

# Why I Took 7 Months Off.

## Decision Engineering Lessons From South America

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17th December 2025

# This is not a talk about vacations.



## It's about debugging my life.

# Act I: Leave.

Decision Models

## Who am I?

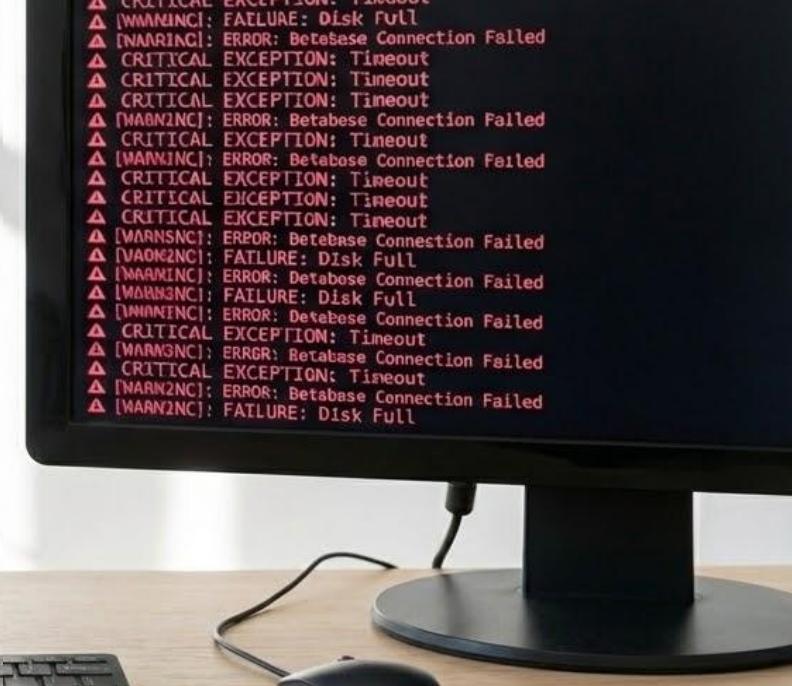
- Career: 14 years
- 2 companies
- B2B SaaS
- Engineer → Director
- Many roles. Many teams.





✓ Dashboard metrics green  
>> Title, salary  
>> Performance reviews

⚠ Deep logs red  
[ERR] Less joy  
[ERR] Reorg fatigue



# Model 1: Quitting Threshold (Cate Huston)

	1 May	1 Jun	1 Jul	1 Aug	1 Sep	
You're not learning (and you want to)	1	1	1	3	5	
Your job is bad for your confidence	2	3	4	5	5	
You feel...	2	3	4	4	4	
You...	2	2	3	2	1	
You...	1	2	2	2	3	
<b>Score</b>	8	10	14	16	18	Threshold = 17/25. I quit!



