

A Place for Everything



And Everything in its Place:
Conducting (and Maintaining!) a
Collection Inventory
4 October 2016

Poll #1



- ❧ What job title is closest to yours:
 - ❧ Registrar or Collection Manager
 - ❧ Curator
 - ❧ Archivist
 - ❧ Director
 - ❧ Most or all of the above: I do it all!
 - ❧ Museum studies student
 - ❧ None of the above



Just an
Ordinary
Day in the
Life of a
Registrar



Sisyphus undertakes an
inventory of his collection

Poll #2



- ❧ What percentage of objects in your collection have a (pretty reliable) location record (“I know where it is” does not count)?
 - ❧ 75% to 100% (why are you taking this webinar?)
 - ❧ 25% to 75% (hey, it’s a start)
 - ❧ less than 25% (don’t feel bad, you have a lot of company)

Why inventory?



or:

Do I have to?????

❧ *Registrars, through the records maintained, are accountable for the objects in custody of their museums and must be able to provide current information on each object, its location, status, and condition.*

❧ *From Code of Ethics for Registrars. The Registrars Committee of the American Association of Museums. Accepted and endorsed 11 June 1984.*

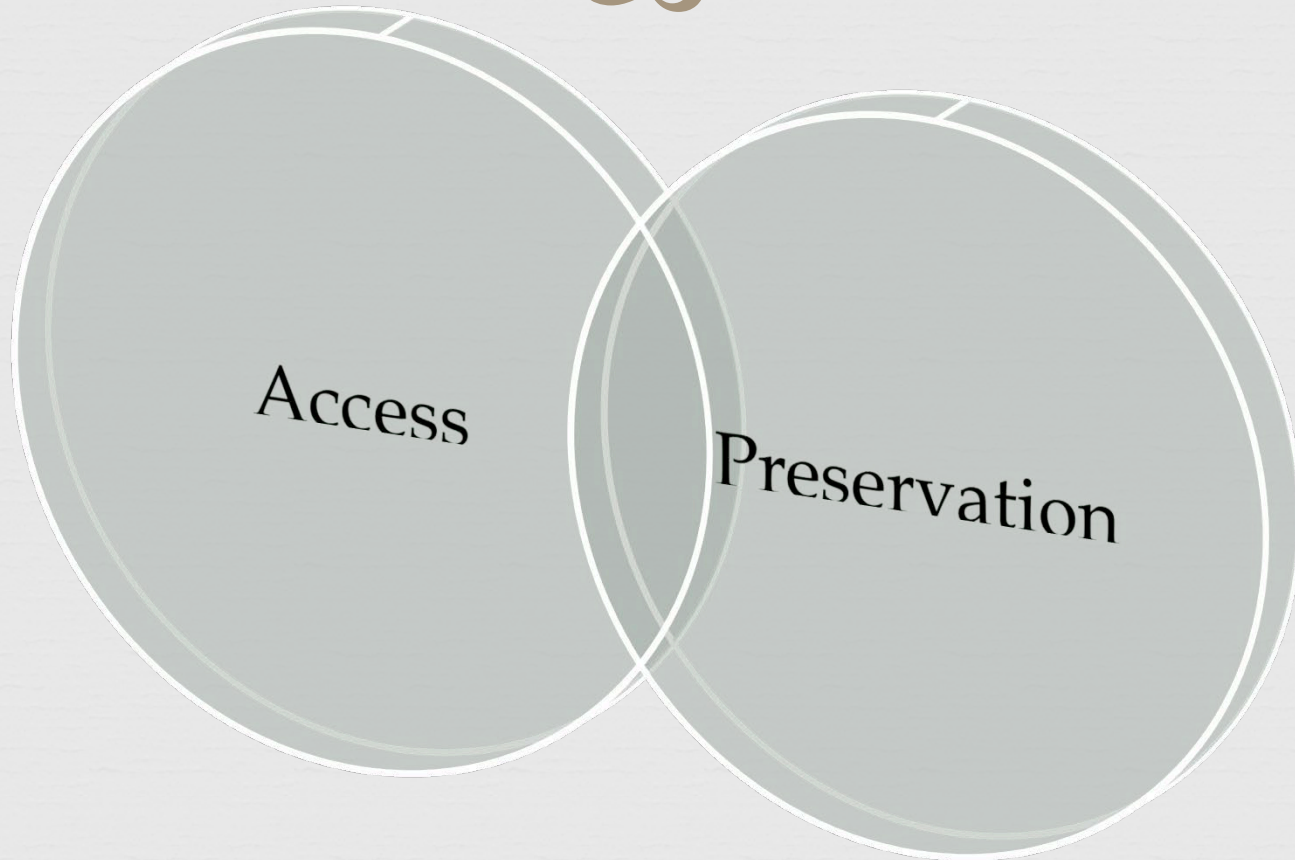
A Museum is



☞ a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment.

