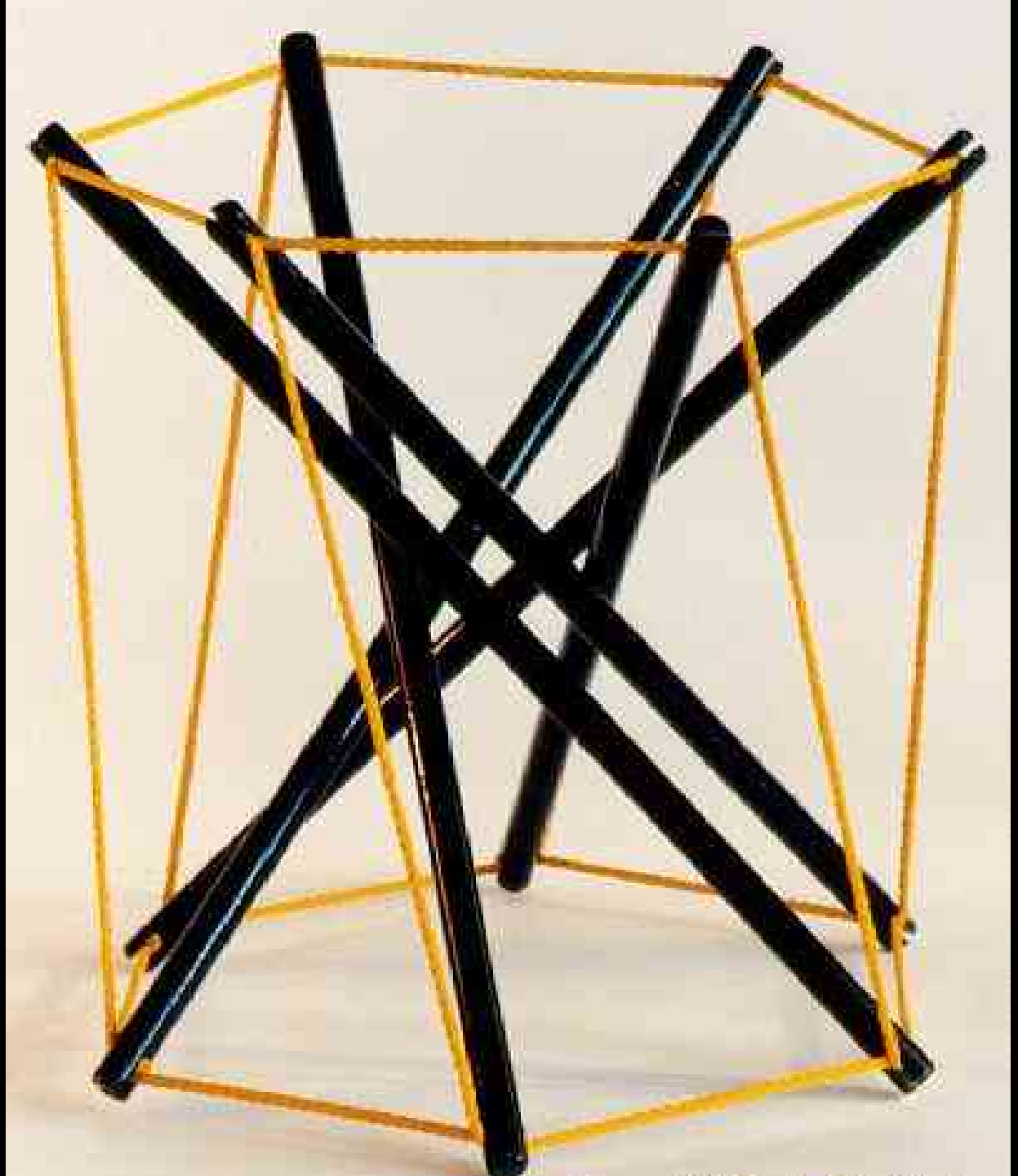

“Galloping Gertie”

“Galloping Gertie”



The chaotic dimensionality of community building is far too complex for anyone to understand.

