

Feel it

Why Design Should Be Closer to Decision-Making

Medium

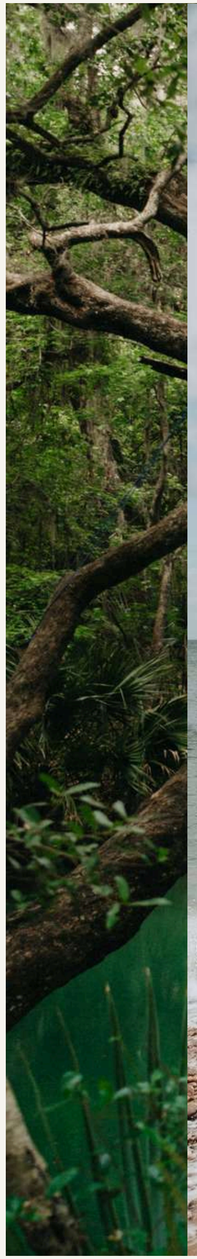
Cassie McDaniel

Designer, Writer

VP Product & Design



UF 02-06



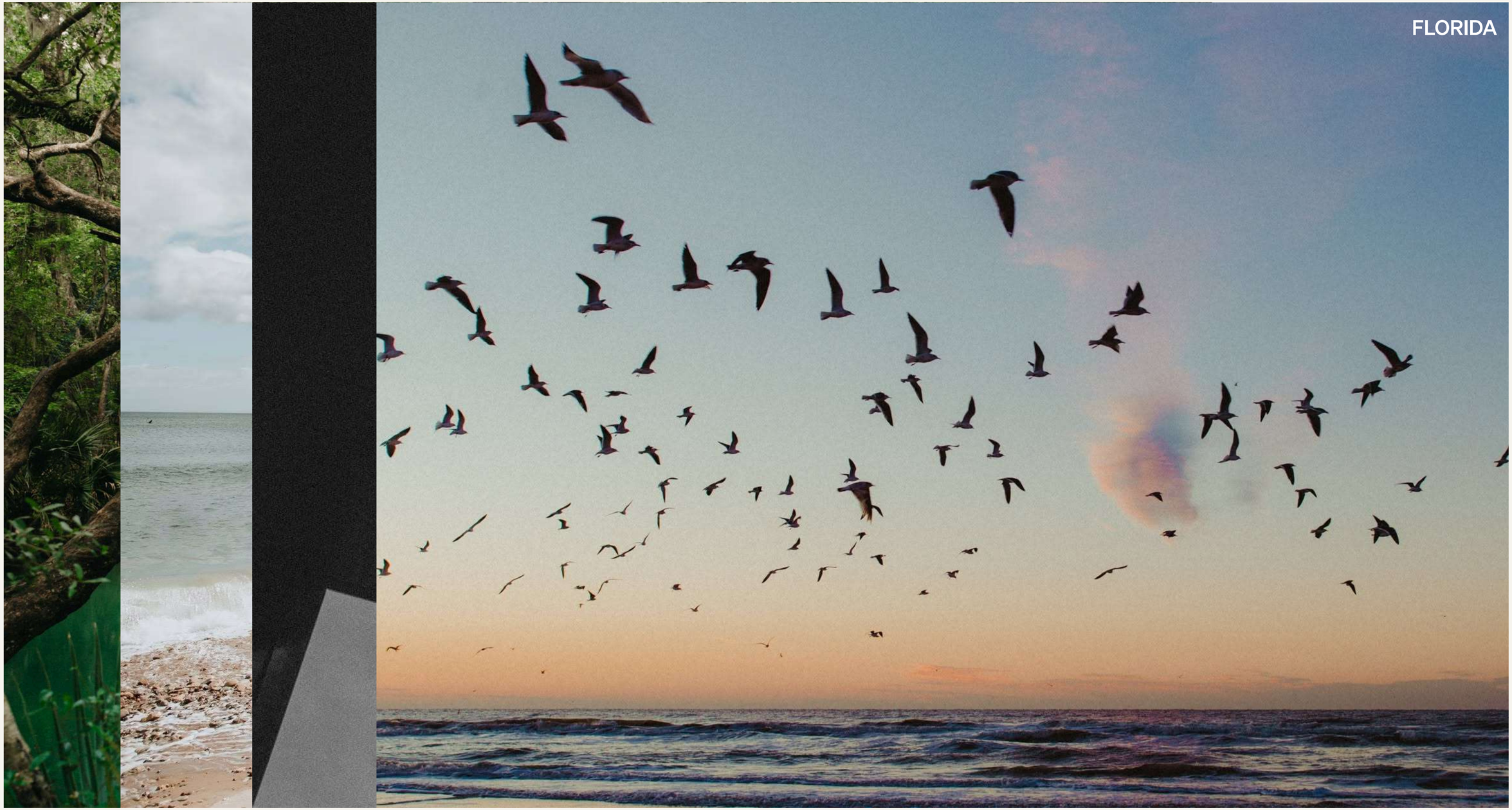

ENGLAND







UF 02-06 UK 06-09 CA 09-18



UF 02-06 UK 06-09 CA 09-18 FL 18-26

01 Why Medium made radical changes to the way we work

02 The real value of design, as clarified by AI upending everything

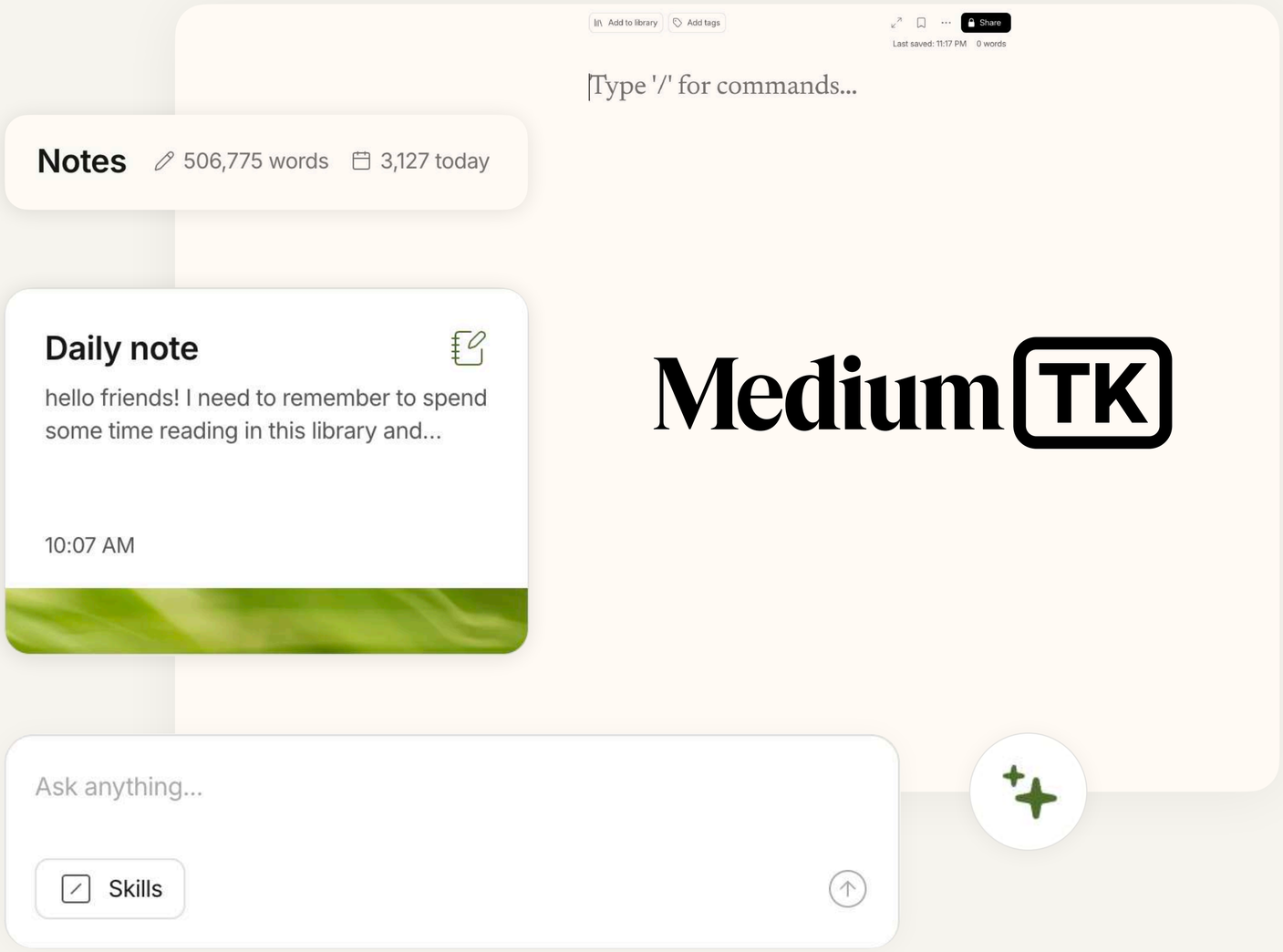
03 How to let design lead

01

Medium

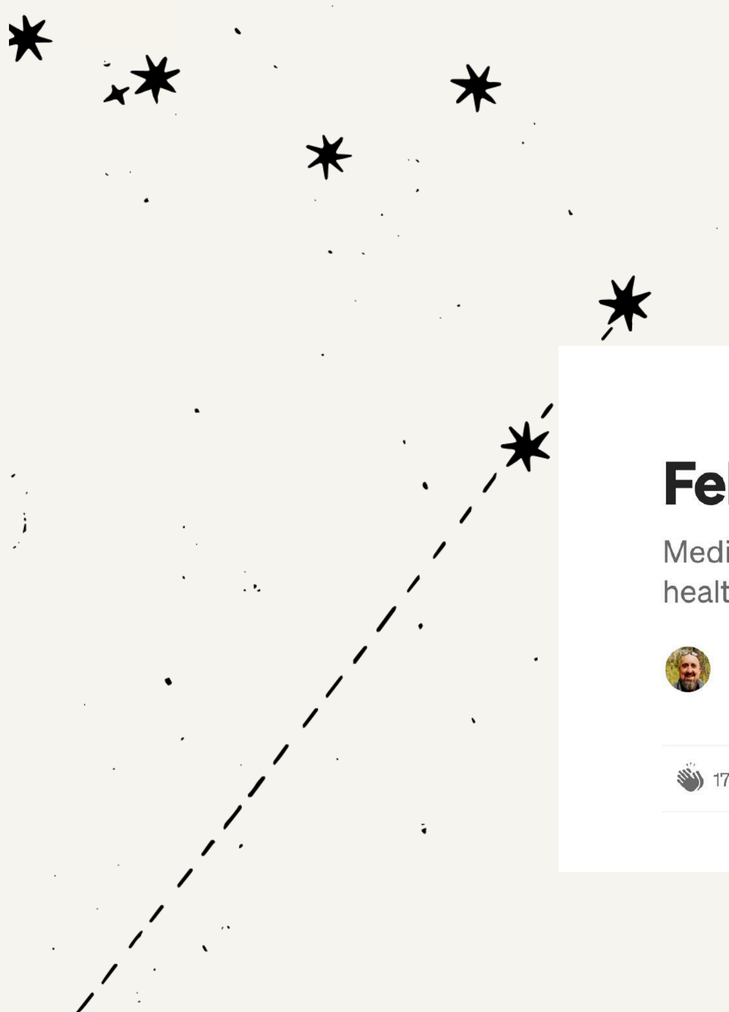
A Reading & Writing Company™

> Medium's new app tries to save the platform from irrelevance
