

Our Culture

STEADILY.

About this

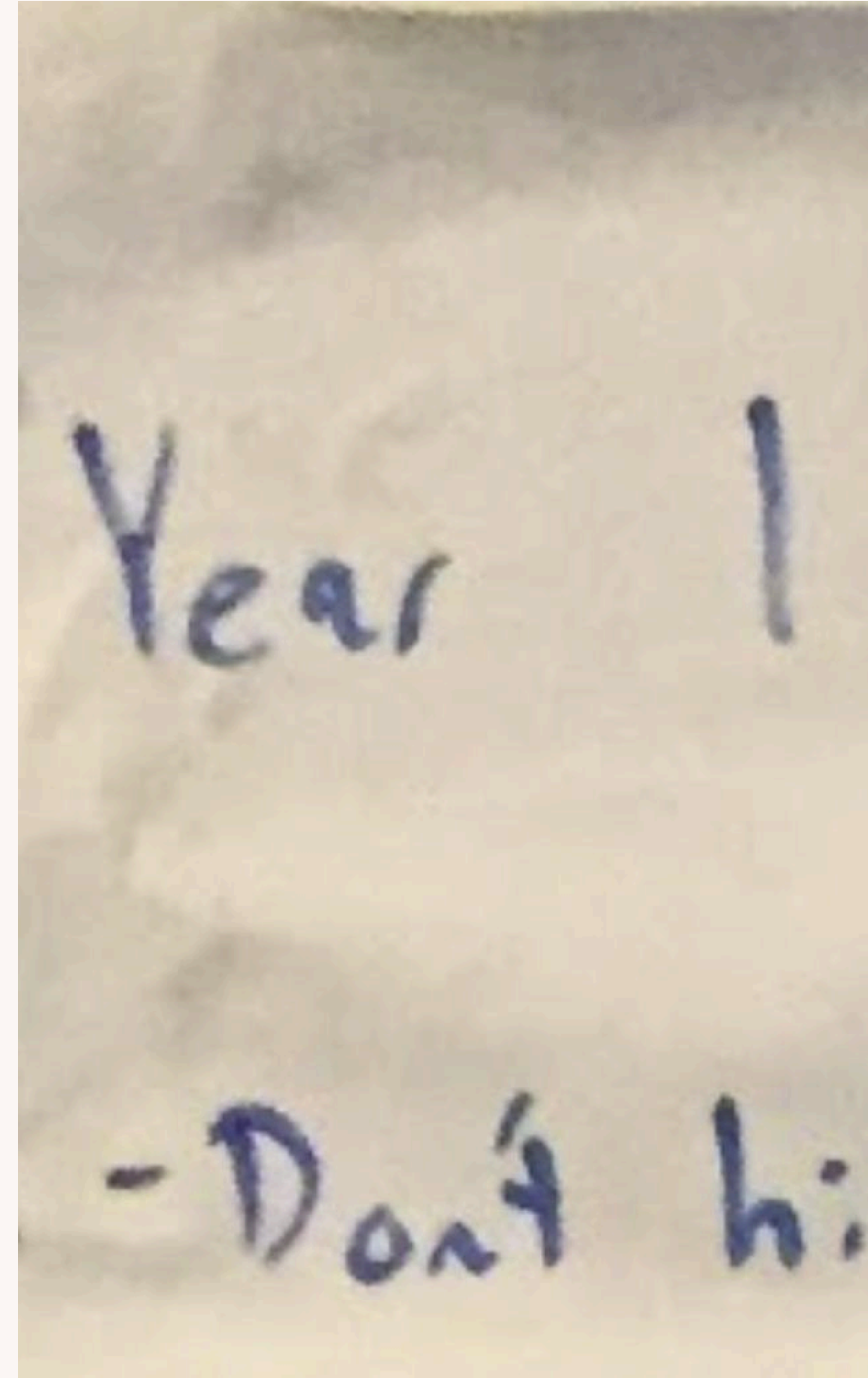
When I started my previous company (Interviewed) in 2015, we kept a three-foot-tall Post-It in the wall that was a mix of Year 1 goals and principles. Over time we crossed some off, added more, and fleshed out our thinking into a playbook for new hires.

These ideas were heavily informed by what we had seen work and fail at prior startups and YCombinator (a startup incubator). We continued to run by that playbook after getting acquired by Indeed. I later discovered the Netflix Culture Deck and the No Rules Rules book, which informed how we think at Steadily. I recommend reading the book.