But we can use some metaphors, such as bridges, engineering, and “tensegrity”—tensional integrity—to understand how communities work.



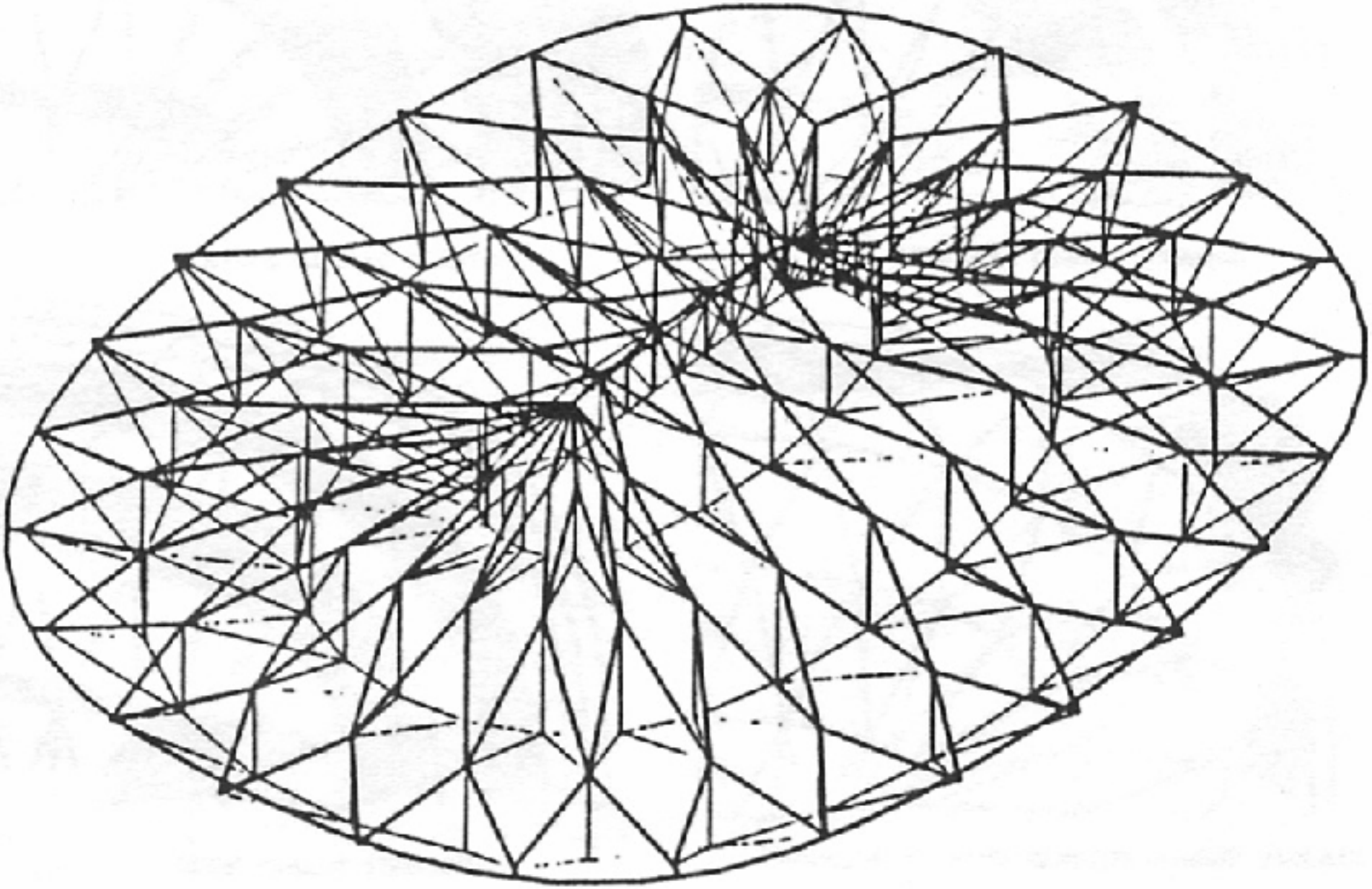


Fig 1. Hypar-Tensegrity Dome

FALCONS

Believing “Contradictions”