>
> Love,
> **Mashable**



Four years ago, we were losing $2.6 million/month.

But the team fixed it!



TechCrunch

VENTURE

Medium's CEO explains what it took to stop losing $2.6M monthly

July 11, 2025

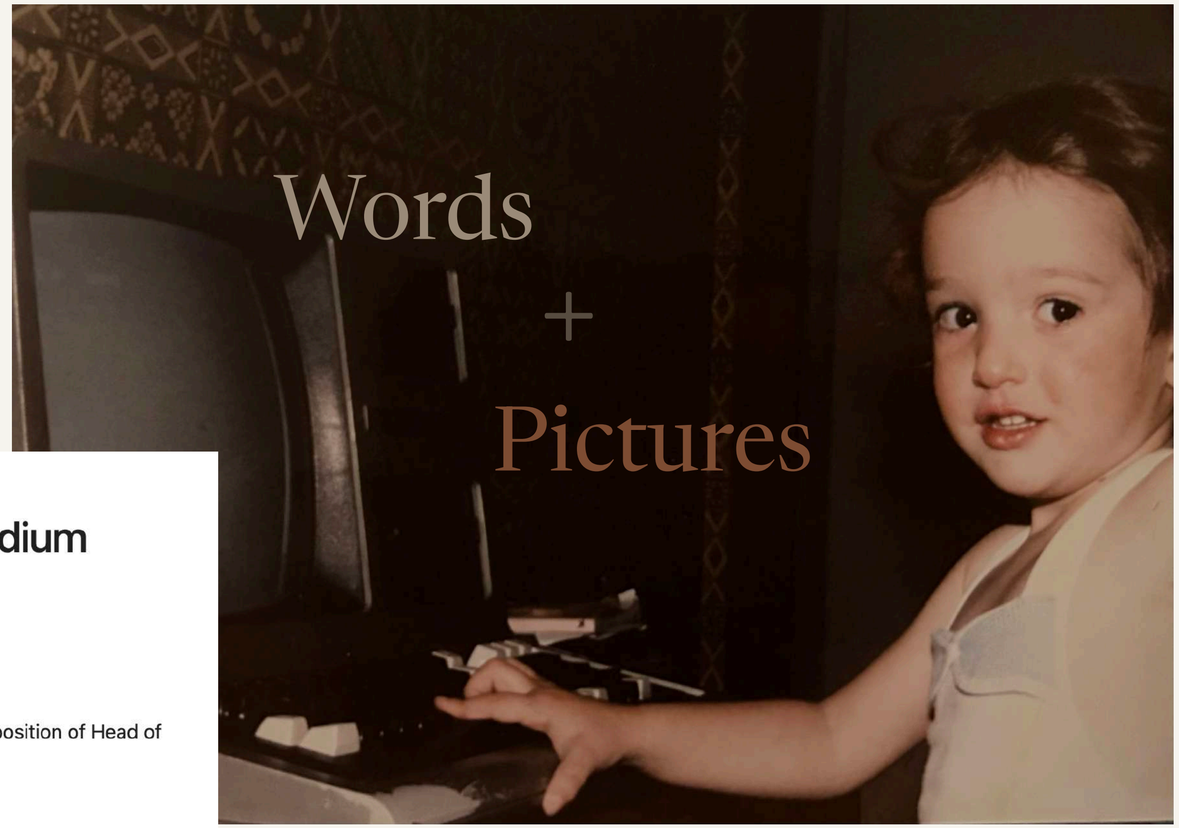
Fell in a hole, got out.

Medium's recap, financial turnaround, and difficult path back to health.

Tony Stubblebine · Following · 18 min read · Jul 11, 2025

17.5K · 445 · 1

That’s when I joined.



Your Offer from Medium

Hi Cassie,

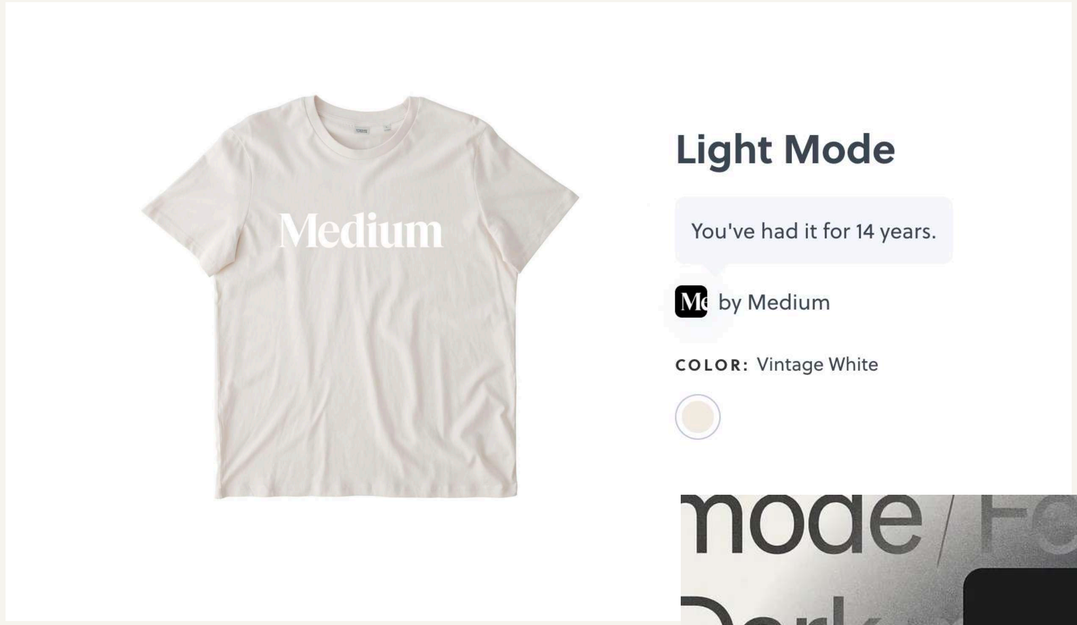
We are pleased to extend you an offer for the position of Head of Design.