# Model 2: Life Vision (with my personal 6 areas)



Career and Technology

I empower people through technology to create real, positive change

Family

Growth

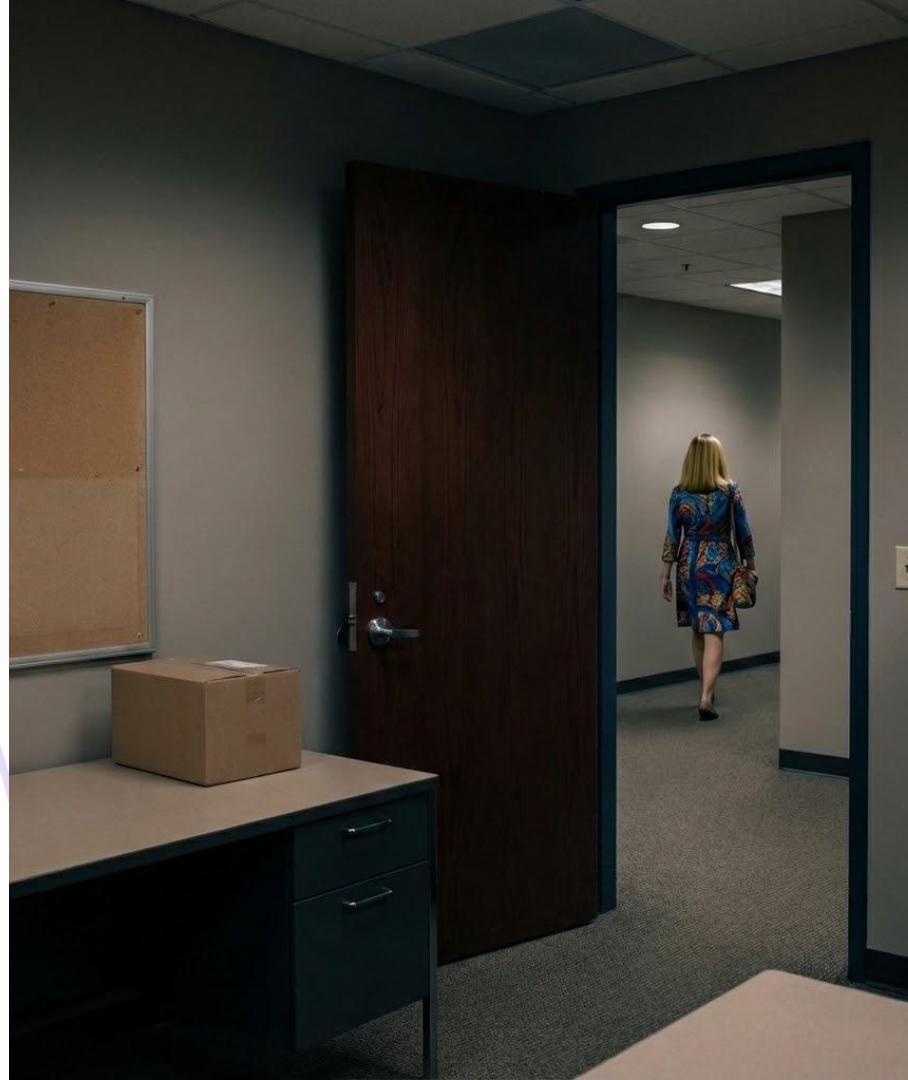
Health

World

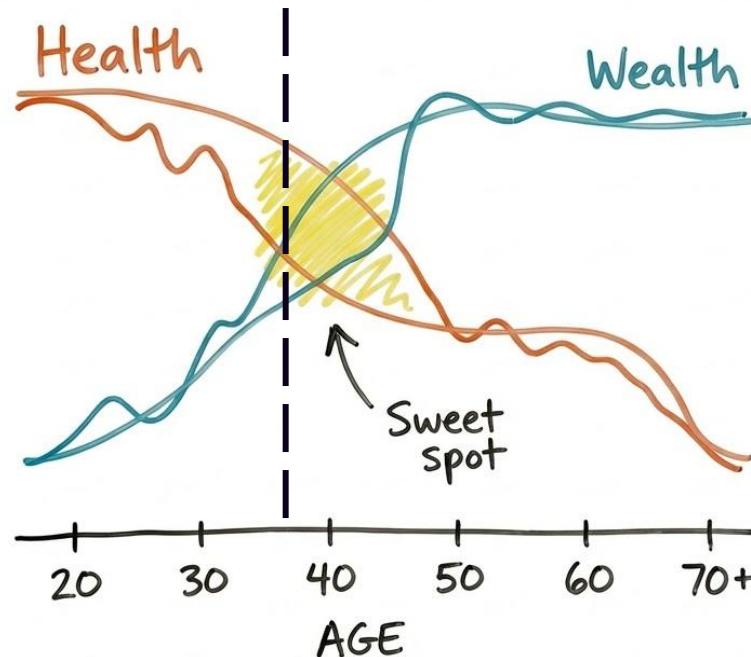
Friends

**The Catalyst:**

**My wife was laid off.  
The decision became clearer.**

