MBUS 3000
April 17 2014
Mixerman Review
Misc topics

- Planning = process of setting goals, developing strategies, and outlining tasks and schedules to accomplish the goals.

Strategic

In setting up a session I have two main goals. First, I want to make certain that the session can move forward without a hitch. The more organized the session, the more readily available instruments and microphones are, the faster the session can move. Second, I take great pains to be sure that everyone is as comfortable as possible, including me. A little extra time, care, and effort in the setup can go a long way toward these goals-hence the early start.

tactical

tactical

"I think we should record three or more songs to completion and let them hear for themselves that Dumb Ass isn't going to cut it," I said to Willy, finally answering the question that allowed me the opportunity to experience new depths of internal pain. "I also think Dumb Ass needs to play more than one song every four days to build up his confidence. Perhaps we should consider not using a clik track to see if he plays better that way."
I had more suggestions, but I decided to stop there and see how my comments were received.
"I think you're right," Willy replied.
Yes! Finally, we were going to move forward. If we could get a few songs in the bag, it would go a long way toward morale, confidence, and vibe. Best of all, it gives something for Jeramiah Weasel to bring to the president of the label.

• Organizing = Arranging elements into a purposeful order or structure; assembling required resources to attain objectives.

"Hey, I'm Lance," the lad said, holding out his pinky finger, as his arms were too full to offer his entire hand.

"Hey, I'm Mixerman," I replied, helping relieve him of some of the cables. "Are you my assistant?"

"Yeah, that's right."

"You didn't happen to get my fax with the instructions and the locations of the players, did you?"

"Yeah, thanks."

Thanks? Thanks???

I looked around the room, half wondering if I were on Candid Camera, as I noticed that there were no mics2 set up, and there were no headphone boxes, no music stands, no A/C strips.3 Nothing was set up, save a rug and some drums-in the wrong place, no less. I had taken several hours of my time putting together instructions to have all of these things set up, or at least nearly set up, before I had arrived. I had marked a to-scale map of the room, notating where each member of the band should reside, taking into account the acoustics of the room and the sight lines.

Thanks? He thanks me for my fax that he has thus far ignored?

"Did you happen to get the diagram of where I wanted the players to be placed?" I asked.

"Yeah, I got it. But no one ever puts drums where you wanted them."

MOTHERFUCKER!

- Leading = positively influencing others to achieve mutually satisfying goals.

keyword: "positively"

"Cotton sucks."

"Cotton?" he asked as he turned to look at me.

"That's my pet name for the drummer," I explained.

"Why Cotton?" he inquired.

"Because he's dumber than cotton," I said dryly.

That must be a funny line because Willy practically fell off his chair just like the bass player had after I said it. When he regained his balance, he sat perched on the edge of his chair, and he laid his head in his arms on the console with his body pulsating from silent laughter almost inappropriately, as my line really didn't warrant such a reaction. Just as the band was completing its fifth take, I, too, found myself laughing, as laughter is oftentimes infectious. Fortunately, I was able to regain my composure.

"I'm going to tell them to make another take," I announced.

Willy sat motionless with his head down as I asked the band to play another take. Lance rolled tape at my cue, and I rolled the clik track.24 Willy had finally regained his composure. He sat up in order to wipe away tears from his face.

Regardless, to me, humor is the single most important part of a session. I'm like the class clown of a session. I dance, play practical jokes, fuck around constantly, make up names for people (I know, big surprise), and I'm an incessant smart-ass. I'll do anything to keep the people involved, happy, and entertained. The more miserable the circumstance, the more I use humor as my weapon. I had achieved what I needed most to achieve today. I got Willy to laugh. More importantly, I got him to laugh uncontrollably. This was a good thing.

"You're right, Cotton sucks," Willy finally replied, still catching his breath, and still having occasional momentary tremors of laughter. "Do you know how to use a razor blade?" he continued.

"Of course," I replied. I should have stopped there, but I was curious, since he had already asked me this in our pre-gig interview.

"You asked me that before."

"Yes, that's one of the reasons you have the gig. Somehow, cut me a good drum take tomorrow," he said. And after the band finished playing the last take, he called it a night.

This isn't going to be easy.

The fatty did just what it was supposed to. I finally had recognized the situation for what it actually was. Humorous.

