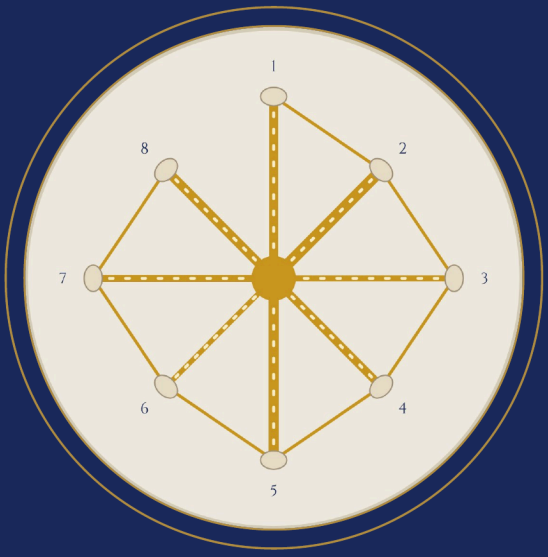
A BOOK BY

GASTÓN LÓPEZ TROPEANO



Prospect
like a slime mold

Explore, listen, thicken, let go

ALTO VALLE · RÍO NEGRO AND NEUQUÉN · 2026

PROSPECT LIKE A SLIME MOLD

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Translated from the Spanish original, *Prospectá como un moho*.

There's also an online version, with the plates in motion.

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ALTO VALLE · RÍO NEGRO AND NEUQUÉN, ARGENTINA

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Chapter 1

A brainless creature that drew the *Tokyo railway*

For months I called it a fungus. It isn't a fungus. I got the name wrong, but what this organism does changed the way I go out looking for clients. And, a little, the way I live.

What is this thing?

It's called *Physarum polycephalum*. In English it's known as a slime mold, and in France they nicknamed it «the blob». It's yellow, slimy, and it lives on the forest floor, on rotting logs and leaves. It eats bacteria and spores.

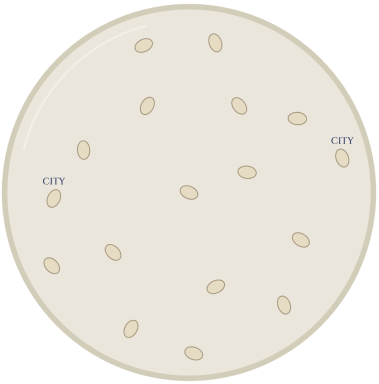
Here's the strange part: it's a single cell. One giant cell that can grow bigger than your hand, with a huge number of nuclei inside. It has no brain. Not a single neuron.

And yet it solves problems that take us years of planning.

The experiment, step by step

In 2010, a team at Hokkaido University in Japan, with Atsushi Tero and Toshiyuki Nakagaki, did something that sounds like a joke. I'll tell it in seven steps. Scroll down slowly and watch the dish.

THE DISH, STEP BY STEP

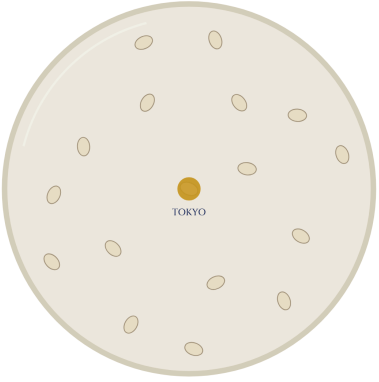


STEP 1 · THE DISH · HOUR 0

A dish and 36 oat flakes

Picture a round lab dish with a moist layer, something like gelatin. On top they place oat flakes. Each flake sits where one of the 36 cities around Tokyo is.

The oats are food. The cities are the places that need connecting.

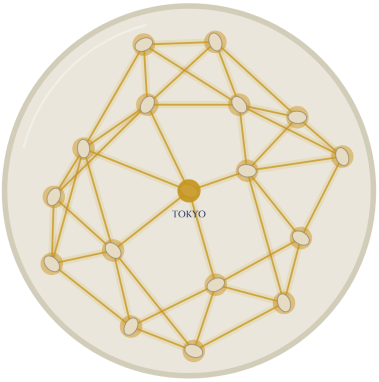


STEP 2 · TOKYO · HOUR 0

The slime mold starts in Tokyo

They put the slime mold where Tokyo is: a small yellow spot. No map, no plan.

Since the slime mold doesn't like light, they shine light where there are mountains, lakes and sea. That way they mark the terrain without telling it anything. And they let it work.

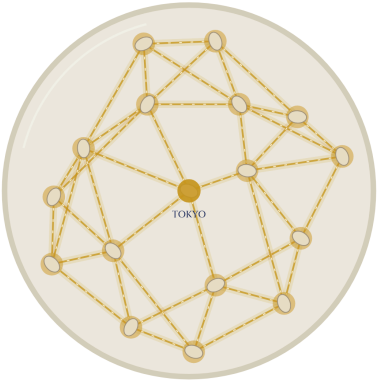


STEP 3 · EXPLORES · HOUR 8

It explores with thin threads

First it stretches out in every direction with very thin threads. It spends very little on each one.

It doesn't pick a path. It tries all of them, a little.



STEP 4 · LISTENS · HOUR 12

It listens to what comes back

Inside the tubes, the slime mold moves its contents back and forth, like a pulse. Watch the small bright dots.

When a thread touches food, more starts flowing through it.



STEP 5 · THICKENS AND LETS GO · HOUR 26

It thickens what brings something, lets go of what doesn't

Where more flows, the tube thickens. Where nothing flows, it thins out until it disappears.

Nobody decides. There's no boss inside the slime mold saying «this path yes, that one no». The flow decides.



STEP 6 · THE NETWORK · HOUR 26

Hour 26: a network like the railway

After 26 hours there was a network connecting every flake. They compared it with the real railway network, the one engineers designed over decades, and they looked remarkably alike.

In cost, in efficiency and in how well it holds up if a section is cut, the slime mold was on par.



STEP 7 · A FLAKE RUNS OUT · HOUR 26+

And if a flake runs out

Look at the flake with the dotted edge. It no longer gives food. The tubes that went there thin out until they disappear, and the rest of the network rearranges itself.

No drama: those tubes had cost it little.

This step is no longer part of the Tokyo experiment. It's the same rule, applied.

Illustrative recreation, with fewer flakes than the original.

EXPERIMENT CARD	SCIENCE · 2010
ORGANISM *Physarum*	FOOD Oat flakes
CITIES 36	STARTS IN Tokyo
TIME 26 hours	BRAIN None

They published the work in the journal *Science*. Shortly after, Andrew Adamatzky and a group of Mexican researchers repeated the idea with a map of Mexico: oat flakes on 19 cities and the slime mold starting in Mexico City. The

network it built looked a lot like the main federal highways.

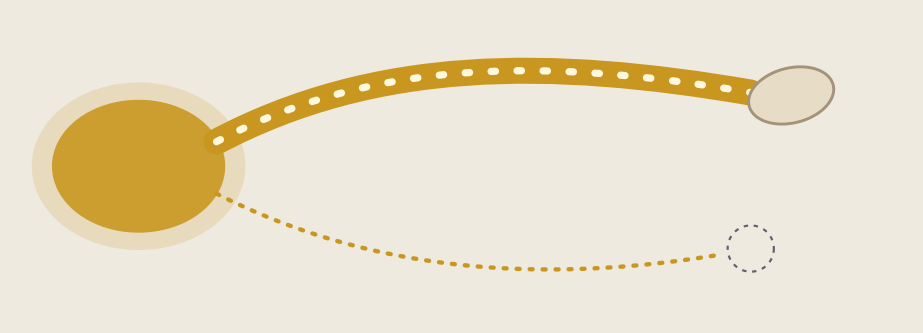
FACT

Before Tokyo, in 2008, Nakagaki and his team won an Ig Nobel Prize, the one given to research that first makes you laugh and then makes you think. They had shown that the slime mold solves mazes: it finds the shortest path between two pieces of food. In 2010 they won another one for the railway.

THE SLIME MOLD'S RULE

Where more flows, the tube *thickens*. Where nothing flows, the tube *thins out* until it disappears.

PLATE I · TWO TUBES



Food comes back

More flows, the tube thickens and even more goes through it.

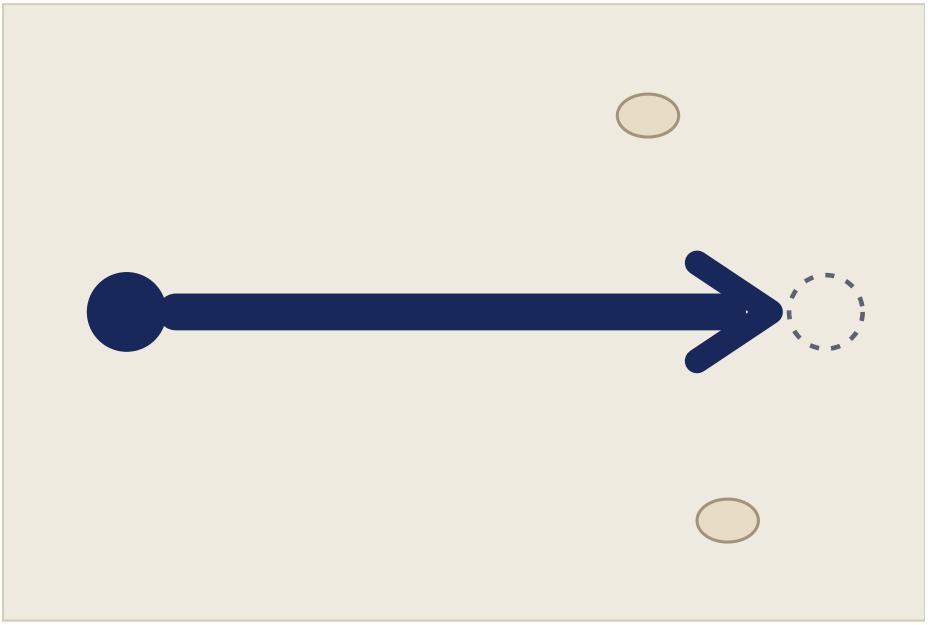
Nothing comes back

Nothing flows, the tube thins out and the slime mold lets it go. It had cost little.

