

॥

How We *Do Things*

Hinge

© 2021 Hinge, Inc. All rights reserved.

TL;DR

Hinge is the dating app that's **Designed to Be Deleted**[®]. To pull off something that audacious, we need all hands on deck. Instead of making decisions from the top, we empower each other through **Radical Trust**. With that trust, we're encouraged to take risks and experiment—even when it's scary. That's what it means to **Love the Leap**. Sometimes, our leaps don't land. But those mistakes become lessons, which we translate into principles. Being **Guided by Principles** helps us make better decisions the next time around. Finally, none of this works without the right team. We look for passionate, ridiculously talented folks who are also caring team players. We hire—and commit to showing up as—**People with Heart**. That is: people just like you.

TABLE

<i>Introduction</i> HOW WE GOT HERE	<i>Introduction</i> MISSION & VISION	<i>Introduction</i> OUR CORE VALUES	<i>Principles</i> DESIGNED TO BE DELETED	<i>Principles</i> RADICAL TRUST	<i>Principles</i> LOVE THE LEAP	<i>Principles</i> GUIDED BY PRINCIPLES	<i>Principles</i> PEOPLE WITH HEART
10	16	18	22	34	46	58	68

OF

<i>Principles in Practice</i> HOW WE SHOW UP IN THE WORLD	<i>Principles in Practice</i> HOW WE GET STUFF DONE	<i>Principles in Practice</i> HOW WE GET BETTER	<i>Principles in Practice</i> HOW WE BUILD OUR TEAM	<i>Principles in Practice</i> OUR BASIC RESPONSIBILITIES	<i>Acknowledgements</i>
82	88	96	100	106	112

CONTENTS

How We GOT HERE

by

Justin McLeod

Founder & CEO

Just before Thanksgiving, back in 2015, I sat down for lunch with Hinge's then-Chief Brand Officer, Katie.

I was, for lack of a better term, flipping out.

It had been almost five years since I started Hinge, and the company was in trouble. An article called “Dawn of the Dating Apocalypse” had just come out in *Vanity Fair*. As the title suggests, it was not an optimistic take. The article featured users of Hinge and other popular dating apps bragging about how many people they'd hooked up with. According to the author, courtship and romance were being replaced by these more superficial encounters, all thanks to companies like Hinge. The article struck a chord with me, because—I eventually admitted—I saw the same thing happening.

That afternoon with Katie, I felt totally lost. It was suddenly clear to me that Hinge in its current form was not the company I set out to build. Sitting across the table from her, I wondered aloud: was the “dating apocalypse” a real thing? Did our app really do any good? Why were we in this business anyway?

I told Katie I wished I could just tear everything down and start from scratch.

Her response was simple: “Then why don't you?”

The Hinge we know today was created during the following two years as a direct response to that question.

It was an exhausting but transformative time. After all, there was a lot to unpack.

From the outside, Hinge had been a success. We'd raised millions of dollars from investors, and received glowing press; the app had changed thousands of people's lives. (Well, at least their romantic lives.) But when you peered under the hood of the company, the warning signs were there. Our growth had slowed. Morale was waning. We'd become obsessed with competing against the other dating apps, and in so doing, had neglected the problem we originally wanted to solve.

In the Very Beginning

Hinge was born out of heartbreak. Early on in college, I'd met the love of my life. We dated on and off for years, but ultimately I just didn't know how to make it work. I was addicted to drugs and alcohol; my identity was wrapped up in being one of the "cool" kids, and those kids were invariably high. After college, I finally started to clean things up. I stopped drinking, built a career and was admitted to a prestigious business school. With all that had changed I was convinced I'd have one last shot at winning back "the one." But when I reached out, she let me know she had moved on. I was devastated.

The project that became Hinge was launched shortly afterward, during my final year of grad school. I knew I needed to get back out there and start meeting people. But I hadn't yet learned how to socialize without the help of my favorite vices. So, I turned to technology.

In 2011, meeting random strangers on dating websites was decidedly uncool. But Facebook wasn't. I had an idea to use Facebook's social graph to match people with friends-of-friends—the types of people they would eventually meet at dinners, parties or weddings. (That's how people met back then). I didn't start Hinge (originally named, regrettably, "Secret Agent Cupid") because I wanted to get rich or change the world. I started it because I wanted to find a girlfriend.

That initial spark of an idea became an obsession. Few things in life have a greater effect on our happiness, health and well-being than our romantic partnerships. But technology, which had transformed so much of our lives, seemed to have barely touched this monumental question: who should we spend our life with? I dreamed about how engineering and design could help us arrive at better potential matches and make smarter romantic decisions. If Hinge was built to solve a problem, you might call it the "problem of love."

The Reboot

My lunch with Katie illuminated just how far Hinge had gone astray. The problem of love seemed so big and exciting, but we had turned into just another hookup app, with a "friends-of-friends" twist. Plus, it hadn't helped me find a girlfriend.¹

¹ Well, that's not totally true. Hinge actually led me back to my college girlfriend in the end, and we're now happily married with a family. But that's a tale for another day.

So, in late 2015 we decided to press "pause" on the existing app and take a hard look at what Hinge had become and where we were headed. During a series of offsites and workshops, we came to see how our product had been a natural extension of our culture. The old Hinge was a top-heavy startup led by "command and control." Decision-making was inconsistent and hasty. Debates were often won by the loudest (or most senior) voice in the room. People were hired and fired too quickly.

None of that was working.

To really transform, we needed more than a re-designed app. We needed a new way of doing things. As we dissected what had gone

wrong, we began to outline what kind of company we wanted to be. Rebuilding the app meant rebuilding the organization: changing the way we hired, collaborated, made decisions and more. That initial work has evolved over time into the book you're reading today.

The refreshed Hinge app was an extension of this effort, too. It was guided by a new North Star: helping people find meaningful relationships. We knew that many users were burnt out by the speed of most dating apps. We knew they were spending hours on their phones and had little to show for it.

So, the new Hinge was “Designed to Be Deleted”: purpose-built to get people off their phones and out on dates. We found ways to make better matches and start more substantive conversations. And we started holding each new feature to one standard: would it lead to more great dates?

