



# CULTURE CODE



Creating a company we love.

# WHAT'S CULTURE?

A set of shared beliefs,  
values and practices.

WHY WORK ON  
CULTURE?

**Culture is to recruiting as  
product is to marketing.**

Customers are more easily attracted  
with a **great product**.

Amazing people are more easily attracted  
with a **great culture**.

# THE INTEREST RATE ON CULTURE DEBT IS HIGH.

Much higher than financial debt  
or technology debt.

Often, crushingly high.

# CULTURE HAPPENS.

Whether we plan it or not,  
culture will happen.

**Why not create a culture we love?**



Lets make the company we always dreamed of. Lets create a company that will be a great place to be *from*.

**REED HASTINGS & PATTY MCCORD  
NETFLIX.**

Now, an  
observation...



PEOPLE HAVE  
DRAMATICALLY  
CHANGED HOW THEY  
LIVE AND WORK.

	THEN	NOW.
FOCUS	Pension	Purpose
NEED	Good Boss	Great Colleagues
HOURS	9-5	Whenever
WORKPLACE	Office	Wherever
TENURE	Whole Career	Whatever

AND ALTHOUGH  
PEOPLE HAVE  
DRAMATICALLY  
CHANGED...



Many  
organizations  
operate as if  
they're **frozen**  
in time.

They operate as if money  
is what matters most...

...as if the Internet hadn't  
been invented...

... and as if amazing  
people are just happy to  
have a job.



We're different.



We are HubSpot.



We're creating  
a company we  
love.

This document is  
part manifesto,  
part employee handbook,  
and part diary of dreams.

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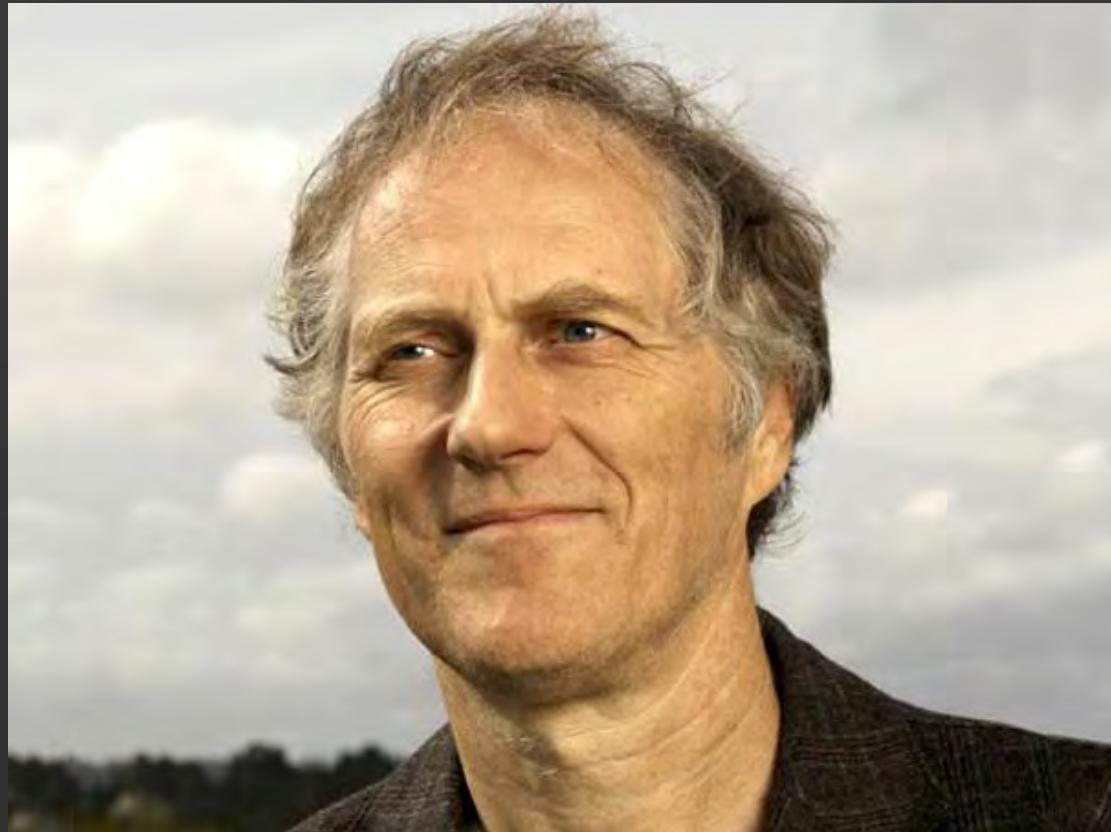
When something is  
aspirational (not yet true)  
we try to call it out.