Consistent with one of our engineering maxims: “Shamelessly copy good ideas; don’t needlessly reinvent the wheel” when it came time to write down the playbook for Steadily, we copied from [Netflix](#) and [Amazon](#).

As our distinct identity evolved, we’ve rewritten it many times so that it accurately reflects the day-to-day reality of Steadily.

--Darren



We seek *excellence*

Our culture focuses on helping us achieve excellence.

STEADILY.

6 aspects of our culture

1. Values are what we Value
2. High Performance
3. Freedom & Responsibility
4. High Context
5. Pay Top of Market
6. Promotions & Development

our | values

respect

We treat others as we would like to be treated ourselves. We do not tolerate abusive or disrespectful treatment. Ruthlessness, callousness, and arrogance don't belong here.

integrity

We work with customers and prospects openly, honestly, and sincerely. When we say we will do something, we will do it; when we say we cannot or will not do something, then we won't do it.

communication

We have an obligation to communicate. Here, we take the time to talk to one another... and to listen. We believe that information is meant to move and that information moves people.

excellence

We are satisfied with nothing less than the very best in everything we do. We will continue to raise the bar for everyone. The great fun here will be for all of us to discover just how good we can really be.

Many companies have nice sounding value statements displayed in the lobby, such as:

- Respect
- Integrity
- Communication
- Excellence



**Enron, whose leaders went to jail,
and went bankrupt from fraud, had
these values displayed in their lobby:**

- Respect
- Integrity
- Communication
- Excellence



These values were not, however, what
was really valued at Enron.

A company's **actual** values are
shown by who gets rewarded,
promoted, or let go

We value
people who
live these
principles

- Ownership
- Insist on the highest standards
- Customer obsession
- Simplify
- Bias for action
- Frugality
- Hire and retain the best
- Have backbone; disagree and commit
- Are right, a lot
- Deliver results

Will we say this of you...

Ownership

You think long term and don't sacrifice long-term value for short-term results. You act on behalf of the entire company, beyond just your own team. You never say "that's not my job."

Insist on the highest standards

You have relentlessly high standards — many people think your standards are unreasonably high. You are continually raising the bar and drive your team to deliver high-quality. You ensure that defects do not get punted down the line and that problems are fixed so they stay fixed.

User obsession

You start with the user experience and work backwards. Whether the user is the agent or the policyholder, you work vigorously to earn and keep their trust.

Simplify

You expect and require innovation and invention from your team and always find ways to simplify. You shamelessly copy good ideas and don't reinvent the wheel.

Bias for action

Speed matters in business. Many decisions and actions are reversible and do not need extensive study. You take calculated risks.

Hire and retain the best

You raise the performance bar with every hire and promotion. You recognize exceptional talent and help them grow. You cut smartly.

Frugality

You accomplish more with less. Constraints breed resourcefulness, self-sufficiency, and invention. There are no extra points for growing headcount or budget size; quite the opposite.

Have backbone; disagree and commit

You respectfully challenge decisions when you disagree, even when doing so is uncomfortable or exhausting. You have conviction and are tenacious. You do not compromise for the sake of social cohesion.

Once a decision is made, you commit wholly.

Are right, a lot

You are right a lot. You have strong judgment and good instincts. You seek conflicting perspectives and work to disconfirm your beliefs.

Deliver results

You focus on the key inputs for our business and deliver them with the right quality and in a timely fashion. Despite setbacks, you rise to the occasion and never settle.

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6 aspects of our culture

1. Values are what we Value
2. **High Performance**
3. Freedom & Responsibility
4. High Context
5. Pay Top of Market
6. Promotions & Development

Imagine if *every* person at
Steadily is someone you
can depend on, respect,
and learn from...

A great workplace is stellar colleagues

A great workplace is not espresso, lush benefits, sushi lunches, boozy parties, or swanky offices. We do some of these things, but only if they are efficient at attracting and retaining stellar colleagues.

Like every company, we
try to hire well

Unlike most companies...

Merely adequate performance
will result in separation

We operate like a
pro sports team,
not a family

Steadily leaders recruit, develop, and cut **smartly**,
so we have stars in every position.

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The Keeper Test that managers use

Which of my people, if they told me they were leaving for a similar job at a peer company,
would I fight hard to keep at Steadily?

Honest *always*

As a Steadling, no one in your group should be materially surprised of your views. To test candor, ask your manager: **“If I told you I were leaving, how hard would you work to change my mind?”**

Pro sports team metaphor is good, but imperfect because...