Please review the offer below.

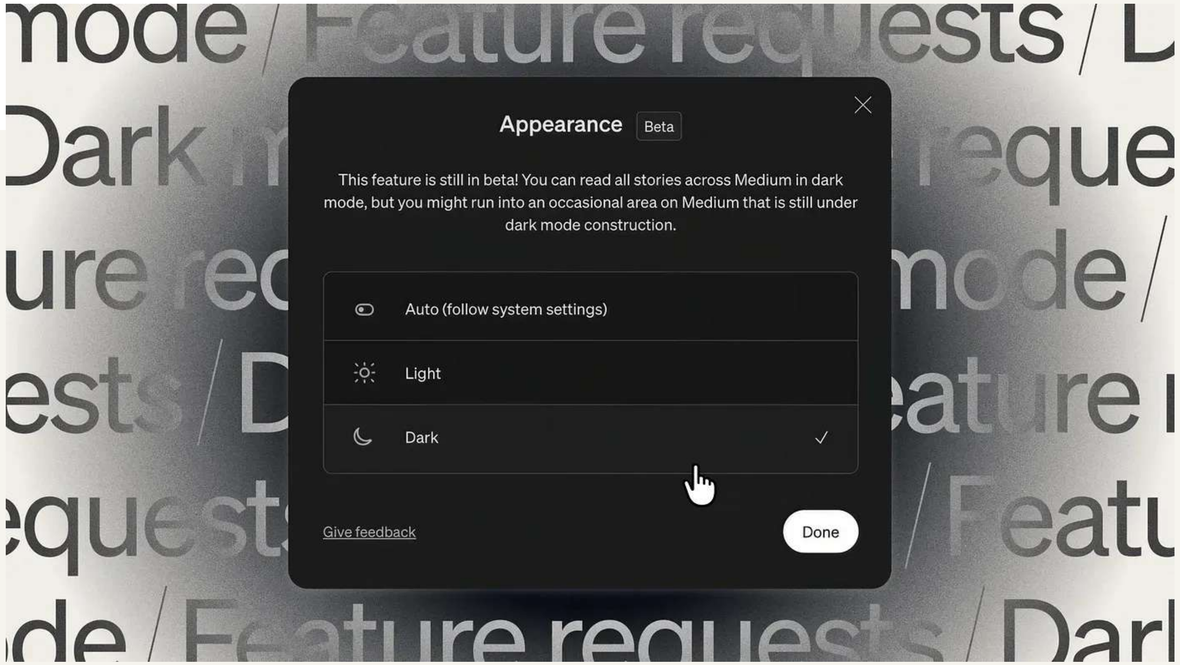
Thanks, Medium

Review Offer

If you have any questions or would like to give us some feedback, you can reply to this email and it will go to the hiring team responsible for this role.



Our 14-year-old code base was getting in the way.



AI slop lords showed up.

Matúš Benkovič · Sep 5, 2025

Even AI-Generated Slop Beats Medium's Clickbait Sludge

Looking for genuine writing

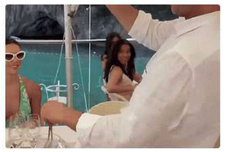


23

In All About Something by Lauri Elias · Jul 30, 2024

I Read So Much Gunk on Medium I Thought Medium Was Bad

'For you' tab considered harmful



852 19

Business + Entrepreneurship +

Medium is full of AI slop

Thack Follow 2 min read · Jun 21, 2025

153 3

Medium is a truly abhorrent platform.

ethX · May 24

Why I'm Canceling My Medium Subscription

On the Devaluation of Writing and the Flood of "AI Slop"

In The Money Guide by Esha · Dec 25, 2025

Should I Stop Writing on Medium?

It's the end of the year and everything feels so hopeless.

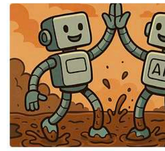


221 6

Xavier Stachowiak · Jun 21, 2025

Medium is a slop-fest of AIs high-fiving each other

There's something deeply unsettling happening on Medium right now, and once you see it, you can't unsee it.



74

Adam Kuro · Apr 18

Taking 6 Months off Writing on Medium Because

I got tired of all the AI Slop



Because you follow Writing

In AI Mind by Dishit Devasia · May 4

AI Made Content Easier. It Also Made It Forgettable.

In a world of endless content, the only thing that stands out is being human.



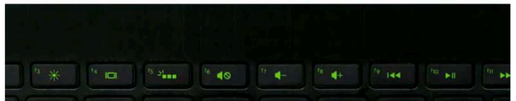
84

WIRED SUBSCRIBE

KATE KNIBBS BUSINESS OCT 28, 2024 12:48 PM

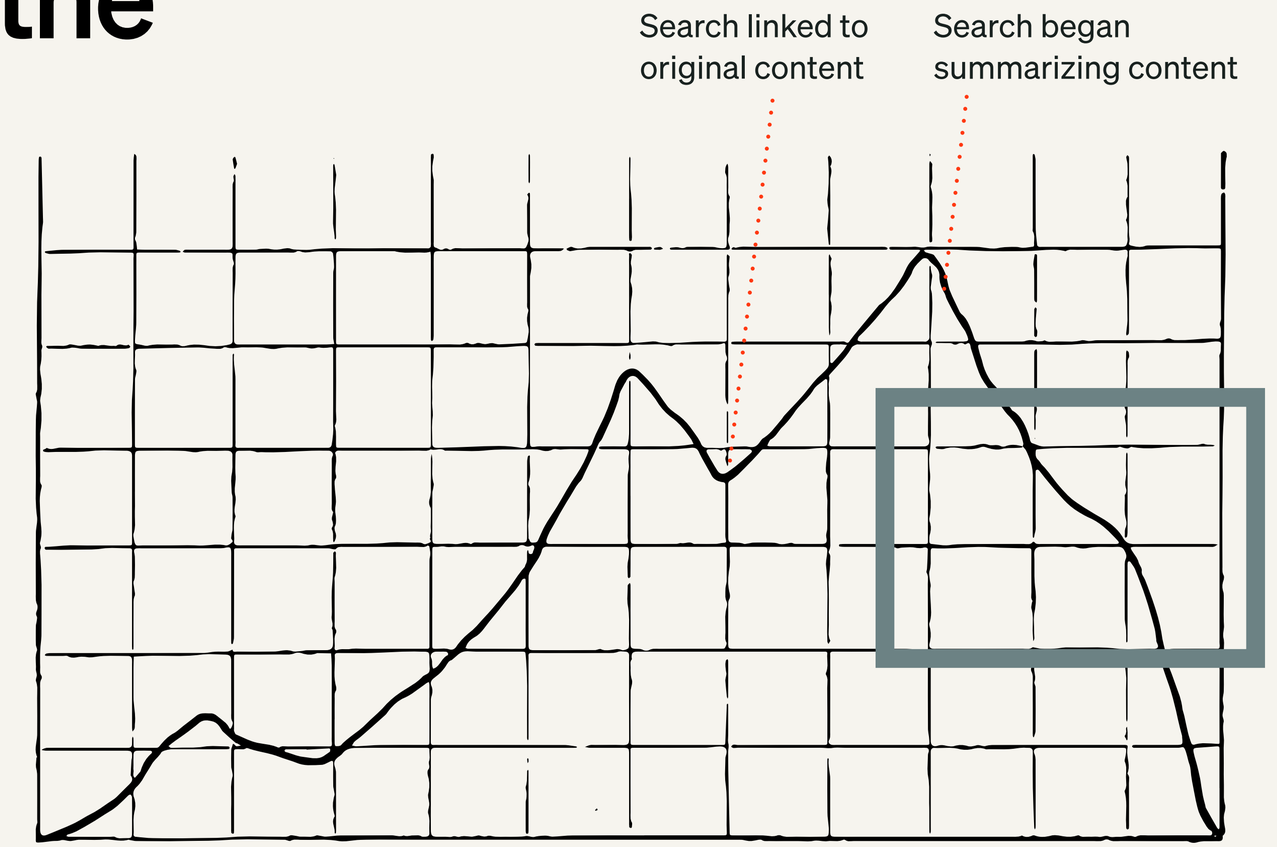
AI Slop Is Flooding Medium

The blogging platform Medium is facing an influx of AI-generated content. CEO Tony Stubblebine says it "doesn't matter" as long as nobody reads it.

