Preventing Community

a how-to guide

Josh Berkus
Community Hit Man
Linux Collab 2010

So,

you started

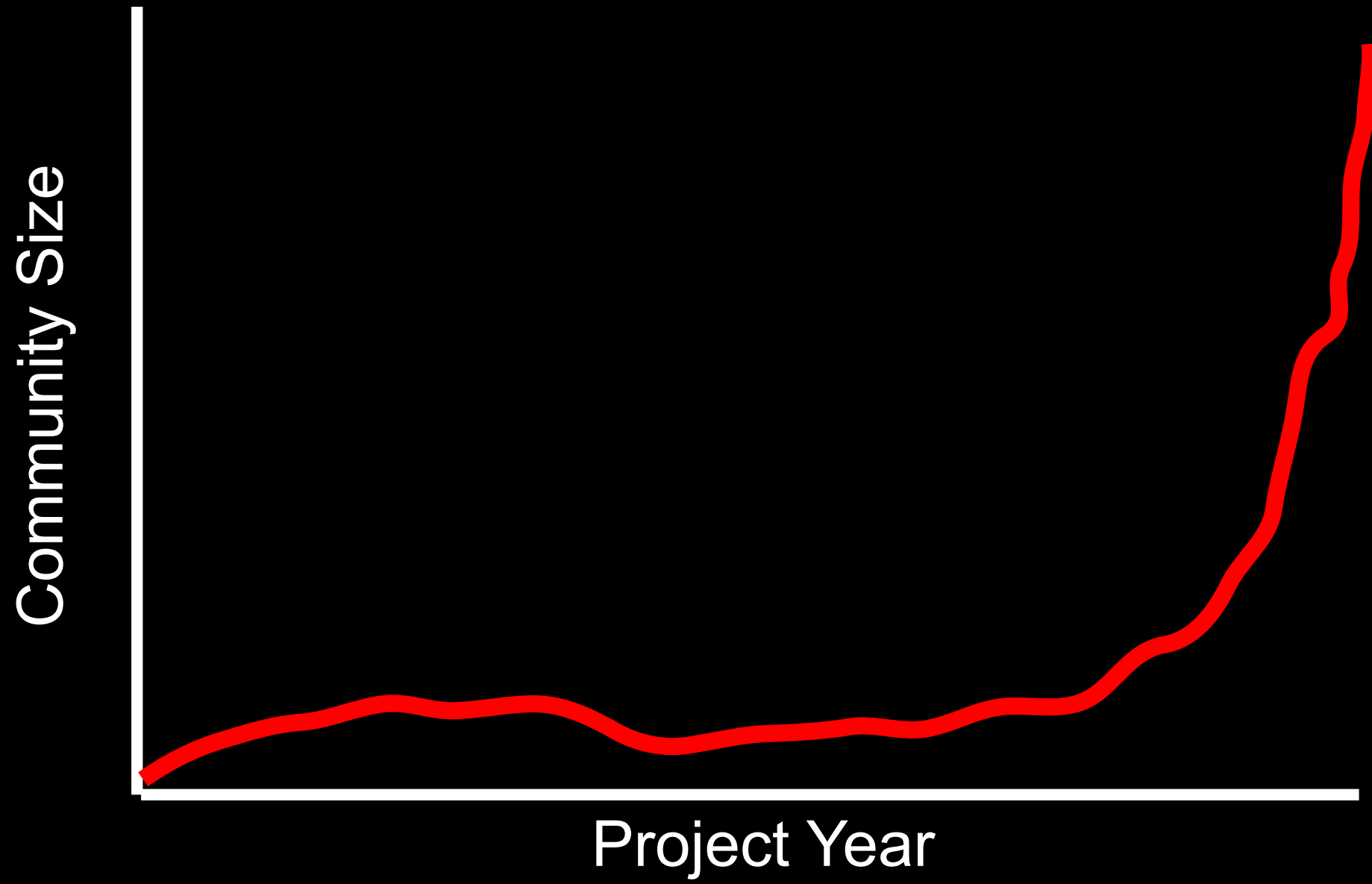
an

open source

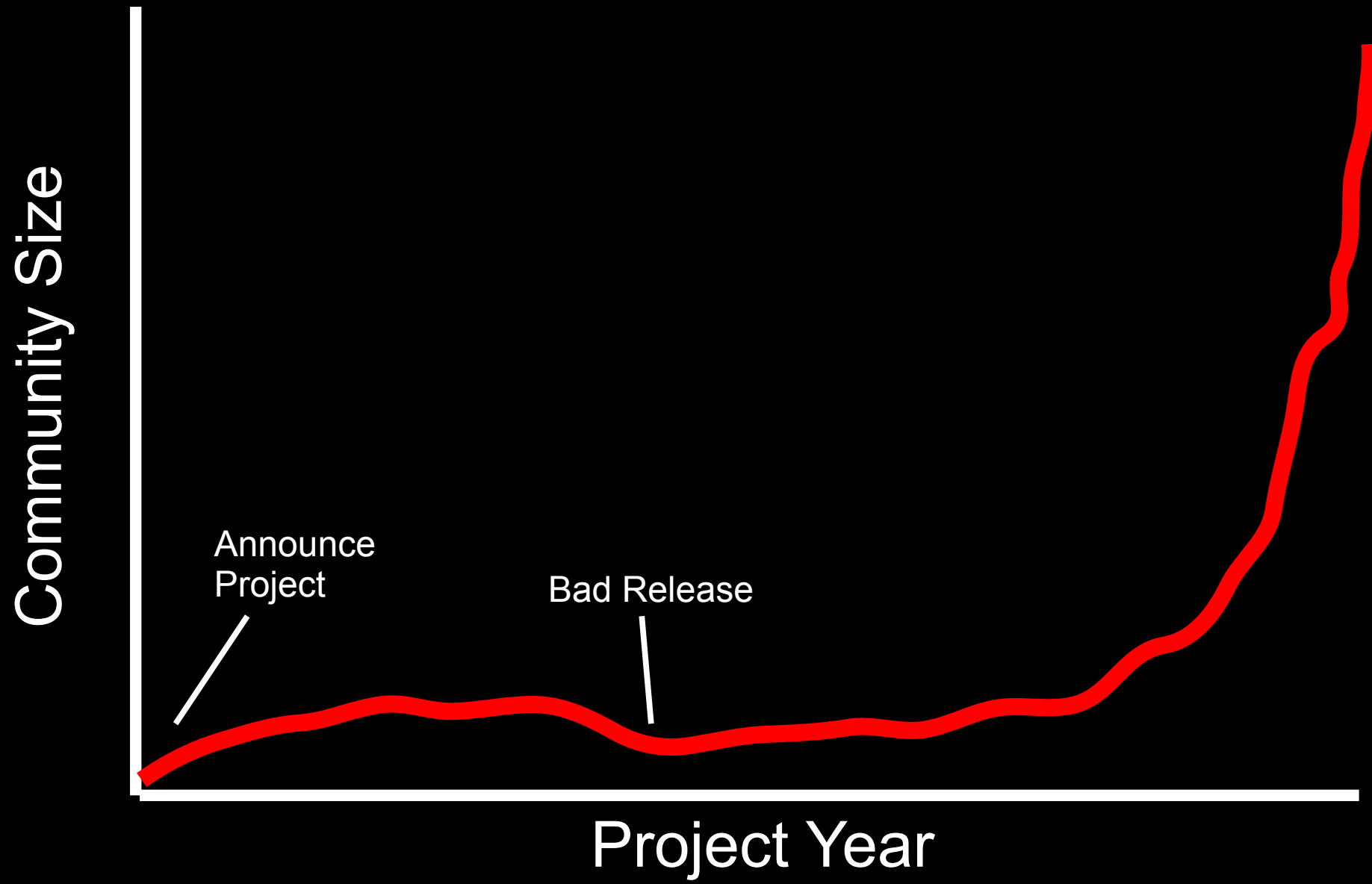
project

COMMUNITY