Athletic teams have a **fixed** number of positions, so team members are always competing with each other for one of the precious slots. Whereas we can have **unlimited starters.**

Corporate team

The more talent we have, the more we can accomplish, so our people help each other all the time.

**Internal cutthroat behavior or toxic politics
has no place here.**

Objections

- Isn't loyalty good?
- What about hard workers?
- What about brilliant jerks?

Loyalty is great

Loyalty is good as a stabilizer.

People who have been stars for us and hit a bad patch get a near term pass because we think they are likely to become stars again.

We want the same: if Steadily hits a temporary bad patch, we want people to stick with us.

But unlimited loyalty to a shrinking firm, or to an ineffective employee, is not what we are about.

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Hard work is correlated with success

We have a mix of roles at Steadily; a few have strict schedules, but most don't.

For most roles, the hours can be long. Ultimately, success is measured by results.

That's why we value **“deliver results”** and why we say **“Sustained B-level performance despite A-for-effort will result in separation.”**

No brilliant jerks

Some companies tolerate them.

For us, the cost to effective teamwork is too high.

Diverse styles are fine, as long as the person embodies our principles.

Why do we insist on high performance?

In procedural work, the **top-10%** are **2x better** than the average. In creative work, the best are **10x better** than the average.

Regardless of role, there's a huge premium for creating teams of the best.

The best people want to
work with the best
people

We can't afford to let B-players stick around
because what attracts A-players is getting to be
on a team of A-players.

Our high
performance
culture is not
right for
everyone

Many people love our culture, and stay a long time.

People who thrive on excellence, candor, and change, love it here.

Some people value comfort and stability over performance and may feel fearful at Steadily.

We try to get better at attracting only the former, and helping the latter realize we are not right for them.