# THE HUBSPOT CULTURE CODE.

1. We are as maniacal about our **metrics** as our **mission**.
2. We obsess over **customers**, not competitors.
3. We are radically and uncomfortably **transparent**.
4. We give ourselves the **autonomy** to be awesome.
5. We are unreasonably **selective** about our peers.
6. We invest in individual **mastery** and market value.
7. We defy conventional “wisdom” as it’s often unwise.
8. We speak the **truth** and face the facts.
9. We believe in **work+life**, not work vs. life.
10. We are a perpetual **work in progress**.



We are as  
maniacal about  
our metrics as  
our mission.



“Pursue something so important that even if you fail, the world is better off with you having tried.”

**TIM O'REILLY.**

Note: The O'Reilly Library at HubSpot is named after Tim.

**OUR MISSION** is to  
make the world **INBOUND.**

We want to transform how  
organizations do marketing.



inbound  
is about empathy.

It's about creating  
an experience  
people **love**.

**WE BELIEVE OURS  
IS A NOBLE CAUSE.**

We help organizations grow.

We also reduce  
spam, junk mail  
and other  
unpleasantness.



We are passionate about our mission.

It has earned us the love of thousands.

We're also maniacal about metrics and reaching our goals.

It has earned us the resources to further our mission.

Balancing this dual personality  
of mission & metrics is challenging.

But it's also what makes us  
**DIFFERENT.**

Balancing this dual personality  
of mission & metrics is challenging.

But it's also what makes us

**DIFFERENT.**

← And sometimes  
dysfunctional.

A photograph of a lighthouse at night. The lighthouse is dark, but its lantern room is brightly lit from within, casting a warm glow. To the left of the lighthouse, a large, bright orange and yellow orb, resembling a moon or a setting sun, is visible against a dark, purple-tinted sky. The horizon line is visible in the distance, showing a dark silhouette of land or water.

One way we balance  
these things is to have a  
**guiding goal** that  
serves the mission.



Our guiding  
goal is  
delighting  
customers.



We obsess over  
customers, not  
competitors.



Have the courage to start with the customer. My biggest regrets are the moments that I let a lack of data override my intuition on what's best for our customers.

**ANDREW MASON.**  
FORMER CEO OF Groupon  
IN HIS DEPARTURE EMAIL

# FOR EVERY DECISION WE SHOULD ASK OURSELVES:

“Selves, what’s in it for the customers?  
Will this delight them?”

In other words...

# SFTC.

Solve for the customer

Not just their happiness,  
but their **success**.

# SFTC.

We sometimes often have  
to remind ourselves of this.

Solve for the customer

Not just their happiness,  
but their **success**.

**WAIT.** Does “Solve For The Customer” mean just giving more away for free? Wouldn’t that delight customers?

**NO.** To delight customers in the long-term, we have to survive in the short-term.

Because...

Bankrupt  
companies  
don't delight  
their customers.

All other goals  
should support  
our guiding goal.

We have a professional sales team.

Does hitting our sales goals support  
our guiding goal?

**YES.**

Having delighted customers requires having  
customers. (funny how that works)

We're on the path towards our Guiding Goal  
as long as we sell to customers that we  
**expect to delight.**

# YES.

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We're on the path towards our Guiding Goal as long as we sell to customers that we **expect to delight.**



This is the key. We shouldn't sell customers we're not justifiably confident we can delight.

# WE LOVE TO EDUCATE.

We are enthusiastic teachers.