Not pathetic, not ridiculous, not hairball. Humorous. I had been given an instant attitude adjustment. I now understood what Willy was trying to achieve. Where I had been negative and doubtful that anything could save Dumb Ass, I was positive that we could do something creative to make the edited take work.

"Who ate my chocolate muffin?" a voice came from across the room. It was Willy, half-kidding, half-serious about the muffin.

• Controlling = the formal, information-based routines and procedures used to maintain or alter patterns in activities.

Not what you think it is.

Very specific "information based routines and procedures"

Only really one or two examples in mixerman diaries

this is on the day of operation control
but very little in "operations control" is control
in the POLCA sense. Most of what he lists
are leadership, planning and organizing.

Phase One of Operation Control began, unwittingly on my part, last night. Phase One: Train Lance to be a worthwhile assistant.

At the conclusion of yesterday's session, ahem, I explained to Lance what I meant when I used the term "start time," expressing very plainly that if we call the session to start at 10 a.m., then I wanted him there at 9:30 a.m. Among other duties, he was to double-check all the documentation from the day before (he was a bit confused by this one, as he still hasn't documented one thing); fire up the "tube" equipment,12 which takes time to warm up; make sure the Apartment environments are neat and clean; organize notes, messages, and receipts; remove obvious trash; and untangle cables, lines, etc. Some of this was being done by the cleaning staff, but Lance was not without his own obligations. I explained to Lance that his job was to help me keep a session running smoothly and quickly, and I asked him if he was going to be able to do this. He assured me that he would.

Lance was only thirty minutes late this morning, which was incredibly encouraging considering that, to date, he has not been less than an hour late. As encouraged as I was, this wasn't good enough. So I decided that he needed to meet the wrath of me. After all, an important Intelligence Operation cannot always be implemented without the use of some force. In a nutshell, I tore Lance a new asshole-a tactic I reserve for when all else fails.

I took Lance into the room, grabbed a clipboard with a pad of paper, and demonstrated to Lance how one documents the settings on a guitar amp. I drew a little circle for each of the knobs on the guitar amp, and I drew a line, like the hands of a clock in each of the circles, which indicated where the knob was set on the amp. It was kind of like kindergarten class, but this was an important step in implementing Phase One. I explained to Lance that on every song, and even every take, if we're switching instruments and amp settings, he was to write down the guitar that was used, the amp that was used, the settings of the amp, the pickups, tone and volume control settings on the guitar, pedals used with their appropriate settings, mics used, snare drum used, kit used, bass used, head settings, compressor settings, mic pre-gain settings, EQ settings, tempo, etc. I suggested he make some templates and photocopies of those templates, so he didn't have to constantly redraw the guitar amp knobs every time we changed the settings on the guitar.

• Adapting = to make suitable to changing requirements or conditions; adjust or modify fittingly

my view is you can't teach people this

About thirty minutes before the crack of dawn, I received a call from the producer. Apparently, he had mysteriously been stricken with a great idea. He wanted to use a PA system9 to amplify the drums in the room, so as to get a really "big and fat drum room sound." He referenced another producer who was a friend of his that swears by this. He then proceeded to tell me that he'd had his personal assistan (a relative, I'm sure) hire a sound reinforcement guy to come to the studio and set up the system.
After dropping the little PA bomb on me, he decided to ask me how everything sounded.
What's it matter? It's all going to change now! I thought to myself.
Regardless, since I wasn't 100 percent happy with the drum sound, thanks to Dumb Ass's less than stellar coordination of multiple limbs hitting skins, I decided to fill the producer in on my disappointmen with his drumming skills.
"I think the PA is a good idea. The drummer could use some help," I said in an exaggerated, half-laughing way so as to get my point across.
"He could? I'm surprised to hear that," replied the producer.
Surprised? Didn't he do rehearsals with this band? How can this be a surprise to him?
"I thought he was a really good drummer," the producer continued.
As if I wasn't fucked before!
I intimated that I thought the PA system was a good idea, and, in an attempt to perform some damage control, I told him that the PA would probably solve the small problems that I was having with his drumming.