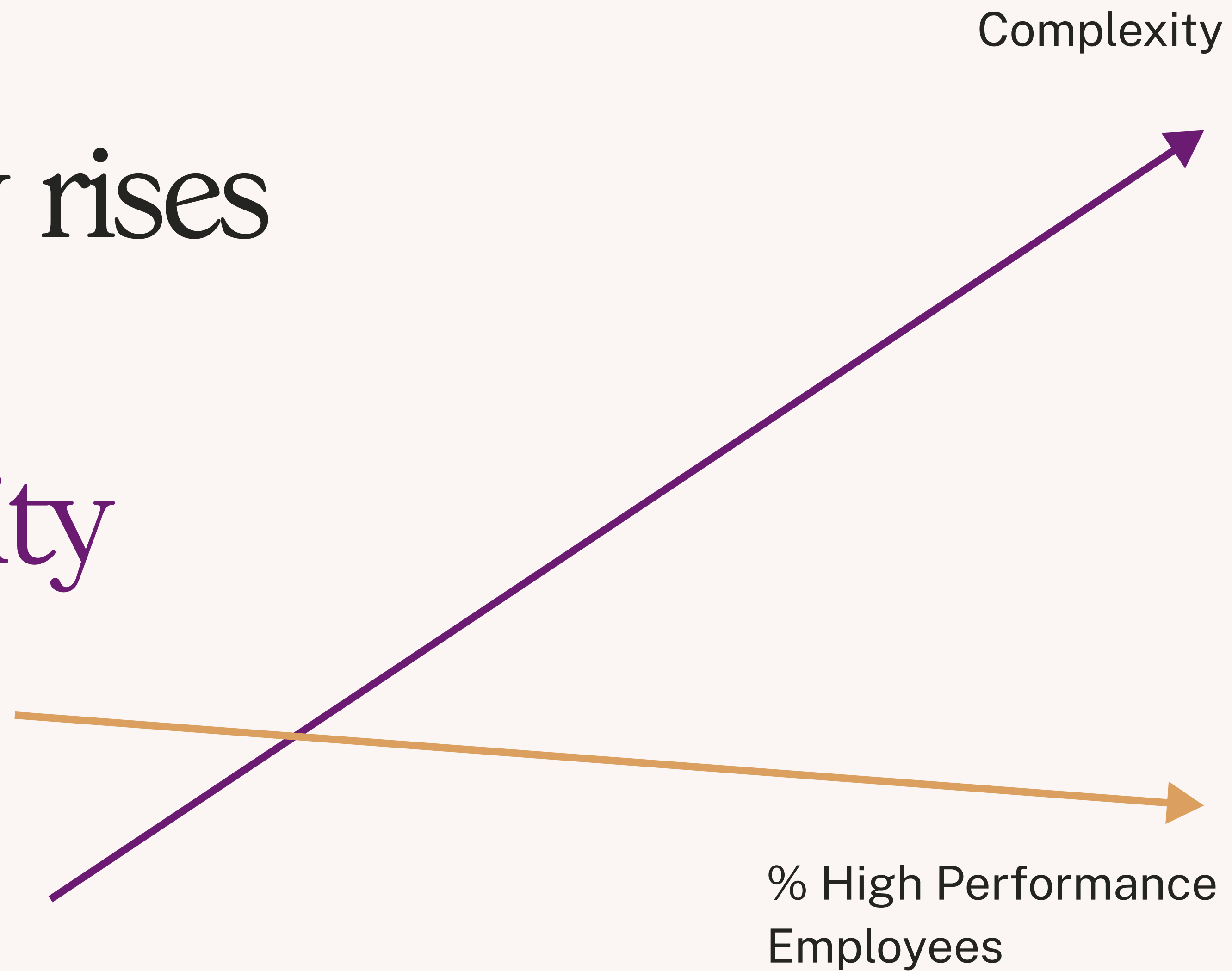
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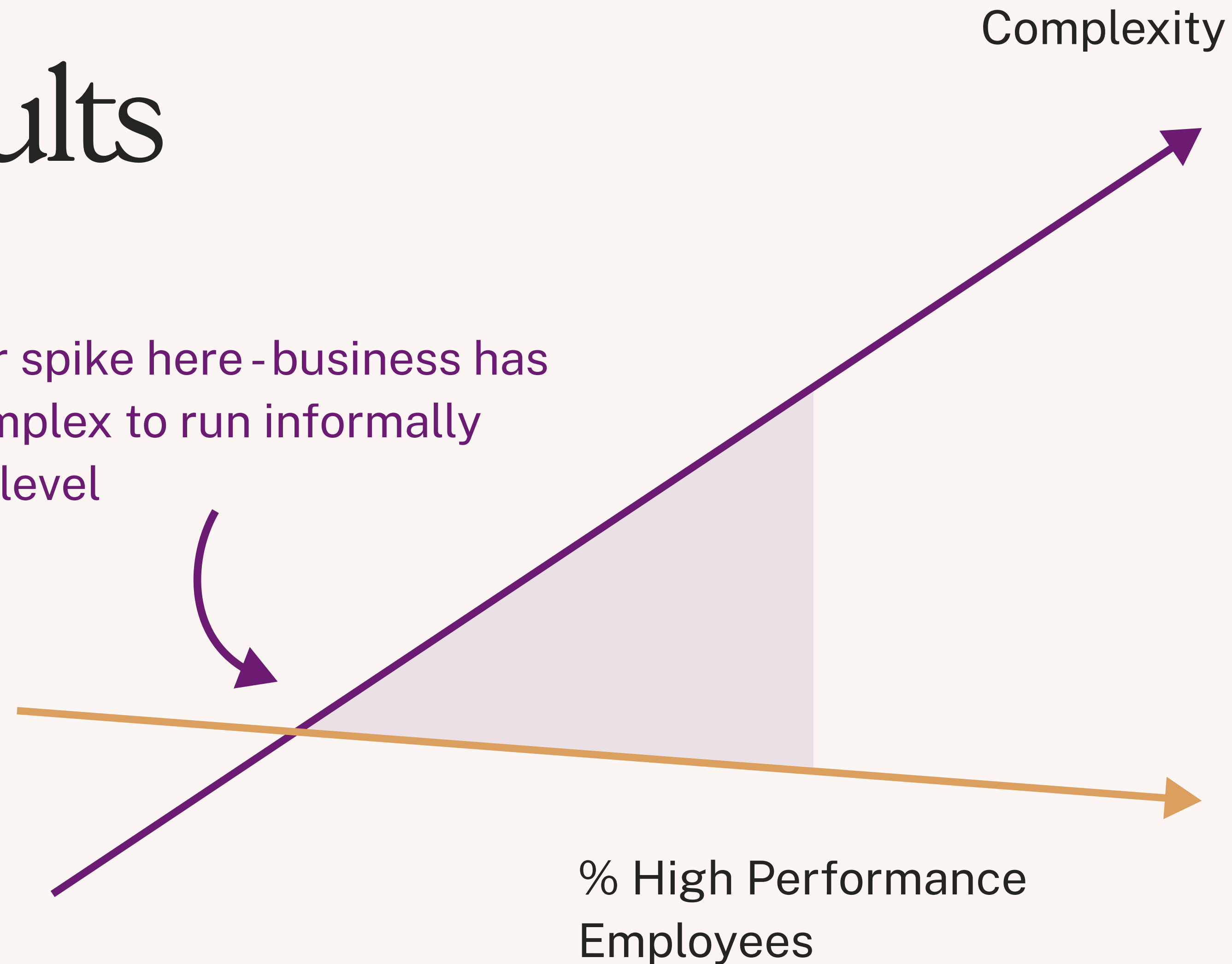
Why do most companies
become **bureaucratic** as
they grow?

