

Less is More
(or)
Why the World Doesn't Need
Your Idea

James Turner
O'Reilly Network Editor: ONLamp

My Goals

- To piss off as many people as I can in under 5 minutes.
- To suggest that forking and duplicate parallel projects aren't just bad, they're REALLY bad.
- To encourage a new ethos for the FL/OSS community.

Me in 20 Seconds

- 27 Years as a software engineer.
- Worked with RMS at MIT AI Lab
- Committer, 1.1b3 Release Manager for Apache Jakarta Struts
- Creator of Flatworm OSS project
- Freelance Journalist, Java Book Author, Site Editor – ONLamp.com
- Writer, “The Watering Hole”

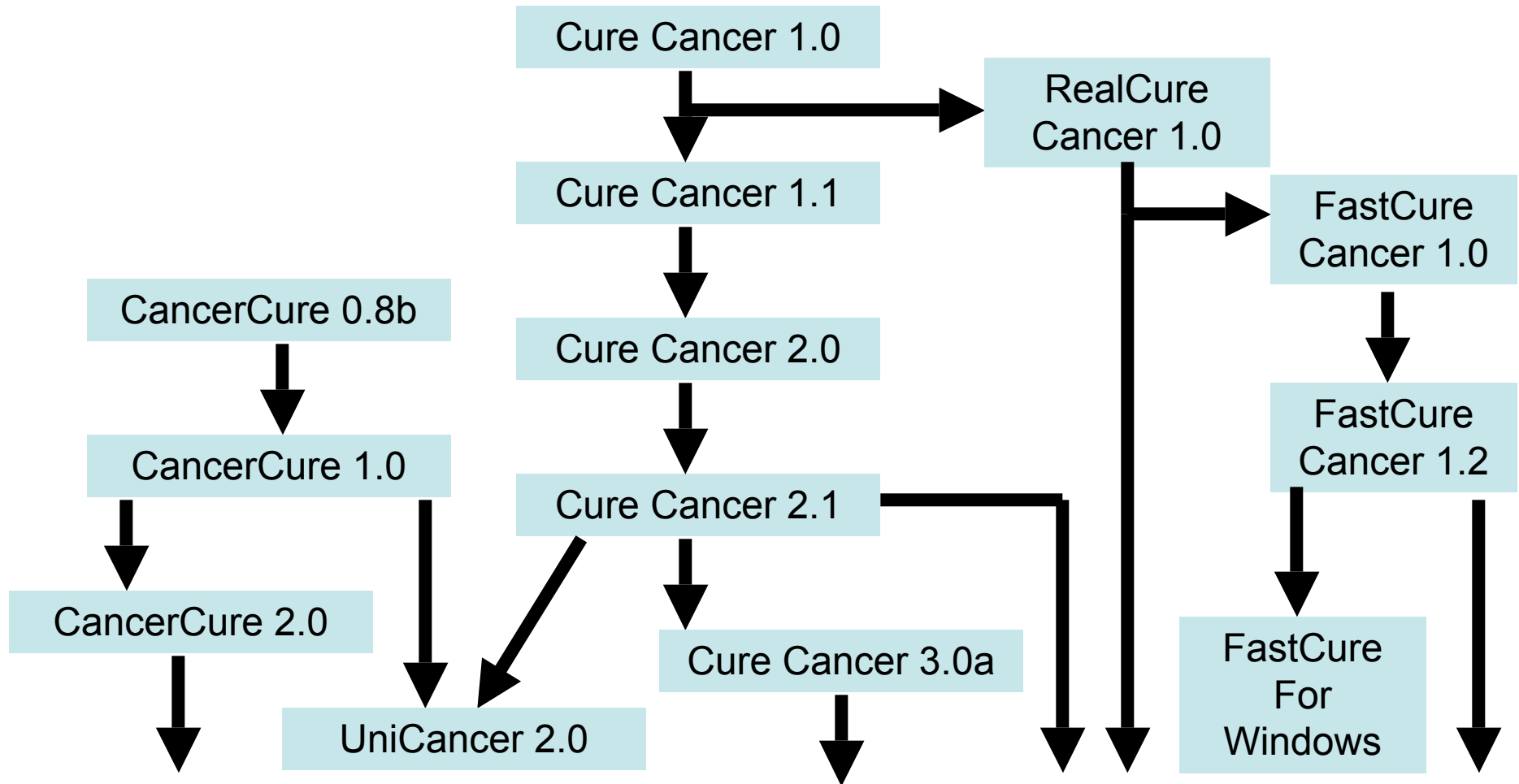
Let's All Be Different Together

- One of the strengths of the FL/OSS movement is that there's no barrier to entry if you want to be creative, or break new ground.
 - Don't Need Venture Funds
 - Don't Need a Business Plan
 - Don't Need a Commercially Viable Product
 - Don't Even Need a Good Idea

On the Other Hand...

- One of the weaknesses of the FL/OSS movement is that there's no barrier to entry if you want to be creative, or break new ground
 - Any bozo (and there are plenty of bozos out there, alas) can start up a project.
 - Personality issues can trump practical concerns, because there aren't any.
 - No market pressure to cull choices.

How Bad Forking Happens to Good Projects...



Diversity Perversity

Microsoft Visual
Cancer Studio For
Windows

Out of Date

RealCure
Cancer 1.0

Unstable

FastCure
Cancer 1.2

Poorly Documented

Cure Cancer 2.1

Performance Issues

CancerCure 2.0

Must Be Built From Sources

Cure Cancer 3.0a

Developer AWOL

UniCancer 2.0

Yeah, Windows ME...

FastCure
For
Windows

I'm Not Evil, I'm Just Misunderstood

- Many people took “The Virtues of Monoculture” as an endorsement of the Redmond Way. But I will say that many people ridicule things like .NET and Visual Studio from a position of ignorance (including me until recently)
- The point I was trying to make is that not everyone has infinite time to become an expert on every framework and tool.

What I Am Saying