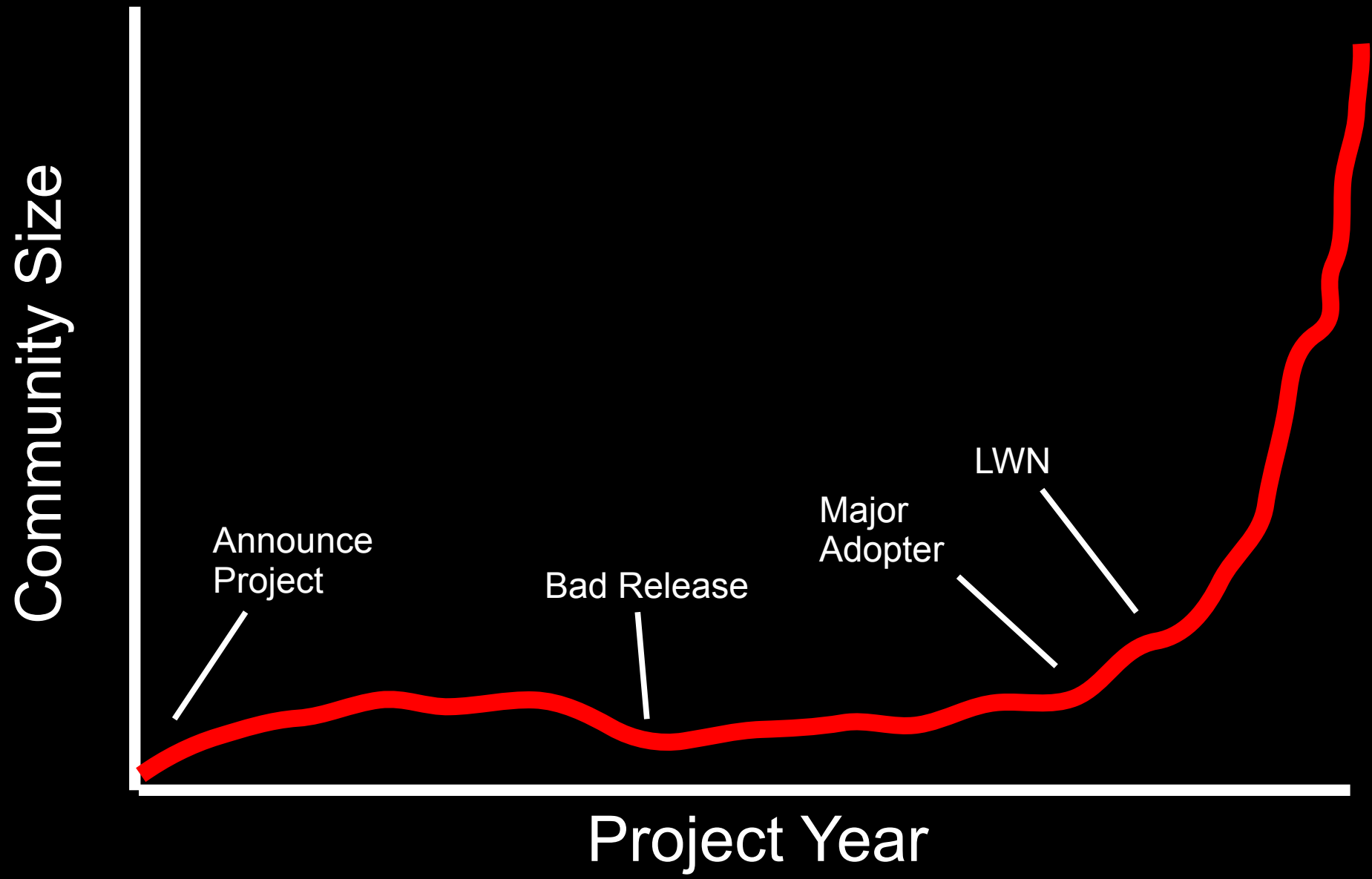
Community Growth



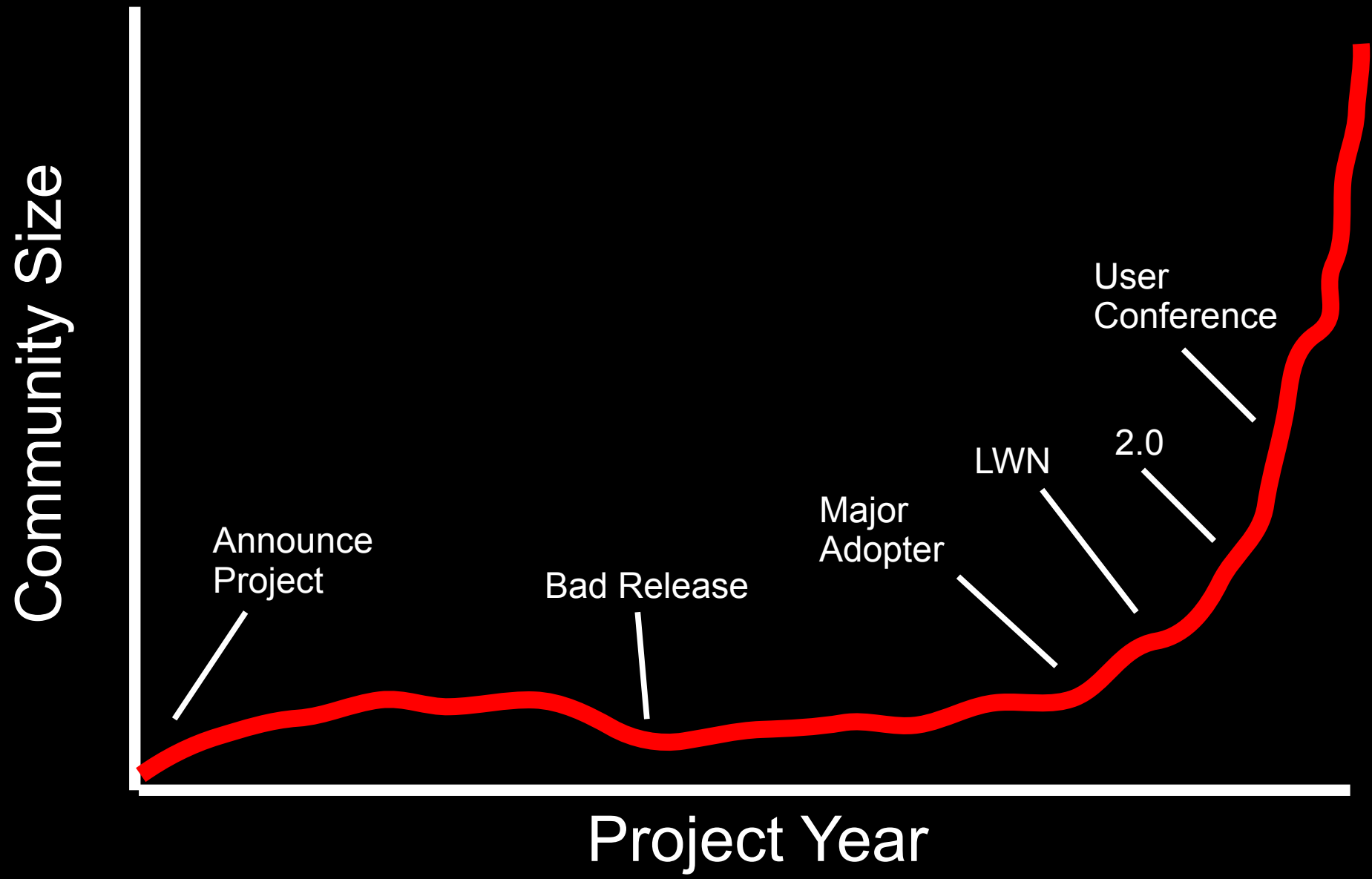
Community Growth