Complexity rises
and
talent density
shrinks



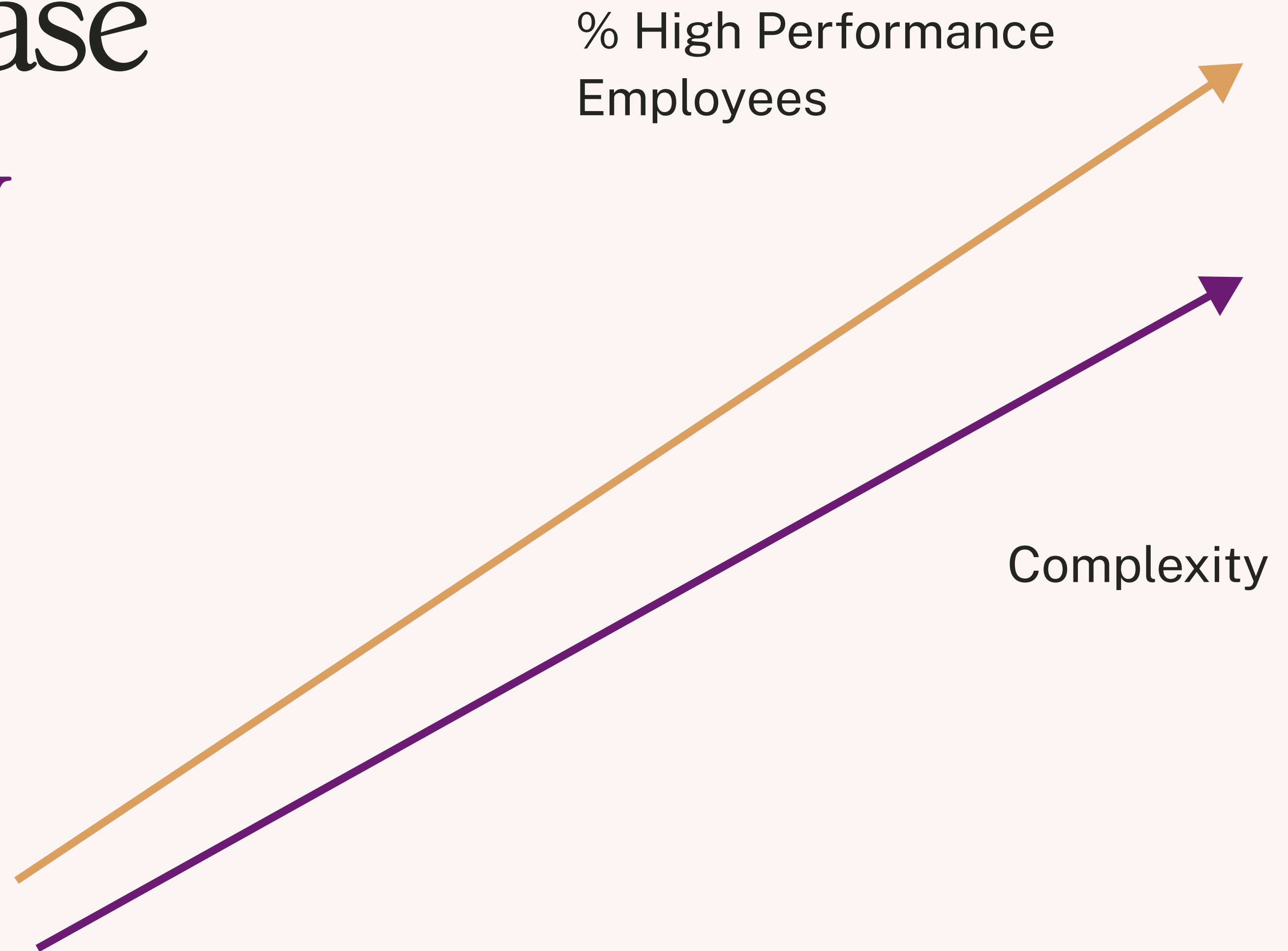
Chaos results

Chaos and error spike here - business has become too complex to run informally with this talent level