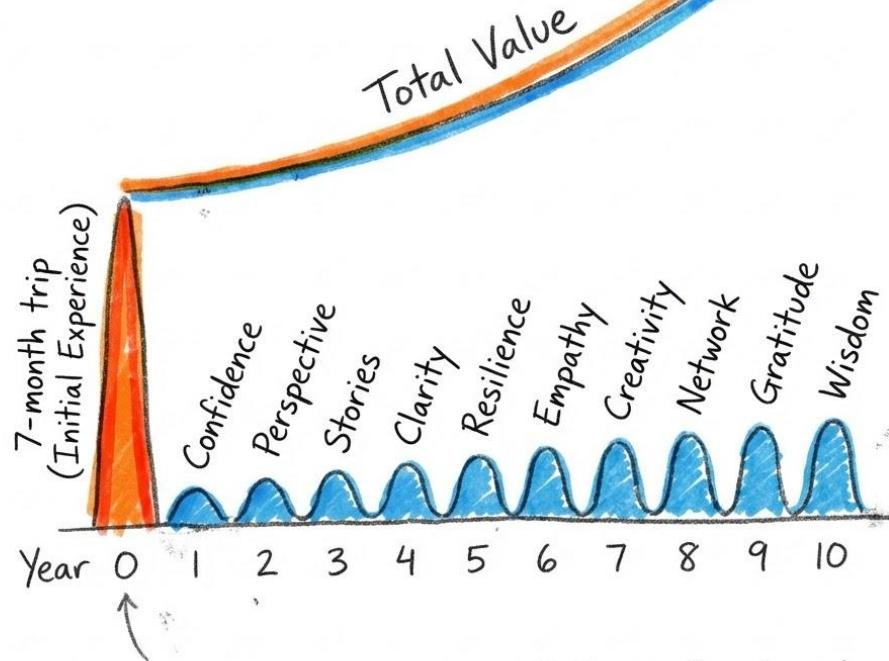


# Model 3: The Optimization Window

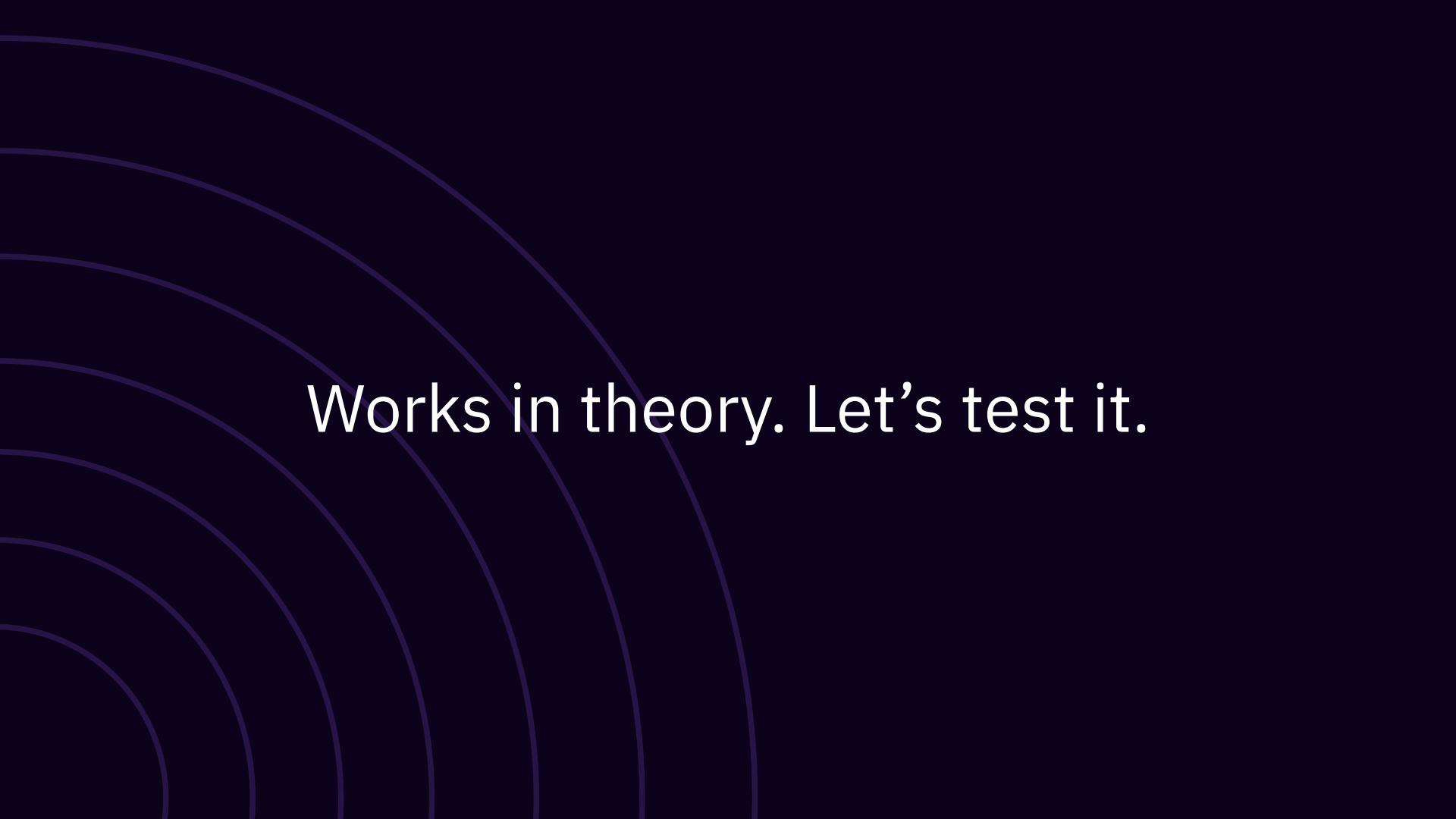


From the outside: risky. From the inside: boringly rational

# Model 3: Memory Dividends (Bill Perkins)



Use experiences when their future return (memory dividend) is highest