☞ ICOM (International Council of Museums) Statutes, adopted by the 22nd General Assembly in Vienna Austria on 24 August 2007

Oxymoron?





Access AND
Preservation?

No
Problem!

Fiduciary



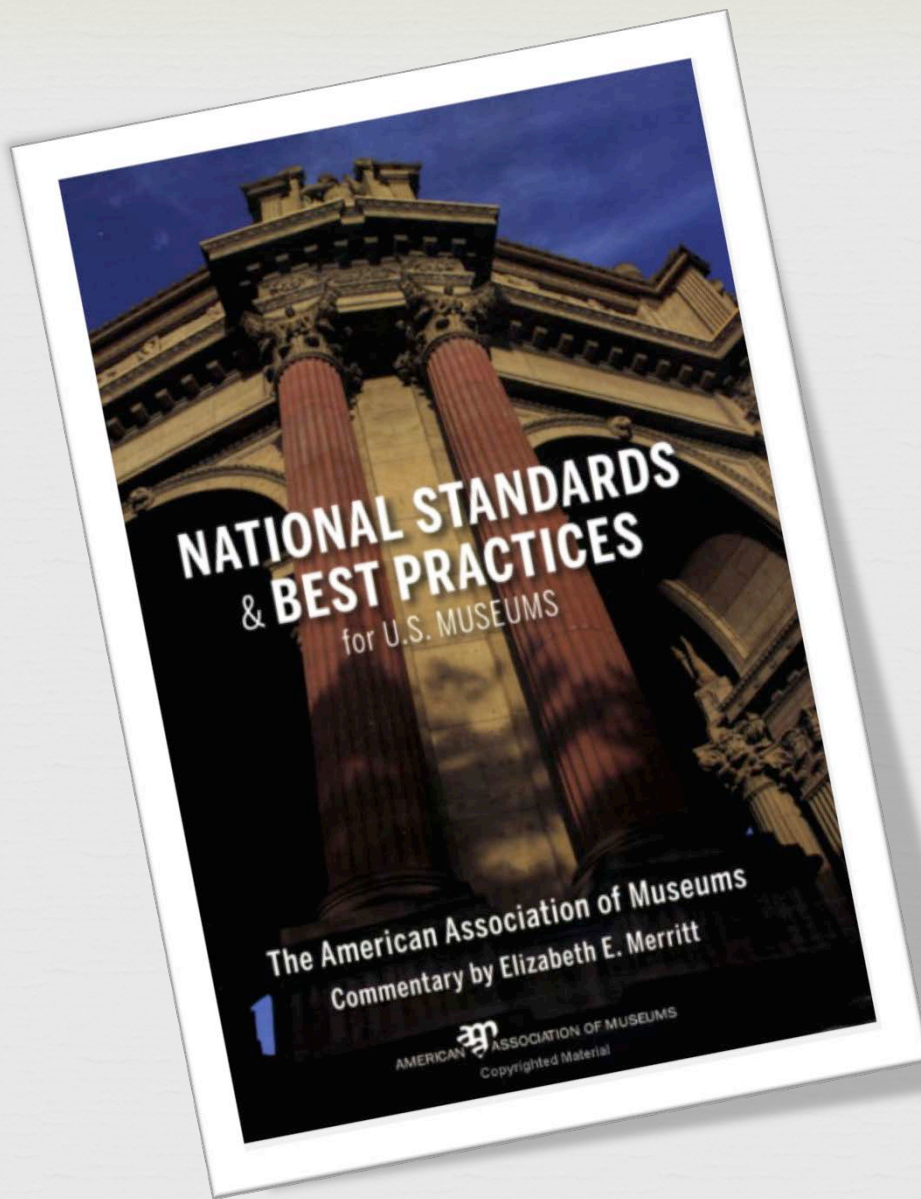
- ❧ Fi-du-ci-ar-y (fi-doo'shē-er'ē) adj.
- ❧ 1.a. of or relating to a duty of acting in good faith with regards to the interests of another;
- ❧ b. Of or being a trustee or trusteeship.
- ❧ c. Held in trust.