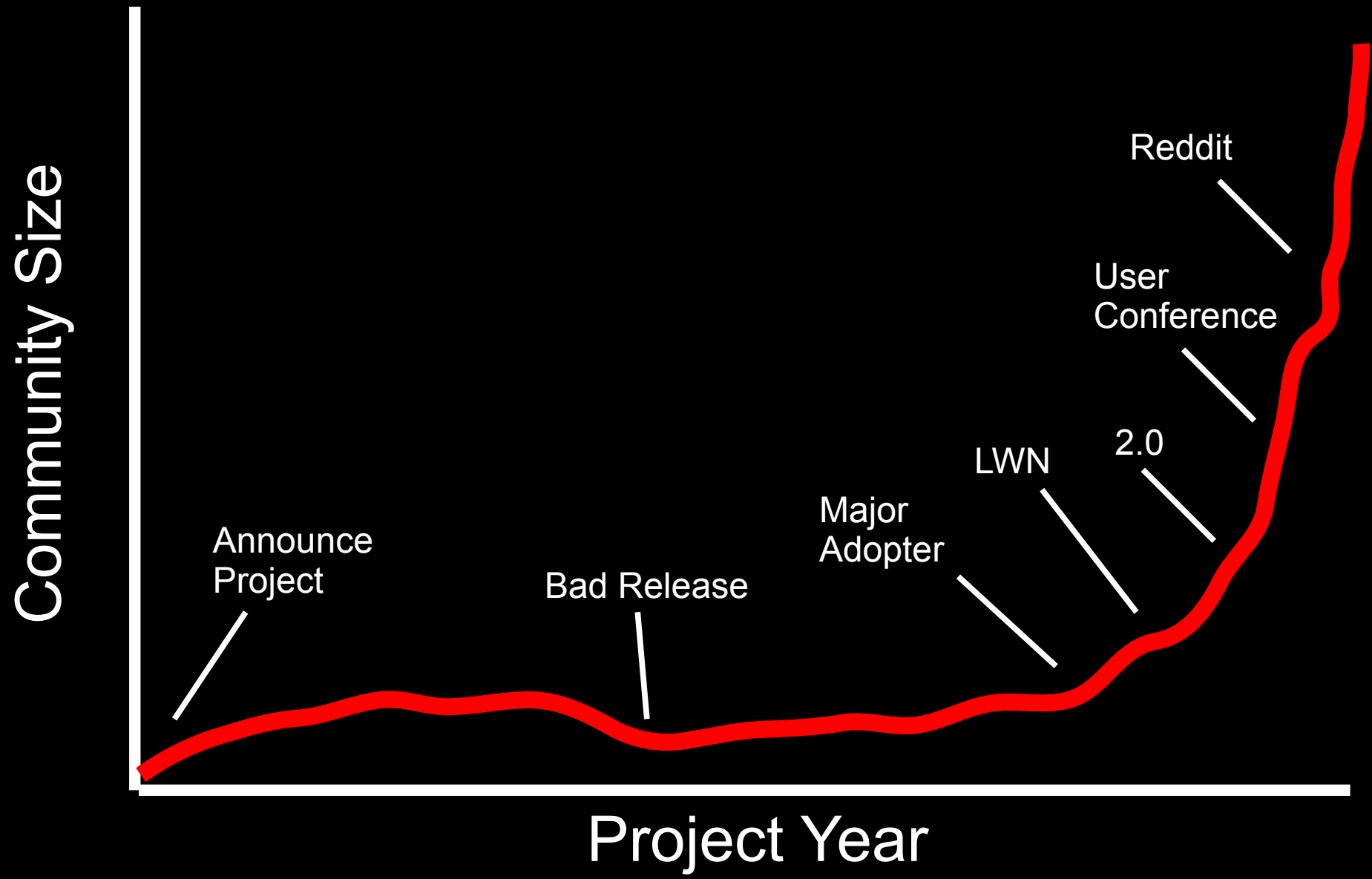
Community Growth



Community Growth



Community Growth



The Horror! The Horror!