We believe success comes through educating customers, not exploiting them.



We are  
radically and  
uncomfortably  
transparent.

**THEN.** (back in the 1900s)

Power came from hoarding knowledge.

Decisions were made behind closed doors.

**NOW...**

Power is gained by  
**sharing knowledge**,  
not hoarding it.



**“Sunlight is the  
best disinfectant.”**

**-LOUIS BRANDEIS**

# WE SHARE (ALMOST) EVERYTHING.

We make information available to  
**everyone in the company.**

We're **radically** and **uncomfortably**  
transparent.

We protect information only when:

**It is legally required.**

Example: Information covered under a  
Non-Disclosure Agreement (NDA)

**It is not completely ours to share.**

Example: Individual compensation data

# WE HAVE THE MOST INTERESTING WIKI ON THE PLANET.\*

Examples of things we share and discuss:

- Financials (cash balance, burn-rate, P&L, etc.)
- Board meeting deck
- Management meeting deck
- “Strategic” topics
- Lore & Mythology (the funniest page on the wiki)

\*Unverified claim

FROM



HubSpot Lore & Mythology 2007 Archive

## June - July 2007

- At some point around this time, Brian's favorite line from Mike Volpe was uttered...
  - Brian: "Isn't there like a scientific way to figure out all this branding stuff?"
  - Mike: "Welcome to Marketing. Two drink minimum."
- 7/12/07 - Dharmesh: "**The technical reason is that we had a big database 'owie'**" (explaining why the product has not been working)
- 6/6/07 - Brian: **"I am a landing page master!"** (after building one landing page in 20 minutes with the first rev of the landing page builder)
- 6/6/07 - Ilya Mirman: **"Holy shit! That's fucking awesome!"** (upon finding out he had 7 RSS subscribers after writing one blog article)
- 6/4/07 - Partner at GC during VC meeting: **"So, where are you in the fundraising process?"** Brian: **"The end."**
- 6/1/07 - Brian: **"Can we promise to never have a 'Chief People Officer'?"**

AND LIKE ANY MINDFUL COMPANY, WE HAVE:



4 Added by [Stephen Huenneke](#), last edited by [Mike Volpe](#) on Mar 19, 2013 [\(view change\)](#)



We have open access to anyone in the company. No permission needed.

Nobody has an office.

# CULTURE HACK.

A large part of the company goes through a random “seat shuffle” every 3 months.

We've been doing this since the beginning.

It reflects our “change is constant” credo.

It also circumvents a lot of needless discussion.

The intent behind all this transparency is to support smarter behavior and better decisions.

So...



We give  
ourselves the  
**autonomy** to  
be awesome.

# THEN.

Organizations tried to prevent mistakes  
with policies and procedures.

# NOW...

WE TRUST  
OURSELVES.

Just because someone made a mistake years ago doesn't mean we need a policy.

**WE DON'T PENALIZE THE MANY  
FOR THE MISTAKES OF THE FEW.**

We only protect against *really* big stuff.



We don't have  
pages of policies  
and procedures.

Instead we have a 3-word policy on  
just about everything:

**USE  
GOOD  
JUDGMENT.**

Social media policy.

Travel policy.

Sick day policy.

Buy a round of drinks at an event policy.

Work from home during a blizzard policy.

Our policy on all of these (and most other things):

**USE GOOD JUDGMENT.**

# WHAT'S GOOD JUDGMENT?

**Team > Self**

Favor your team's interest  
over your own.

**Company > Team**

Favor the company's interest  
over your team.

**Customer > Company**

Favor the customer's interest  
over the company.

# WHAT'S GOOD JUDGMENT?

## Team > Self

Favor your team's interest over your own.

## Company > Team

Favor the company's interest over your team.

## Customer > Company

Favor the customer's interest over the company.

We're pretty good at the first and second – but the third is tricky sometimes.

