THE HubSpot

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?
Let's make the company we always dreamed of. Let's 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.
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<th>THEN</th>
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<td><strong>HOURS</strong></td>
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<td><strong>TENURE</strong></td>
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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.
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.

Solve for the customer

Not just their happiness, but their success.

We sometimes often have to remind ourselves of this.
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
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:
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?

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Company > Team
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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, let's 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.
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.
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.

(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.
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

Those who will help us create a company we love.

Yes, “heart” is a bit cheesy. We’re a bit cheesy sometimes.
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
“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?
We start out being exceptional.

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

If we regress to the mean, we fail. It’s that simple.
Remarkable outcomes rarely result from modest risk.
Simplicity is a competitive advantage.
Things start simple...
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.
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.
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