What I take from it

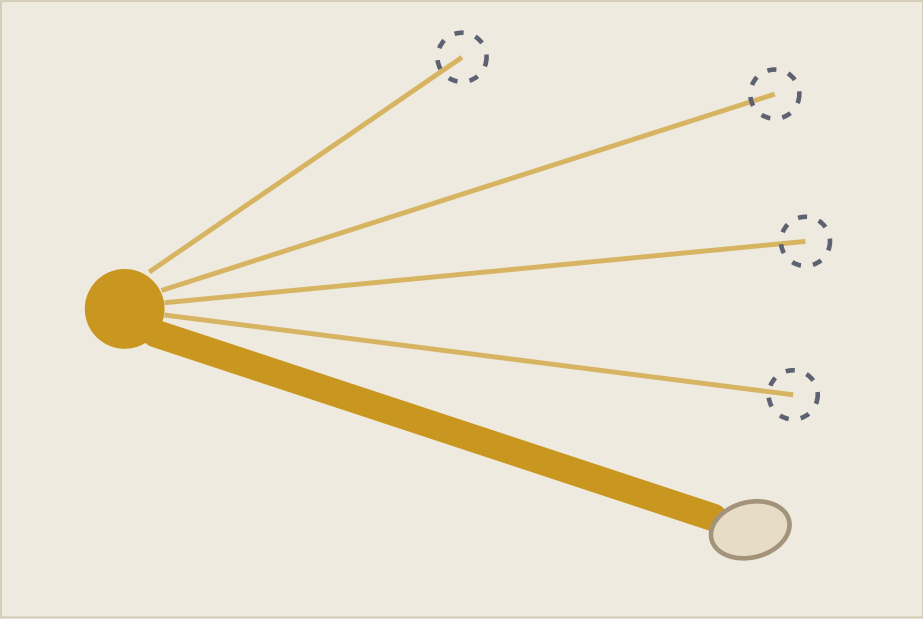
When I understood this, I saw myself. I come from the school of betting everything: pick a path, put in all I have and push until it works. Sometimes it worked. Many times it left me exhausted.

The slime mold doesn't bet everything on one direction. Nor does it sit still waiting to know where to go. It casts threads, listens to what comes back and thickens what brings food.



Betting everything

A lot of energy toward a single place. If there was nothing there, you have nothing left. And you never even saw the food that was off to the side.



Casting threads

A little in each direction. Most bring nothing back, and that's fine. The one that does, thickens.

A thread that brings nothing isn't a failure. It's information, and it cost little. What would be a problem is measuring your worth by every thread that didn't come back. Then you're no longer doing what the slime mold does: you're betting everything, one thread at a time.

In the next chapters I'll tell you what this looks like in real life. A Korean fishing guide who wrote to every fishing lodge in Neuquén, in Argentine Patagonia. My 600 emails to old customers of my phone repair shop. And also what it looks like outside of sales, when you're stuck and don't know which way to go.

One clarification before going on. This is a way, not the way. The slime mold doesn't claim to be right either.

It just eats.

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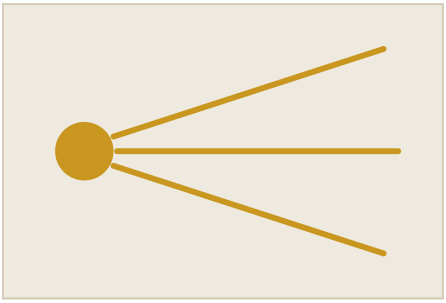
Toshiyuki Nakagaki
Ig Nobel Prizes of 2008 and 2010.

Chapter 2

Explore, listen, *thicken, let go*

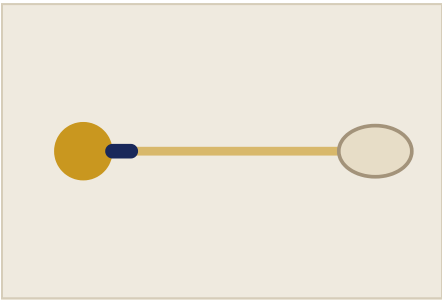
The slime mold does four things. Nothing more. And with those four things it built a railway network. When I understood them, I realized I was doing only one: I picked a path and pushed.

In this chapter we'll take those four things from the lab into life. First, one by one.



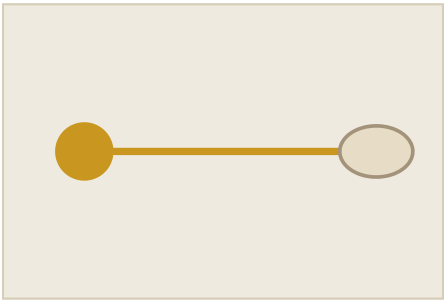
Explore

Cast thin threads in many directions. A little on each.



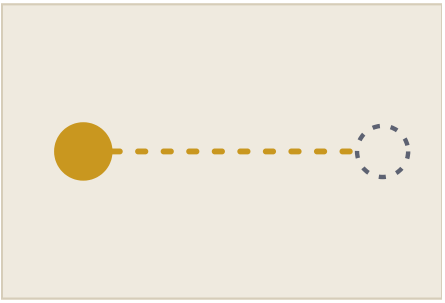
Listen

Notice what comes back. And whether what comes back is good for you.



Thicken

Put more where food comes back: time, visits, proposals.



Let go

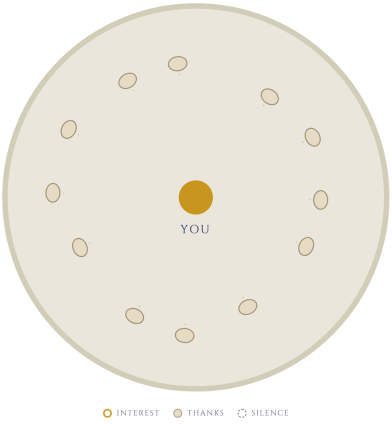
Stop putting into what brings nothing back. Without anger.

It sounds obvious. It wasn't for me. I explored little, and whatever I chose I didn't let go of, even when nothing came back.

Now, with people

Let's take the dish into real life. Instead of oat flakes, people and companies. Instead of tubes, messages. Scroll down slowly and watch how it changes.

THE DISH, STEP BY STEP

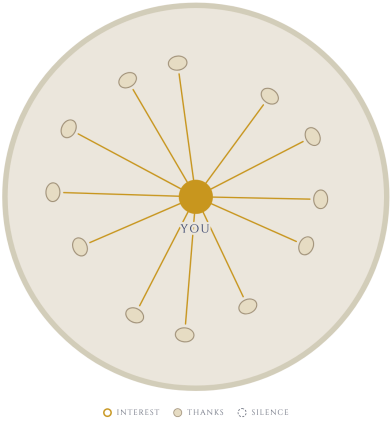


STEP 1 · YOUR DISH · THREADS 0 · ECHOES 0

Your dish

You're in the center. Around you, twelve people or companies who could use what you do. Former clients, workshops, shops, companies in your area.

You don't know yet which one has food. Just like the slime mold.

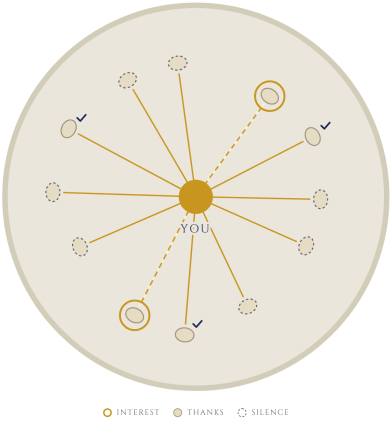


STEP 2 · EXPLORE · THREADS 12 · ECHOES 0

Explore: one thread to each

You send each of them a message. An email, a WhatsApp. Short and concrete: who you are, what you offer, how they can reach you.

Each thread costs little. That's the idea.

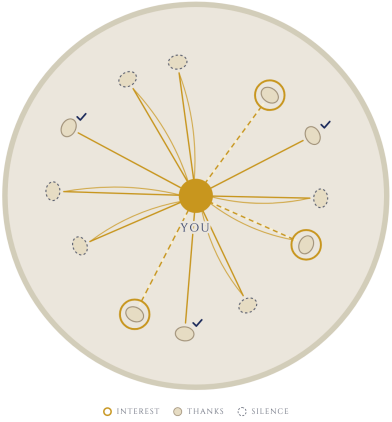


STEP 3 · LISTEN · THREADS 12 · ECHOES 5

Listen: the echo

A few days go by. Seven don't answer. Three say thanks. Two ask something.

That's the echo. It isn't a judgment about you. It's information about where the food is.

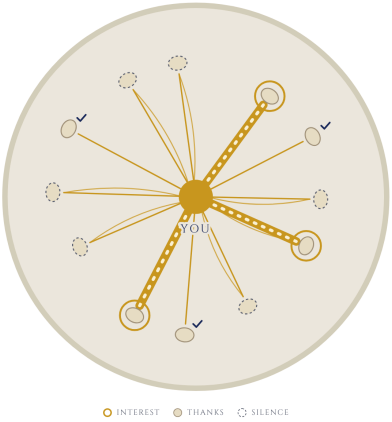


STEP 4 · SECOND THREAD · THREADS 19 · ECHOES 6

A second thread, and no more

To those who didn't answer, you send a second message. Just one.

To those who answered you don't send more prepared messages: a conversation starts with them. And one of the silent ones answers now.