The background of the slide features a series of concentric, semi-transparent purple arcs that radiate from the bottom left corner towards the top right, creating a dynamic, circular motion effect.

Works in theory. Let's test it.



Fitz Roy, Argentina



Atacama Desert, Chile



Quilotoa Lagoon, Ecuador

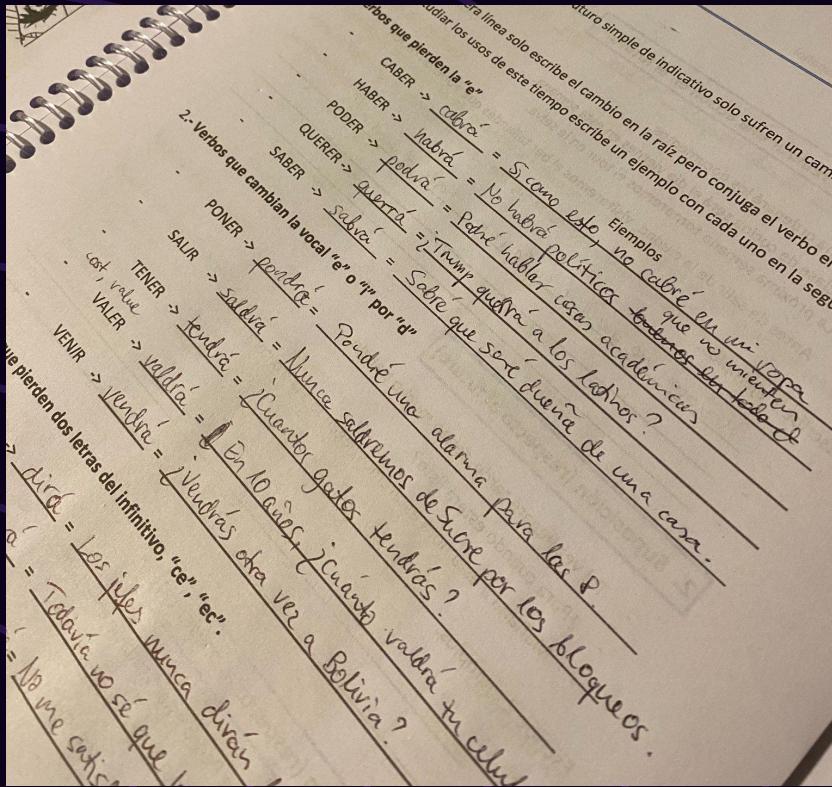
# Act II: Learn.