The Superstar Economy
or
Welcome to Extremistan

Long Volatility Revisited

The Advent of Scalability

Consider the fate of Giaccomo, an opera singer at the end of the nineteenth century, before sound recording was invented. Say he performs in a small and remote town in central Italy. He is shielded from those big egos at La Scala in Milan and other major opera houses. He feels safe as his vocal cords will always be in demand somewhere in the district. There is no way for him to export his singing, and there is no way for the big guns to export theirs and threaten his local franchise. It is not yet possible for him to store his work, so his presence is needed at every performance, just as a barber is (still) needed today for every haircut. So the total pie is unevenly split, but

only mildly so, much like your calorie consumption. It is cut in a few pieces and everyone has a share; the big guns have larger audiences and get more invitations than the small guy, but this is not too worrisome. Inequalities exist, but let us call them *mild*. There is no scalability yet, no way to double the largest in-person audience without having to sing twice.

Now consider the effect of the first music recording, an invention that introduced a great deal of injustice. Our ability to reproduce and repeat performances allows me to listen on my laptop to hours of background music of the pianist Vladimir Horowitz (now extremely dead) performing Rachmaninoff's *Preludes*, instead of to the local Russian émigré musician (still living), who is now reduced to giving piano lessons to generally untalented children for close to minimum wage. Horowitz, though dead, is putting the poor man out of business. I would rather listen to Vladimir Horowitz or Arthur Rubinstein for $10.99 a CD than pay $9.99 for one by some unknown (but very talented) graduate of the Juilliard School or the Prague Conservatory. If you ask me why I select Horowitz, I will answer that it is because of the order, rhythm, or passion, when in fact there are probably a legion of people I have never heard about, and will never hear about—those who did not make it to the stage, but who might play just as well.

Some people naïvely believe that the process of unfairness started with the gramophone, according to the logic that I just presented. I disagree. I am convinced that the process started much, much earlier, with our DNA, which stores information about our selves and allows us to repeat our performance without our being there by spreading our genes down the

The success of movies depends severely on contagions. Such contagions do not just apply to the movies: they seem to affect a wide range of cultural products. It is hard for us to accept that people do not fall in love with works of art only for their own sake, but also in order to feel that they belong to a community. By imitating, we get closer to others—that is, other imitators. It fights solitude.

This discussion shows the difficulty in predicting outcomes in an environment of concentrated success. So for now let us note that the division between professions can be used to understand the division between types of random variables. Let us go further into the issue of knowledge, of inference about the unknown and the properties of the known.

where the payoff goes to ideas is higher inequality among the idea generators together with a greater role for both opportunity and luck—but I will leave the socioeconomic discussion for Part Three and focus here on knowledge.

TRAVELS INSIDE MEDIOCRISTAN

This scalable/nonscalable distinction allows us to make a clear-cut differentiation between two varieties of uncertainties, two types of randomness.

Let's play the following thought experiment. Assume that you round up a thousand people randomly selected from the general population and have them stand next to one another in a stadium. You can even include Frenchmen (but please, not too many out of consideration for the others in the group), Mafia members, non-Mafia members, and vegetarians.

Imagine the heaviest person you can think of and add him to that sample. Assuming he weighs three times the average, between four hundred and five hundred pounds, he will rarely represent more than a very small fraction of the weight of the entire population (in this case, about a half of a percent).

You can get even more aggressive. If you picked the heaviest biologically possible human on the planet (who yet can still be called a human), he would not represent more than, say, 0.6 percent of the total, a very negligible increase. And if you had ten thousand persons, his contribution would be vanishingly small.

In the utopian province of Mediocristan, particular events don't contribute much individually—only collectively. I can

state the supreme law of Mediocristan as follows: *When your sample is large, no single instance will significantly change the aggregate or the total.* The largest observation will remain impressive, but eventually insignificant, to the sum.

I'll borrow another example from my friend Bruce Goldberg: your caloric consumption. Look at how much you consume per year—if you are classified as human, close to eight hundred thousand calories. No single day, not even Thanksgiving at your great-aunt's, will represent a large share of that. Even if you tried to kill yourself by eating, that day's calories would not seriously affect your yearly consumption.

Now, if I told you that it is possible to run into someone who weighs several thousand tons, or stands several hundred miles tall, you would be perfectly justified in having my frontal lobe examined, or in suggesting that I switch to science-fiction writing. But you cannot so easily rule out extreme variations with a different brand of quantities, to which we turn next.