Believing “contradictions”

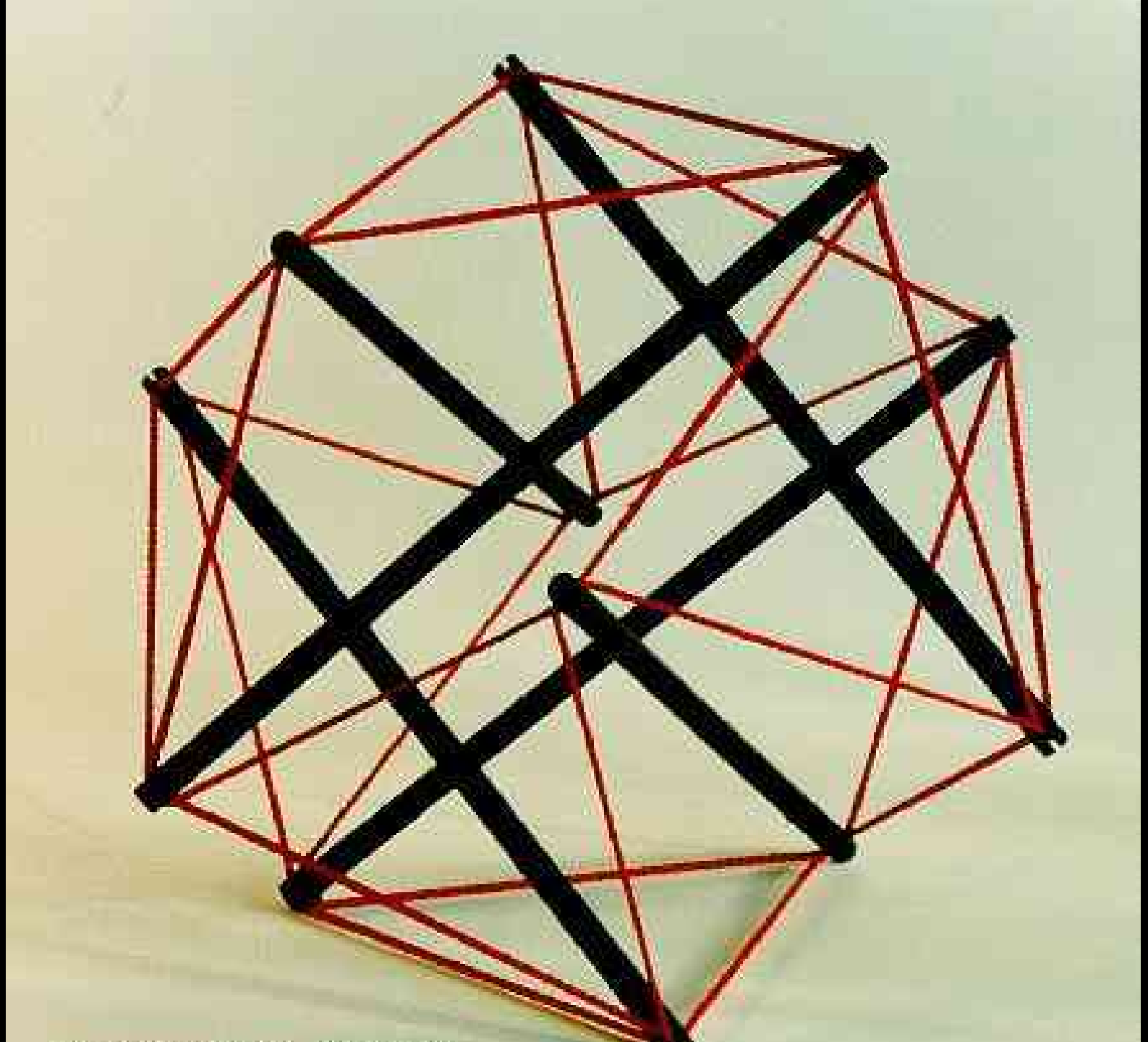
It is good to push.