Decision Heuristics

7 months  
9 countries  
5000 memories  
5000 decisions?



# Losing identity



Heuristic  
Principles >  
Job titles

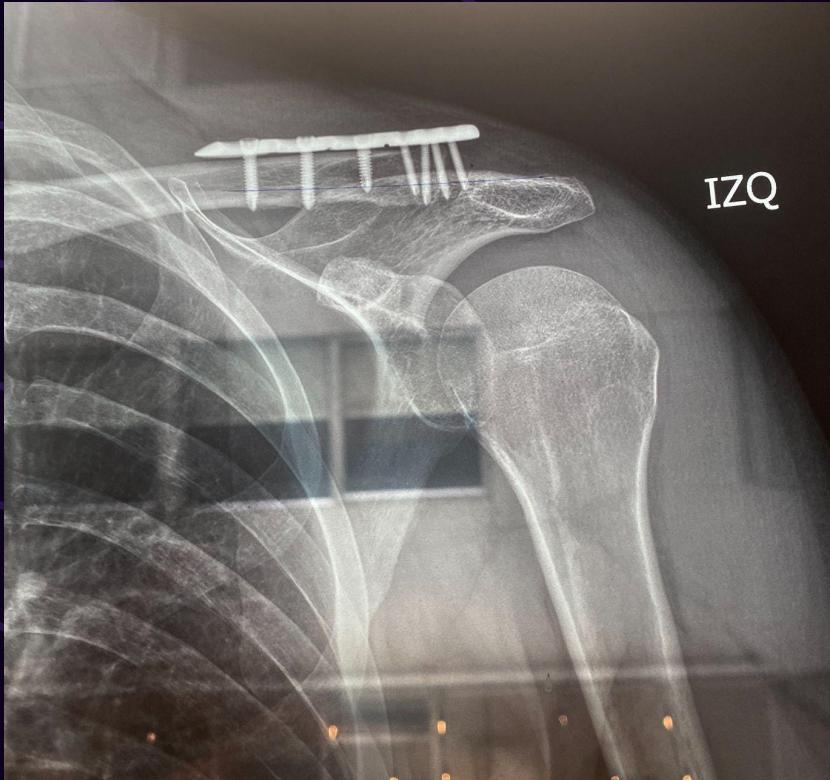
# Losing urgency



Heuristic

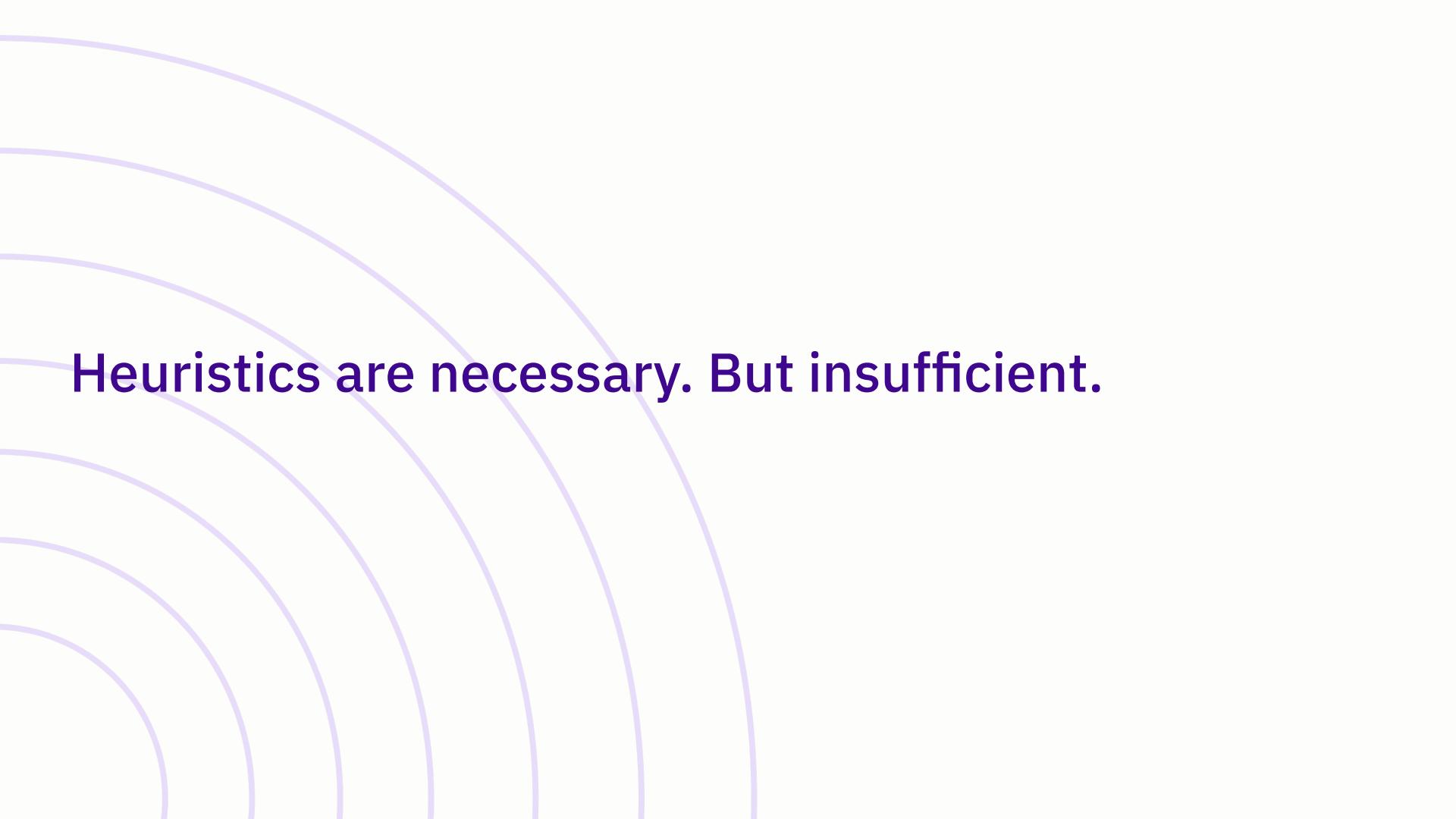
Zoom-out lens >  
Urgency bias

# Losing control



Heuristic

Short decision loops >  
Perfect plans



**Heuristics are necessary. But insufficient.**

# Act III: Restart.

Decision Engine

# Tech in Q4 ≠ Tech in Q1

2025

AI

# Noise



# So I built a decision system for myself

Compathy > Your personal AI assistant for job search and career direction

Alex Chen

Companies Opportunities Profile

Search opportunities... + Add

Active All Alphabetical Best fits first Newest

Spotify Senior Research Scientist - AI Alignment 83

Anthropic ML Research Engineer 78

Spotify Data Science Engineer - Recommendations 66

Stripe Senior Machine Learning Engineer 63

Uber Senior Data Science Engineer 68

Airalo Data Scientist - Growth 54

← Back to opportunity AI fit analysis

Fit score 70% Data quality score 71%

You have a strong technical and mission alignment with Anthropic's ML Research Engineer role, but the academic research expectations (PhD, AI alignment publications) and missing salary/stability information create some uncertainty that you would need to clarify during the process.

Key insights

- ⚠ You face a moderate risk of credential mismatch because the role explicitly requires a PhD while you currently show a Master's plus applied research experience, so you may need to demonstrate equivalent research depth.
- ✓ You are strongly aligned with Anthropic's mission and AI safety focus, matching your life vision to work on interpretable, trustworthy, and beneficial AI systems.
- ✓ You have substantial hands-on experience with deep learning, NLP (BERT/GPT), and large-scale ML systems, which maps well to the role's emphasis on large language model development and experimentation.
- ✓ The fully remote, flexible setup with a collaborative research

Position fit 8

Company culture 9

Salary 5

Prestige 9

Growth potential 9

Work-life balance 8

Role reality 9

Strategic fit 10

Location & logistics 10

Risk profile 5

Recalculate

# Why do I fit?

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Recalculate

Back to opportunity AI fit analysis

**Prestige** 9

You have a strong technical and mission alignment with Anthropic's ML Research Engineer role, but the research expectations (PhD, AI alignment) and missing salary/stability information create uncertainty. It's important that you would need to clarify during the interview process.