The Strange Country of Extremistan

Consider by comparison the net worth of the thousand people you lined up in the stadium. Add to them the wealthiest person to be found on the planet—say, Bill Gates, the founder of Microsoft. Assume his net worth to be close to $80 billion—with the total capital of the others around a few million. How much of the total wealth would he represent? 99.9 percent? Indeed, all the others would represent no more than a rounding error for his net worth, the variation of his

personal portfolio over the past second. For someone's weight to represent such a share, he would need to weigh fifty million pounds!

Try it again with, say, book sales. Line up a thousand authors (or people begging to get published, but calling themselves authors instead of waiters), and check their book sales. Then add the living writer who (currently) has the most readers. J. K. Rowling, the author of the Harry Potter series, with several hundred million books sold, will dwarf the remaining thousand authors with, say, collectively, a few hundred thousand readers at most.

Try it also with academic citations (the mention of one academic by another academic in a formal publication), media references, income, company size, and so on. Let us call these *social* matters, as they are man-made, as opposed to physical ones, like the size of waistlines.

In Extremistan, inequalities are such that one single observation can disproportionately impact the aggregate, or the total.

So while weight, height, and calorie consumption are from Mediocristan, wealth is not. Almost all social matters are from Extremistan. Another way to say it is that social quantities are informational, not physical: you cannot touch them. Money in a bank account is something important, but certainly *not physical*. As such it can take any value without necessitating the expenditure of energy. It is just a number!

Note that before the advent of modern technology, wars used to belong to Mediocristan. It is hard to kill many people if you need to slaughter them one at the time. Today, with tools of mass destruction, all it takes is a button, a nutcase, or

a small error to wipe out the planet.

Look at the implication for the Black Swan. Extremistan can produce Black Swans, and does, since a few occurrences have had huge influences on history. This is the main idea of this book.

Extremistan and Knowledge

While this distinction (between Mediocristan and Extremistan) has severe ramifications for both social fairness and the dynamics of events, let us see its application to knowledge, which is where most of its value lies. If a Martian came to earth and engaged in the business of measuring the heights of the denizens of this happy planet, he could safely stop at a hundred humans to get a good picture of the average height. If you live in Mediocristan, you can be comfortable with what you have measured—provided that you know for sure that it comes from Mediocristan. You can also be comfortable with *what you have learned* from the data. The epistemological consequence is that with Mediocristan-style randomness it is not *possible*[*] to have a Black Swan surprise such that a single event can dominate a phenomenon. *Primo*, the first hundred days should reveal all you need to know about the data. *Secondo*, even if you do have a surprise, as we saw in the case of the heaviest human, it would not be consequential.

If you are dealing with quantities from Extremistan, you will have trouble figuring out the average from any sample since it can depend so much on one single observation. The

idea is not more difficult than that. In Extremistan, one unit can easily affect the total in a disproportionate way. In this world, you should always be suspicious of the knowledge you derive from data. This is a very simple test of uncertainty that allows you to distinguish between the two kinds of randomness. Capish?

What you can know from data in Mediocristan augments very rapidly with the supply of information. But knowledge in Extremistan grows slowly and erratically with the addition of data, some of it extreme, possibly at an unknown rate.

Wild and Mild

If we follow my distinction of scalable versus nonscalable, we can see clear differences shaping up between Mediocristan and Extremistan. Here are a few examples.

Matters that seem to belong to Mediocristan (subjected to what we call type 1 randomness): height, weight, calorie consumption, income for a baker, a small restaurant owner, a prostitute, or an orthodontist; gambling profits (in the very special case, assuming the person goes to a casino and maintains a constant betting size), car accidents, mortality rates, "IQ" (as measured).

Matters that seem to belong to Extremistan (subjected to what we call type 2 randomness): wealth, income, book sales per author, book citations per author, name recognition as a "celebrity," number of references on Google, populations of cities, uses of words in a vocabulary, numbers of speakers per language, damage caused by earthquakes, deaths in war,

deaths from terrorist incidents, sizes of planets, sizes of companies, stock ownership, height between species (consider elephants and mice), financial markets (but your investment manager does not know it), commodity prices, inflation rates, economic data. The Extremistan list is much longer than the prior one.

The Tyranny of the Accident

Another way to rephrase the general distinction is as follows: Mediocristan is where we must endure the tyranny of the collective, the routine, the obvious, and the predicted; Extremistan is where we are subjected to the tyranny of the singular, the accidental, the unseen, and the unpredicted. As hard as you try, you will never lose a lot of weight in a single day; you need the collective effect of many days, weeks, even months. Likewise, if you work as a dentist, you will never get rich in a single day—but you can do very well over thirty years of motivated, diligent, disciplined, and regular attendance to teeth-drilling sessions. If you are subject to Extremistan-based speculation, however, you can gain or lose your fortune in a single minute.