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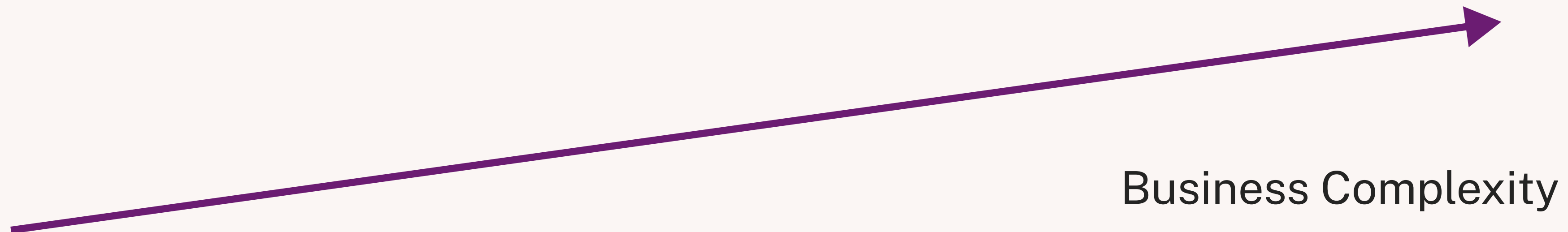
The fix: increase
talent density
faster than
complexity
grows



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Minimize complexity growth

- Focus on doing a few big things exceptionally well
- Eliminate distracting complexity (barnacles)
- Be wary of efficiency optimizations that increase complexity and rigidity



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Responsible people
thrive on freedom and
are worthy of freedom

Good vs bad process

Good process helps talented teams get more done or prevents **unrecoverable** mistakes:

- Checking photos of the property before binding a policy
- Having a schedule and sticking to it when you're customer-facing
- Letting all admins know when altering Salesforce configs
- Fully documenting each account and customer interaction

Bad process accumulates over time like barnacles on a boat:

- Lots of recurring meetings
- Deploying code once a week to reduce disruptions
- Getting multi-level sign-offs for designs and projects
- Pre-approvals for all spending
- Looping in the whole leadership team when two could solve it

But insurance
is all about
rules?

That's true.

Folks who are customer-facing will have a lot more rules.

It's the nature of selling a product where one mistake can cost a million dollars.

We're treading a narrow path that balances flexibility with consistency.

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“If you want to build a ship,
don’t drum up the people to
gather wood, divide the work,
and give orders. Instead, teach
them to yearn for the vast
and endless sea.”

- **Antoine de Saint-Exupery**, Author of *The Little Prince*



The best managers figure out
how to get great outcomes by
setting the appropriate context

Good context

- Link to company/team goals
- Relative priority (how important or time sensitive is it)
- Level of precision & refinement (a rough experiment or polished product)
- Key stakeholders
- Definition of success or key metrics

Working in-person increases context

Working with people face-face lets you hear chatter by the fridge or read the look on someone's face after a tough conversation

Being in-person makes it easier to make fast, smart decisions and build bonds between people

That's why we keep traditional office hours and why we're intentional about which roles we hire remotely vs in-person

Why manage via **context**?

High performance people will do better work if they **understand** the context.

This is why we are so open internally about strategies and results.

Dumb moves

When someone does something dumb,
ask what role you played in it.

What context did you fail to set?

Are you articulating and inspiring enough
about goals and strategies?

High context means:

- We share metrics and results with everybody in the company
- We explain the why of everything we ask for
- We question the process

It does **not** mean:

- People ignore the processes they don't like
- People work whenever or wherever they like

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Paying top of market is core to high performance culture

One stellar teammate gets more done and
costs less than two adequate teammates.
We endeavor to have **only** stellar people.

3 tests for top of market

1. What could they get elsewhere?
2. What would we pay for replacement?
3. What would we pay to keep that person?
 - a. Assuming they had a bigger offer elsewhere

Requires great judgement

Goal is to keep each employee at top of market for that person:

- Pay them more than anyone else likely would
- Pay them as much as a replacement would
- Pay them as much as we would pay to keep them if they had higher offer from elsewhere

Titles are misleading

This is why we **do not** use salary bands:

- Lots of people have the title “Major League Pitcher” but they are not all equally effective
- Similarly, all people with the title “Senior Marketing Manager” or “Director of Engineering” are not equally effective
- So the art of compensation is answering the Three Tests for each employee

Annual comp review

At many firms, when employees are hired, market compensation applies, but at comp review time, it no longer applies!