**Key insights**

- ⚠ You face a moderate risk of credential mismatch. While the role explicitly requires a PhD while you currently have a Master's, you have substantial hands-on experience with deep learning, NLP (BERT/GPT), and large-scale ML systems, which maps well to the role's emphasis on large language model development and experimentation.
- ✓ You are strongly aligned with Anthropic's mission and AI safety focus, matching your life vision to work on interpretable, trustworthy, and beneficial AI systems.
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- ✓ The fully remote, flexible setup with a collaborative research environment.

indicates strong growth and learning opportunities. but no explicit boundaries on workload.

Role reality 9

You see a clearly scoped research engineer role focused on AI alignment and LLM development with concrete responsibilities and realistic expectations.

Strategic fit 10

You prefer AI/ML and ethical AI industries and the company is an AI safety research lab with a clear mission on beneficial AI, but long-term strategy details are not fully specified.

Location & logistics 10

Risk profile 5

# Where's the catch?

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← Back to opportunity AI fit analysis Recalculate

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- ✓ The fully remote, flexible setup with a collaborative research

Salary 5

You specify a detailed salary expectation but the job  
description only says competitive compensation  
with no concrete range or structure.

publications, and work on transformative AI which  
indicates strong growth and learning opportunities.

Role reality 9

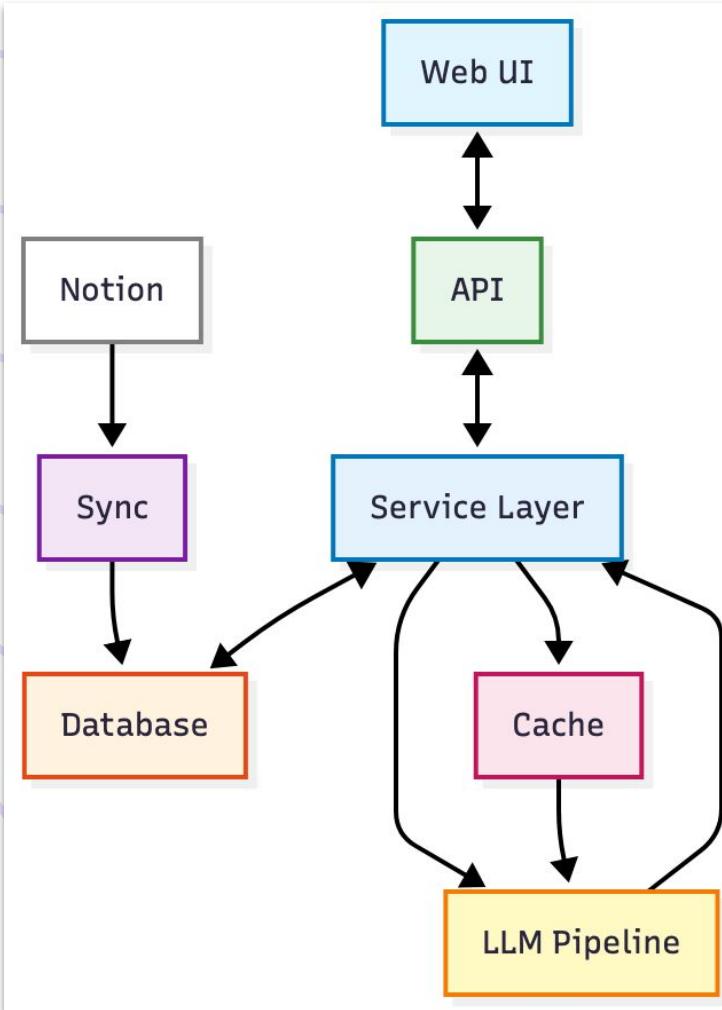
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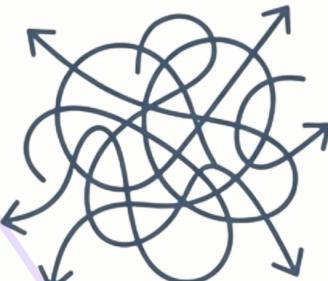