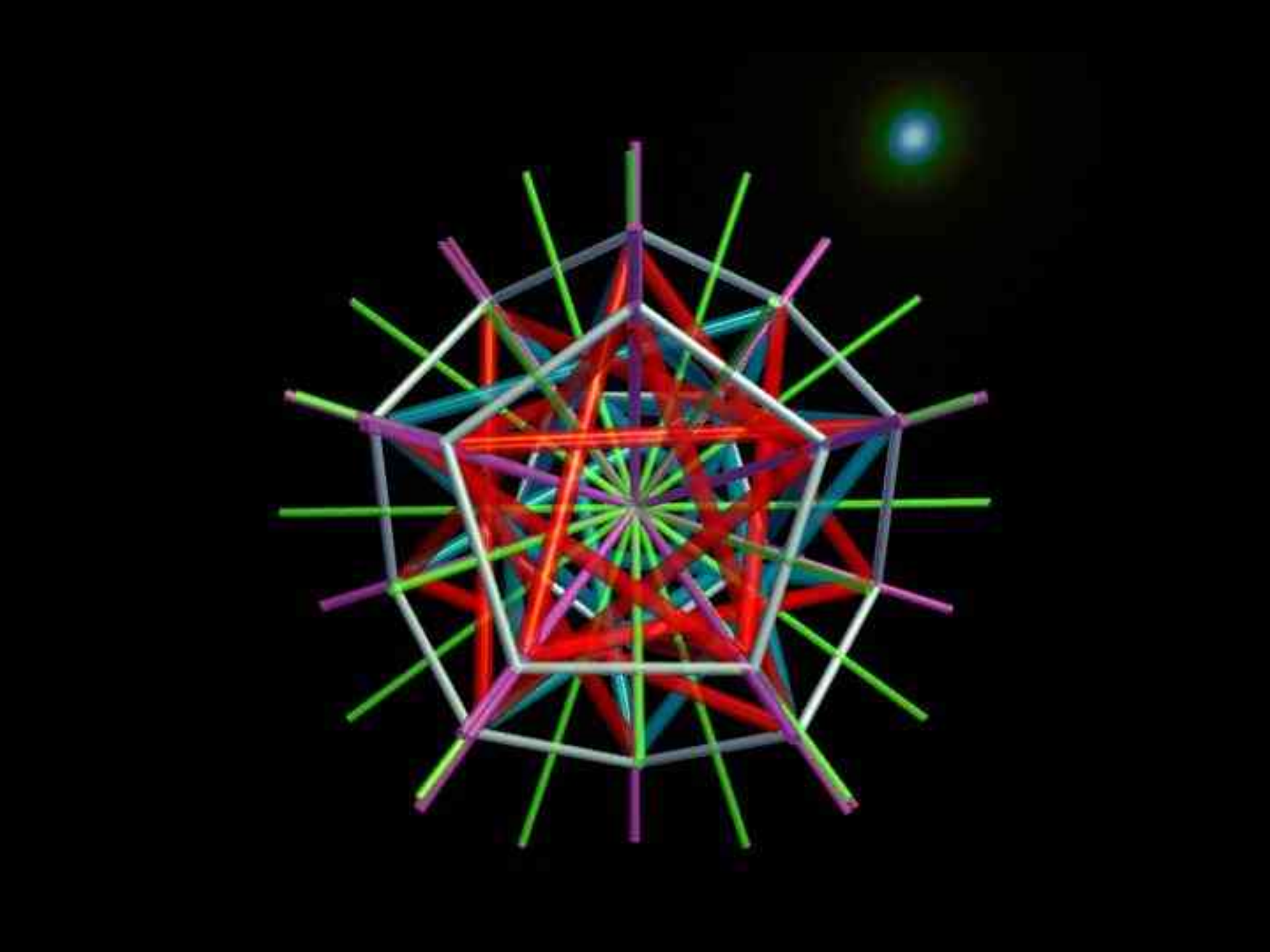
It is good to pull.