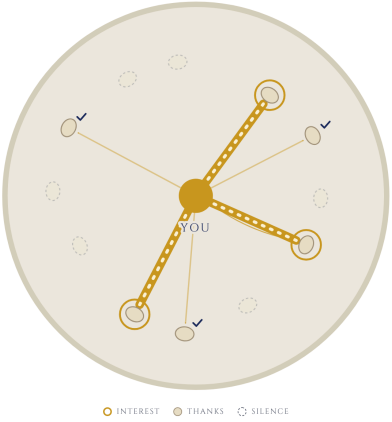


STEP 5 · THICKEN · THREADS 19 · ECHOES 6

Thicken where something came back

That's where you put more: a call, a visit, a proposal, your time. Those links thicken.

Notice you don't thicken everyone. Only the ones that brought food.

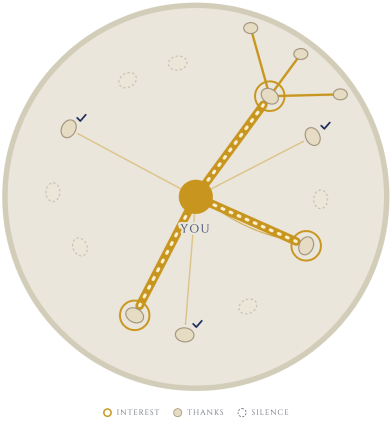


STEP 6 · LET GO · THREADS 19 · ECHOES 6

Let go without drama

Those who didn't answer twice, you let go. Without anger and without insisting.

Those who said thanks, you leave a thin thread to. The door stays open, but you don't push.



STEP 7 · THE NETWORK GROWS · THREADS 19 · ECHOES 6 · NEW 3

The network spreads on its own

And something you didn't plan happens. One of those conversations connects you with other people. Food brings more food.

You'll see this up close with Mansoo, in chapter 4.

Illustrative example. The numbers change; the logic doesn't.

PLATE IV · THE ECHO LADDER



The higher the echo, the more you put in. No answer asks you to push.

Listening is also choosing

The slime mold doesn't go toward just anything. You already saw it avoids light. Listening isn't just seeing who replied. It's asking yourself whether what comes back is good for you.

Some answers bring food and some answers eat up your time. The one who asks for quote after quote and never buys. The client who leaves you more tired than happy. There's flow there too, but it doesn't nourish you. That tube gets let go as well.

What's hardest

Of the four verbs, the hardest for me is letting go. Letting go feels like losing. But look at the dish: the slime mold loses nothing when it lets go of a tube. It stops spending there and puts it where there's flow.

In front of my house there's a bush that doesn't bloom. Daniel's, a few meters away, is full of flowers. The difference is that I keep pruning mine. Every time I cut it, it spends its energy regrowing and has nothing left to bloom.

Insisting where there's no echo is pruning yourself. You spend everything regrowing.

TO TRY THIS WEEK

Five threads a day

For one week, send five messages a day to people or companies who could use what you do. Write down what comes back: silence, seen, thanks, question or yes. Don't judge each answer on its own. On Friday look at the whole and ask yourself where there was an echo.

Explore, listen, thicken, let go. Four verbs.

None of them is pushing.

Chapter 3

Four ways to *look for food*

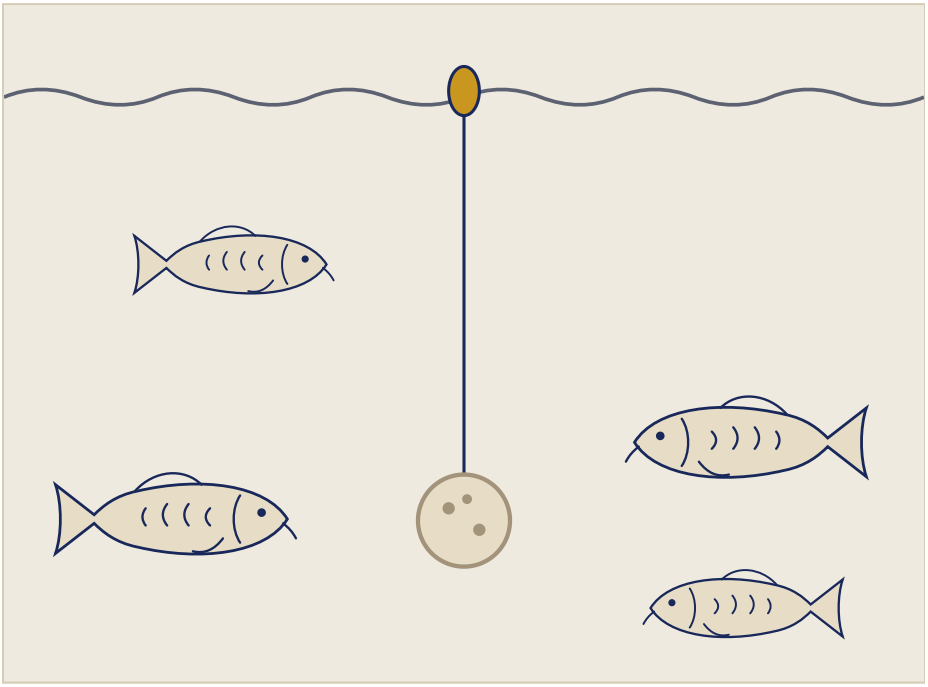
There are two classic ways to fish for carp, not counting nets.

One is throwing bait dough. I knew carp were caught that way, though I never fished like that. You prepare something carp like, throw it in with the hooks and wait. At some point they come, eat, and you catch them. It works when the dough attracts the fish you want to catch.

The other is fly fishing. Mansoo taught me fly fishing from start to finish: carp first, then trout. Mansoo is my friend, and also a fly-fishing guide licensed by the province of Neuquén.

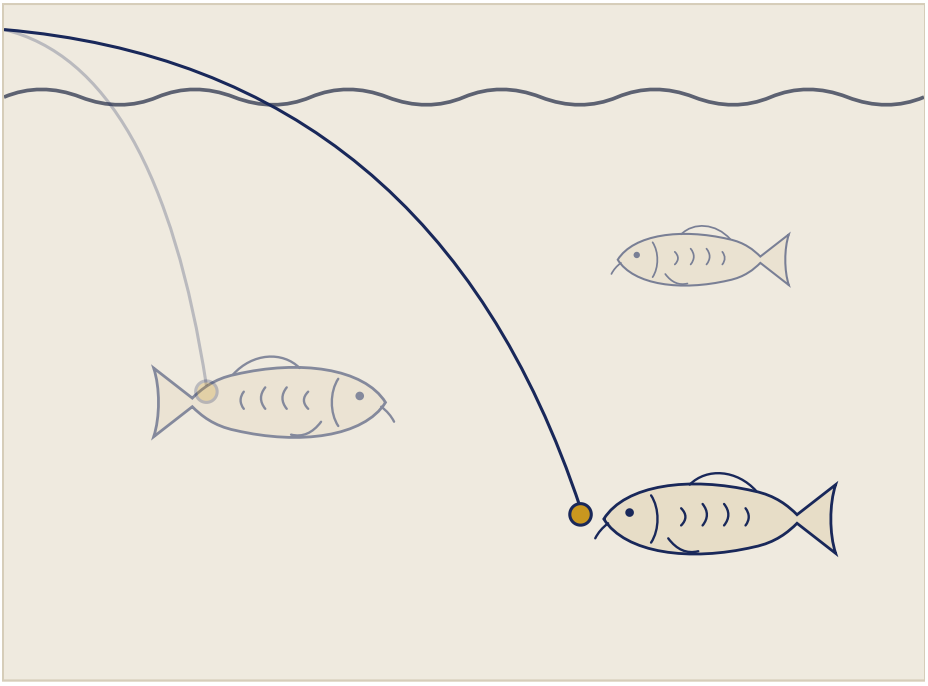
With a fly you have to see the carp, approach carefully and cast to it. It may take the fly or not. And what Mansoo kept telling me was what comes next: you aim at one, and if it ignores you, you move on to the next. You don't keep insisting.

PLATE V · TWO WAYS TO CATCH A CARP



With dough

You attract with something they like and wait. It works if the dough attracts the fish you want to catch.



With a fly

You aim at one. If it ignores you, you move on to the next.

If it doesn't take, you move on to the next.

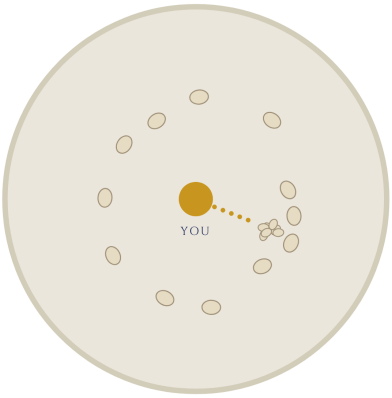
It took me a long time to get it, because I was the insisting type. Only when I discovered how the slime mold works did the two ideas connect. Mansoo's fly and the slime mold's threads do the same thing: they try, they listen and they move on.

Four ways

To look for clients, work or opportunities, I see four big ways. The two from fishing, and two more that didn't exist when dough was invented.

None is bad. Each one is paid for with a different currency. Scroll down slowly and notice what each currency is.

THE DISH, STEP BY STEP

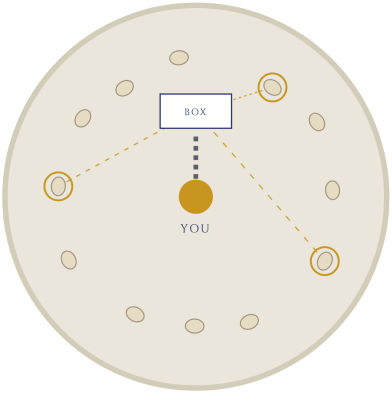


STEP 1 · THE BAIT · CURRENCY MONEY

The bait

You put out something attractive and wait for them to come. Advertising, a promotion, a free event where you show yourself as an expert.

It's dough fishing. It works when what you offer attracts the fish you want to catch, and as long as there's dough. The little gold dots coming out of you are what you pay so there is some.