In short, the plan worked. Hinge became the fastest-growing dating app in the world. But it didn't happen overnight, and it didn't happen without growing pains.

How We Do Things

What we built during and since our reboot is an organization that does things in a very particular way. That way is best explained through our three core values and five principles. In putting this book together, we asked Hinge team members to tell their own stories and help bring these ideas to life.

To be clear, this way of doing things is not for everyone. Our culture demands participation. Our philosophies on decision-making and hiring leave some people perplexed. But that's okay! What's important is that it works for us. And that we all commit to engaging with these ideas and practicing them on a daily basis.

It might seem crazy to commit all of this to paper. We're a dating app after all, not a government. But the last ten years have shown us the power of being transparent and thoughtful about how we operate. We want every new team member at Hinge to understand our values and have the tools to navigate—and contribute to—our culture from day one. We also need new voices to hold us accountable to the values and principles in this book. No matter how explicit we are about culture, building a great one requires consistency, and lots of hard work.

My hope is that you'll return to this book and see it as a practical resource. That you'll dog-ear the pages that are most relevant to you, and challenge and discuss the ideas inside. I hope you spill coffee on it. And one day, I hope you'll help us write the next version.

Most of all, I want to thank you—for believing in Hinge, and for joining our team. If you've been here a while, this book might function as a kind of recap. If you're brand new, this is just how we do things.

Mission & VISION

Our Mission

Why do we exist?

We believe that anyone
looking for love should
be able to find it.

Our Vision

Who do we want to be?

The leading innovator
in intentioned dating.

Our Core VALUES

Authenticity
Courage
Empathy

Relationships are at the center of everything we do here. (And not just the romantic kind.) That's because really hard things can't be accomplished alone. It takes teamwork. And great relationships are the foundation of teamwork.

What does it take to build a great relationship? Two things, mostly. Authenticity: that is, showing up as your true self. Also, Empathy: seeing and understanding others. All the other hallmarks of a great relationship stem from these two.

Our third core value is Courage. Once we've established a strong working relationship, it takes Courage to turn that into great work. We need to take risks, challenge one another, and be candid, even when it's really hard. Courage enables us to do just that.

Our Core VALUES

Together, these three values underpin just about everything we do at Hinge.

01

Authenticity

WE SHARE, NEVER HIDE, OUR WORDS, ACTIONS AND INTENTIONS. Transparency, candor, and humility are the antidotes to ego, gossip and politics.

02

Courage

WE EMBRACE LOFTY GOALS AND TOUGH CHALLENGES. Breakthroughs require a willingness to take risks. We strive toward audacious goals, persevering through setbacks and failures along the way.

03

Empathy

WE DEEPLY CONSIDER THE PERSPECTIVES OF OTHERS. We're all human beings first. We keep in mind who we're serving. We listen humbly and openly. We speak and act with kindness and care.

DESIGNED TO BE *Deleted*

Our tagline, “Designed to Be Deleted,” is the clearest expression of what makes Hinge different. We don’t focus on keeping customers on Hinge, or keeping Hinge on their phones. We focus on helping our users find a relationship... so they can delete Hinge forever.

You don’t hear a lot of businesses refer to their own demise, much less celebrate it. Especially a company that relies on subscriptions to make money. How can a business survive if it was built with the intention of not being used?

We used to think this way too. So, to better understand this principle, let’s turn back the clock.

Starting Up, and Keeping Up

In the early years of Hinge, growth came before everything. We had told a story to investors, partners and colleagues about achieving certain numbers and we held ourselves accountable to that story. We focused on traditional social media metrics like time-in-app, sessions and engagement. For a while, this worked fine. (At the very least, it gave us enough traction to raise the next round of funding.)

During those early years, we also spent a lot of time thinking about our competition. After all, many of them were better than us at optimizing for engagement and time-in-app. Hinge was just another generic dating app, with one twist: we'd only introduce a user to potential matches with whom they had a friend in common. While that part was different, the fundamental experience wasn't. And as we became more similar to our better-funded, better-designed competitors, our growth slowed down. We were stagnating. And if we didn't evolve, the business would fail.

Just Great Dates

Hinge's reboot in 2015 began with the premise that we could no longer play our competitor's game. They were better at it than we were. So, we spent months ideating and experimenting with new potential avenues for the business.

Our research made one thing clear: customers were becoming disillusioned with dating apps—especially those who actually wanted to find a relationship. Plus, many of our competitors weren't really built to help them do that; they were more focused on boosting engagement. Eventually, a new vision for Hinge emerged: what if, instead of focusing on engagement, we focused exclusively on our user's success?

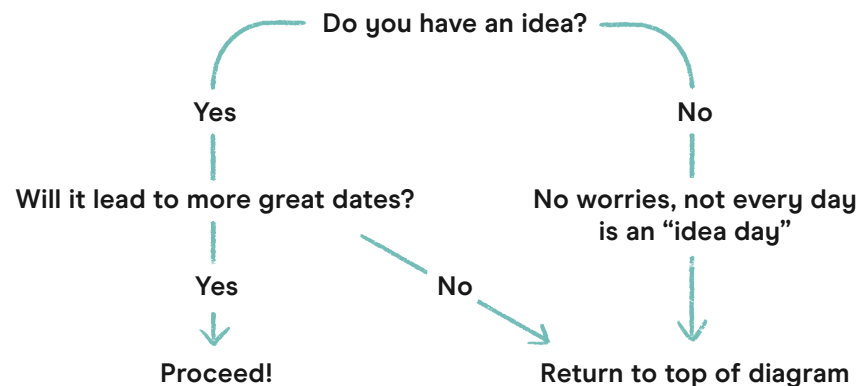
Eventually, a new vision for Hinge emerged:

What if, instead of
focusing on ~~engagement~~,
we focused exclusively
on our user's success?

The first thing we had to do was measure that success. Seems obvious, right? But at the time, we didn't even know which of our users were going on dates.

So we launched "We Met," which asks users if they've connected in real life, and if the person they met is someone they'd like to see again. Once we could measure great dates per user, we could find ways to optimize the other parts of Hinge to boost that number.

The more we did so, the more Hinge changed. We started to look and function less and less like our competitors, and more like what you see today. "Designed to Be Deleted" is our tagline and the Principle that informs how we think about success.