It is good to love your wife just the way she is.

It is good to want your wife to improve.

To most Christians, God is one person,





People are naturally good.
bad.

People love / hate new ideas.

People love / hate outsiders.

People should all be alike.
different.

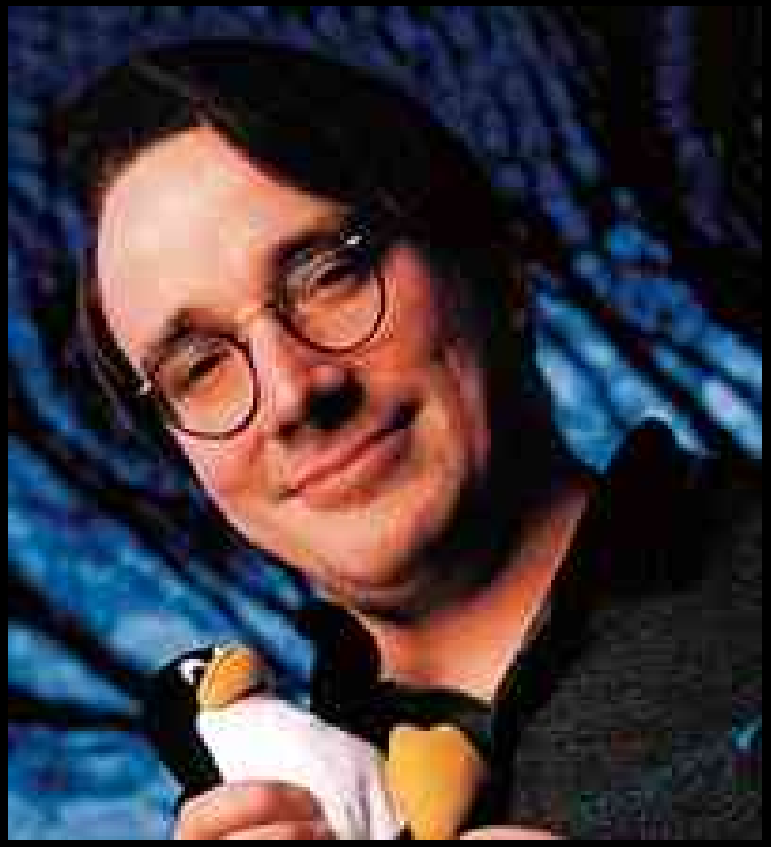
People should / shouldn't be in charge of others.

It should be easy / hard to get in.

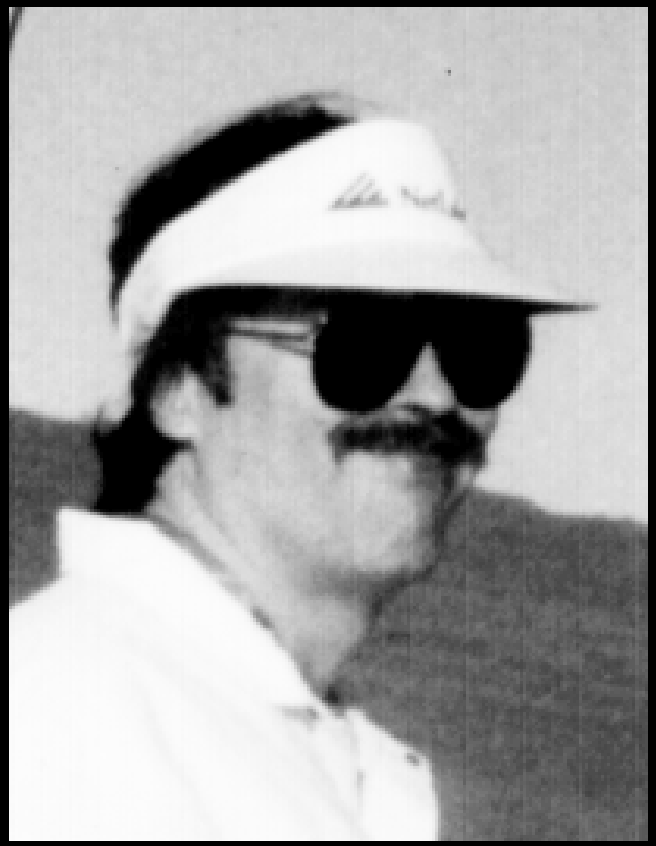
It should be easy / hard to get out.