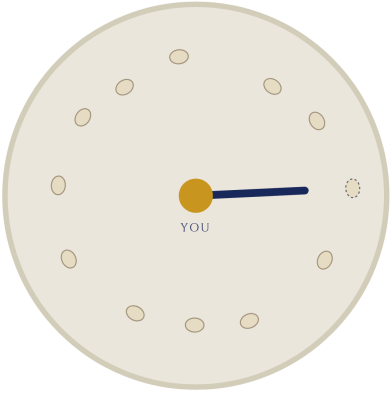


STEP 2 · THE ALGORITHM · CURRENCY CONSTANCY

The algorithm

You post content on social media and a box you don't control decides who gets to see it.

You don't pay with money. You pay with constancy: you have to feed it often, and what you post has to be genuine for it to be shown. Sometimes a video works. Many don't.

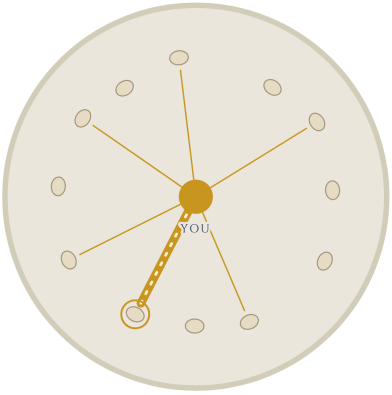


STEP 3 · THE PUSH · CURRENCY WEAR

The push

You pick up the phone and call. If not, you call again. You insist on the same person until they say yes or hang up.

Some people do it naturally, and it works for them. The currency is wear and tear: yours, and the other person's, who often didn't want to buy.

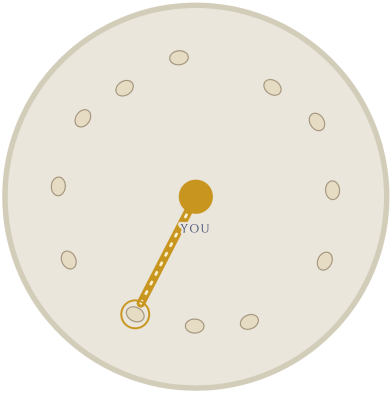


STEP 4 · THE THREAD · CURRENCY LITTLE PER TRY

The thread

You choose who could use what you do and you write to them. Short, direct, to a specific someone. If they answer, you talk. If not, after a second try, you let go.

It's fly fishing: you aim at one, and if it doesn't take, you move on to the next. The currency is small for each try.



STEP 5 · IF YOU STOP · WHAT REMAINS?

What's left if you stop?

This question put everything in order for me. Without money, the bait runs out and people scatter. Without constancy, the algorithm shows you less. Without effort, the push stops.

What you thickened with a thread is a relationship with a specific someone. That doesn't depend on you paying to keep it.

None is bad. Each is paid for differently.

Bait

HOW THE FOOD ARRIVES
It comes to you, attracted

WHAT YOU PAY WITH
Money, or something you give away

IF YOU STOP
The flow stops

Algorithm

HOW THE FOOD ARRIVES
A box decides who to show you to

WHAT YOU PAY WITH
Constancy and genuine content

IF YOU STOP
It shows you less

Push

HOW THE FOOD ARRIVES
You pull it out yourself, insisting

WHAT YOU PAY WITH
Effort and wear, yours and theirs

IF YOU STOP
It stops

Thread

HOW THE FOOD ARRIVES
It comes back from someone you chose

WHAT YOU PAY WITH
Little for each try

IF YOU STOP
The relationship remains

None is bad

I'm not telling you to drop advertising or social media. The bait works if you have a budget and something that truly attracts the people you want to attract. The algorithm works if you like creating and can keep it up. And there are salespeople who live on the phone and are happy.

What I'm saying is that the thread is the lightest. And that almost nobody uses it on purpose, because it seems like so little. One message. What can happen with one message?

What happens is what you saw in the previous chapter: almost always nothing, and sometimes, everything.

A fine line

There's a fine line between casting threads and pushing. A badly cast thread turns into spam, which is a push in different clothes. Before sending each thread, I ask myself three questions.

I

Could this person use it?

If I can't answer that, it isn't a thread. It's casting for the sake of casting.

II

Do I leave them an easy way out?

That they can not answer without guilt, or ask me to stop writing. A thread never corners anyone.

III

Am I willing to let go?

If I already know I'll insist until they say yes, I'm not casting a thread. I'm pushing.

By hand or automatic

Mansoo cast his threads by hand, one by one. I built a system that sends two hundred emails a day. Both are threads.

What makes something a thread isn't the tool. It's the attitude: aimed at someone who could use it, light, and with your ear on what comes back. With that, it doesn't matter whether you send it from your phone or from a program.

TO TRY THIS WEEK

What currency have you been paying with?

Think of your last ten clients, or the last ten opportunities that came to you. How did each one arrive: through bait, algorithm, push or thread? Also write down how much each one cost you, in money, in time and in wear. You'll see what currency you've been paying with, and whether it's the one that costs you least.

The question isn't which one works. They all work.

The question is which one costs you least to be.

Chapter 4

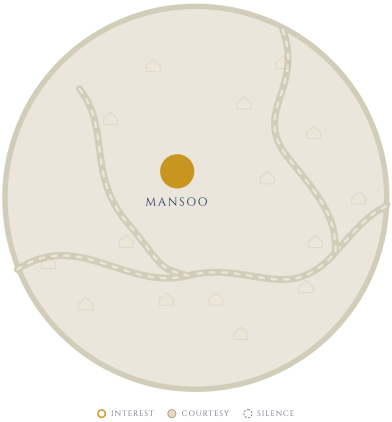
Mansoo and the *lodges of Neuquén*

Mansoo had just been licensed as a fly-fishing guide in the province of Neuquén, in Argentine Patagonia. He had a lot to offer and no clients.

What he had was himself. He's passionate about fly fishing. He specializes in carp and trout. He speaks Korean and English, which isn't common in this world. And he's an excellent companion for someone just starting out. I know because he taught me.

What he didn't have was anyone who knew him. He could have sat waiting for a call. He didn't.

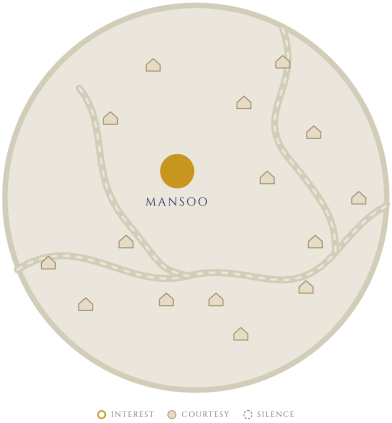
I'll tell what follows step by step, because it's the slime mold's dish with real people.



STEP 1 · A NEW GUIDE · PLACES ?

A new guide

In the center, Mansoo. The lines are rivers. He doesn't know yet the places that could hire a guide: they're there, but barely visible.

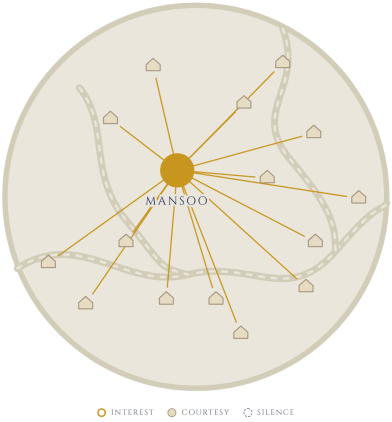


STEP 2 · SEARCH · PLACES 15

Search

The first thing was to search. On Instagram and Google, every lodge (places that offer guided fishing trips) and fishing spot that might need someone like him.

Without filtering too much. If he could be useful to them, they went on the list.

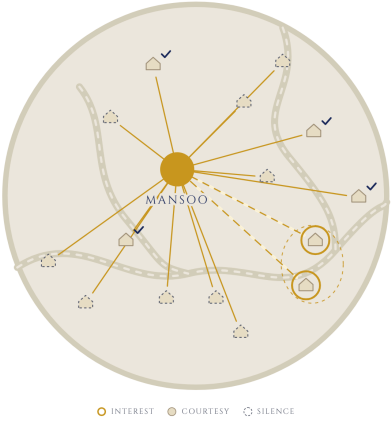


STEP 3 · WRITE · PLACES 15 · THREADS 15

Write to all of them

He wrote to all of them, through different channels. By hand, one by one.

And in each message he told them who he is: the passion, the carp and the trout, the Korean and the English, and how he guides someone who's starting out.

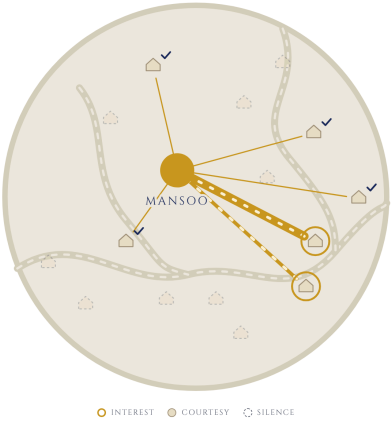


STEP 4 · THE ECHO · THREADS 15 · INTEREST 2

The echo

Some didn't answer. Others answered out of courtesy. And two, in the same area, answered with interest.

Look where those two are. They're together.

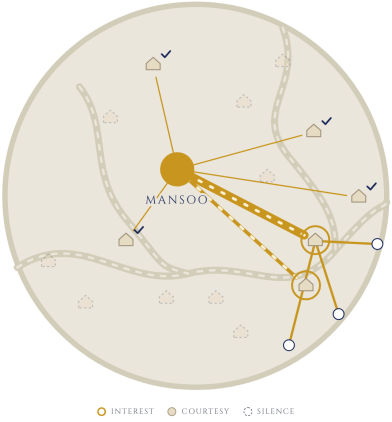


STEP 5 · TWO VISITS · VISITS 2 · HIRED 1

Two visits

He went to see them in person. One hired him straight away. The other left a door open, mostly because of his English.

One thick tube and another half thickened. With the rest there was no need to insist: the food was elsewhere.



STEP 6 · THE NETWORK SPREADS · HIRED 1 · NETWORK +

The network spreads

This is where the underlying structure shows up. That place has its own network: people who arrive, who recommend, who come back.