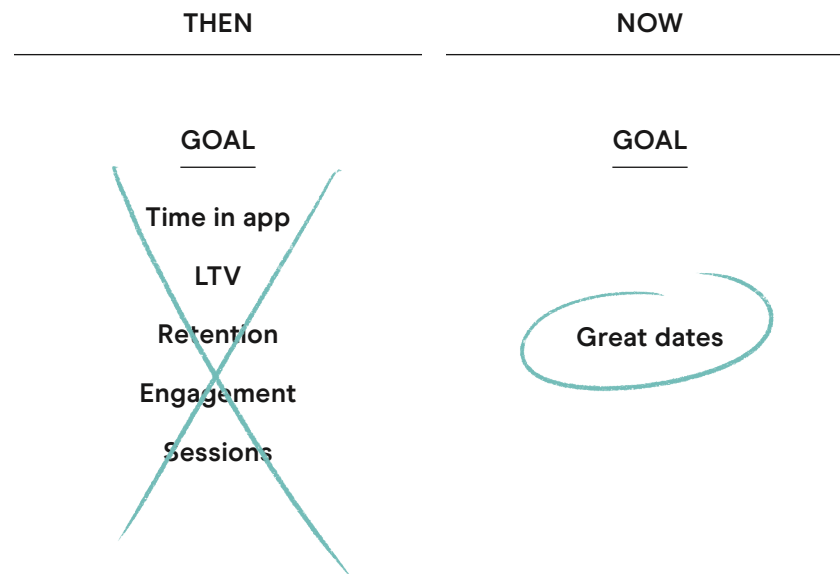
A Healthier Obsession

People have been searching for love since the earliest humanoids first stood upright (if not longer). It's only recently that we've started carrying around tiny, addictive supercomputers in our pockets.

"Designed to Be Deleted" is our line in the sand, and helps us negotiate the complicated intersection of love and technology. It points to what we value. Just as important, it clarifies what we don't value: engagement for the sake of engagement, or anything that takes our customers off the path of achieving their goal.

When we focus on customers and their success, we do so in a particular way. A ton of companies like to call themselves "customer obsessed," Hinge included. But what are the goals underpinning that obsession? Those companies could be obsessed with learning about their customers in order to distract them, or deceive them. We are obsessed with understanding their behavior in order to help them find love.

We are obsessed with understanding their behavior in order to help them find love.



Great Dates, Good Business

"Designed to Be Deleted" sometimes brings up another important question: isn't this strategy bad for business? Or: at what point does Hinge let go of this ideal to hit its quarterly goal? As crazy as it may sound, that moment does not happen.

For the most part, Hinge grows through word of mouth, and the best word of mouth is hearing from your friend that they met someone on Hinge. Even though we spend millions of dollars on advertising every year, it can't compete with these casual, friend-to-friend recommendations, which still drive the majority of our new registrations.

It's the app itself, more than anything else, that has driven Hinge's growth. And we've found that every time we increase the effectiveness of Hinge, we grow faster. So as long as there are single people in the world, we should be okay.

Designed to be *Deleted*

Hinge exists to help our users achieve one goal: *finding love*. We do that by setting up *great dates*.

Sounds Like

“I love that idea. But do you think it will generate more great dates?”

Beware Of

“That other app just launched this new feature and people are obsessed. Let’s try it!”

or

“This feature is a huge win! It increased sessions per day by 20%.”

Slow It Down



Tim MacGougan
Chief Design Officer

Tinder's Swipe® feature changed online dating. When Tinder® was emerging in 2012, it took only a few months for it to become the most popular dating app in the world.

As part of our reboot in 2016, we took a long hard look at Tinder's Swipe feature.

Yes, it helped engagement go through the roof. But did it actually lead to meaningful matches and relationships? This conversation, and the decisions our small team made during the reboot, constituted the birth of our Principle, "Designed to be Deleted."

We knew that to survive—let alone thrive—in a Tinder-dominated industry, we couldn't imitate them. And more fundamentally, we didn't want to. It was clear from our research that many users were exhausted by that experience. We decided that Hinge needed to double down on relationships in a way that our competitors weren't. So, we focused on some of the building blocks of the app: how you like someone, what you like and what happens next.

Quality > Quantity

Our end goal in the reboot was to get our customers off the app and out on dates. To do so, "likes" had to mean more than they did on the old Hinge, or on competitor apps. One key innovation was to force users to like something specific on a profile—either a photo or a Prompt.

This was the scariest, most audacious change we made. We feared it would decimate our engagement metrics—time on app, number of likes and matches. And it did. But all of our new features, like non-anonymous likes, Prompts and liking content, also led to something else: better matches, and more dates per user. Slowing down the experience of the app made it more effective. In the old Hinge, it took about a thousand "likes" to go on a date; in the new Hinge, it took about fifty.

**In the old Hinge, it took
about a thousand "likes"
to go on a date; in the new
Hinge, it took about fifty.**

It took a few more tweaks, but these changes laid the foundation for our success. Within a few years, Hinge would become the fastest-growing dating app in the world. Not because we were the most addictive platform, but because we were the most effective. More than anything else, that effectiveness is what has driven our growth.

Likes Per Day



Yun Choi
Data Scientist

Recently, we ran an experiment on a pretty fundamental part of the app: the number of likes each non-premium user is allowed to use each day. For years, this number was ten. There wasn't a particularly good reason behind this, it just always felt like the right number. So we decided to test other numbers—six, seven, eight, nine and twelve. How might having more or less daily likes affect our users' behavior?

It turned out, quite a bit. When we reduced the number of daily likes all the way to six, our eyes lit up. Customers were quickly running out of likes and making the move to buy a premium subscription. But at the same time, six likes per day actually led to fewer overall dates.

The Sweet Spot

The question was a big one: should we sacrifice an infusion of revenue for a better user experience? Or could there be another

way? After lots of data-gathering and analysis, we found our answer. When we offered users eight likes per day, the number of dates-per-user actually went up. It also led to a lift in revenue—just not quite as much. That was okay. The scarcity of eight-per-day was the sweet spot we were looking for.