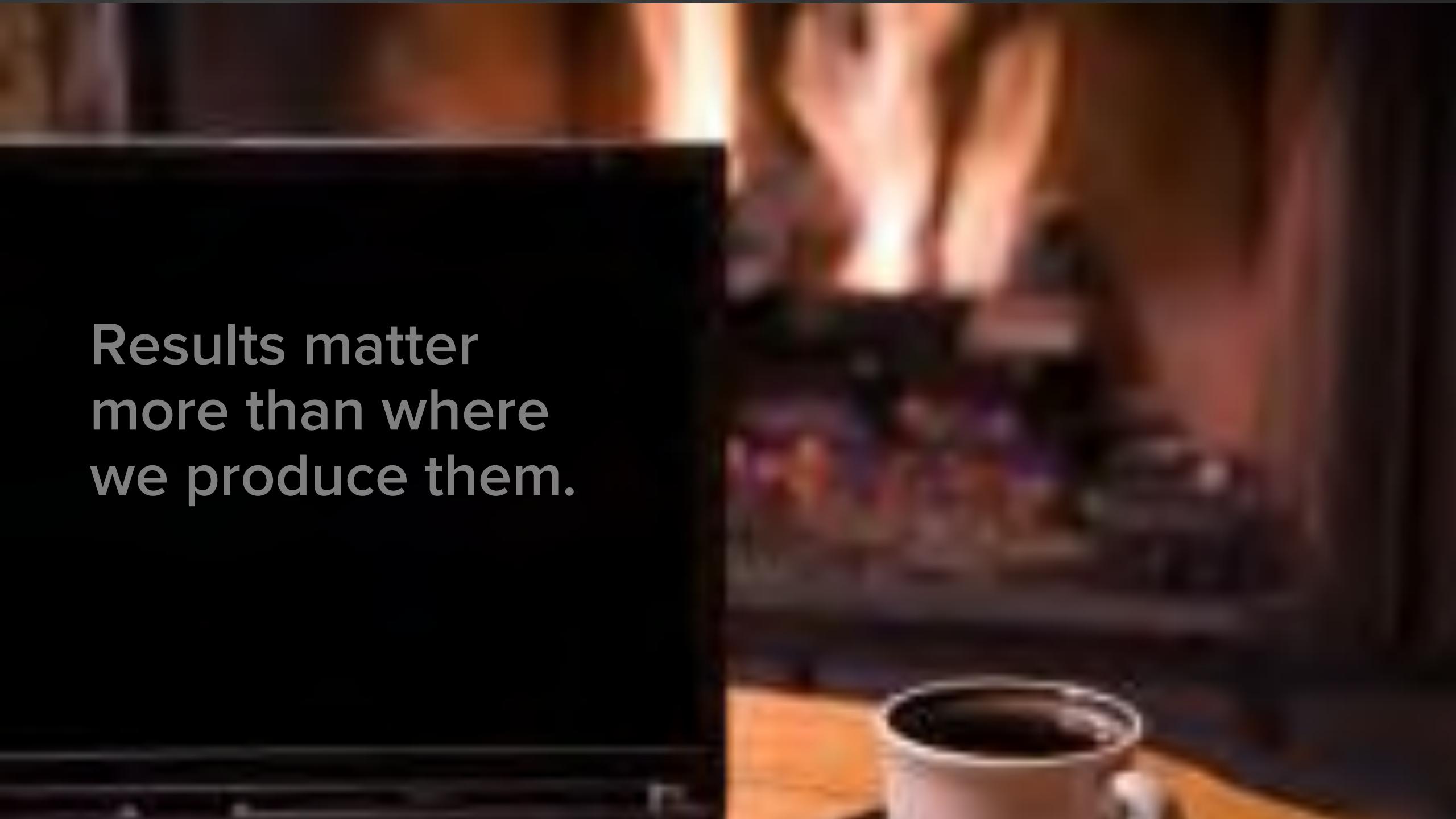
Remember, acting in our customers' interest is in our long-term interest too.

Now, lets talk about where  
and when we work.

Generally...

**Results** matter more than  
the hours we work.





Results matter  
more than where  
we produce them.



**Results** matter more  
than how much  
vacation we take.  
(we have unlimited vacation time)

We believe in the  
freedom to work when,  
where and how we want.

Remarkable results are  
what matter.