When the tube thickens, what reaches that place starts reaching Mansoo too. He didn't have to look for those people. They came to him through the tube.

Illustrative map. The rivers and places are not the real ones.

Why that one, and not another

Fishing is a competitive world. Many guides, each pulling their own way. Sometimes, like trout, they try to prey on each other's clients.

The person who hired him already knew that world. And what caught his attention about Mansoo was exactly what set him apart: a humble person, passionate about fishing, who didn't come to compete with anyone.

Mansoo didn't change to fit into that world. He cast his threads being who he is. And the echo came from those who valued that.

You don't need everyone to like you. You need the people who were looking for someone like you to find you.

Listening is also looking at where

There's a detail that can go unnoticed: the two who answered with interest were in the same area.

That's echo too. It's not only who answers, it's also where. If the ones who answer cluster in one place, one trade or one kind of client, there's something there. Maybe more demand, maybe a need nobody is covering. The slime mold thickens toward where there's more food. Looking at the map of your echoes tells you which way to go.

Explore

He searched Instagram and Google for every place that could hire him and wrote to all of them, by hand.

Listen

Silence from some, courtesy from others, interest from two. And both in the same area.

Thicken

He went to see them in person. One hired him; the other left the door open.

Let go

He didn't keep insisting with those who didn't answer.

The network

What reaches that place starts reaching him.

What it made me see

I knew Mansoo as a friend and as the one who taught me to fish. Watching him do this put in order something that had been going around in my head. I was already thinking about sending emails and messages, but I saw it as a tactic. With him I saw it as an attitude.

He didn't use any special tool or system. He used his phone, his time and who he is. If it worked for him like that, by hand, the slime mold strategy doesn't depend on knowing how to automate. It depends on daring to cast the thread.

TO TRY THIS WEEK

Your list of lodges

Make a list of every place, person or company that could need what you do. Look for them like Mansoo did: on Google and Instagram, without filtering too much. Then write in three lines what makes you singular: what you're passionate about, what you specialize in, what you have that few have and how you accompany people. That goes into every thread.

Mansoo didn't go out to convince anyone.

He went out to show himself, one by one.

Chapter 5

My 600 *emails*

Cuba Center, my phone repair and sales shop in Cipolletti, in Argentine Patagonia, opened on December 1, 2010. Over these years more than 19,000 customers have come through the counter. Each one left their name, their phone number and, many of them, their email.

That list sat there for years, asleep. This chapter is the story of how I woke it up with a thread.

First, the system

At first I paid someone to build a system for the shop. Three years later I hired someone else to build another one. The problem was always the same: the business's needs changed, and every time I needed a change I had to write to the developer and wait. Fair enough, he had his own timing.

A few months ago I was shown a tool for making apps by talking to an artificial intelligence. With it I built a very good app, with the database of all these years inside. And then I realized something: the platform had me locked in. To keep using it I had to keep paying, and the code wasn't mine.

So I let it go. I moved to artificial intelligence tools that write code that's mine, and I rebuilt the app, this time with much more experience. It came out great.

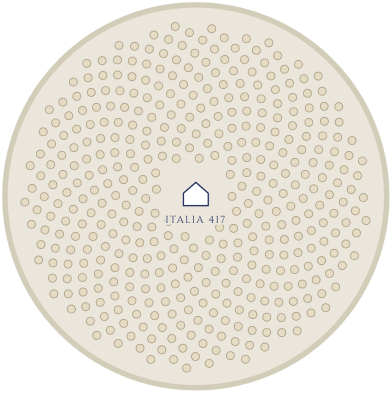
Looking at it now, even with the tools I did what the slime mold does. I tried one, listened to what it gave back, saw it wasn't somewhere to stay, and thickened the one that was.

A move nobody knew about

Three or four months before the pandemic, the shop moved to another address: Italia 417. Then came the lockdown, and a lot of people lost track. Customers of many years didn't know where we were.

I had the list. They didn't have the address. That's where the thread appeared.

THE DISH, STEP BY STEP

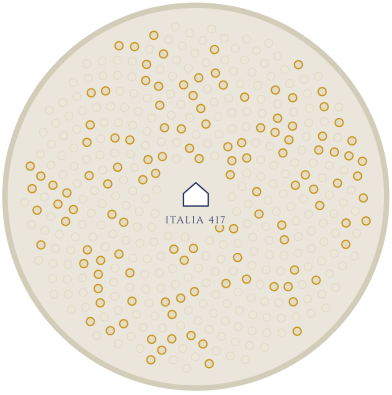


STEP 1 · THE DATABASE · CUSTOMERS 19,000

The sleeping database

These are Cuba Center's customers. In the center, the shop. More than 19,000 people who at some point trusted us.

A tube that dried up isn't a dead tube. It's there, waiting for something to flow again.

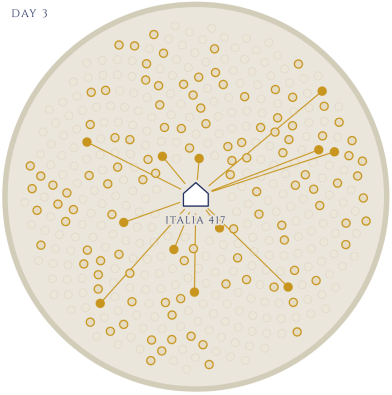


STEP 2 · VERIFY · VALID EMAILS 5,800

Verify before casting

I connected the database to a service that checks whether each email still exists. Of those who had an email, about 5,800 valid ones remained.

It looks like a technical detail, but it's the slime mold's diet. Sending to emails that don't exist has a cost: email providers start treating you as spam and then not even the good ones get through.

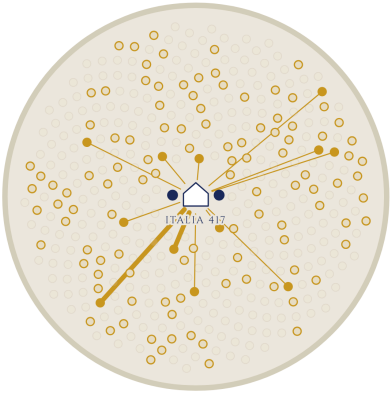


STEP 3 · 200 A DAY · SENT 600

Two hundred a day

I scheduled the sending: two hundred emails a day, on their own. Each one said where we are, with the map and the WhatsApp number.

And it offered something: an immediate alert when one of the urgent things we see every day at the shop comes up, like a scam going around, and a newsletter with discounts and tips. Each person chose what they wanted to receive, or nothing.

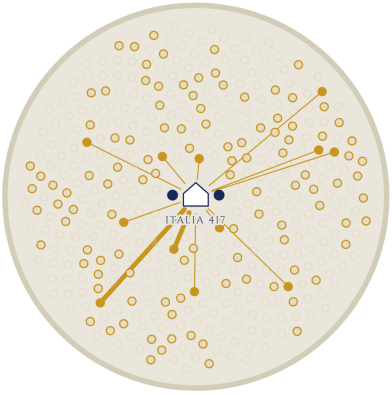


STEP 4 · THE ECHO · SENT 600 · CAME 2

Two came

The first one came after the first 200 emails. The second, the next day. Six hundred threads in three days, and two people who came in for specific repairs. Happy, too, that we had reached out.

Those are the answers that say yes. The ones at the very top of the echo ladder.



STEP 5 · THE THREAD CONTINUES · LEFT 5,200 · 200 A DAY

The thread keeps going out

The best part is that it doesn't depend on me. Every day two hundred more go out, while I do something else. Each one is a thin thread toward someone who already knows us.

Some will come back. Most won't. That's fine.

Each dot represents about 48 customers.

Why it worked

The email didn't sell anything. It told people something useful to them: where we are. And it offered something useful, urgent alerts and tips, without forcing anyone. Each person chose what to receive, or whether to receive nothing.

Also, it wasn't new territory. Mansoo wrote to places that didn't know him. I wrote to people who had already been to the shop. I wasn't exploring: I was reconnecting old tubes that had dried up with the move.

Sometimes the food isn't far away. It's in the people who already know you and lost the way.

Manual or automatic, it doesn't matter

I did it with a system because I like building them. But you don't need to. Mansoo did it by hand, message by message, and it worked for him. If you don't know how to automate anything, this works just the same.

What matters isn't the tool. It's casting threads to people who could use what you do, and listening to the echo.

Now I'm setting up the same thing with companies in the Alto Valle, the region where I live, that don't know me yet. It's taking shape, it isn't running yet. But the underlying structure is the same.

TO TRY THIS WEEK

What's your sleeping database?

Find the list of people who already know you: former clients, old contacts, people who bought from you once. Think about what you could tell them that would truly be useful, without selling them anything. Send the first thread to a few and see what comes back.

I didn't sell anything to anyone. I told them where I was.

And two came.

Chapter 6

What a thread *costs*

What do you lose by writing to fifteen or twenty people a day, by hand?

I asked myself that many times. The short answer is: almost nothing. The long answer is this chapter, because almost nothing isn't nothing. A thread costs little, but it doesn't cost zero. And it's worth knowing what you pay, so it stays little.

What a thread really costs

I

Time

A few minutes per message: finding who, thinking about what's useful to them, writing it. Twenty a day is a while, not a whole day.

II

Attention

When someone answers, a conversation opens that you have to keep up. It's the best cost of all: it means there was an echo.

III

A bit of ego

Being left on «seen» hurts the first few times. Then you understand it isn't about you: it's information about where there's no food today.

IV

Reputation

If you become a nuisance, or write to people who can't use what you do, people start avoiding you. This is the only cost that can grow. That's why the diet exists.

The slime mold's diet

The slime mold spends little on each thread, and that's why it can cast many. The diet is that: keeping each thread light.