We arrive at these decision points all the time at Hinge. On one side, there's the option to prioritize great dates; on the other, something else (in this case, a revenue bump). As usual, we bet on great dates (and went with eight per day, not six). With Boost, Roses and other feature sets, we've used the same argument: if it makes for more great dates, it's better for Hinge.

The scarcity of
eight per day
was the sweet
spot we were
looking for.

RADICAL *Trust*

Building a dating app that is “Designed to Be Deleted” is a wildly ambitious proposition. To achieve it, we need to work together really well. Without a strong foundation of mutual trust that simply would not happen.

At Hinge, we practice this trust in a few ways. First, we are all trusted to own our projects and make important decisions for the company. (We were hired to do just that!) At the same time, we build trust with our teammates through open and transparent communication.

We call this principle “Radical Trust” because for most of us, this level of trust and transparency is unfamiliar, even uncomfortable. It is a leap to learn to trust each other radically, and it takes work to reinforce it.

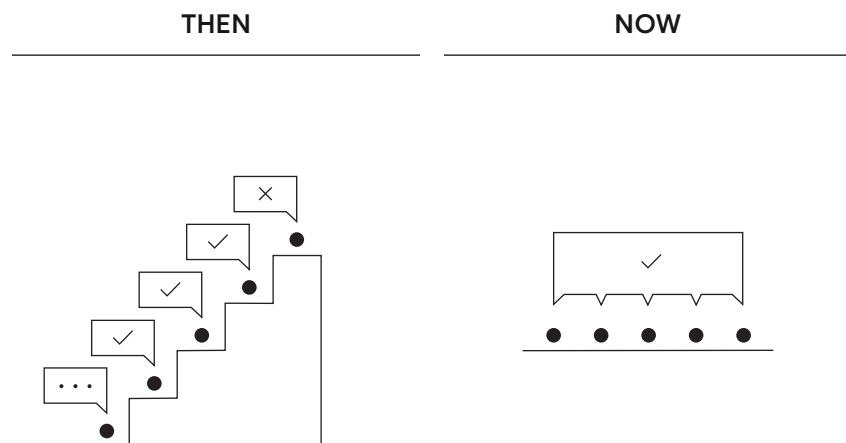
We spend so much time thinking about trust because we’ve seen what can happen without it: micromanagement, unnecessary drama and endless finger-pointing. When our work relationships are built on Radical Trust, though, we are freed to take risks and make bold decisions that a fear-based culture might have squashed.

Approval culture

We didn't always think like this. For years, Hinge was more of a top-down organization. Leaders and managers made most of the key decisions and everyone else was responsible for execution. It wasn't a place where new or early-career employees had much of a voice.

This way of doing things is pretty common, especially at bigger companies. You might call it "approval culture." To get something done, a junior employee makes their case to a manager, who makes their case to a senior executive, who makes the final call.

There are benefits to this model, but to us it never felt right. It works for companies that move slowly and want to avoid mistakes. We want to move quickly, collaborate seamlessly, and keep taking risks. "Approval culture" hinders that.



Working in alignment

At Hinge, we replace "approval" with something else: alignment. When we work in alignment, it means our work is guided by principles and generally supports Hinge's big-picture strategy. It lets us take risks and make important decisions, so long as we abide by a few constraints.

If you are the owner of a project, then you are responsible for the major decisions that drive its success.

If you are the owner of a project, then you are responsible for the major decisions that drive its success. But with that power comes a responsibility to keep your teammates aligned and informed. That means sharing work with colleagues, soliciting feedback and collecting insights early and often. WIP isn't just okay—it's encouraged! We'd much rather stay aligned throughout a project then get to the finish line and see that your work has suffered because it ignored some important context or insight.

Ultimately, alignment means arriving at a kind of shared brain, with multiple perspectives. You may be more versed in the specifics, but your colleagues can provide wisdom and insights from a different vantage point. It's out of that diversity that the best work comes to light.

Radical Transparency

In order to make smart decisions, we need access to the right information. A crucial part of Radical Trust is our commitment to transparency and sharing knowledge across Hinge.

No matter our role, everyone at Hinge is trusted with information on company performance and financials that other organizations typically ~~keep confidential~~.

No matter our role, everyone at Hinge is trusted with information on company performance and financials that other organizations typically keep confidential. And Hinge leadership works hard to ensure that everyone knows what each department is doing, and how each project fits into the greater whole. That is the purpose of weekly Team Updates, bi-weekly Wrap and CEO Town Hall and our semi-annual shareback of board presentations. The point of all these steps is to empower and inform our decision-making.

Disagree and commit

Radical Trust also helps us address those moments when there may be different opinions between two parties about the best course of action. We don't agree all the time, whether that's within departments and teams, among the leadership team, or as an organization. Also, most decisions

entail tradeoffs, the consequences of which are hard to predict. Someone might weigh those tradeoffs differently than you, and opt for a path that you oppose. Still, once a clear decision is made, we all commit to getting behind it and producing a positive result.

Manager as coach

At Hinge, the manager's primary job is to coach, challenge, and support and not to micromanage—in other words, create and uphold the conditions for us to succeed. They are not there to provide answers; they're there to help us arrive at our own answers.

TO-DO LIST FOR MANAGERS



Radical *Trust*

We are trusted to *own*
our projects and make the
decisions that shape them.
We maintain that trust through
open communication.

Sounds Like

“Here’s how I’m approaching this so far. What do you think?”
“You are closer to the details—why don’t you lead the conversation?”

Beware Of

“It’s not perfect yet. Can I show you when it’s done?”
“We can’t share that. It’s none of your business.”

The Story of “Go”



Ben Celebecic
CTO

For the first five or six years of its existence, Hinge was built on Python. During our reboot in 2016, however, we quickly realized that the new Hinge could not properly scale using this programming language.

There were a dozen reasons why Python was out. Most importantly, the servers needed to run Python with millions of users would be far too expensive. But leaving Python posed a serious problem: most of our engineers, myself included, had deep experience in Python and weren't as comfortable with other languages. Two members of my team introduced us to Go, a programming language built by Google that was very new at the time. There is always that compulsion to get excited about a shiny new toy. But could Go actually help us scale? They took the lead and ran a proof of concept. And guess what—it worked.