This is what we believe.

But we also recognize  
that...



The biggest driver of performance in complex industries like software is serendipitous interaction.

**BEN WABER.**

VISITING SCIENTIST, MIT MEDIA LAB  
AUTHOR, “PEOPLE ANALYTICS”

So, we trust our leaders to  
**use good judgment** when  
guiding their teams.

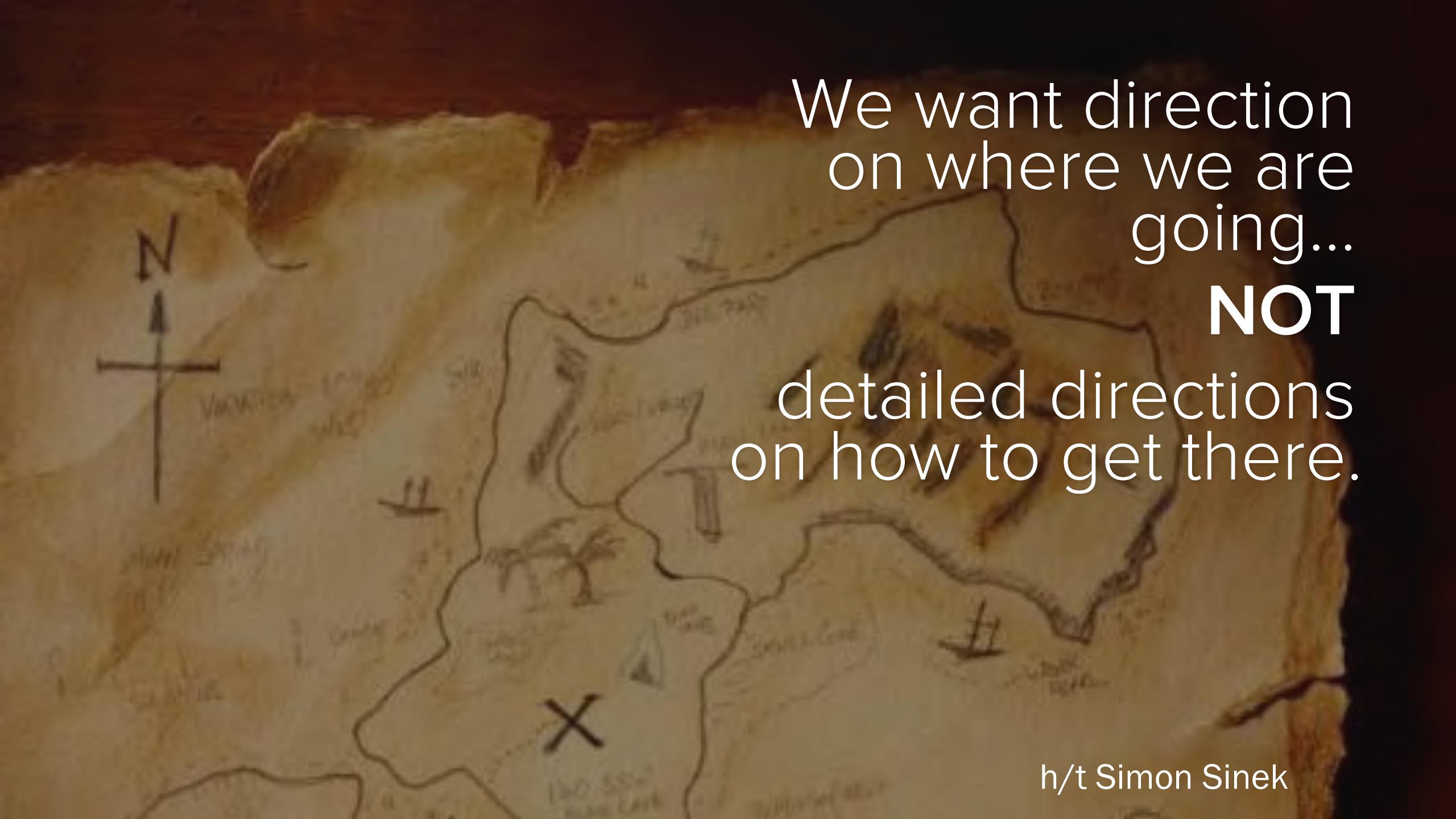
And we try to create a  
work environment where  
we **want** to come in.