Table 1 summarizes the differences between the two dynamics, to which I will refer in the rest of the book; confusing the left column with the right one can lead to dire (or extremely lucky) consequences.

TABLE 1

Mediocristan	*Extremist*

Nonscalable	Scalable
Mild or type 1 randomness	Wild (even superwild) or type 2 randomness
The most typical member is mediocre	The most "typical" is either giant or dwarf, i.e., there is no typical member
Winners get a small segment of the total pie	Winner-take-almost-all effects
Example: audience of an opera singer before the gramophone	Today's audience for an artist
More likely to be found in our ancestral environment	More likely to be found in our modern environment
Impervious to the Black Swan	Vulnerable to the Black Swan
Subject to gravity	There are no physical constraints on what a number can be
Corresponds (generally) to physical quantities, i.e., height	Corresponds to numbers, say, wealth
As close to utopian equality as reality can spontaneously deliver	Dominated by extreme winner-take-all inequality

Total is not determined by a single instance or observation	Total will be determined by a small number of extreme events
When you observe for a while you can get to know what's going on	It takes a long time to know what's going on
Tyranny of the collective	Tyranny of the accidental
Easy to predict from what you see and extend to what you do not see	Hard to predict from past information
History crawls	History makes jumps
Events are distributed* according to the "bell curve" (the GIF) or its variations	The distribution is either Mandelbrotian "gray" Swans (tractable scientifically) or totally intractable Black Swans

* What I call "probability distribution" here is the model used to calculate the odds of different events, how they are distributed. When I say that an event is distributed according to the "bell curve," I mean that the Gaussian bell curve (after C. F. Gauss; more on him later) can help provide probabilities of various occurrences.

This framework, showing that Extremistan is where most of the Black Swan action is, is only a rough approximation—please do not Platonify it; don't simplify it beyond what's necessary.
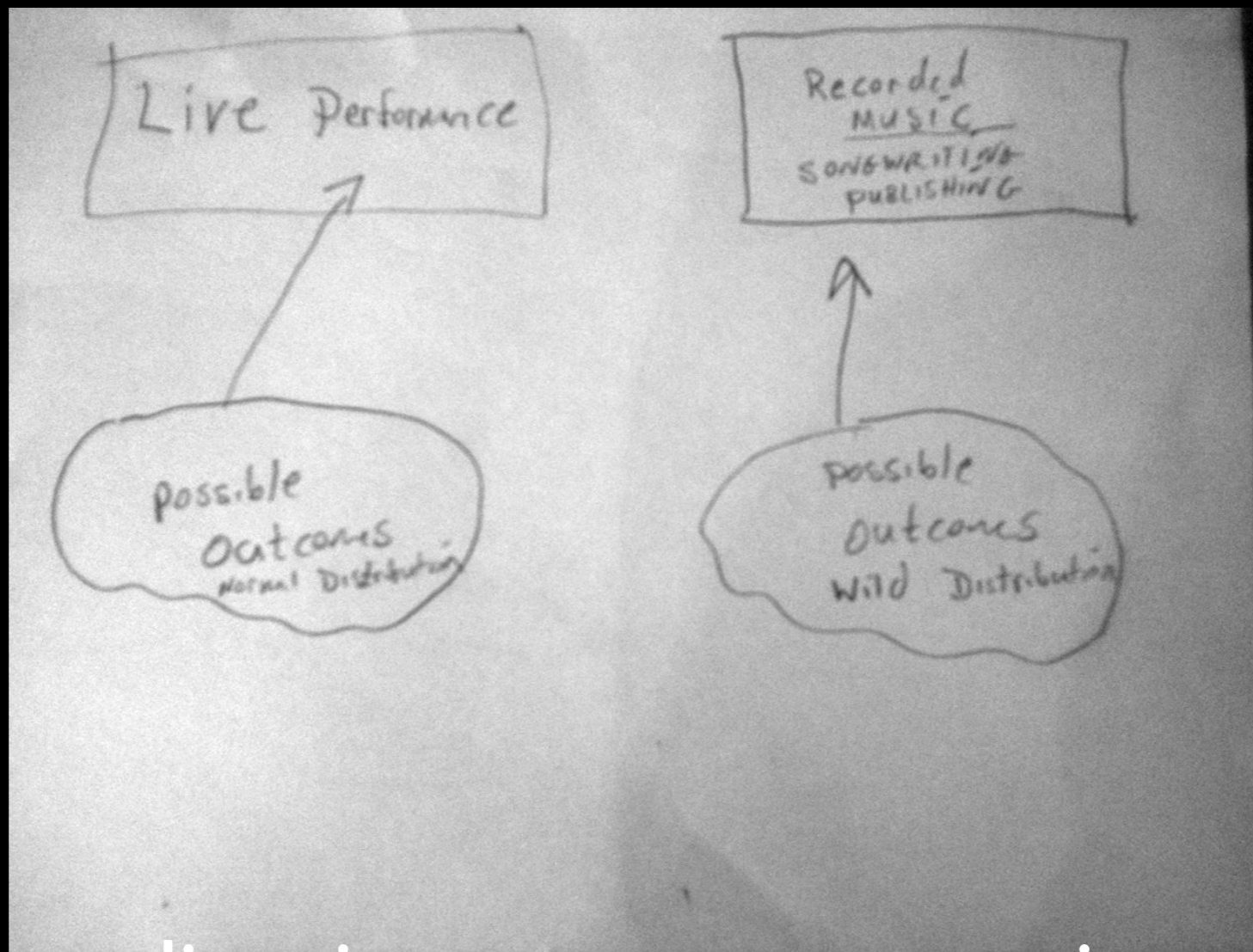
mediocristan	extremistan
non-scalable	scalable
normal variation	wild variation
limited upside	unlimited upside
short volatility	long volatility