I didn't know Go very well, and its novelty didn't inspire confidence. In fact, I'd heard from some friends that transitioning our entire app to such a new language was a death sentence. There simply wouldn't be enough resources and other developers to help us solve problems when they emerged. We'd also hired a super experienced CTO advisor at the time, a respected voice in the industry. His take? Go is a mistake.

A Lesson in Trust

Adopting Go was the ultimate lesson in trust. Our engineering team trusted the two young developers who brought in the idea. I trusted our team to execute it. And Hinge leadership trusted me to make the right call for our business. Leaders will rarely have all of the details necessary to understand every angle of a particular decision. But in this case, we were aligned on what we needed: scale and performance. And Go was the best possible solution.

Adopting Go was the ultimate lesson in trust.

Oddly enough, we weren't the only company coming to this conclusion. In 2016, Go—which is derived from C, and excels when used for distributed network services—was really quite obscure. By 2018, it had rocketed to the 12th most popular programming language. And today, the fact that Hinge is built on Go is actually a competitive advantage for us.

Day One Trust



Lisa De La Torre
Head of CX
Operations

During one of my initial interviews at Hinge, my future manager couldn't have been clearer: "We want someone with a strong POV on how things should be done—on day one." This was not something I was used to hearing. But it was refreshing and empowering to hear this expectation, and be given an opportunity to deliver on it. It's one of the reasons I decided to join.

My world at Hinge is customer service operations. We have thousands of interactions with our users every week, exclusively through email. After every one of these exchanges, users are given a chance to provide feedback on our customer service. The results of that survey are called our "CSAT score," what's now a standard metric that most businesses track.

After I started at Hinge, my manager and I arrived at a rather simple goal: raise the CSAT score from around a 50% positive response rate to 80%. How? That was more or less up to me. I think it takes courage as a manager to let go of the details and trust that you hired the right person to make things happen. This was definitely the case on my team, and I am grateful for it. As it turns out, I did have a plan. And it would entail a drastic overhaul of the way Hinge did customer support.

Making the Switch

Our original vendor had pretty basic functionality when it came to asking our customers for feedback. I'd worked with other vendors before, and I knew that to better serve our community, we needed to have more flexibility, branding, and personality in our communications. At a lot of companies, switching up a major vendor like this would entail jumping through dozens of bureaucratic hoops.

My managers welcomed my pitch, let me run with it, and provided helpful guidance along the way. This trust was scary at first, but soon filled me with confidence.

Soon enough, we had selected and signed on a new vendor for our customer service follow-ups. The experience for our customers is now warmer, more customized, and more Hinge—and the early results on our CSAT are promising. Just as important, though, is the process that got us there. As a new employee, being given the freedom to find my way—and the best solution—was both empowering and unfamiliar. But in the end I think it led us to the best possible answer.

LOVE *the Leap*

Once we trust each other, and have created the conditions for great work, it's time to actually... get to work. Our mission is not a shy one. We want to bring about a world where anyone looking for a relationship can find it. It's a lofty, brazen, crazy dream—the kind that's so impossible it somehow comes true.

It takes a leap of faith to start that kind of company, to join as an employee, to stick with it even through the rockiest of times. This leap is a part of Hinge's DNA. We are each here because, among other things, we aren't afraid to take it.

At the same time, as Hinge scales the pressure to succeed keeps going up. We have to live up to certain expectations about our growth and key financial metrics. But this does not change the simple fact that we “love the leap.” And we continue to set wildly ambitious goals, even if we're not exactly sure how we'll get there.

It's important to remember that as a company, Hinge isn't launching rockets into space. That is to say: we all have the freedom to experiment here, and as making mistakes usually isn't catastrophic. When we take the “leap,” we intentionally create the space to fail because it inspires better ideas and outcomes. Failure means we're testing new ground and hitting our edge, whether as individuals, a team or the entire organization. Failure is something we embrace.

From Debate, to Experimentation

During Hinge's early years, we didn't think this way at all. We were incredibly worried about getting things "right." We loved to debate important product and business decisions, especially among the leadership team. And yet when we finally made a decision, we were often wrong.

The real problem back then was that we were making decisions by trying to be smart. But usually, the best way to figure something out is to get moving. Instead of swimming in theoreticals, we made a commitment to experiment, gather data and test—as early and often as possible. Instead of asking, "do you think this would work?" We started to ask: "How can we learn more?"

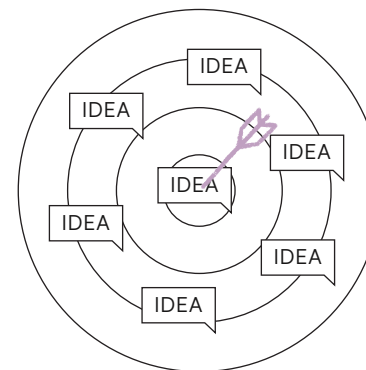
These days, when projects are huge, with lots of stakeholders and moving parts, moving that fast can be daunting. So we do our best across Hinge to "stay in motion," and have learned to divide big projects into much smaller pieces. The best way to learn is by doing.

Process Before Outcome

That sense of experimentation also informs how we think about process and outcomes. A poor process that leads to an amazing outcome isn't a slam-dunk...it's a fluke. You can't learn much from a fluke. On the other hand, a great new process that leads to a neutral outcome might seem like a failure, but it will often yield lessons that we can apply going forward. Embracing failure means being willing to experiment with how we do something, always aiming for success but accepting imperfect outcomes as the inevitable byproduct of taking risks.