Specialization is good.
bad.

People volunteer for altruistic / selfish reasons.



We need / don't need a benevolent dictator.



Larry Wall is important.
unimportant.

Larry Wall is
a genius.
an idiot.

Modernism is good.
bad.

Postmodernism is good.
~~good~~.

Communities develop naturally.
artificially.

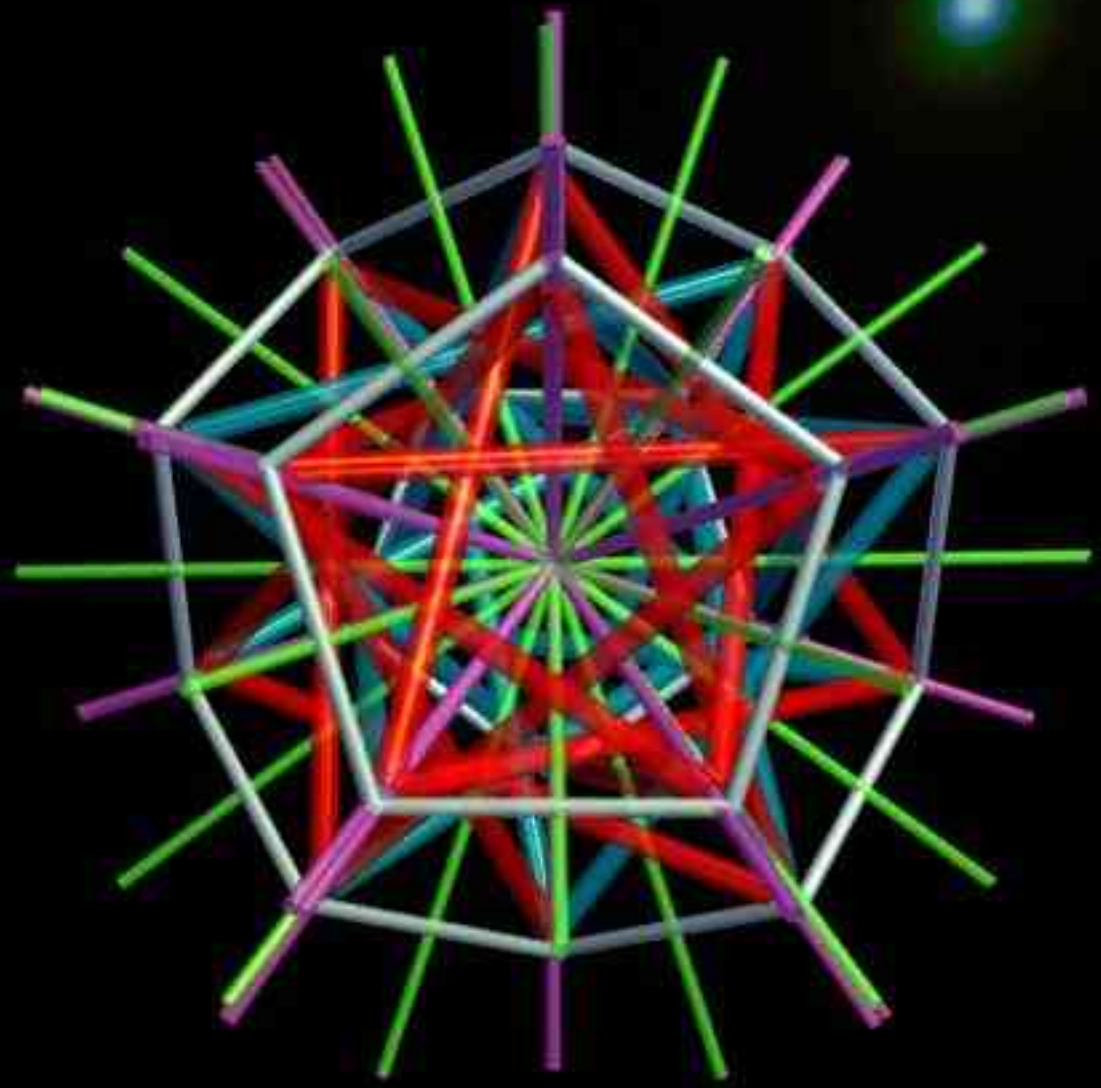
Communities develop naturally

- Habitat
- Food
- Health
- Sex, cross-fertilization