Mediocristan	Extremistan
Live performance	Record labels
Recording studios (by the hour)	Publishing companies
Lawyering by the hour	Producing records
Accounting by the hour	Managing artists
ETC	Songwriting

Associated concepts

Gaussian	Non-Gaussian
Normal Distribution	Wild
Short Volatility	Long Volatility
limited upside	unlimited upside
non-scalable occupations	Scalable occupations
Physical world	information/money/numbers
Mediocristan	Extremistan

The genius of the old record labels and publishing companies was that they were structured to expect the unexpected and unpredictable.

It was structured to profit from black swans.

And it expected them to happen from time to time.
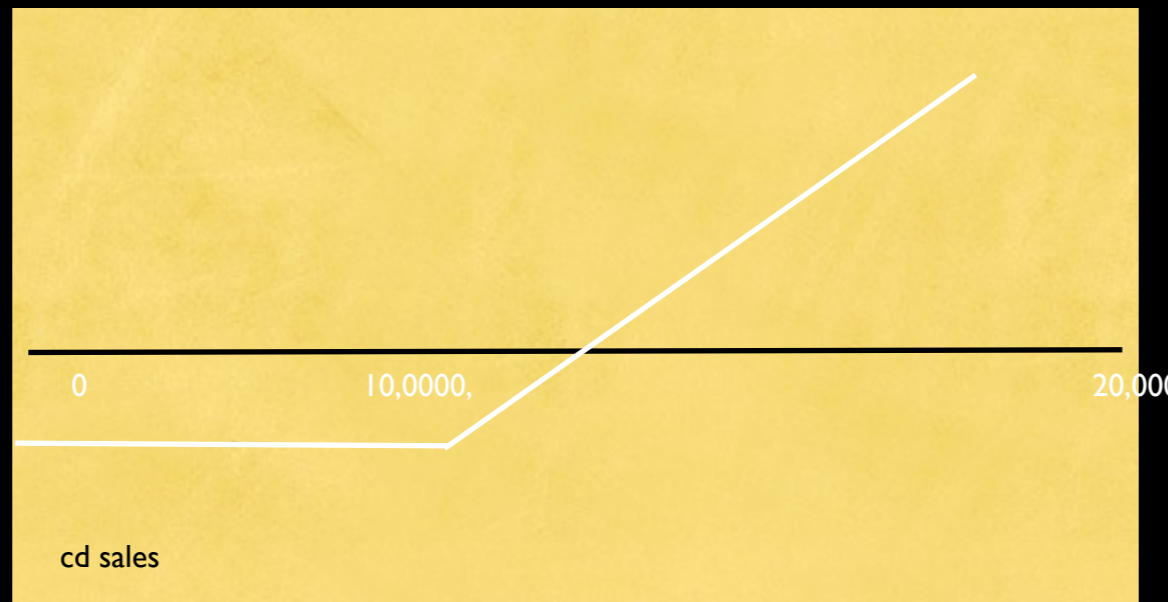
Long Volatility/Short Volatility Review.