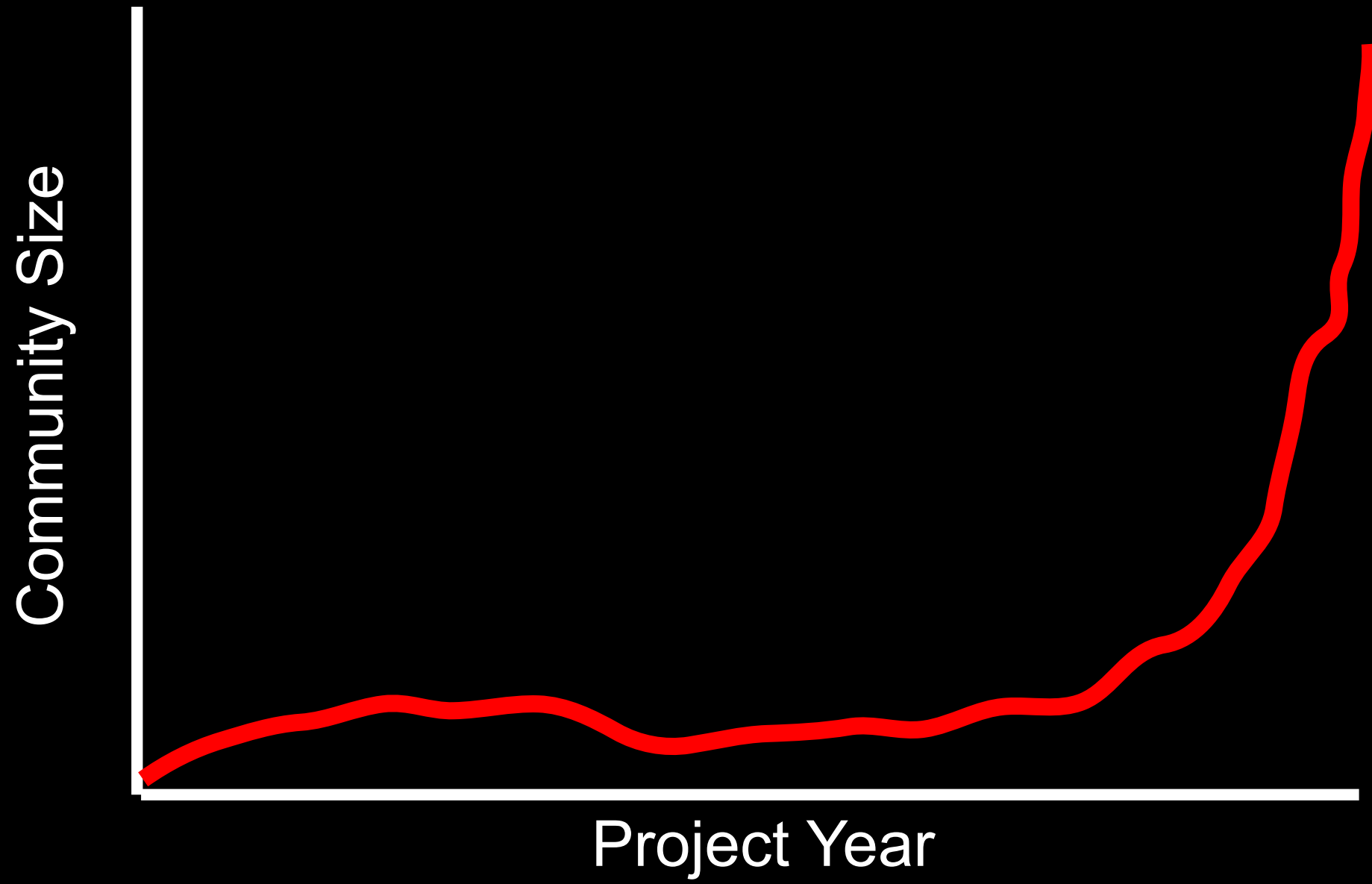
Thousands of Messages

Hundreds of People

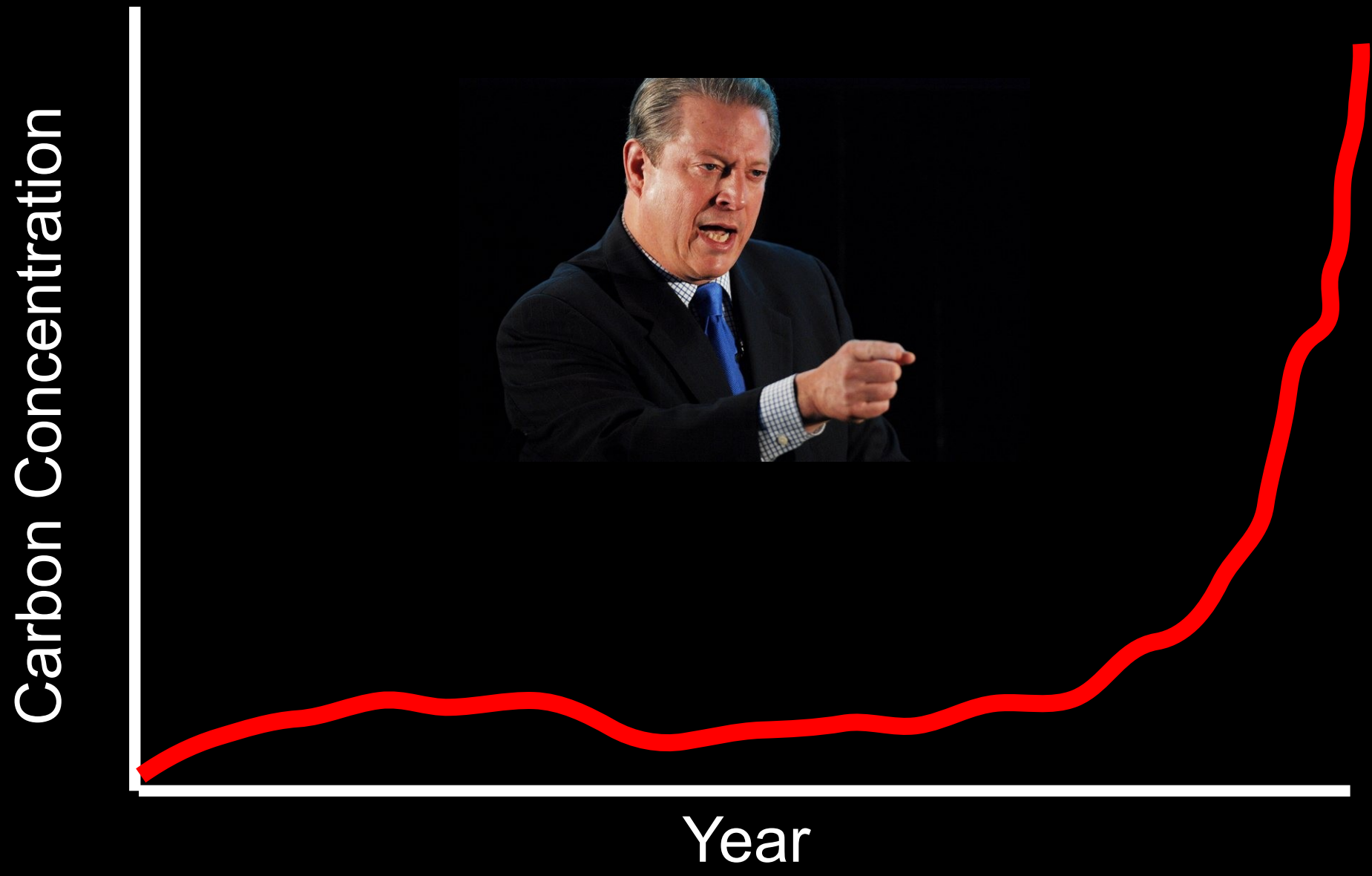
Dozens of Events

Out of Control

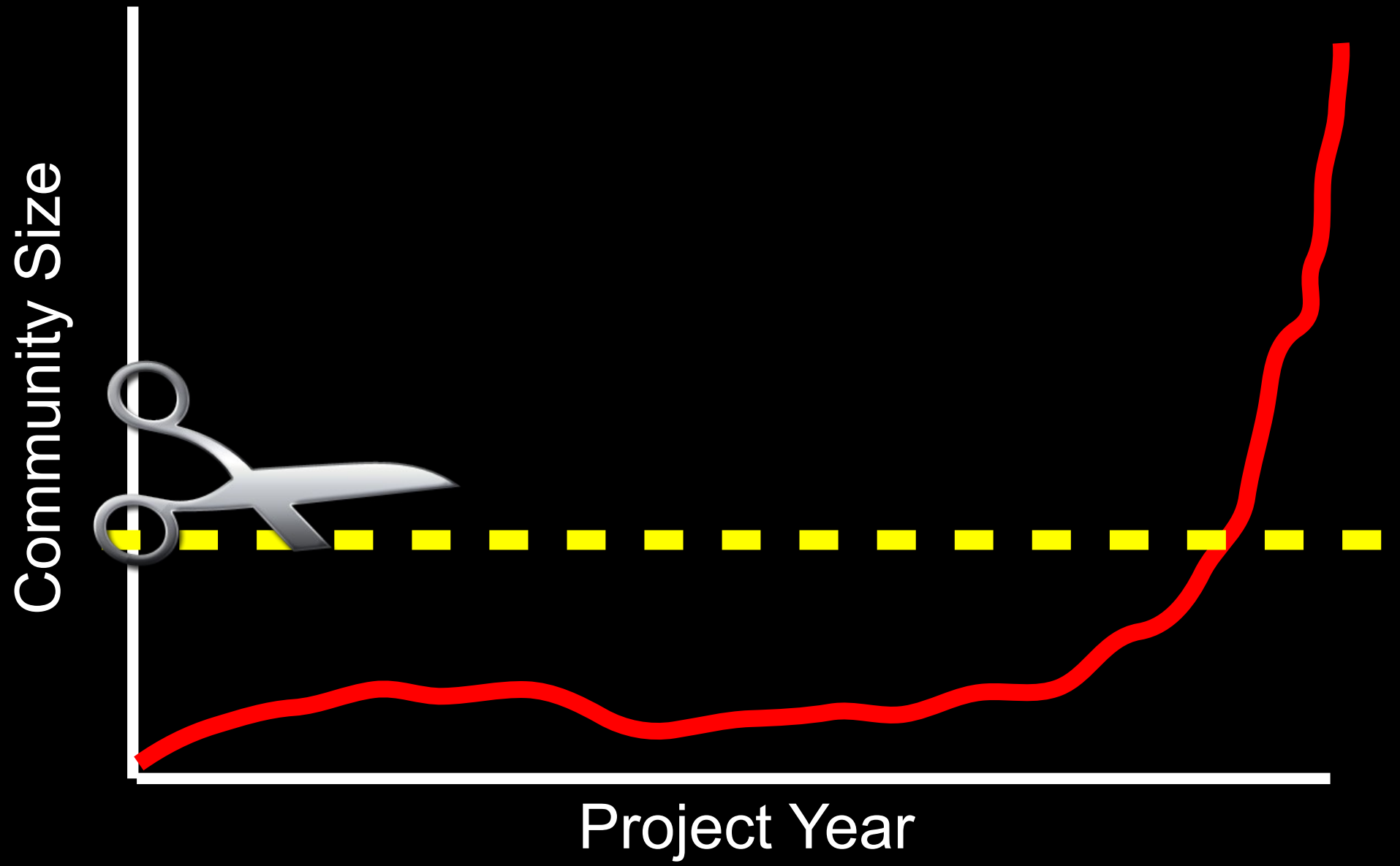
Community Growth



Global CO_2 Concentration



Cut Off That Ugly Growth!



The 7 Habits of Highly Stagnant Communities

THROW IT

THROW IT
OVER

THROW IT
OVER
THE WALL

THROW IT

THROW IT
OVER

THROW IT
OVER
THE WALL

Habit #1

Difficult Tools

- Proprietary version control
- Idiosyncratic build systems
- Antiquated bug trackers
- Home-grown CMS with proprietary components
- Documentation system with no GUI tools

advantages of difficult tools

- huge barrier to entry for new contributors
  - most get discouraged and leave
- slow down the whole project by making routine tasks difficult
- skills are non-portable to other OSS projects
- your staff know the tools better than the community

the best thing
about difficult tools is ...

you probably have them already!

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Habit #2

Overworked Project Team

enemy #1: your own staff

solution: overwork your team!

1. assign your development engineers to managing the project