- Big gene pool
- Leadership by example, consensus
- Defined by core, not by periphery
- Migration and Speciation

Communities also die naturally

- Habitat destruction
- Starvation
- Disease
- No cross-fertilization, insular
- Small gene pool, tribalism
- Internal warfare and anarchy
- Defined by arbitrary boundaries
- Stagnation and Extinction

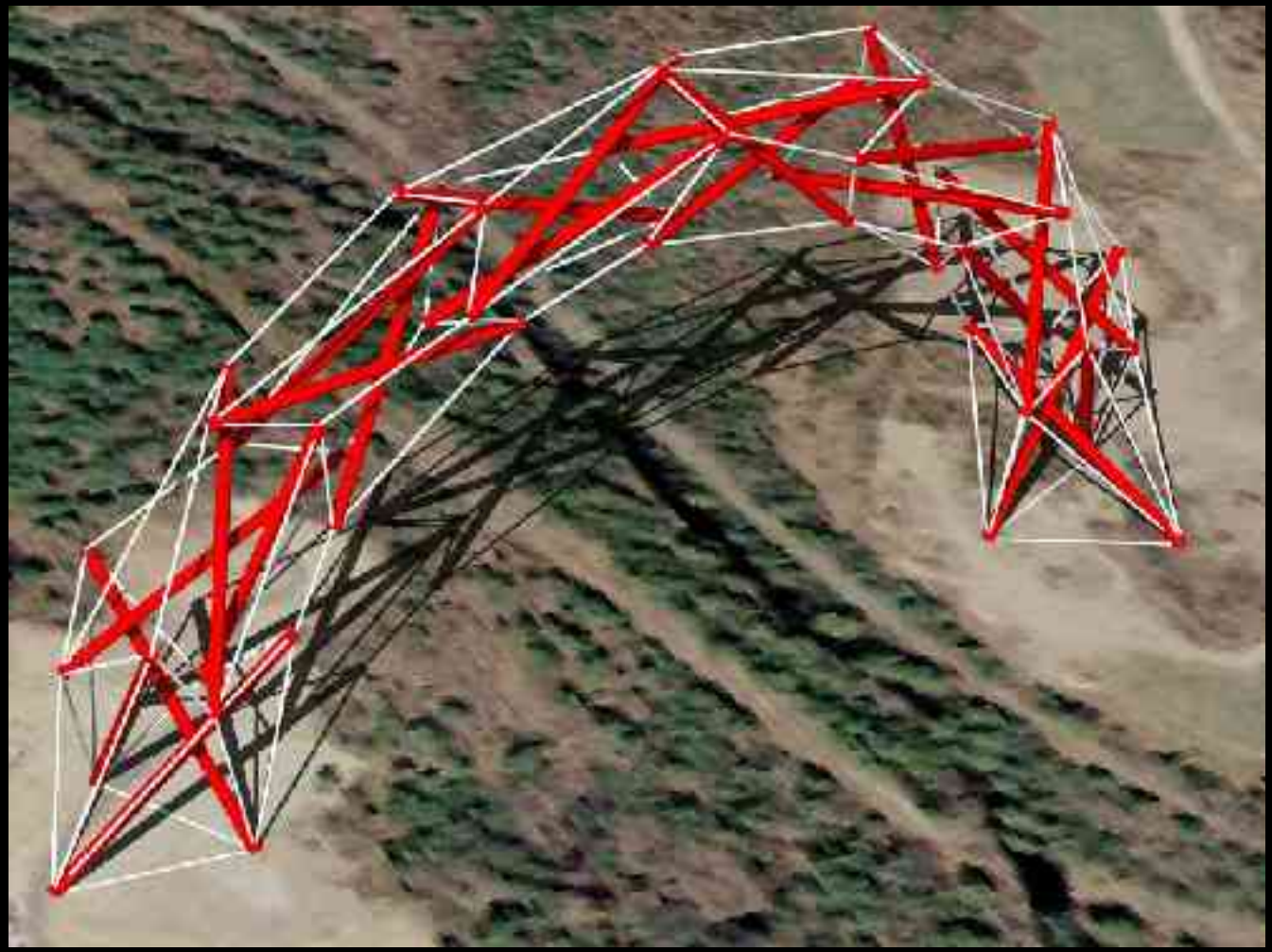
A healthy community is both unified. diverse.