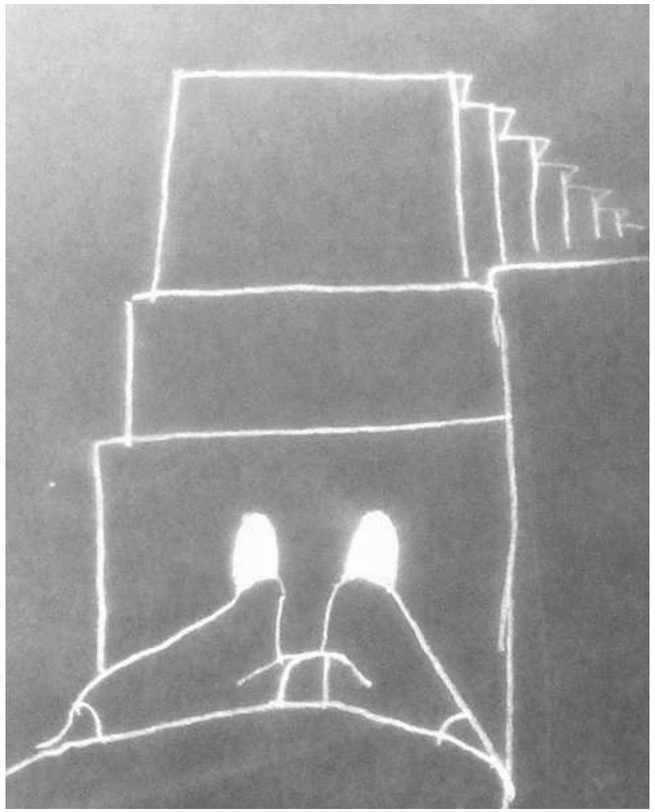


3.

Search summaries changed the internet.



35% drop in our traffic



Inefficient operations

Ineffective production

Upended business model

Upended industry

Unstable economy

Not changing was the worst thing we could do.