- ❧ Fi-du-ci-ar-y (fi-doo'shē-er'ē) noun
- ❧ A person who holds assets in trust for a beneficiary.

TAKE HOME POINT #1



œ In order for a collection inventory to succeed it must be an institution-wide priority!



1. Know what stuff you have
2. Know where it is
3. Take good care of it

AAM's National Standards & Best Practices

Know what stuff you have



Know where it is



Take good care of it



1966 Florence



Time = \$\$\$



Abandoned property?



Start the clock ticking!

Ignorantia juris non excusat!





There's no such thing as bad
publicity,

~ P. T. Barnum

Hermitage, St. Petersburg



Type of Inventories #1



❧ Random (or Spot) Inventory:

- ❧ Extremely limited in scope
- ❧ Used to verify the location of a representative sampling of objects
- ❧ Better thought of as an audit than a true inventory

Type of Inventories #2



œ Partial (or Section-by-Section) Inventory:

- œ Limited in scope, usually by a particular display or storage location
- œ More useful than random/spot inventories but
- œ Can *not* be definitively reconciled against museum records

Type of Inventories #3



œ Complete Inventory:

- œ Aka a 100% Inventory, a Wall-to-Wall inventory, a Baseline inventory
- œ Documents the location of every object that is in (or is *supposed* to be in) a museum's collection *as well as* in its custody (e.g. loans)
- œ Can be authoritatively reconciled (or justified) against museum records

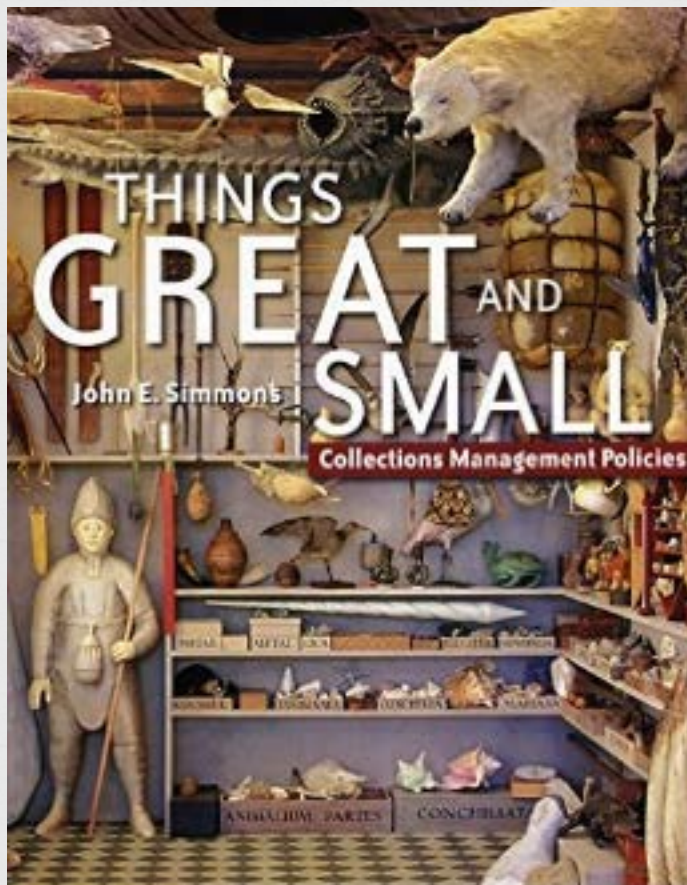
PLANNING



Collection Management Policy



- ❧ From Malaro & DeAngeles, *A Legal Primer on Managing Museum Collections*:
 - ❧ The purpose of the museum and its collection goals
 - ❧ The method of acquiring objects for the collections
 - ❧ The method of disposing of objects from the collections
 - ❧ The handling of objects left in the custody of the museum
 - ❧ The care and control of collection objects generally
 - ❧ Access to collections
 - ❧ Insurance procedures relating to collection objects
 - ❧ The records that are to be kept of collection activities, when these records are to be made, and where they are to be maintained.