# THEN.

Influence based on hierarchy  
Command & Control

# NOW...

**INFLUENCE IS  
INDEPENDENT OF  
HIERARCHY.**

A photograph of an old, yellowed map of the British Isles. A compass rose is visible in the upper left corner, with the letter 'N' at the top. In the lower center, there is a large black 'X' mark. The map shows coastlines and some internal boundaries.

We want direction  
on where we are  
going...

**NOT**

detailed directions  
on how to get there.

h/t Simon Sinek

We don't want just "managers"

We want inspiring leaders.  
Passionate coaches.  
Tireless supporters.

Managers exist to help  
individual stars **make**  
**magic.**

**CEO, CTO, VP of This,  
Manager of That.  
Doesn't matter what  
your title is.**

**EVERYBODY  
DOES REAL  
WORK AND  
GETS THEIR  
HANDS DIRTY.**



Oh, and speaking of job  
titles...

# WE HAVE TRADITIONAL JOB TITLES AT HUBSPOT.

It is a topic of intense debate.

Options:

- 1) No titles for anyone
- 2) Make up our own creative titles
- 3) Use traditional titles

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We ended up with the last option.  
Bummer. But, it does align with our  
desire to increase individual market  
value.

Back to having autonomy...

**Awesome is  
as awesome does.**



HAVING AUTONOMY DOESN'T MEAN  
CRAP IF YOU DON'T ACT.

DON'T OVER-THINK IT.

JFDI.

(Just F\*#king Do It)



With this kind of  
transparency and trust  
we can't take chances when hiring.  
So...



We are  
**unreasonably**  
picky about our  
peers.

A close-up portrait of Drew Houston, CEO of Dropbox. He is a young man with short brown hair, looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression. He is wearing a light-colored, ribbed, button-down shirt. The background is dark and out of focus.

You become the  
average of the 5  
people you hang  
out with.

Drew Houston  
CEO, Dropbox

Note: Drew's a friend and on our advisory board.

What makes someone  
a great fit for HubSpot?

What makes them awesome *for us*?

What does it mean to be  
**HUBSPOTTY?**

There are **5 attributes**  
that we value in people.



# HUMBLE.

Modest, despite being awesome.

Self-aware and respectful.

**Wait.** Doesn't being humble mean lacking confidence?

**No.**

The very best people are self-aware and self-critical – not arrogant.

Examples: Bezos. Buffet. Berners-Lee.  
(and that's just some of the Bs)



Humility is not thinking less of yourself; it is thinking of yourself less.

C.S. LEWIS.

When things go well, humble  
people tend to  
**share the credit.**

When things go poorly,  
they tend to  
**shoulder the responsibility.**



# EFFECTIVE.

Gets sh\*t done.

Measurably moves the needle.  
Immeasurably adds value.

# EFFECTIVE PEOPLE ARE:

Predisposed to action. They just start doing.

They have a sense of ownership.

They're resourceful and always looking for leverage.

Effective people find ways to have their cake and eat it too.





# ADAPTABLE.

Constantly changing.

Life-long learner.

**WAIT.** What about good people that just want stability and predictability?

They may do good work, but they likely won't be happy here.

**Change is constant** at HubSpot.



# REMARK·ABLE.

worthy of being remarked upon\*

Has a super-power that makes them stand out in some way.

Remarkably smart.

Remarkably creative.

Remarkably resourceful.

\*h/t to Seth Godin



# TRANSPARENT.

Open and honest with others  
and with themselves.

HUMBLE  
EFFECTIVE  
ADAPTABLE  
REMARKABLE  
TRANSPARENT



We want people  
with **heart**.

**HUMBLE**  
**EFFECTIVE**  
**ADAPTABLE**  
**REMARKABLE**  
**TRANSPARENT**



Those who will help  
us create a  
company  
we love.