02

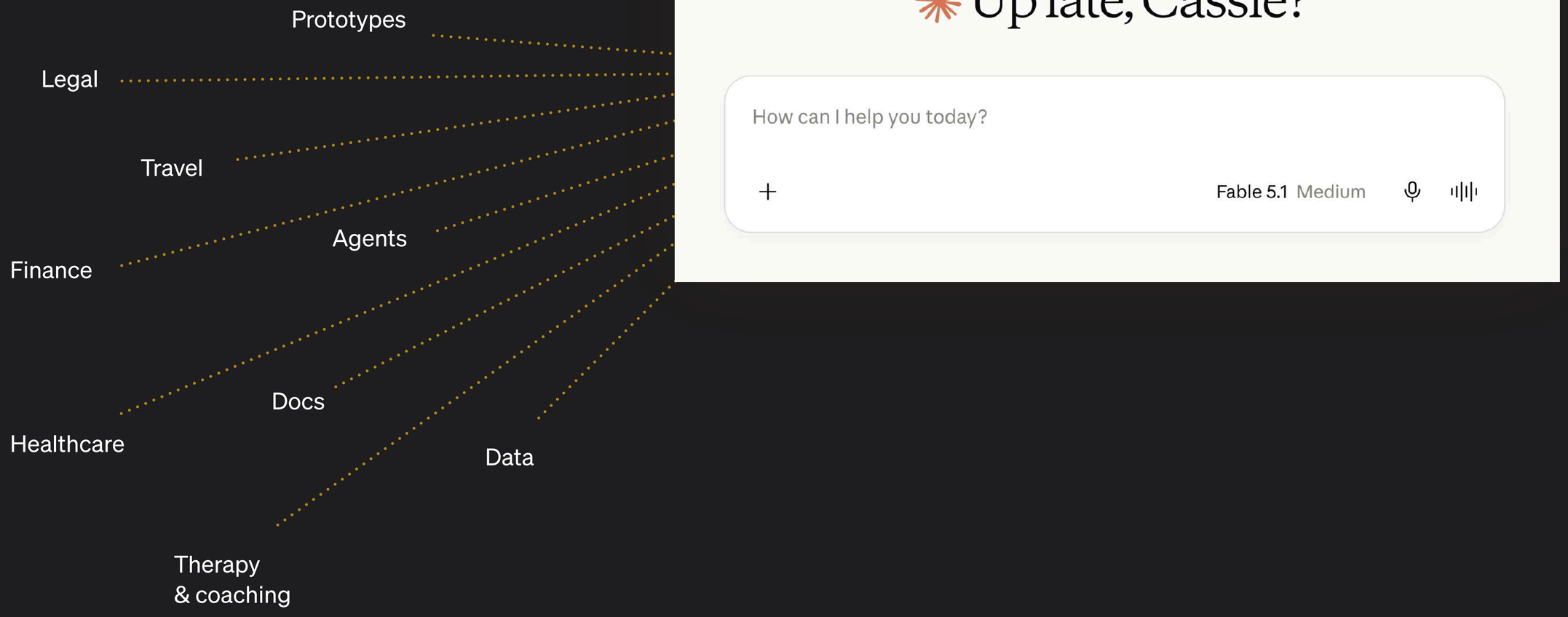
The real value of design

as clarified by AI upending everything



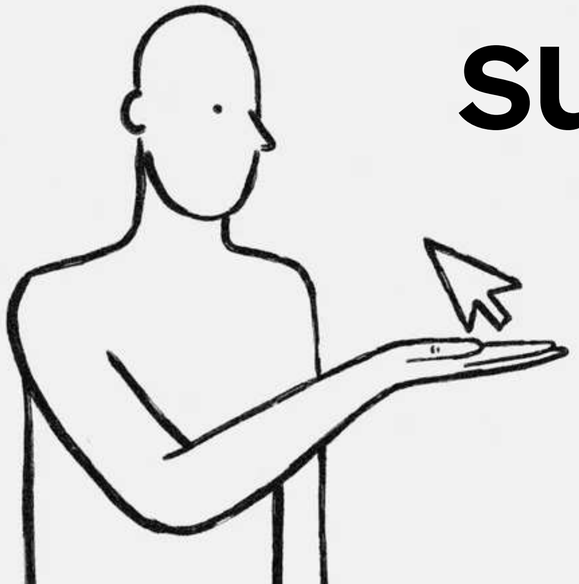
bottleneck
clean-up crew
not special

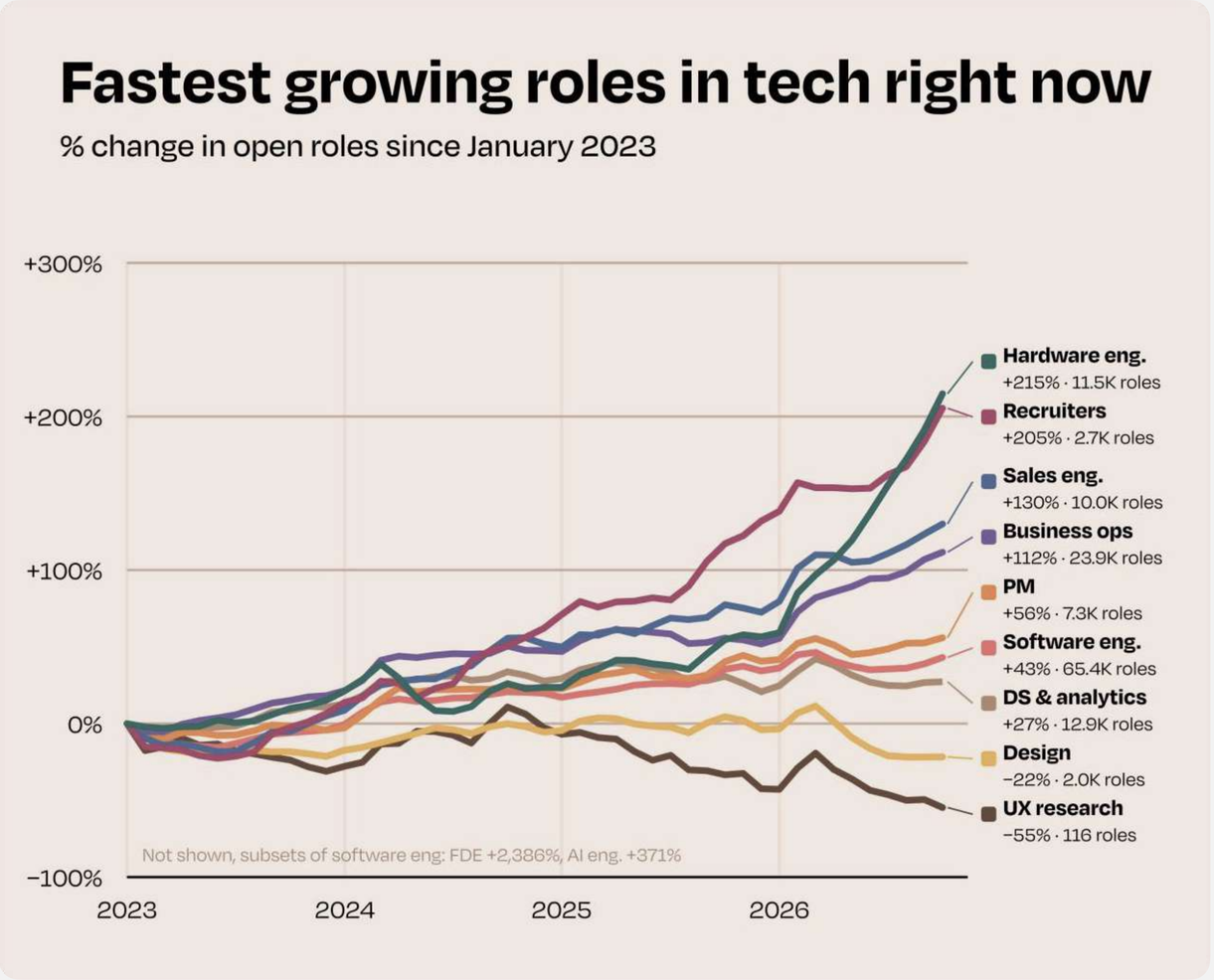
Design skills as no longer rare


Prototypes
Legal
Travel
Agents
Finance
Docs
Healthcare
Data
Therapy
& coaching
Up late, Cassie?
How can I help you today?
Fable 5.1 Medium


Engineering
Design
Product

What used to be design's superpower became everyone's superpower.