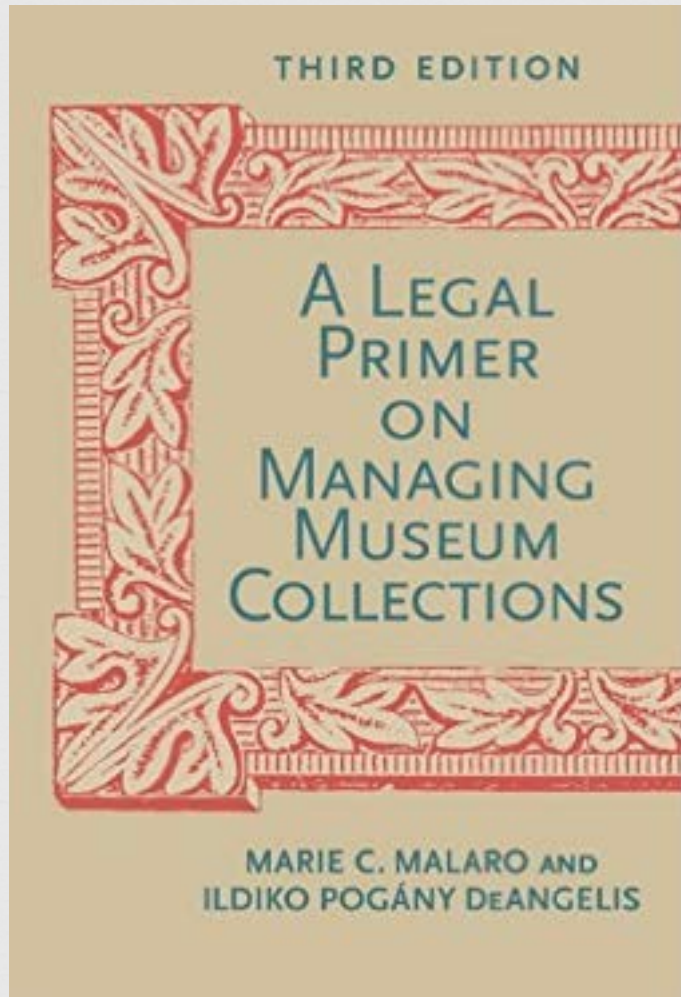


What?!? You Don't
Have a Current
CMP?!?

Buy This Book!

*Things Great and Small:
Collections Management
Policies*

See webinar resources for full
information



What?!? Don't own
this book???

Buy it!!!

*A Legal Primer on
Managing Museum
Collections*

See webinar resources for full
information

What will it cost?
How long will it take?



Step #1: Determine Scope



- ❧ Define your standard inventory record:
 - ❧ What fields of information will you capture?
 - ❧ At minimum:
 - ❧ Accession or unique inventory control number
 - ❧ Current location
 - ❧ Staff member confirming location
 - ❧ Date object is located

Scope cont.



- œ Additional information to consider including:
 - œ Brief condition assessment
 - œ Direct digital capture
 - œ Confirm (or take missing) dimensions
 - œ Storage needs assessment
 - œ Documentation of accessories (frames, mounts, etc.)

Step #2: Planning Assumptions



- ❧ What resources and/or constraints are available?
 - ❧ Will it be possible to close galleries or freeze storage areas?
 - ❧ Will it be possible to impose moratoria or otherwise limit activities?
 - ❧ Existing staff or dedicated staff?
 - ❧ Interns and/or volunteers?
 - ❧ Will inventory staff work independently or in teams?
 - ❧ Specialized tasks or cross-trained?

Planning Assumptions cont.



œ Logistical considerations:

- œ Is there sufficient room in your storage areas to work?
- œ Will you need to move objects to another location?
- œ Can you otherwise dedicate space for the project?
- œ What equipment do you have on hand?
- œ What will you need to purchase?