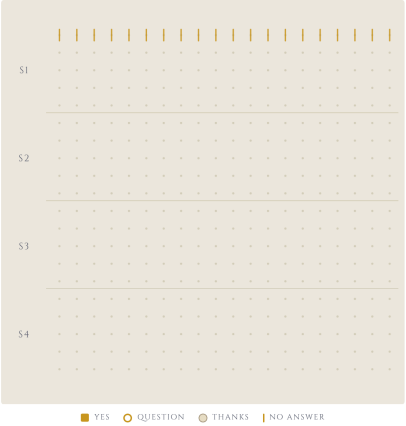
Short. Who you are, what you offer and how they can reach you. If more is needed, there'll be a conversation. **To someone it's useful to.** If you can't say why this person could use it, don't send it. **With an easy way out.** So they can not answer without guilt. **And letting go in time.** A second try, and then nothing more.

With that, the four costs stay small. Without it, the fourth eats the others.

A month of threads by hand

Let's try it on the dish. Twenty threads a day, five days a week, for a month. By hand. Scroll down slowly.

THE DISH, STEP BY STEP

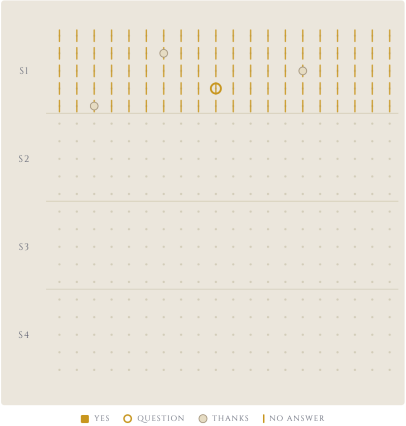


STEP 1 · ONE DAY · THREADS 20 · ECHOES 0

One day

Twenty threads. A while in the morning, or in a gap in the afternoon.

The first day is almost always silence. That's normal. Nothing has happened yet.

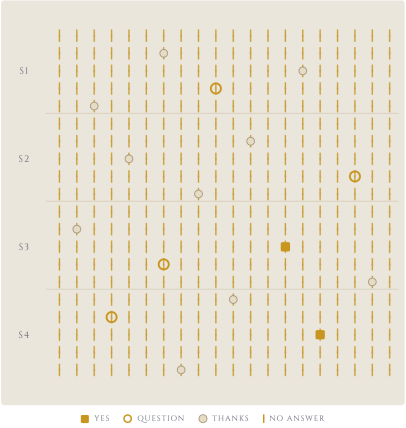


STEP 2 · ONE WEEK · THREADS 100 · ECHOES 4

One week

A hundred threads. A few thanks show up and, with luck, a question.

It seems like little. But you already know something you didn't know on Monday: where there's a bit of echo.

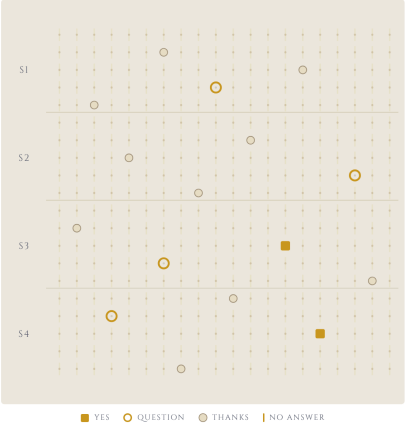


STEP 3 · ONE MONTH · THREADS 400 · ECHOES 16

One month

Four hundred threads. The echoes add up: several thanks, a few questions, and a couple of people who say yes.

None of those yeses was there on the first day. You had to keep casting.

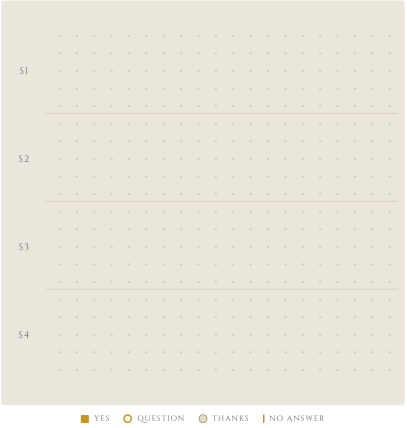


STEP 4 · WHAT REMAINS · REMAINING 16 · YES 2

What remains

Let go of what didn't come back and look at what remains. Open conversations, doors left ajar and a couple of clients.

What went away cost you almost nothing. What remained, you didn't have.



STEP 5 · A STILL MONTH · THREADS 0 · ECHOES 0

The same month, still

Now the same month without casting a single thread.

You didn't waste time writing. Nothing happened either. The month went by all the same.

Illustrative example. Each row is a day; each line, a thread.

A simple sum

Twenty threads a day is about a hundred a week and about four hundred a month. You don't need many to answer. It's enough for one to say yes.

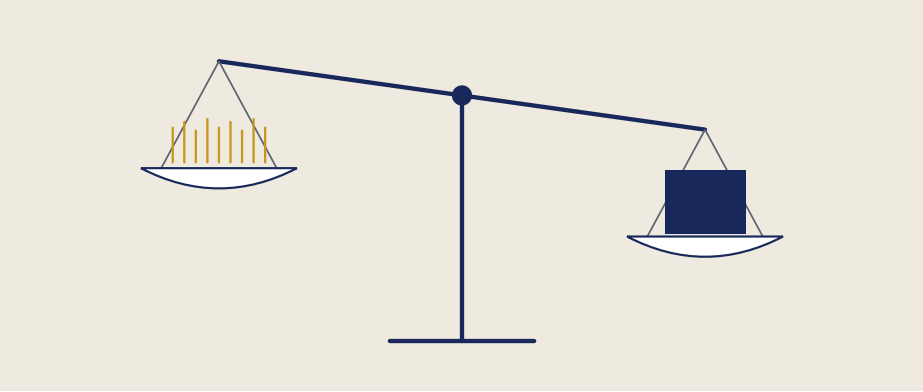
And if you do it with a system, the sum is even lighter. My 600 threads to old customers cost me less than three days of advertising.

What not casting it costs

There's a cost almost nobody counts, because it doesn't show up on any invoice: the cost of standing still.

Waiting to know which way to go. Thinking hard about what the right path will be before taking a step. Preparing for months for something that never comes out. All that is paid too, in a currency you can't see: time, drive, and opportunities that go by without you noticing.

PLATE VIII · WHAT WEIGHS MORE



Twenty threads a day

A while, some attention and a bit of ego. Light.

A still day

It costs nothing you can see. But it brings nothing, and the day doesn't come back.

I'm not saying you always have to be moving. There are times of gestation, and that's fine. I'm saying that if you're still because you're afraid it won't work, the slime mold has an answer: try one thread. If nothing comes back, you lost very little. If something comes back, you know which way to go.

TO TRY THIS WEEK

Twenty threads by hand

For one week, send between fifteen and twenty messages a day, by hand, to people or companies who could use what you do. Write down how long it takes and how you feel afterward. At the end of the week, answer the question from the beginning: what did you lose?

A thread costs little.

Standing still is paid for too.

Chapter 7

Being ready when *the food arrives*

So far we've talked about casting threads. This chapter is about what happens when they come back.

Because a thread is an invitation. You tell someone: this exists, and it could be useful to you. If that person answers and comes, they have to find what you promised. If not, the thread wasn't just useless: it became a broken promise.

You can't offer something that doesn't exist. There has to be consistency.

What the slime mold does

You might think the slime mold grows nonstop, as much as it can, toward any food. It doesn't.

In 2010, researcher Audrey Dussutour and her team offered the slime mold dozens of foods with different mixes of protein and sugar. The slime mold didn't eat everything it found. It moved between foods until it kept the mix that suits it for growing well, about two parts protein to one of sugar. Without a brain, it regulated what it took in.

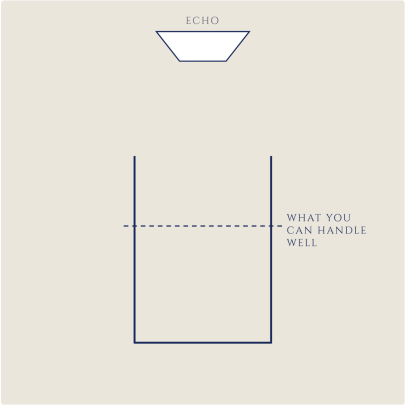
And something else: when it's well fed, it moves little. It goes out searching when it needs to.

The slime mold doesn't grow indiscriminately. It grows in balance, like life itself. It explores when it lacks, settles when it has, and takes no more than it can sustain.

Not too little, not too much

Brought to our world: being ready means having the structure to handle what comes back, and adjusting your threads accordingly. Scroll down slowly.

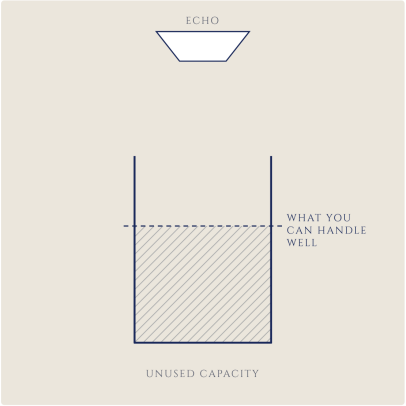
THE DISH, STEP BY STEP



STEP 1 · YOUR CAPACITY · CAPACITY YOURS

Your capacity

This container is what you can handle well today: your time, your team, your stock, your energy. The line marks the level you work comfortably at.

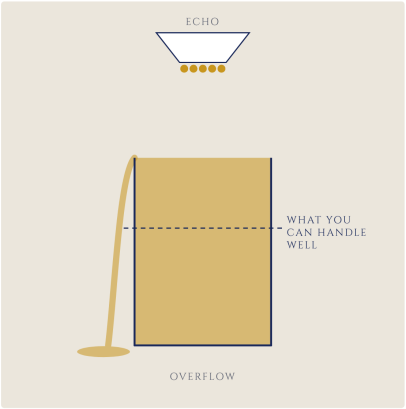


STEP 2 · NO THREADS · ECHO NONE

No threads

If you don't cast threads, nothing arrives. The container stays empty.

You don't overflow, that's true. But you aren't using the capacity you have either. That striped part is work you could do and don't.