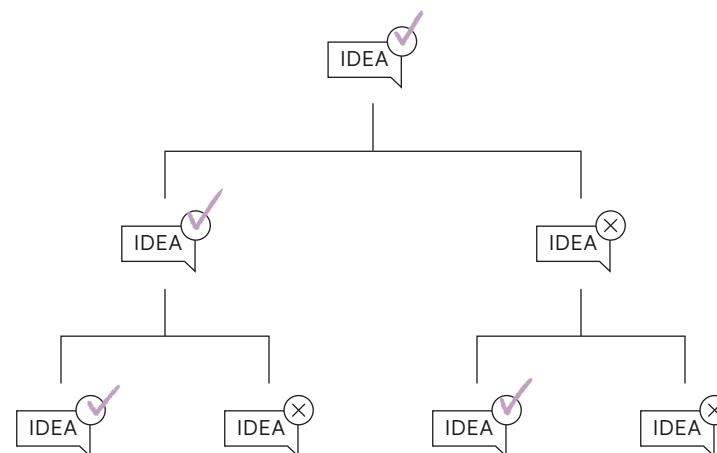
THEN

Debate then Guess



NOW

Test & Build



Shoot for the stars, hit the moon

An obvious place where this principle comes to life is through goals. We set ambitious ones. Not to exhaust ourselves, but to shift mindsets and help us arrive at completely new solutions.

There are a lot of great examples. At one point, we set out to double the number of dates-per-user. Another year, the goal was to double revenue-per-user to show we were worth investing in. More recently, we set the goal of cutting the number of bad actor reports in half.

Setting ambitious goals often involves taking a hard look at areas where we aren't doing well. Let's dive into one story. Back in 2015, our NPS (net promoter score) was — to use a technical term—atrocious. NPS is the industry standard for measuring customer experience, and it is based on a single question: How likely are you to recommend this brand/product/service to a friend? At the time, our NPS was negative 50. That's not a typo. Negative 50 meant that not only were people not likely to recommend Hinge to their friends, but they were likely to actively discourage it. You can see why this was a problem.

Instead of trying to get our NPS into neutral territory, we set the goal of achieving a positive NPS. Going from “bad” to “fine” wasn't enough; as a goal, that was too timid to jolt our thinking. So we aimed high, even though it seemed absurd and we had no idea how to get there.

That's the thing about setting big goals: you have to be comfortable with ambiguity. In this case, the road to our positive NPS ultimately meant completely tearing down our app and starting over from scratch. The process of execution may be unknown and messy and scary, but with clear strategy, strong principles, good people, and a defined goal, you'll be able to plot a course through the swamp.

When to be good, and when to be great

An important caveat to this strategy of setting audacious goals is that we cannot do so in every part of the business. As a team, we've learned to be more discerning about this, and to say “no” to initiatives and goals that don't align with our strategy. We've seen how in many cases you don't need to reach the proverbial “finish line” to achieve success. Getting to 80% (good) is fine enough, and reaching 100% (great) just isn't worth it. As often as we can, we try to execute to perfection where it matters most, but take a pass when it doesn't.

As often as we can,
we try to execute to perfection
where it matters most, but
take a pass when it doesn't.

How we get better

When you take big leaps as a business, there will inevitably be things that don't pan out. It's not enough to say that we merely learn from these mistakes. At Hinge, we have a comprehensive (and principled) approach to retrospectives and feedback that is integral to how we work. Instead of blaming others, we assume best intentions and try to assess what happened objectively. By documenting events and learnings, we ensure that the same mistake won't happen twice. Fail fast, fail forward, fail any way you want, but do so out in the open so that we all can learn together.

Love the Leap

We set *big, audacious goals* and take risks to achieve them. Failure—and *learning from it*—is a part of the model.

Sounds Like

“I don’t care if no one’s done it. Let’s be the first to try.”

Beware Of

“Don’t look at me—it wasn’t my idea.”
“We’ll get in trouble if this doesn’t work.”

A Brief History of Audacious Goal-Setting



Sam Levy
COO

During my time at Hinge, I've always been blown away by our ability to achieve crazy big goals year after year. At this point, I think it's safe to say that this doesn't happen by chance.

When we redesigned Hinge in 2016, we were guided by a fundamental shift in how we thought about the app. The only thing that mattered was great dates; that is, whether the new Hinge was better at setting them up. We were obsessed with what we wanted to achieve and why it was important, not bogged down by how it was going to happen. To take a leap of faith like that takes more than just courage—you have to trust each other. And we did. While the road to get there was circuitous and full of potholes, the Hinge we released in 2017 far exceeded anyone's expectations. Most importantly, it was 9x more efficient at getting our users out on dates.

M&M Goals

The following year, we set clear goals related to both users and revenue. We called it “M&M” for one million monthly active users and \$1 million in revenue - more than double what we had ever achieved in the five years prior. Given where we were at the time, a logical person would've seen those goals and said “There's no damn way.” And to be frank, the path to get there was totally unclear.

Given where we were at the time, a logical person would've seen those goals and said, “There's no damn way.”

Still, the team rallied around these goals and never underestimated what they could do in a single year. Our Product team overhauled our membership model and simplified our UX. Marketing found new ways to break through and acquire users through both PR and advertising. We actually hit our “M&M” goals with a few months to spare, and our growth that year caught the eye of Match Group, which became our parent company.

With Match Group's backing, we have continued this same culture of fearless goal-setting. When setting expectations with a new parent company, it could have been a moment for sandbagging, or setting goals we knew we'd hit. We've done the opposite. We've found, over and over, that setting audacious goals and holding each other accountable to them drives innovation and results.

In traditional Hinge fashion, we also developed a set of principles for how we set our goals and OKRs. As Hinge has grown in size, we've extended this philosophy of ambitious goal-setting to each department, from Marketing to Engineering. I think that fearlessness has permeated our culture, and is core to the success of Hinge—both looking back, and as we continue to grow.

DEI Takes Shape at Hinge



Jamel Exhem
DEI Specialist

Back in 2018, we sent out a survey to employees related to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (“DEI”). The fundamental question was: “Do you feel seen and included in the world of Hinge?” Long story short: We didn’t love what came back. As much as Hinge thought of itself as a family, there were big gaps in people’s experiences.

We held an all-hands to discuss the results. There was one share that really stood out. One of our newest employees—a person of color—spoke of feeling isolated and alone. She told us, through tears, how she hadn’t found her place—even though Hinge’s culture was the primary reason she’d joined the company.

Diving in

This story and others really opened our eyes. A few things happened next. First, Justin and I went on a listening tour, having lunch with small groups of employees to dig a bit deeper. We then formed a DEI Committee and Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) to provide a greater sense of belonging to those who needed it most. We enlisted their help to document what we were hearing across the company related to DEI, and what we wanted to see instead.