2024:  
At least a quarter for a team

Q4 2025:  
Two weeks for me & Cursor

This changed  
how I  
– search  
– select  
– think

BEFORE



- **100+ options, mostly noise**
- Emotional reactions
- Fear of missing out
- Could land anywhere

AFTER



- **8 positions with >70% fit**
- Data-backed
- Calm, deliberate, aligned
- Will land at the right place

# Decision Engineering

Audit

Diagnose

Triage

Protect

Logs

Models

Heuristics

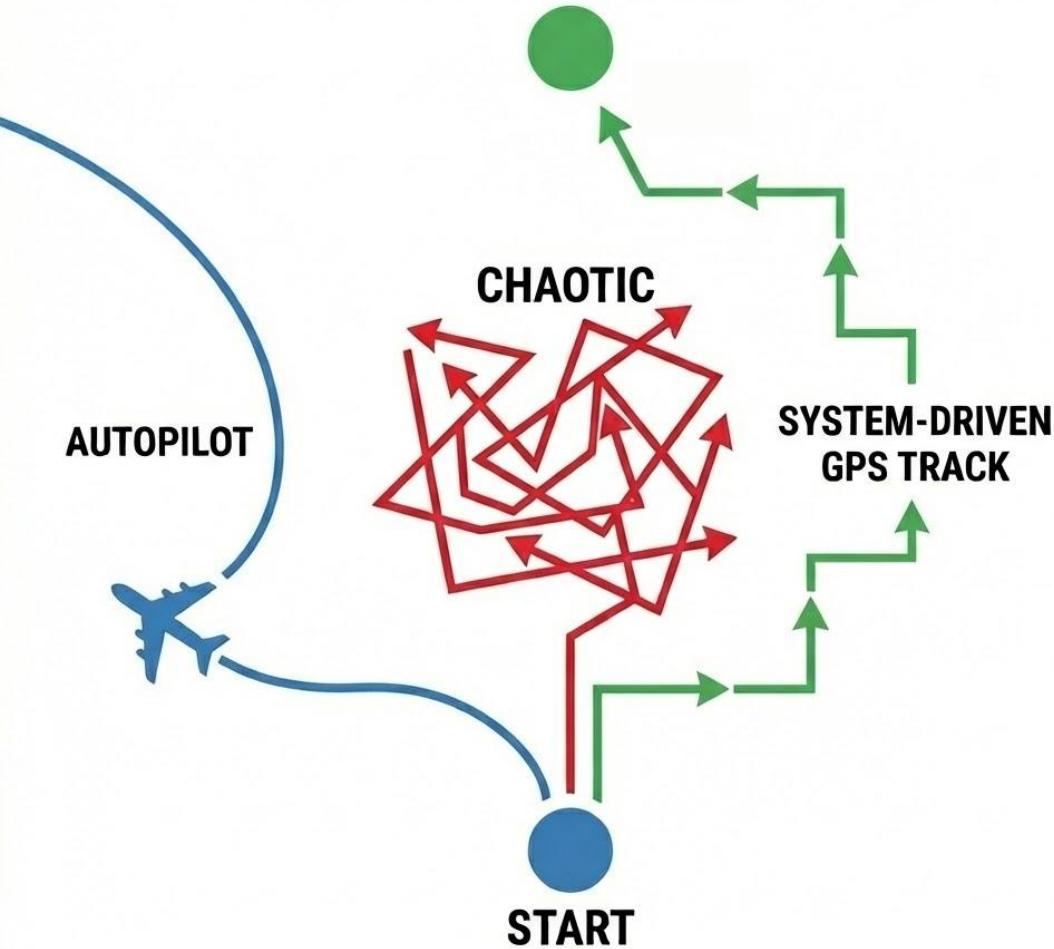
System

# What's my Return on Investment?

Better decisions – everywhere, not just in the career.



## SELF-FULFILLMENT



Which road are you on?



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<https://kdg.one>