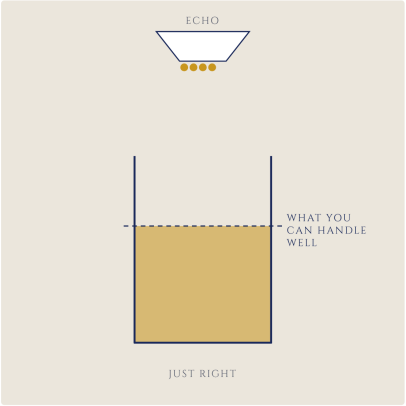


STEP 3 · TOO MANY · ECHO TOO MUCH

Too many, all at once

If you cast many more threads than you can handle, the echo runs over you.

Clients who wait, answers that take too long, work done in a rush. What spills over isn't just lost work: it's people who came and left worse off than they arrived.

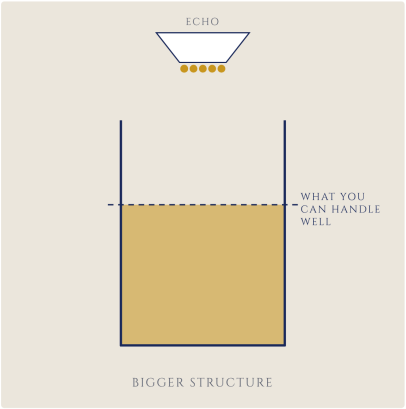


STEP 4 · JUST RIGHT · ECHO JUST RIGHT

Just right

You adjust your threads to what comes back. If the echo fills the container, you cast fewer. If there's room left, you cast more.

The level stays close to the line. That's being ready.



STEP 5 · GROWING LITTLE BY LITTLE · CAPACITY LARGER

Growing little by little

When the structure grows, because you got organized, brought someone in or built a system, the container gets bigger. Only then does it make sense to cast more threads.

First the container, then the threads. Not the other way around.

The drops are the echo: the people who answer and arrive.

Before casting the first thread

It's worth answering three questions. They're the same for one message by hand as for a thousand scheduled emails.

I

Does what I offer exist, today?

Not what I'm going to have, not what I'm putting together. What someone can receive if they say yes tomorrow.

II

Can I properly look after those who answer?

If twice as many answered as I expect, could I cope? If the answer is no, I cast fewer threads.

III

Does the person who answers know how to continue?

A number, an address, someone who answers. So the echo has somewhere to land.

When I sent the emails to Cuba Center's old customers, the shop was open, with the team working. Each email said where we are and how to write to us. The two people who came found what the email promised. That's why they left happy.

Same with the Alto Valle companies I'm about to contact. Before writing to them, I make sure I can give them what a company needs, like invoices and a credit account. That first, then the thread.

TO TRY THIS WEEK

The sum backwards

Start from the end. How many new clients can you properly look after each week without overflowing? Then look at your echoes: out of so many threads, how many say yes? With those two answers you know how many threads to cast. Not one more than you can sustain. Not one fewer than you need.

The slime mold doesn't grow for no reason.

It grows as far as it can sustain.

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The slime mold regulates its diet between protein and sugar. Published in PNAS.

McGill, Physics of Superorganisms

How the slime mold's way of growing changes with the food available.

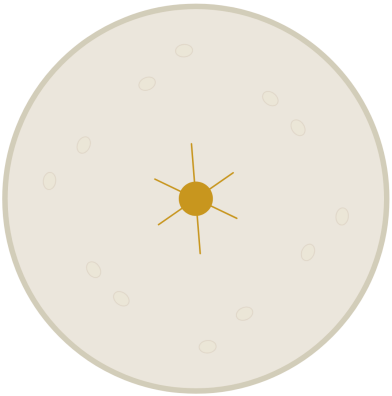
CHAPTER 8

The slime mold beyond *sales*

This book started out talking about clients. But the slime mold strategy isn't only for selling. I also use it for life itself.

Think about the urge to open up to something new: a job, a project, a different way of living. Many times we stay stuck weighing which choice will be the right hit. And while we weigh, nothing happens.

There are three ways of being stuck that I see often, in others and in myself. I'll show them to you on the dish.

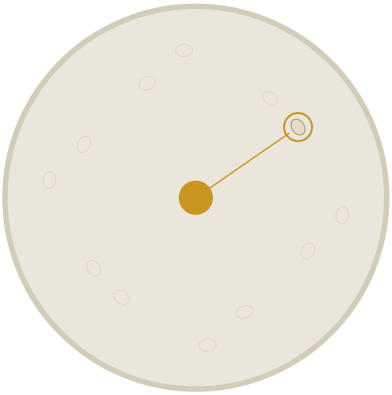


STEP 1 · OUT OF FEAR · THREADS 0

The one who doesn't try out of fear

It starts and pulls back. It begins a thread and withdraws it before it reaches anything. What if it doesn't work? What if they say no?

Look at the dish: there's food all around, but it never finds out.

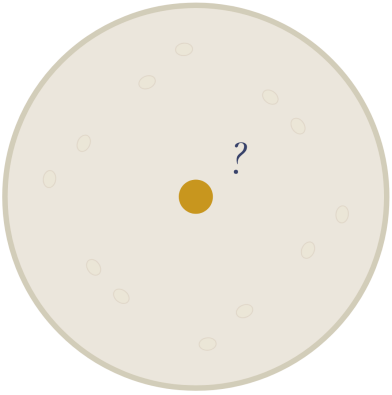


STEP 2 · ONE THREAD · THREADS 1 · ECHO 1

One thread is enough to start

You don't need to lose the fear. You need the first thread to be so small that the fear has nothing to grab onto.

A message. A question. An afternoon's try. If nothing comes back, you lost very little. If something comes back, you're no longer still.

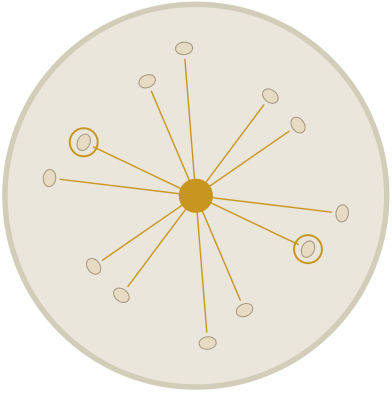


STEP 3 · WAITING FOR THE MAP · MAP NONE

The one who waits to know which way to go

It wants the map before setting out. To know the right path, the one that doesn't fail.

But the slime mold never had a map. In Tokyo it didn't know where the oats were.

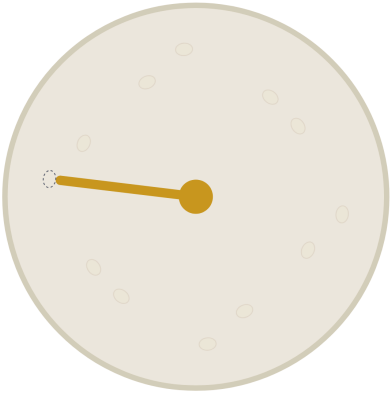


STEP 4 · EXPLORE TO SEE · THREADS 12 · MAP IN SIGHT

The map is drawn by exploring

The flakes only appear when the threads reach them. The map wasn't there before: the slime mold drew it by moving.

Knowing which way to go isn't the requirement to start. It's what appears after you start.

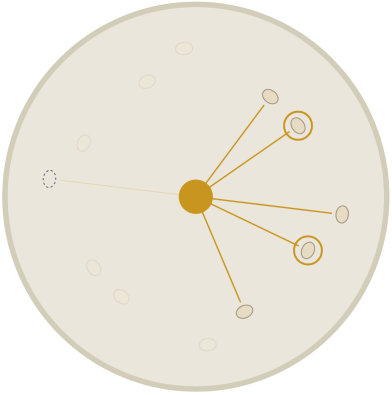


STEP 5 · STAGNANT · TUBE 1 · ECHO 0

The one who feels stagnant

It has a thick tube toward something that no longer gives food. A job, a project, a way of doing things that worked in its day.

All the energy goes there, and nothing comes back from there anymore.



STEP 6 · LET GO AND EXPLORE · THREADS 5 · ECHO 2

Let go to be able to explore

When the old tube thins out, there's energy left to cast new threads. And flakes appear that couldn't be seen from the thick tube.

You don't need to cut everything at once. Sometimes it's enough to stop feeding what no longer feeds you.

The pale flakes are opportunities you haven't seen yet.

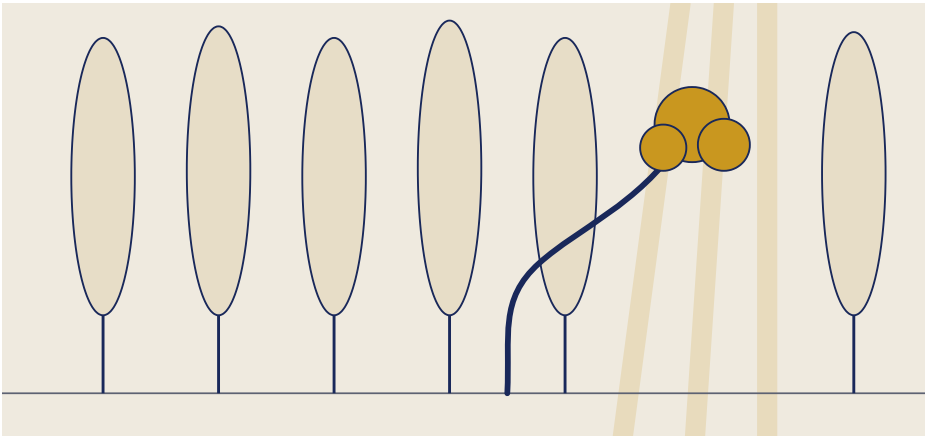
The wattle and the poplars

On a walk along the bank of the Neuquén River we saw a wattle tree that had grown on its own, among a row of planted poplars. The poplars were comfortable: straight, orderly, each one with its light. The wattle didn't have

that luck. It had to find its own way to reach the light, twisting between the others.