At Steadily, market comp **always** applies:

Top of market comp is re-established once a year for high performing employees during annual comp review.

No fixed comp budgets

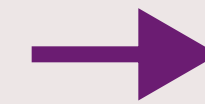
There are no centrally administered “**raise pools**” each year. Instead, each manager aligns their people near the top of their personal market.

Others

Manager sets pay at 50th or 75th percentile of average for “Sales Manager” based on Salary.com.

Manager cares about **internal** parity so all “Senior Engineers” earn roughly the same.

Manager gives everyone an equal raise across the board after a good year.



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Each person’s pay is set near the top of their personal market.



In baseball each “**Major League Pitcher**” earns different pay. We apply that idea to every job title.



Respond to the market so employees don’t become materially underpaid or overpaid over time.

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Comp over time

Some people will move up in comp very quickly because their value in the marketplace is moving up quickly, driven by increasing skills and/or great demand for their area.

Some people will stay flat because their value in the marketplace has stayed flat

- Depends in part on inflation and economy
- Always top of market, though, for that person

Employee success

It's pretty ingrained in our society that the size of one's raise is the indicator of how well one did the prior year

- But for us the other factor is the outside market

Employee success is still a big factor in comp because it influences market value

- In particular, how much we would pay to keep the person

When top of
market comp
is done right

Employees will feel they are getting paid well relative to their other options in the market.

We will **rarely** counter an external offer with higher comp when someone is voluntarily leaving because we should already have moved comp to our max for that person.

Interview elsewhere to find out your value

It's a healthy idea, not a traitorous one, to understand what other firms would pay you, by interviewing and talking to peers at other companies

- Talk with your manager about what you find in terms of comp
- Stay mindful of company confidential information

Big salary is efficient

Big salary is the most efficient form of comp:

- Most motivating for any given expense level
- Put all that expense of fringe benefits into big salaries, and give people freedom to spend their salaries as they think best
- Employees can decide how much Steadily stock they want versus salary
- We still offer standard benefits like health insurance and 401K because those are efficient

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In some time periods, in
some groups, there will be
lots of opportunity and
growth at *Steadily*

Some people, through both luck and talent,
will have **extraordinary** career growth.

Baseball: minors to majors

Very talented people usually get to move up, but only true for the very talented.

Some luck in terms of what positions open up and what the competition is.

Some people move to other teams to get the opportunity they want.

Great teams keep their best talent.

Some minor league players keep playing even though they don't move up because they love the game.

Steadily doesn't have to be for life

In some times, in some groups, there may not be enough growth opportunities for everyone.

In which case, we should celebrate someone leaving Steadily for a bigger job that we didn't have available to offer them.

Three conditions for promotion

1. Job has to be **big enough**

- a. Even with the person devoting all their energy to the role, there would still be more to do.
- b. Doesn't create an unneeded role to satisfy the desire to promote someone
- c. Maintains a flat org structure with thin management.

2. Person has to be **superstar**

- a. Could get the next level job here if applying from outside and we knew their talents well
- b. Could get the next level job at peer firm that knew their talents well

3. Person is an **extraordinary role model** of our culture and values

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Development

We develop people by surrounding them with stellar colleagues and giving them big challenges to work on. In other words, we give people the opportunity to develop themselves.

Mediocre colleagues or unchallenging work is what kills progress of a person's skills.

We don't have formal “career planning”

Formalized development is rarely effective, and we don't try to do it e.g.

- Mentor assignment
- Rotation around a firm
- Multi-year career paths

We want people to take initiative for their own career growth, and not rely on a corporation for “**planning**” their careers.

Mentor relationships are great when they form organically; cultivate them over time.