- 1 Strong project is better than 9 fragmented ones.
- If there's an active project that's close to what you want to do, your first thought should be "Maybe I can contribute my ideas to that project", not "They don't do what I need, so they suck. I'll do my own."

Or, phrased more simply...

- Get Over Yourself

On the Other Side of the Fence

- If you're in a governance role of a project (committer, creator, release manager), you have to be open to new ideas from newcomers.
- Set the bar at the right height.
- It can be done successfully!
 - The Linux Kernel
 - The Apache Server

FL/OSS Has FUD Too

- “I keep trying to get my ideas into a project, but they keep rejecting them.”
 - Persistence is a virtue, not just a synonym for database storage. You have to be willing to fight for your ideas (without being obnoxious) and defend them eloquently and persuasively.
 - It took 6 months of persistence to get zero-argument instantiation into the Struts 1.1 release.

FL/OSS Has FUD Too

- “Monocultures are unhealthy, we need tons of projects to promote vigor.”
 - There’s such a thing as straining an analogy, software isn’t a wheat crop.
 - Hybrid vigor only works if there is cross-fertilization, the opposite of what happens in competing projects.
 - Duplicative projects frequently lead to unproductive competitiveness, and nasty sniping back and forth.

More FL/OSS FUD

- “We shouldn’t care about whether something is easy to use or good for businesses...”
 - If you didn’t want to make it a successful tool, why did you release it in the first place?
 - Most software developers need to earn a living. And that means they have to be able to put software to a practical use. Being gainfully employed is not a crime.

Imagine a World

- Where all FL/OSS projects had solid reliability, great documentation, broad platform support, responsive mailing lists, incredible feature sets and comprehensive interoperability.
- You can't make a baby with nine women in one month. Teamwork and flexibility have to trump ego and divisiveness, because 9 fragmented projects will never get there.