And it got there.

PLATE IX · SEEKING THE LIGHT



The poplars grow straight because they have the light handed to them. The wattle didn't: it had to look for it.

I'm not saying you have to live twisted. I'm saying that when the light doesn't reach you on its own, staying still and waiting isn't the only option. You can grow toward where it is.

What gets used, thickens

There's something I'm convinced of: the slime mold can't work very differently from the connections in our brain.

In 1949, the psychologist Donald Hebb proposed that when one neuron repeatedly helps fire another, the connection between the two gets stronger. It's the same rule as the tubes: where it flows, it thickens. Where it stops flowing, it thins out.

If that's so, wherever you put your attention every day is a tube. And it thickens.

Looking at what works

In the eighties, David Cooperrider was studying how a clinic in the United States worked. Instead of focusing on what was going wrong, he focused on what was going right, and on how to grow that. That's where what's now called appreciative inquiry came from.

The underlying idea is simple: when a conversation always revolves around the problem, the problem thickens. Because that's where all the attention is flowing.

This is how I see it: if you want something to grow in your life, make it flow there. Cast threads to it. Give it attention. And let what doesn't feed you thin out.

This book is a thread

This book is a thread too. I give it away for free, because that's what the slime mold does. If I put a price on it, I would no longer be casting a thin line: I'd be asking for something before knowing whether there's an echo.

What does it cost me to write it and let it go? Little. If nothing comes back, the thread stays there. If something comes back, I'll know where to thicken.

TO TRY THIS WEEK

A thread for your life

Think of something you've been turning over for a long time: a change, a project, a pending conversation. Don't solve it. Look for the smallest possible thread toward it and cast it this week: a message, a question, an afternoon's try. Then see what comes back.

You don't need to know the way.

You need to cast the first thread.

REFERENCES

Hebb's theory
Donald Hebb, *The Organization of Behavior* (1949).

Ideastream: the origin of appreciative inquiry
David Cooperrider and the Cleveland Clinic, in the eighties.

CHAPTER 9

A way, *not the way*

We've reached the end. And I want to go back to what I said at the start: this is a way, not the way.

It isn't a formula. It doesn't replace having something worth offering. It doesn't promise results. And there are people for whom the bait, the algorithm or the push work better than they do for me. That's fine.

Many ways of working

Life on this planet has a huge number of ways to look for food. There are animals that hunt, others that wait, others that filter water, others that sow. The slime mold is one of them, neither better nor worse.

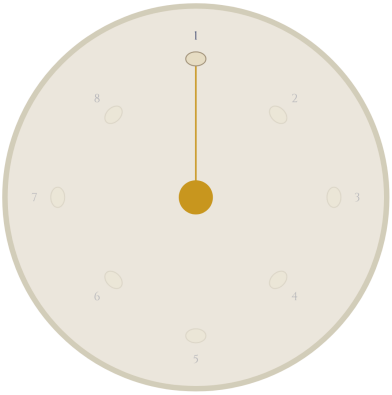
The point isn't finding the right way. It's finding the one that fits you best.

The slime mold's way fit me. It took off the weight of having to get it right from the start.

The book on a dish

Before saying goodbye, let's go over what we saw. Scroll down slowly: each chapter is a flake.

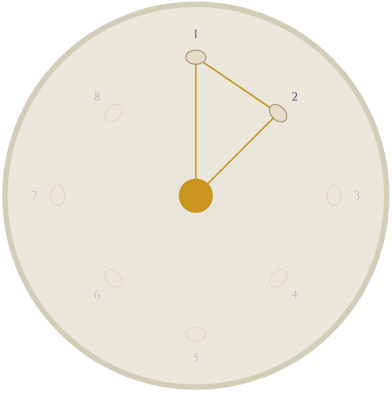
THE DISH, STEP BY STEP



STEP 1 · CHAPTER 1 · FLAKES 1 OF 8

A brainless creature

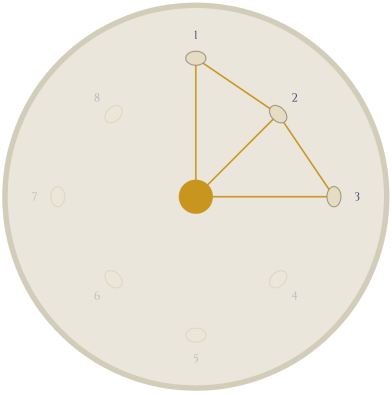
A slime mold built a network like the Tokyo railway, without a map and without a plan. Just following the flow.



STEP 2 · CHAPTER 2 · FLAKES 2 OF 8

Four verbs

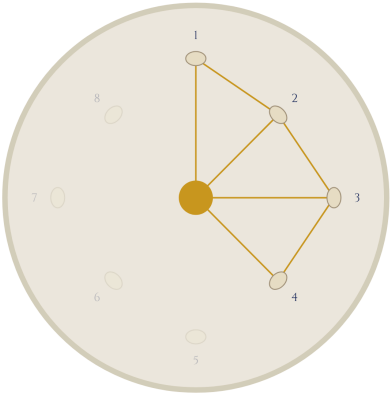
Explore, listen, thicken, let go. None of them is pushing.



STEP 3 · CHAPTER 3 · FLAKES 3 OF 8

Four ways

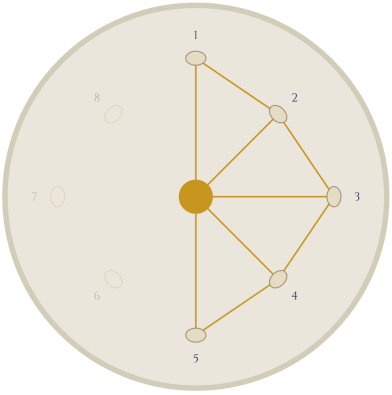
Bait, algorithm, push and thread. Each is paid for with a different currency. The thread is the lightest.



STEP 4 · CHAPTER 4 · FLAKES 4 OF 8

Mansoo

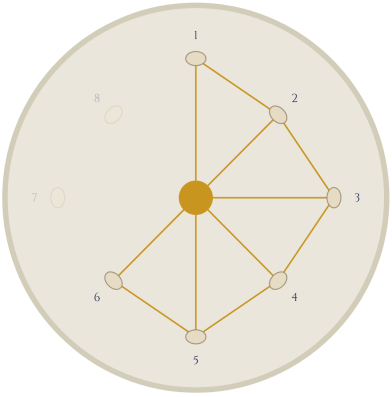
A new guide who showed himself, one by one. The echo came from those who valued who he is.



STEP 5 · CHAPTER 5 · FLAKES 5 OF 8

Six hundred emails

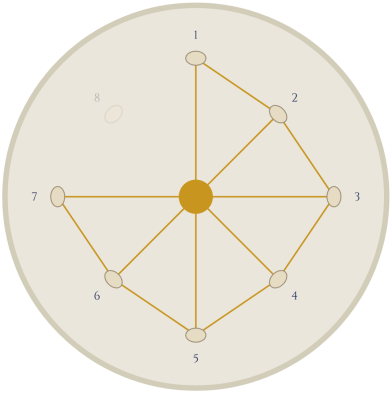
A sleeping database, a useful notice, and two people who said yes.



STEP 6 · CHAPTER 6 · FLAKES 6 OF 8

What a thread

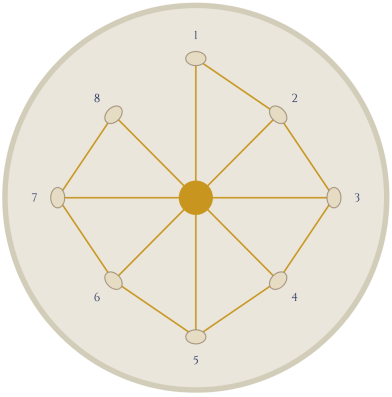
A thread costs little. Standing still is paid for too.



STEP 7 · CHAPTER 7 · FLAKES 7 OF 8

Being ready

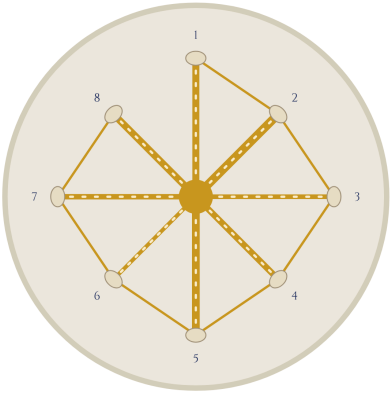
First the container, then the threads. Grow as far as you can sustain.



STEP 8 · CHAPTER 8 · FLAKES 8 OF 8

Beyond sales

You don't need to know the way. You need to cast the first thread.



The network

That's also how this book came together. An idea that showed up on a walk, a first thread, and whatever kept coming back.

What brought food thickened. What didn't, was let go.

Each flake is a chapter of the book.

THE RULE

Where more flows, it thickens. Where nothing flows, it thins out until it disappears.

THE FOUR VERBS

1. **Explore.** Thin threads in many directions.
2. **Listen.** What comes back, and whether it's good for you.
3. **Thicken.** More where food comes back.
4. **Let go.** Stop putting into what brings nothing back.

BEFORE THE FIRST THREAD

1. Does what I offer exist, today?
2. Could this person use it?
3. Can I properly look after those who answer?
4. Am I willing to let go?

THE SLIME MOLD'S DIET

1. Short.
2. To someone it's useful to.
3. With an easy way out.
4. A second try, and nothing more.

And now, you

If this book reached you, you're already part of the experiment. Someone cast a thread, and here you are.

I'd love to know what thread you cast and what comes back to you. Write to me and tell me. And if it was useful, pass it on to someone who's stuck. It's one more thread.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gastón López Tropeano

I write what I see: how systems, companies and relationships work. I talk with owners and executives who are eager for something: a project, a decision, something to build. I founded Cuba Center, a phone repair shop that has been running for more than fifteen years in Argentine Patagonia.

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The slime mold doesn't know where it's going.

It goes anyway.