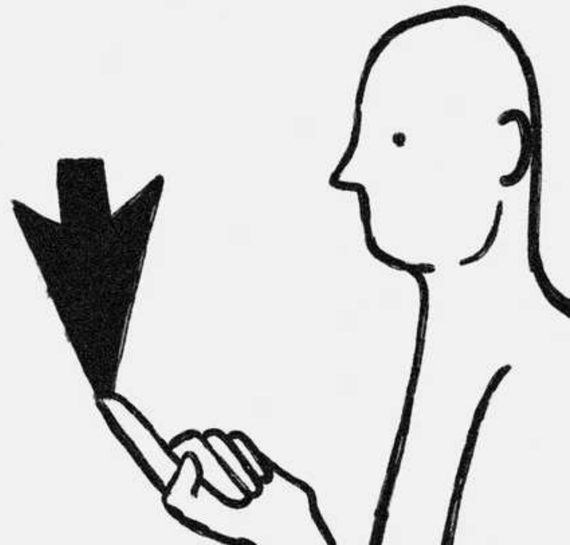




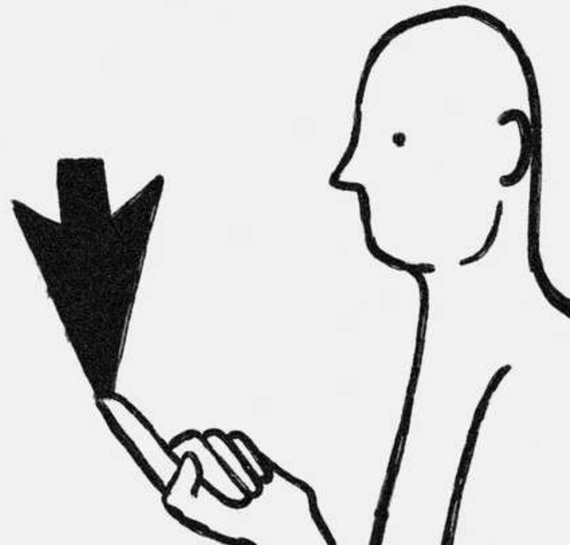
Lenny's Newsletter | November 2026

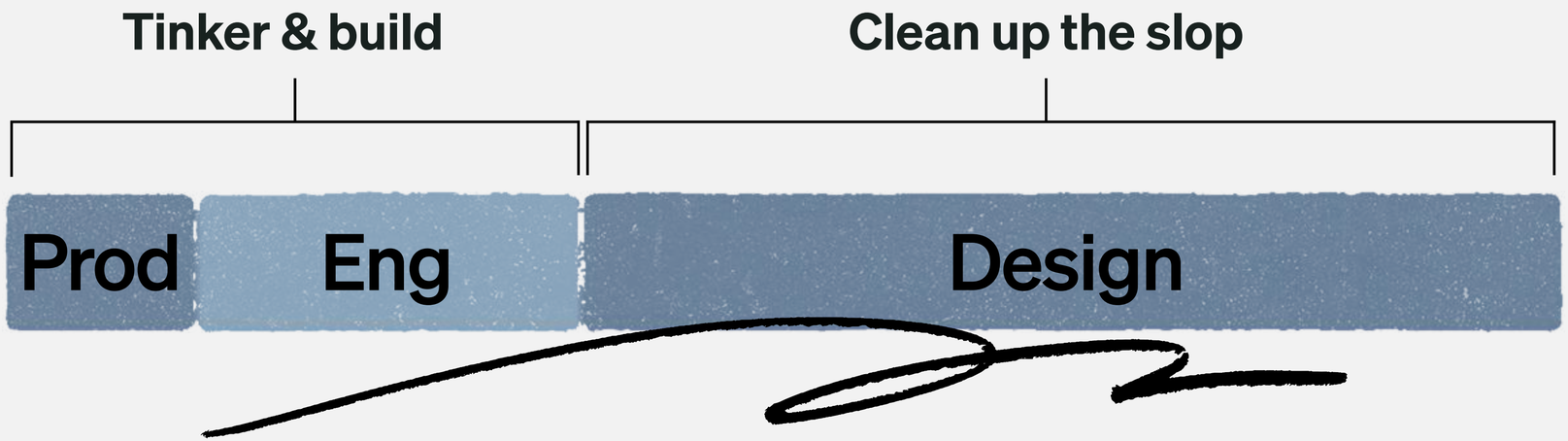
Design as bottleneck

~~Roadmaps~~ are dead



~~The handoff~~ is dead




Tinker & build
Clean up the slop
Prod
Eng
Design

Three & two-legged stools





























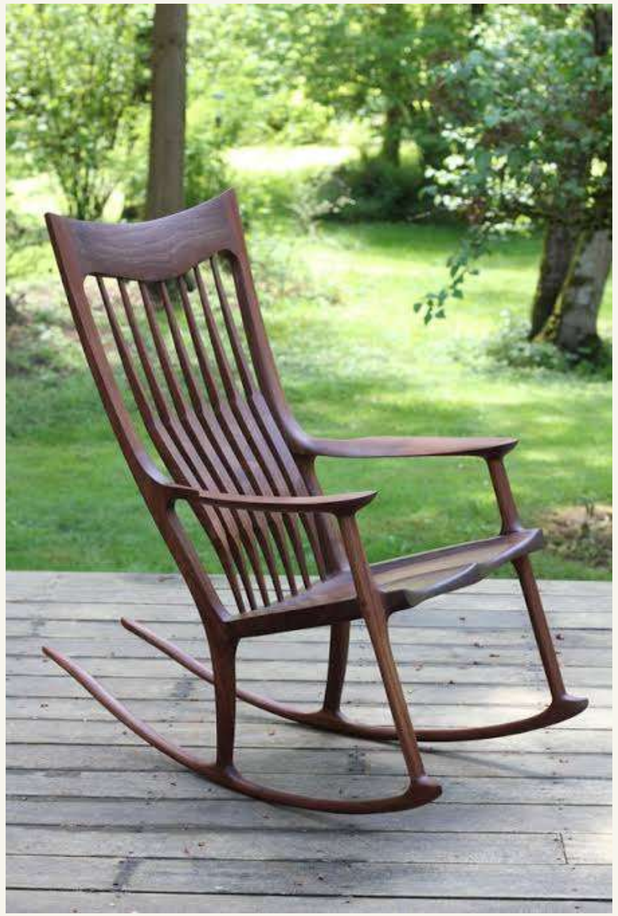














Medium's take



Lenny's Summit Aug 2026

The New Playbook for product management

1. **Understand people deeply**

2. **Diagnose root causes of their problems**

3. **Craft is not optional**

Product Design has both words in it

KPIs, TAM, LTV
CAC, ARR, MRR, CTR
NPS, CSAT, E.G., ETC.

2023

Popular Topics

1. Life
2. Self-Improvement
3. Technology
4. Writing
5. AI
6. Artificial Intelligence
7. Poetry
8. Life Lessons
9. Relationships
10. Mental Health

2026

Popular Topics

1. Artificial Intelligence
2. Relationships
3. Self-Improvement
4. Life
5. Psychology
6. AI
7. Writing
8. Technology
9. Life Lessons
10. Mental Health

2023

Popular Topics

1. Life
2. Self-Improvement
3. Technology
4. Writing
5. AI
6. Artificial Intelligence
7. Poetry
8. Life Lessons
9. **Relationships**
10. Mental Health

2026

Popular Topics

1. Artificial Intelligence
2. **Relationships**
3. Self-Improvement
4. Life
5. Psychology
6. AI
7. Writing
8. Technology
9. Life Lessons
10. Mental Health

2023

Popular Topics

1. Life
2. Self-Improvement
3. **Technology**
4. Writing
5. AI
6. Artificial Intelligence
7. Poetry
8. Life Lessons
9. Relationships
10. Mental Health

2026

Popular Topics

1. Artificial Intelligence
2. Relationships
3. Self-Improvement
4. Life
5. Psychology
6. AI
7. Writing
8. **Technology**
9. Life Lessons
10. Mental Health

2023

Popular Topics

1. Life
2. Self-Improvement
3. Technology
4. Writing
5. AI
6. Artificial Intelligence
7. **Poetry**
8. **Life Lessons**
9. **Relationships**
10. **Mental Health**

2026

Popular Topics

1. Artificial Intelligence
2. **Relationships**
3. **Self-Improvement**
4. **Life**
5. **Psychology**
6. AI
7. Writing
8. Technology
9. Life Lessons
10. Mental Health

You can make decisions without data

Three valid sources of information:

a) Numbers
b) Reason
c) Feelings

> If a process treats design as the final coat of polish on whatever code got generated, the team is not building faster. They are just managing the consequences of unvetted decisions.”

—Avi Ashkenazi

Everyone has access to

- Data
- Code
- Research
- Agents
- Customers
- Strategy
- Templates
- Frameworks
- Expert advice
- New skills



But

Access ≠ Insight

The most valuable thing a designer does is not ~~the flow~~ or ~~the interface.~~



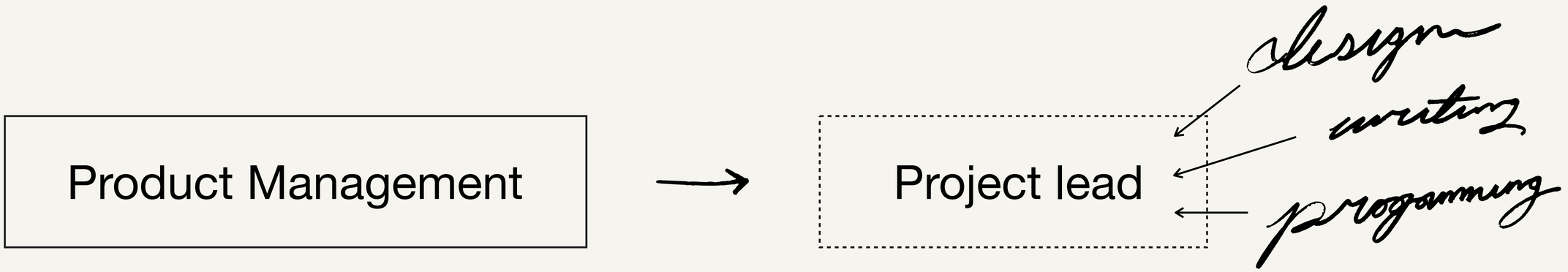
It's asking questions.

Heat-seeking





No more ~~Product Managers~~ on our teams



We gave product power to our designers, engineers, and our content team.

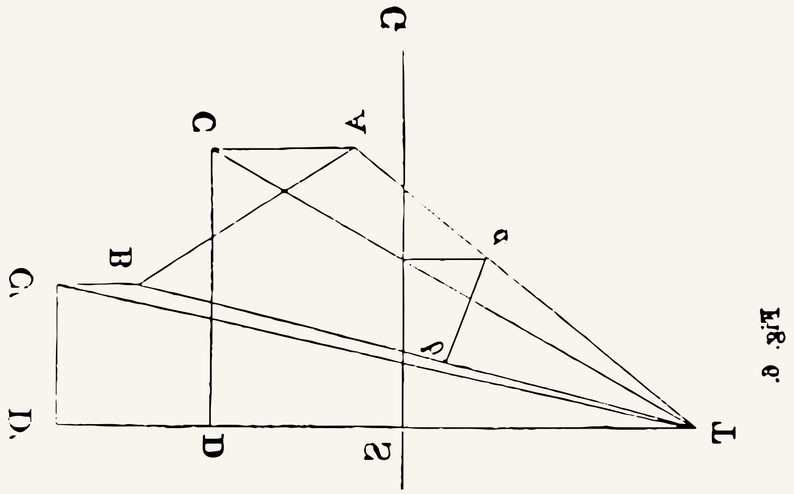


Fig. 6

Product = Project Lead

Project leads have had to learn to:

- Plan for impact
- Scope small (laddering)
- De-risk through speed
- Go-to-market
- Align team & stakeholders
- Measure impact
- Manage up
- Research
- Lead teams
- Apply strategy

~~PRDs~~

~~Status updates~~

~~Meetings~~

~~Oversight~~

~~Perf reviews~~

03

Letting design lead

What do you need?



The goal:

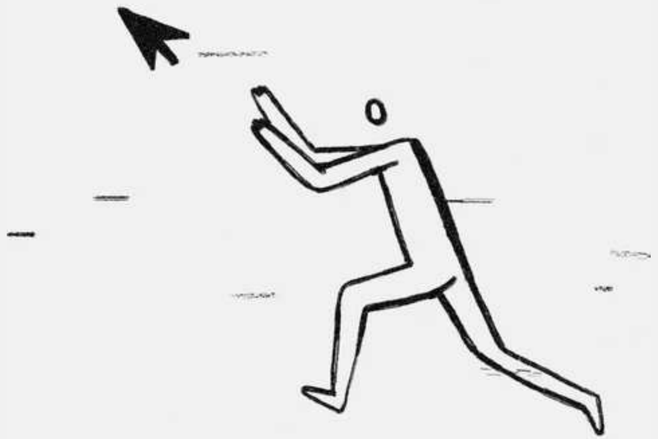
Ship great work.