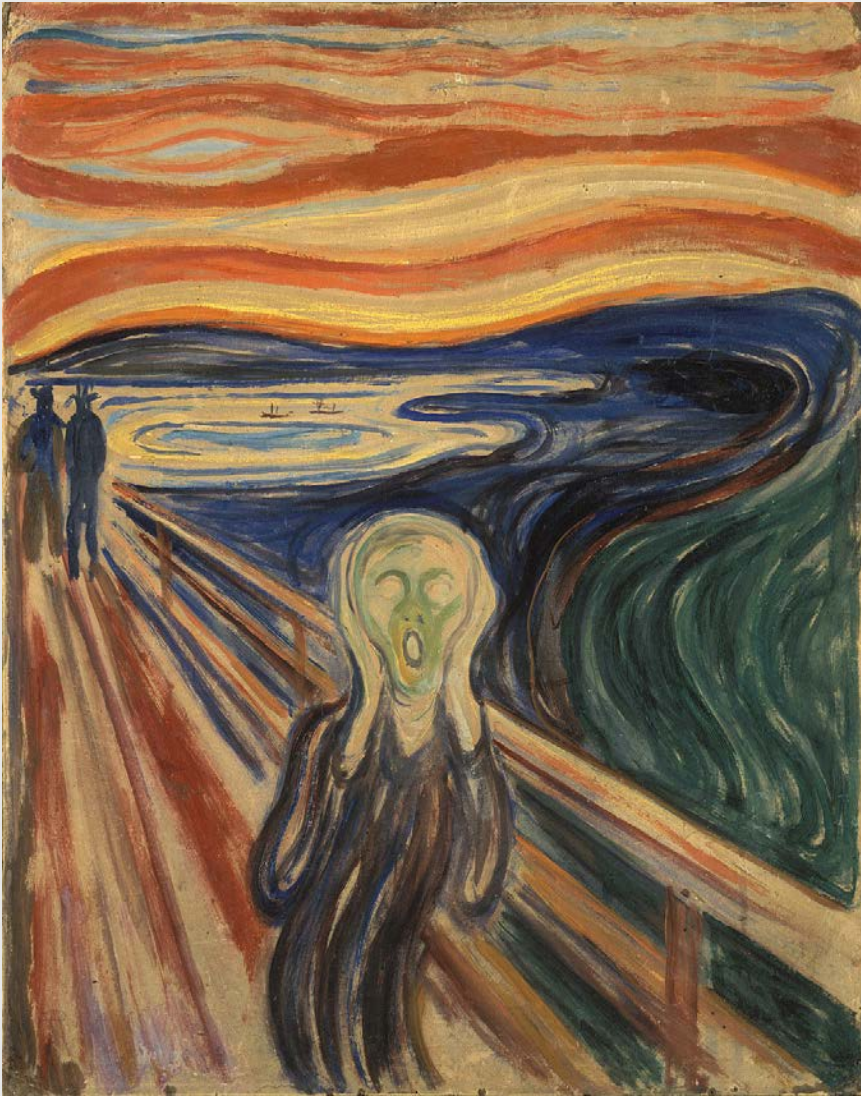
Planning Assumptions cont.



œ Documentation considerations:

œ Collections Management System (CMS)

- œ Is there a record for every object in the museum's custody in the CMS? Is retrospective data entry needed?
- œ Will you enter inventory data directly into your CMS?
 - œ If yes: does your museum wireless? Do you have or will you need to purchase laptops?
 - œ If no: will you use your CMS to generate checklists and retrospectively enter inventory data?
 - œ Will you barcode?



But my museum
doesn't have a
Collections
Management
System!!!!

Hmmmm.

Maybe that should be a higher
priority?

To Digitize or Not to Digitize?



œ Digital Photography PROS

- œ A picture really *is* worth a thousand words
- œ May minimize handling in the long run
- œ Documents condition
- œ Makes the inventory 'sexier' and easier to fund-raise for
- œ Is fast becoming an *expectation*, especially for museums associated with colleges and universities

To Digitize or Not to Digitize?



❧ Digital Photography CONS

- ❧ Will seriously s l o o o w down the project
- ❧ Added complexity in processing, naming, uploading and storing/archiving digital assets
- ❧ Added hardware costs
- ❧ Added software costs
- ❧ Added staffing costs

Step #3: Testing



Step #4: Proposal & Budget



SAMPLE MUSEUM OF ART

**A Proposal to Inventory the
Collection**



Step #5: Fund Raising



Step #6: Preparation



- ❧ **Organize your Records:**
- ❧ If you will enter data directly into your CMS
 - ❧ Do any necessary retrospective data entry or “scrubbing”
 - ❧ Design queries and data entry screens specific to the inventory project
- ❧ If you will annotate lists & retrospectively update your CMS
 - ❧ Design queries and reports to generate forms

Preparation cont.



- ❧ If you will use Excel or other spreadsheet application:
 - ❧ Determine the fields of data you will collect
 - ❧ Stored on a shared drive?
 - ❧ If on a stand-alone device: how to backup?
 - ❧ Password protection?
 - ❧ Create dropdown lists to control vocabulary for key fields (location, object type, etc.)

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[illegible]

TAKE HOME POINT #2



Work from your records to your objects, not from your objects to your records!

Preparation cont.