2. increase their engineering workload at the same time
3. have no dedicated community liaison, or one who is useless
4. add a bunch of ambitious deadlines for the project

3 possible outcomes

- your staff will neglect the community
- your staff will hate the community and the community will hate them
- staff who care about community will burn out and abandon the project

All win!

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Habit #3

Closed-Door Meetings

Closed-Door Meetings

Good

Short-notice online meetings

Closed-Door Meetings

Good

Short-notice online meetings

Better

Telephone meetings

Closed-Door Meetings

Good

Short-notice online meetings

Better

Telephone meetings

Best

Meet in person, in your secure off ce

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THE WALL

Habit #4: Feed The Trolls

nurture your trolls

Maximize the damage they can do!

1. Argue with them at length

nurture your trolls

Maximize the damage they can do!

1. Argue with them at length
2. Denounce them venemously

nurture your trolls

Maximize the damage they can do!

1. Argue with them at length
2. Denounce them venemously
3. Ban them

nurture your trolls

Maximize the damage they can do!

1. Argue with them at length
2. Denounce them venemously
3. Ban them
4. Argue with them in other projects/sites

nurture your trolls

Maximize the damage they can do!

1. Argue with them at length
2. Denounce them venemously
3. Ban them
4. Argue with them in other projects/sites
5. Allow them back into your project

nurture your trolls

Maximize the damage they can do!

1. Argue with them at length
2. Denounce them venemously
3. Ban them
4. Argue with them in other projects
5. Allow them back into your project
6. GOTO 1

Habit #5:
Lock It Down!

there can be only one!

- **Only one** person should have admin on the web server
- **Only one** person can have control of the DNS
- **Only one** person may touch the mail server
- **Only one** person will administrate the CMS

make it the right person

overworked

antisocial

required to follow elaborate company procedures

and never, ever an outside community member or team!

then, let them go on vacation!

what could go wrong?

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Habit #6

Legalese, Legalese, Legalese

you can't have too much legalese!

The longer and more complex the better!

- Contributor agreements
- Website content licensing
- Non-disclosure agreements
- Trademark licensing terms
- Open source release review process

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- Open source release review process

- Bonus: change the documents every couple of months, without any official notice.

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Habit #7

silence is golden

The 7 Habits

1. Difficult Tools
2. Overworked Project Team
3. Closed-Door Meetings
4. Feed The Trolls
5. Lock it Down!
6. Legalese, Legalese, Legalese
7. Silence

The 7 Other Habits

1. easy, common tools
2. allocate time for project
3. open decision-making
4. manage & expel trolls
5. share control
6. minimize legalese
7. communicate

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THE WALL

contact

- Josh Berkus
  - josh@pgexperts.com
  - www.pgexperts.com
  - it.toolbox.com/blogs/database-soup
- events
  - open source bridge Portland june 1
  - community leadership summit Portland july 17
  - OSCON Portland july 19

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