The goal:

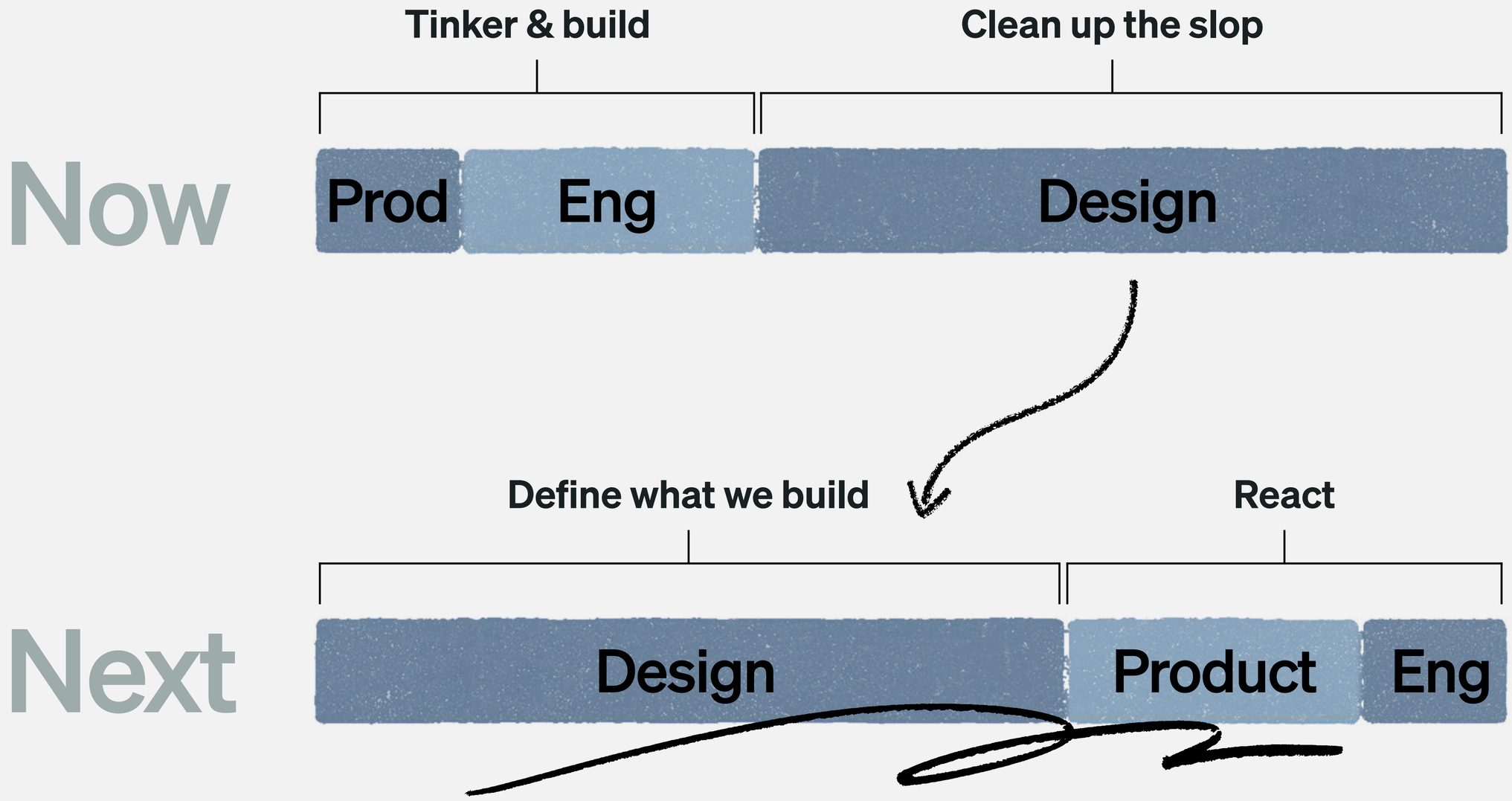
Ship great work.

Unblock **Define** **Strategy**

The window for direction-setting closes early.



A thing gets splashed onto the screen and **everything that comes afterward is a response** to that splash.


Tinker & build
Clean up the slop
Now
Prod
Eng
Design
Define what we build
React
Next
Design
Product
Eng

Failure is an option.

Topic pills, discovery, search
Pubs mgmt & quality of life
Activity feed & repost

Games
Bundling plans
Custom footers

Collaborating editing
Assistant skills
Inline commenting

Off topic pill

Easier to spot spammy submissions

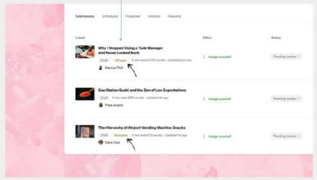
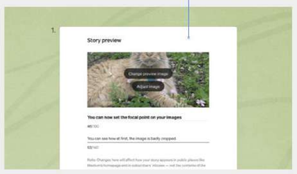


Image focal point

Adjust what part of the image previews



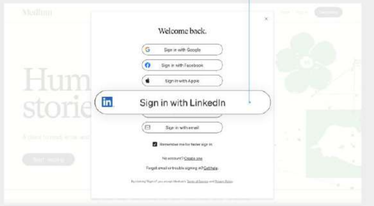
Hide highlights

Distraction free reading experience



Linkedin Oauth

Connect your profile to LinkedIn



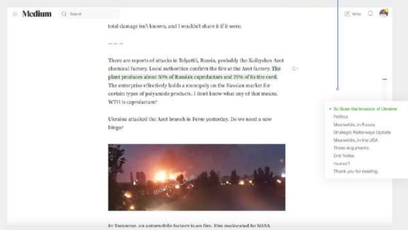
Repost with clap

Feedback loop



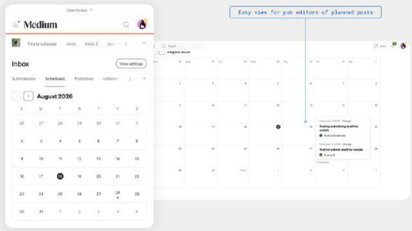
Table of Contents

Easier to navigate long stories



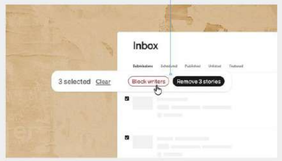
Content Calendar

Easy view for pub editors of planned posts



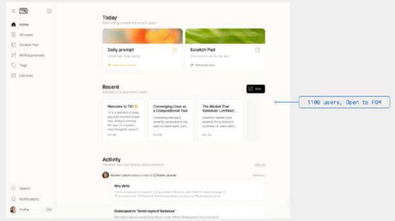
Bulk actions

Way easier publication management



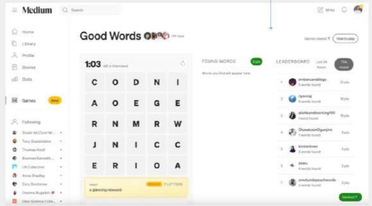
TK—Social writing

1100 users, Open to FOR



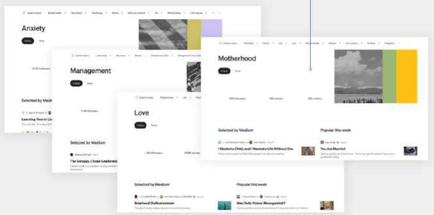
Games: Good Words

Build vocabulary by playing together



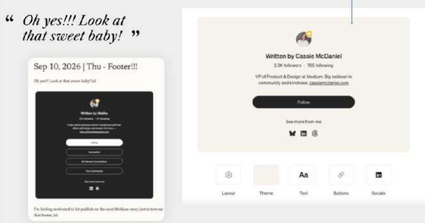
New topic pages

Modernized & curated topic categories



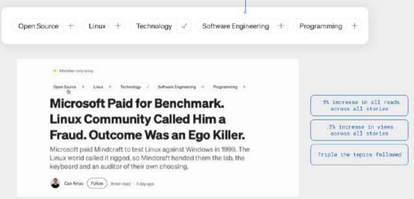
Custom Footers

Customizable footers appended to every post

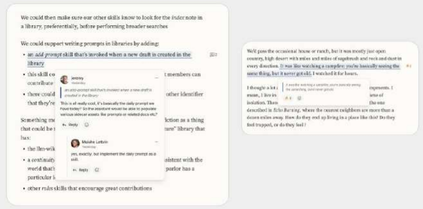


Topic pills

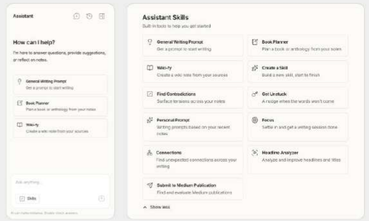
Easy-follow topic pills added to story pages