A community needs to share a set of core values, but also allow honest differences of opinion on side issues.

Is there a technological fix?

Yes!
No!

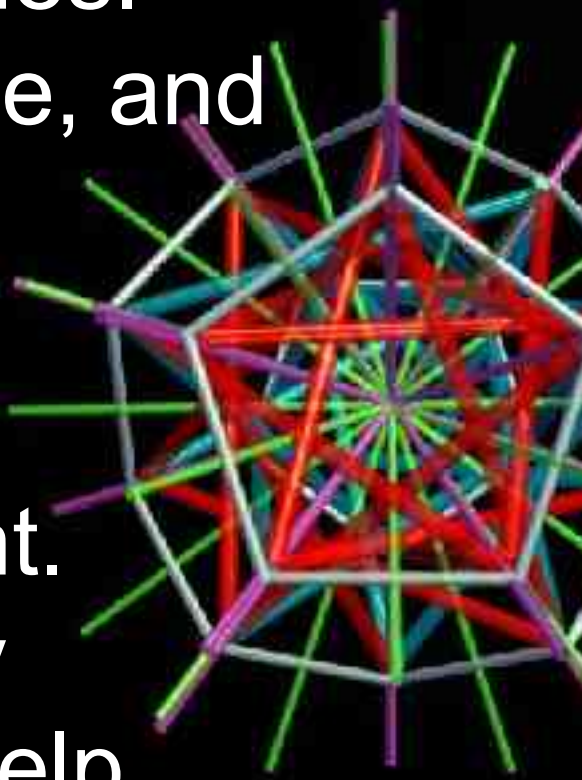


Is there a technological fix? Yes!

- Look for a fine-grained extension mechanism. Perl 4 > Perl 5 > Perl 6…
- Build a repository like CPAN.
- Be prepared to separate combatants.
- Do not be afraid to ask the community to restructure itself.
- Give people enough time to get used to new ideas.

Is there a technological fix? No!

People are basically irrational. Look for cheerleading opportunities.
Allow people to be the same, and allow them to be different.
Simultaneously encourage and discourage the “cult”.
Cultural identity is emergent.
You need to find some way of making people *want* to help.
Have fun!!!



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