Long Tail/Long Volatility Strategy

- many small "bets" that rarely pay off.

- upside must be unlimited and of a "wild" variety/ "wild" payouts on successful "bets"

- low overhead / "bets" are inexpensive or acquired free in the course of other activities.
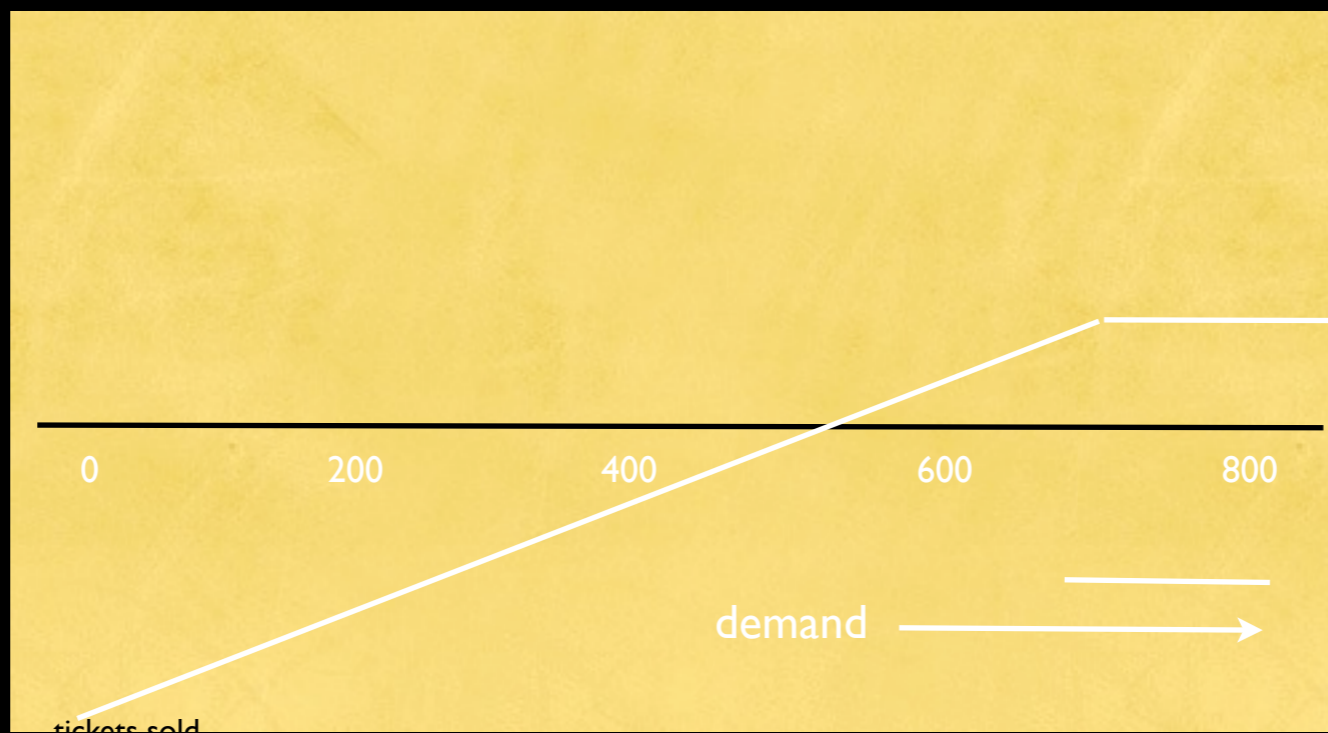
long volatility: you profit if things change beyond
expectations

short volatility: you profit when things stay within the
range of expectations

record label profit and loss chart

limited downside/ unlimited upside

40 watt club presents dinosaur jr.

limited upside

Long Volatility:
fail most of the time.
Lots of small losses occasional big wins.

Short volatility:
succeed most of the time
Lots of small wins occasional big losses