TK—Inline comments & reactions

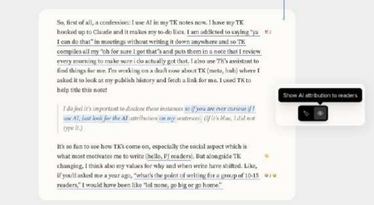


TK—Assistant Skills & History



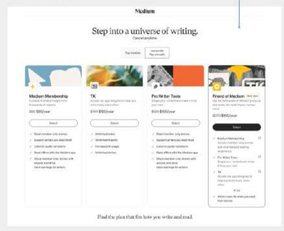
TK—AI attribution

Allow authors to show AI-generated writing



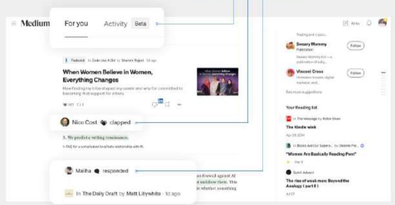
Plans architecture

/plans page

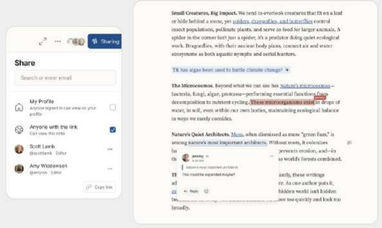


Activity Feed

All your social activity in one place

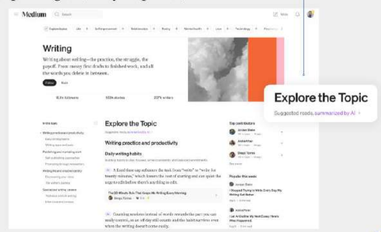


TK—Collaborative Editing



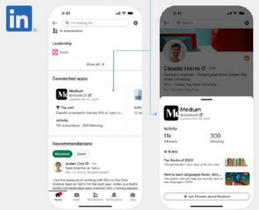
AI Topic Pages (Encyclopedia)

Browsable AI summaries

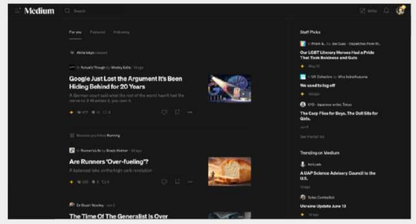


Connected Apps

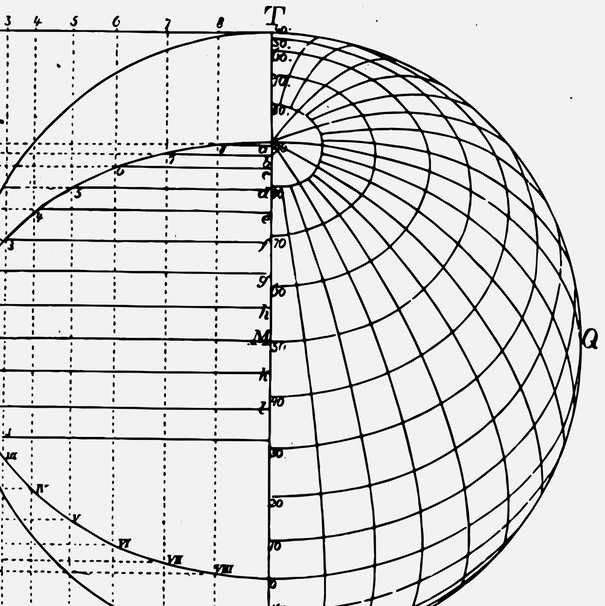
Add Medium account & stories to LinkedIn Profile



Dark Mode



Democratize data



Stewing
Tinkering
Imagining
Transferring ideas
~~Gatekeeping creativity~~

Build systems that make it hard for other people to fail.

Design principles
Design systems
Decisions & documentation

OPERATING PRINCIPLES

OPERATING PRINCIPLE NO. 1

Humans first



OPERATING PRINCIPLE NO. 2

Deepen understanding



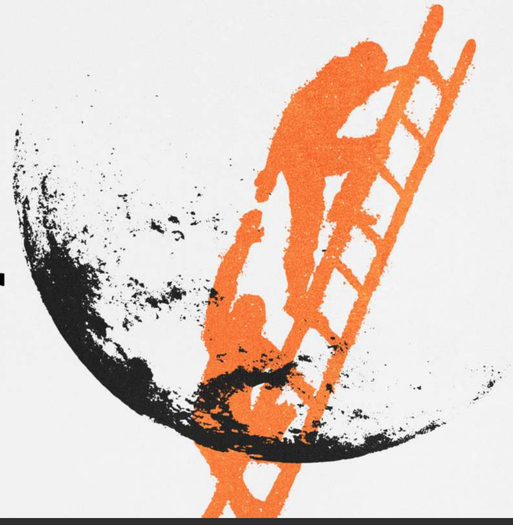
OPERATING PRINCIPLE NO. 3

Orient for impact



OPERATING PRINCIPLE NO. 4

Ladder together



OPERATING PRINCIPLE NO. 5

Feel it

In addition to data and customer feedback, we listen to our gut, our taste, and our intuition as inputs for decisions.

1. Help define the problem and the goal before the prototype.

2. Know your gut call and why before you look at data.

3. Let others build. Critique their output like engineers review code.

4. Ship small to learn.

I.

The surprise of change

IN THE END



Instructions & thinking

Agent context

Editing, refinement

Now everyone is a writer too.

Write every day

Description, briefs

How ‘bout writing a book?

Human writing, thinking & feeling have never been more precious.



Medium TK

TK.XYZ

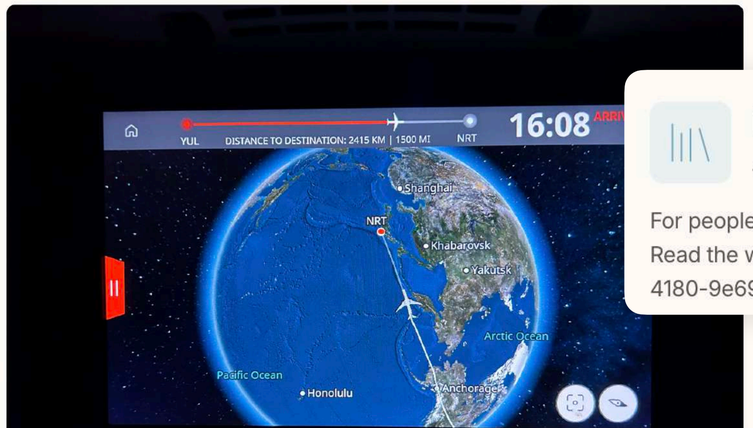
Begin with the sentence that scares you most.

November 15, 2026 - Daily note

Type '/' for commands...

stress of that has to go somewhere. She had a fall a few days before I left and gave herself a black eye and swollen nose, and a huge gash on her hand, not helped by blood thinners. Like, fell right out of her wheelchair. I'm impressed she managed to fall from a sitting position. Have to get a seatbelt for her. All of it is an experience. I am practicing suffering. I am saying to myself: I am aware of being mad / sad / tired / frustrated / happy / excited / proud / hopeful, etc, and trying to let feelings of all kinds move past me instead of feeling like I have anything active to do about them. Except meditate. I should do that.

Almost there. I am really hoping for an adventure and I think that is pretty much guaranteed. What else does the universe have in store for me?



TK

Public Journal

3574 Notes

This is a place to write and share a casual post every day. Stream of consciousness is encouraged; many people do morning pages...

Cassie McDaniel

November 13, 2026 - On my way (Day 0,...

Taking a break from working on my talk to write this. Been itching to get into TK all ...

Yesterday



Design Friends ✨

45 members · 26 notes

For people who are or have considered themselves designers. Read the welcome note here: https://tk.xyz/notes/4c156f87-af12-4180-9e69-0d67d151c88c



Thank you

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