We support self- improvement

High performance people are generally self-improving through experience, observation, introspection, reading, and discussion

- As long as they have stellar colleagues and big challenges to work on
- We all try to help each other grow
- We are very honest with each other

Your economic security is
based on your skills and
reputation

We try hard to consistently provide opportunity to
grow both by surrounding you with **great talent.**

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We're pragmatic about remote hiring

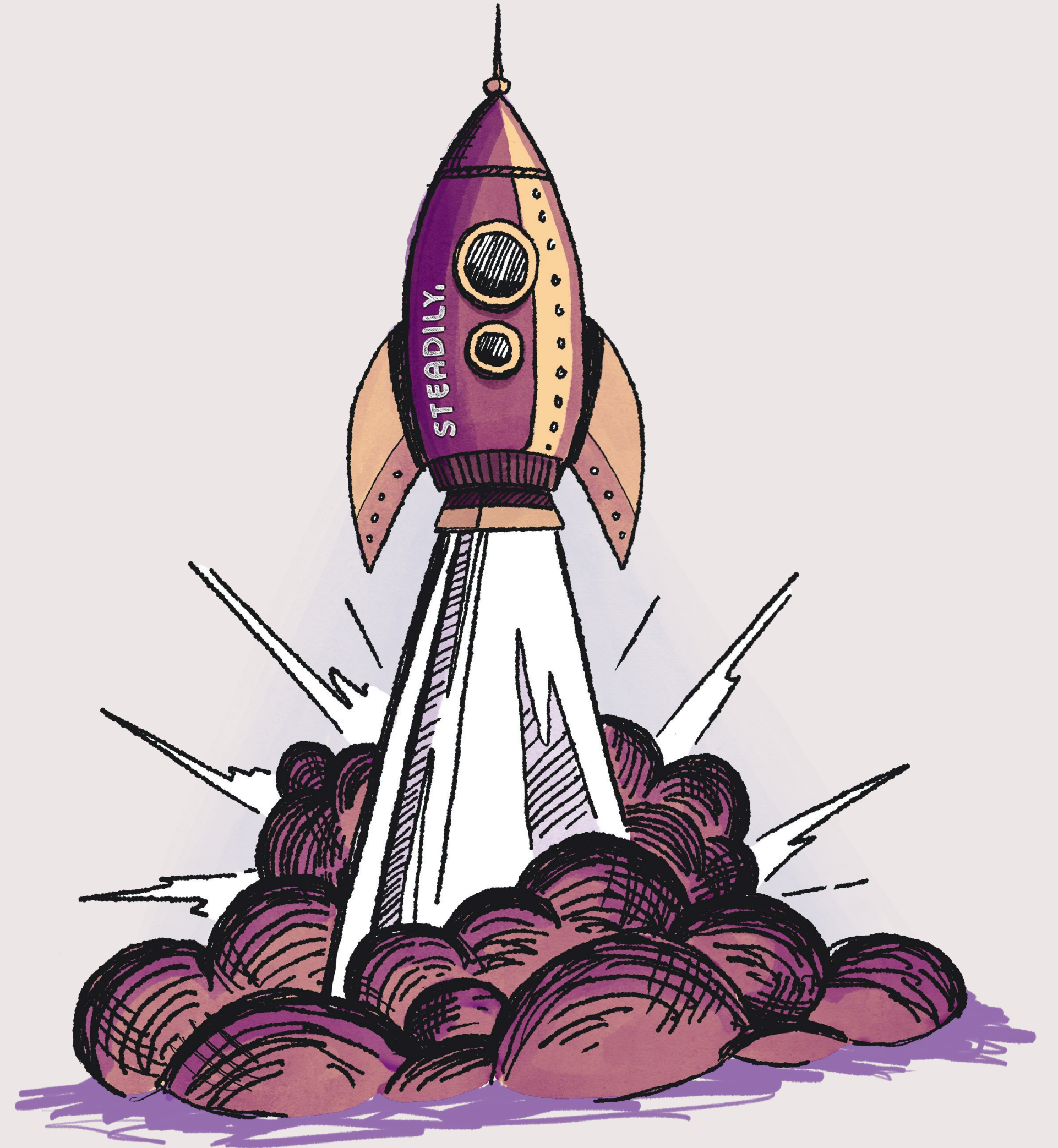
- Sometimes the pool of stellar talent isn't big enough locally
- We benchmark the value of in-person work for each role on a scale of 1-Medium to 4-Extreme
- Then, we raise the hiring bar for remote in proportion to the benchmark
- We've never backtracked: once someone's hired remote, we don't later require them to move

We score each role

We use a 1-4 scale to score each role for in-person vs remote-eligible:

- We advertise 1-Medium roles as remote-friendly
- For the 2+ scored roles, we don't proactively look outside of Austin/KC
- People-manager roles are scored as a 3 or 4, so we've hired vanishingly few people managers remote

We will keep
improving our
culture as we grow
and get better at
seeking excellence



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