Out of this work came our DEI Charter.
It consists of five core ideas:

- 1 Open the circle
- 2 Lead with love
- 3 Know our unknowns
- 4 No spokespeople
- 5 Zero hate

The following month, we organized a Culture Retreat with a heavy emphasis on DEI, and continued to work through all of these ideas as a team. We tracked our progress, and over the course of a year, we significantly narrowed or even reversed many of the gaps in employee engagement and feelings of inclusion at the company.

Since then, we have doubled down on this important work. What began as a blindspot for Hinge has become a strength. This kind of work is never over. But to get started, we had to be open and honest about where we were and take a massive leap forward. And we did.

GUIDED BY *Principles*

When we “Love the Leap” we accept that taking risks will inevitably lead to mistakes. Each one we make is an opportunity to learn. Over time, we’ve synthesized these learnings into principles. The five principles we focus on in this book are the output of hundreds of lessons from the first ten years of Hinge.

Our fourth principle is all about principles themselves. A meta-principle! In this chapter, we’ll cover where they come from, how we use them, and why they’re so important.

So, what exactly is a principle, as defined by Hinge?

Essentially, principles are just guidelines that help us make better decisions.

They can help us address a wide variety of moments.

From the general:

...to the more specific:

“How should I use my one-on-one time with my manager?”

“We just interviewed a rockstar engineer, but he kind of seems like a jerk. Should we hire him?”

“I don’t think this presentation is very good. Should I say something?”

“This new feature increases revenue but leads to fewer people actually going out on dates. Should we release it?”

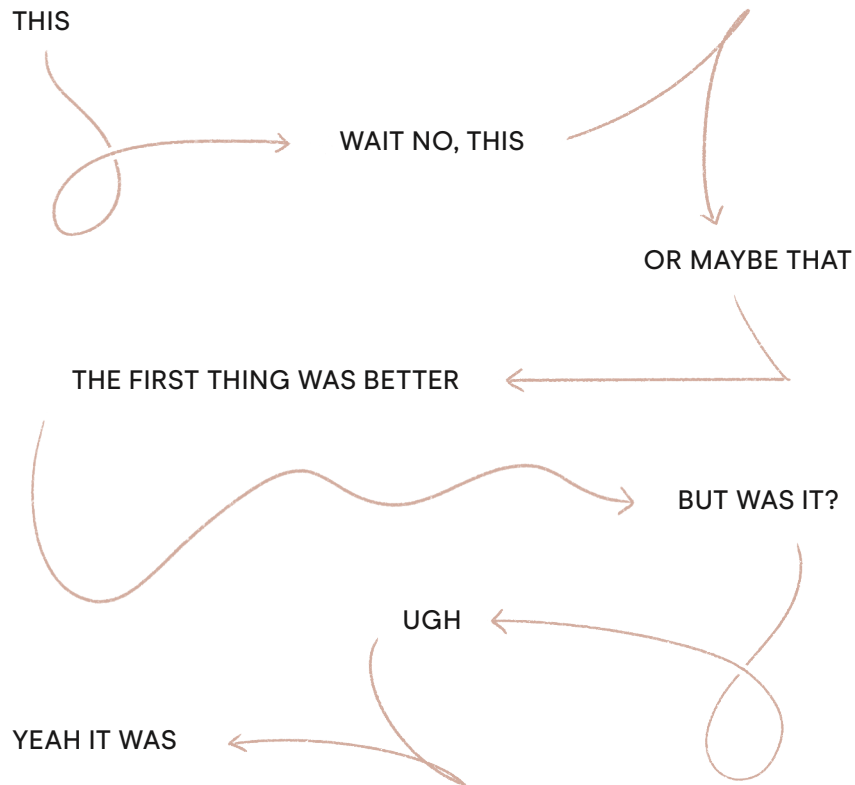
Principles give us a kind of shortcut for remembering what’s worked before, as well as what is aligned with our core values and company strategy.

To understand this one, it helps to jump back a few years to remember what Hinge was like when we didn’t really think about this kind of thing at all.

Move Fast, Get Whiplash

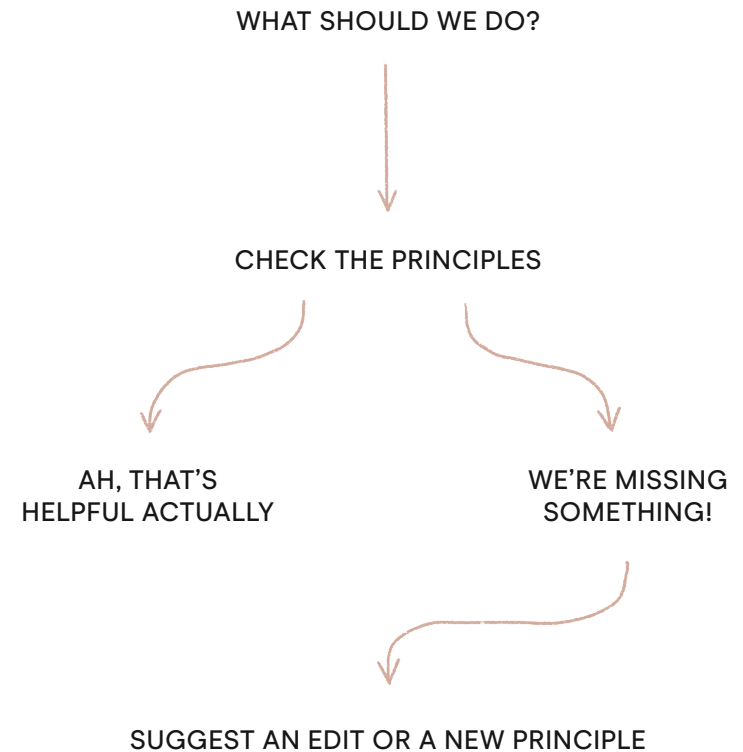
When companies are just starting out, the founders get involved in almost everything. Things move at warp speed. At Hinge, it felt like there were five versions of our app in the first five years! It was an exhilarating time. It was also stressful and pretty disorganized.