❧ Organize Storage

❧ Create a Hierarchical Location Authority

- ❧ All storage areas
- ❧ All display areas
- ❧ All off-site areas
- ❧ From general to specific
- ❧ Label all rooms, painting screen, drawers, racks, etc.
- ❧ Create a map where labeling is not practical

Sample Location Authority



Building	Room	Storage/Display Type	Storage/Display Unit	Unit Detail
Museum	Gallery 1	Wall	North wall	
Museum	Gallery 1	Freestanding vitrine		
Museum	Gallery 1	In-wall case	Case 13	
Museum	Storeroom 1	Painting Screen	Screen 47	Left side
Museum	Storeroom 1	Cabinet 6	Drawer 3	
Museum	Storeroom 1	Mobile Rack 3	Shelf Unit B	Shelf 4
Museum	Conservation Lab			
Museum Storage Annex	Painting Storage	Painting Bin	Bin 16	
Museum Storage Annex	Object Storage	Aisle 4	Rack 7	Shelf 2

Preparation cont.



- ❧ **Produce an Inventory Manual that includes:**
 - ❧ Documentation guidelines
 - ❧ Vocabulary and Location authorities
 - ❧ Art handling guidelines
 - ❧ Condition assessment guidelines and nomenclature
 - ❧ How or if to document accessories
 - ❧ How to document objects with multiple components
 - ❧ How to document objects without numbers or other identifying information

Preparation cont.



❧ Build your team(s)

- ❧ Hire new staff or volunteers
- ❧ Retrain staff who that are being reassigned to the project

GO!



TAKE HOME POINT #3



✧ The easiest part of conducting a collection inventory is conducting the inventory!

Expect false starts



Reconciling the Inventory





Collection Conundrums

Solving Collections Management Mysteries

Rebecca A. Buck and Jean Allman Gilmore

Buy This Book!

*Collection Connundrums:
Solving Collections
Management Mysteries*

See webinar resources for full
information

Congratulations!



Maintaining the Inventory



- ☞ It's simple 😊
- ☞ But it's not easy 😞
- ☞ Record object movement at the same time an object is moved +
- ☞ Update your collection records asap thereafter +
- ☞ Do this 100% of the time =
- ☞ An accurate inventory!

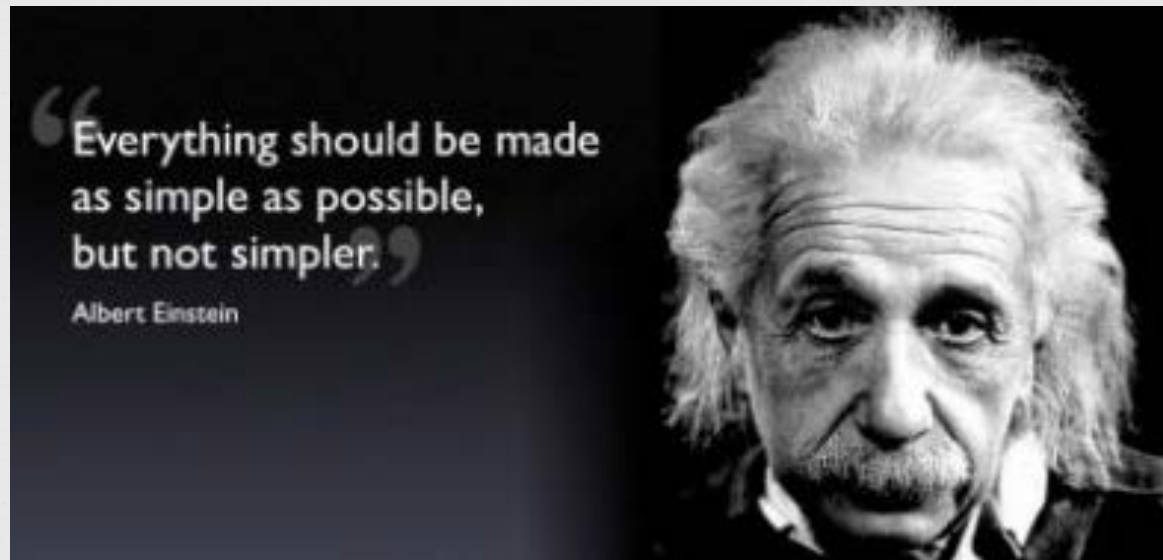
100% of the Time???



œ Some strategies:

- œ Limit access (as per your CMS)
- œ Develop procedures *with* the folks who move the objects
- œ Writes these down
- œ Share them widely
- œ Review and revise them often
- œ Make the time

Keep it Simple



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