We want people  
with **heart**.

**HUMBLE**  
**EFFECTIVE**  
**ADAPTABLE**  
**REMARKABLE**  
**TRANSPARENT**

Yes, "heart" is a bit cheesy.  
We're a bit cheesy sometimes.



Those who will help  
us create a  
company  
we love.

**WE DON'T JUST  
BELIEVE IN HEART,  
WE BET ON IT.**

We hire, reward, and release people based on the five attributes.

## **EXAMPLE 1:**

If you're closed, arrogant and stuck in your ways, it doesn't matter how effective you are. It's not going to work out.

## **EXAMPLE 2:**

You can be remarkably smart, humble and open. But, if you're not effectively moving us forward, it's not going to work out.

Does this mean we only accept  
those that fit match the 5  
attributes perfectly?

**No.** Confucius has good advice  
here...

“Better a diamond with  
a flaw than a pebble  
without.”

**CONFUCIUS.**



The Netflix logo, featuring the word "NETFLIX" in its signature white, blocky, sans-serif font, set against a solid red rectangular background.

“We’re a team, not a family. We hire, develop and cut smartly so we have stars in every position.”

+1 We couldn’t have said it better ourselves, so we didn’t.

# Don't just hire to delegate.

It's tempting to bring people in that you can push off work you don't have time for.

# Hire to elevate.

Bring people in that are better than you at something and you can learn from.

**WITH GREAT PEOPLE  
COMES GREAT  
RESPONSIBILITY.**

Success is when a group of people achieve their collective potential.

So...



We invest in  
individual  
mastery and  
market value.

We want to be as proud  
of the **people** we build  
as we are  
of the **company** we build.

We believe in investing to  
increase the **individual**  
**market value** of every  
HubSpotter.

We're doing a few things  
already...

# HubTalks: Learning From Leaders



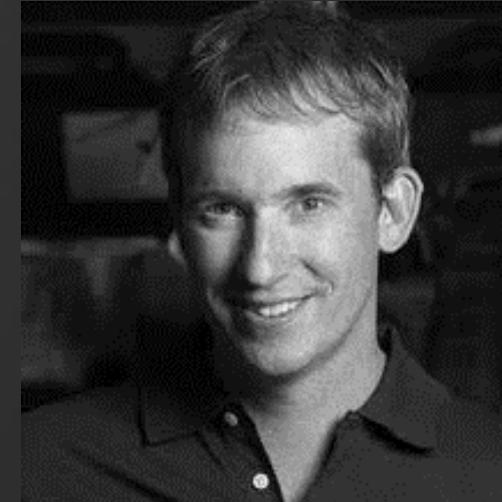
Clay Christensen  
“Innovator’s  
Dilemma”



Eric Ries  
“The Lean  
Startup”



Sheila Marcelo  
CEO, care.com



Colin Angle  
CEO, iRobot

These are small informal talks given at HubSpot.

# Unlimited Free Books Program.

Post a comment on the HubSpot wiki  
requesting a book.

It shows up in your Kindle account.

No muss, no fuss.  
No expense sheets.

# Unlimited Free Meals Program.

Take someone smart out for a meal.  
Learn something.

Expense it.  
No approval needed.  
No limits. No rules.

**Use good judgment.**

# THAT'S JUST THE BEGINNING.

We believe in compensating fairly,  
but we want to **invest generously**  
in our learning and growth.

We're always looking for new ideas.

We compensate based on  
**fair market value.**

Reality: It's hard to know what market  
value is. We think of it as VORP  
(Value Over Replacement Player)

# THERE ARE TWO WAYS TO PROGRESS AT HUBSPOT.

1. Gain mastery as an individual contributor and make magic.
2. Provide spectacular support to those who are doing #1.

Reality: This is mostly true, but we need a quant-based approach to measuring how true it is.



We defy  
conventional  
“wisdom”  
because it’s  
often unwise.

We'd rather be failing frequently than never trying new things.



Why do we care so much  
about being daring?



If we regress to the mean, we fail.  
It's that simple.

We start out being exceptional.

As we grow, there is a dark, powerful force that pulls us towards the average.

Remarkable outcomes  
rarely result  
from modest risk.

**Simplicity** is a competitive  
advantage.

Things start simple...



A photograph of a massive iceberg in the ocean. The top portion of the iceberg is visible above the water's surface, showing a rugged, snow-covered peak. The submerged part of the iceberg is a deep, dark blue, illustrating the scale of what is unseen.

THEN COMPLEXITY  
QUIETLY CREEPS IN.

ITS TOLL LIES BELOW  
THE SURFACE.

# WHY DOES COMPLEXITY CREEP IN?

It is often the easy, seductive answer to short-term issues.

Fighting for simplicity takes courage and commitment to the long game.

# WHY DOES COMPLEXITY ALWAYS INCREASE?

Because everyone *adds* complexity and nobody takes it away.

Ironically, adding complexity is easy and maintaining simplicity is hard.

# COMPLEXITY AND THE TRAGEDY OF THE COMMONS.

Example: “I need to hit my goals this month, so I’m going to push for this exception to our standard contract.”

Result: You may make your goal *now*, but we all pay the price of the complexity *forever*.

**Focus on the long game. Team over self.**

Like software,

Organizations should be  
**frequently**  
**refactored.**



Refactoring means to  
improve internal structure  
without changing external  
behavior.

# REFACTOR.

- Pull out unused features.
- Remove unnecessary rules.
- Stop generating useless reports.
- Cancel unproductive meetings.
- Prune extraneous process.



We speak the truth  
and face the facts.

# NO SILENT DISAGREEMENT.

If we disagree with a decision or direction, we have the responsibility to speak up.

We trust our candor will not be used against us.

We have the right to clear, candid  
and constructive feedback. We can  
ask for this at anytime.

We're replacing the traditional  
annual review. Favoring more frequent  
feedback.

# WE LOVE DATA.

We like to think our decisions are  
not **data driven** but **data powered**.



We like to think it, but it's not true.  
We are obsessed with data.

# DEBATES ARE WON WITH DATA.

Job titles don't win debates.

We disfavor pulling rank.

BUT WE ALSO  
DISLIKE  
INDECISION



Data is collected. Debates are had.

**THEN SOMEONE JUST HAS TO DECIDE.**

An imperfect decision  
is better than no decision.

A controversial decision  
is better than no decision.

9

WE BELIEVE IN  
WORK+LIFE,  
NOT WORK VS.  
LIFE.

Work-life  
“balance” is  
misguided.



We don't think it's possible to be unhappy at work and then happy in life.

We believe in enjoying life.

We also believe in enjoying work.

**We believe in work+life fit.**

10

WE ARE A  
PERPETUAL  
WORK IN  
PROGRESS.

We believe it takes more  
than talent to succeed.

**GREATNESS REQUIRES  
INTENSE COMMITMENT.**

# WE WORK IMMENSELY HARD.

It's not for everyone, but it's part of who we are.

## We are on a mission to transform marketing.

That's not easy to do.

# WE ARE NEVER DONE.

Never done **iterating**.

Never done **learning**.

Never done **rethinking**.

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10. We are a perpetual **work in progress**.

# WE WERE INSPIRED BY

- The Netflix Culture Deck (McCord & Hastings)
- “Drive” (Daniel Pink)
- The Valve Employee Handbook
- “Rework” (Fried and Hansson)
- Google’s People Ops Team
  - ...and countless others on the web.

## PROPS TO OUR EXTERNAL BETA USERS.

They helped out despite having better things to do.

- Patty McCord, Netflix Culture Deck
- Rand Fishkin, SEOMoz
- Joel Gascoigne, Buffer
- Leo Widrich, Buffer
- Hiten Shah, KISSmetrics
- Jason Fried, 37signals
- Garry Tan, Y Combinator
- Dan Martell, Clarity
- Ziad Sultan, Marginize

# THANK YOU.

Congrats for making it this far.

We would love feedback and discussion:

[CultureCode.com](http://CultureCode.com)



Yes, we're hiring.  
Click the logo.