Then



Back then, there was a ton of debate about what we should do and be—as a company. Though these debates were started with the best of intentions, they were usually won by the most senior leader in the room, or at least the best debater. Then, a few months later, we'd have another all-night conversation and agree to do the opposite. Then, we'd switch it up yet again. As a company, we were getting whiplash. That was bad for Hinge, and exhausting for all parties involved.

Now



A New Model

We knew that the way we made decisions needed to change. Hinge had become too big and complex to rely on the founders and senior leaders to make every decision. There were simply too many to make, and not enough time to understand all the relevant context. Still, we didn't want to swing all the way to the other end of this spectrum: everyone deciding everything based on their personal opinions. That's not a team—that's just chaos.

**Principles were our way forward:
a set of guidelines that we collectively
form and agree upon to ensure we
stay aligned as a team.**

Our first set of principles came to life via a shared Google doc that everyone at Hinge could edit. There were general ones that applied to company strategy, and eventually other, more specific principles for departments, teams and things like meetings, giving feedback, and time off. Over time, we synthesized our core principles to the five in this book.

Working With Principles

These days, principles are everywhere at Hinge—like WiFi, or coffee. We don't just have these five core principles. We have them for more specific aspects of working at Hinge like hiring and feedback, which are included later on in this book. We have them for departments like Product and Community. And, we often make new ones at the outset of an individual project.

Creating Principles

Developing new principles can help us get oriented on what matters, what to watch out for and what success looks like.

Kicking off a new project? First, ask yourself what existing principles might apply. Still, that may not be enough, in which case it's time to draft a few principles of your own. The questions below can help you get started:

- What non-obvious assumptions are we making in our approach?
- Where do we anticipate we might disagree, and what might be underneath that disagreement?
- What is out of bounds?

Principles in Action

You may find that in the middle of a project, a new Principle is needed. (OR an existing Principle needs to be updated.) This might happen when there is a major disagreement, or something in your gut says, "this just isn't right." In moments like these, it can be helpful to step back and ask: "What assumption is causing this disagreement or discomfort?" Often, this can point to the formation of a new Principle, or editing an existing one. Our experience is that when smart, thoughtful people are looking at the same information and holding the same values and assumptions, there is always a constructive way forward.

When a project is not succeeding, we can almost always point to one of two issues: either we are not executing well on our principles or we have the wrong principles. Discerning between the two is critical to resolving the problem: the former points to execution, and the latter to strategy.

Guided by *Principles*

We create principles to get clear on *what matters* and *why*.

Principles help us *move faster, resolve conflicts* and *make better decisions*.

Sounds Like

“Before we get started, let’s get aligned on the relevant principles.”

“Wait. What principles are we using to make that decision?”

Beware Of

“We’ve always done it this way, so...”

“Just do it the way the leadership team likes it—it’ll save time.”

The Principles Behind Doing Good



Saara Lankarani
Executive Business
Partner

For most of its history, Hinge tended to stay out of politics and social issues. As a dating app with a broad user base, we worried that making any bold public statement could alienate some portion of our user base. There was also an underlying fear that if we tried something, we might get it totally wrong.

The national conversations around systemic racism and other social issues in 2020 completely changed that. It was such a year of upheaval that

not taking a stance became its own stance—and not the one we wanted to take.

Remember, Hinge is made up of folks who embody our core values of Authenticity, Courage and Empathy. So, it makes sense that we are called to serve our communities, and want to work for an organization that feels similarly. 2020 was the year when this underlying energy was transformed into dedicated action.

A Shaky Start

That action took the form of corporate donations, public statements, content in our Help Center about race and inclusion and in-app notifications. These gestures were mostly directed toward police brutality, inequity and social justice issues—and always in response to the national discussion. We had good intentions, but haphazard execution. And the more we tried to make an impact in response to social issues, the more we kept asking: is this right? Jumping between issues and doing a lot of small gestures felt reactive and short-sighted.

That's where our principles came in. We needed something to anchor our actions and statements on social justice and politics. After a period of listening, workshopping and studying, we landed on the following principles for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) at Hinge:

CSR Principles

Stand for love.

We focus on causes that relate to our mission to help anyone looking for a relationship to find it. We recognize that trying to be an activist everywhere may lead to being impactful nowhere.

Speak from the heart.

We use our voice when we can speak authentically. We always walk the walk before we talk the talk.

Real impact requires sustained effort.

We take a long-term, outcomes-based approach rooted in our values and research. We aren't fair-weather friends during press and media storms.

Narrowing Our Focus

The principles helped us identify the one major social cause that Hinge's CSR efforts now focus on: healthy relationships. We still provide support and make donations when a major issue affecting the greater Hinge community comes up—for example, the surge in AAPI-related hate crimes in 2021. But the arena where we can make the greatest long-term impact—outside of the core product—is in relationships themselves.

Healthy relationships take time, work and practice. But most of all, they demand continuous learning. That's why we're partnering with nonprofit organizations to incentivize relationship-focused learning and training for our customers, in addition to other initiatives and donations in this space.

If you step back, this topic was a no-brainer: it's tied to our mission, it's an arena where we have a lot of data and expertise, and we have the ability to make a real difference. Slowing down and putting in the work to establish our principles in CSR was a critical first step.

PEOPLE WITH *Heart*

So far, we've looked at our core strategy, how we build trust and share information, as well as our approach to using principles and taking risks. But the thing is, without the right people, most of the above would fall apart in five minutes.

Building a great company without a great team is like trying to make a pizza without a crust. Or driving a car without wheels.

The first step in forming a great team is defining your selection criteria. What type of person will thrive at Hinge? What type of person won't? Over the years, we've landed on a cluster of traits that we look for in every candidate. They include demonstrating our core values—Authenticity, Courage and Empathy—as well as a few others that relate to being great team players. These stand in opposition to the “lone wolf genius” who crushes it at their job but can't play well with others. When faced with two great candidates, we always opt for team-oriented collaborators over individualistic rock stars.

As usual, we learned this lesson the hard way...

Hire Fast, Fire Fast

In the early days of Hinge, we hired people really quickly. There wasn't a strong understanding of who would succeed here and who wouldn't. The result sometimes felt like a group of talented people who didn't work particularly well together. Another result? Many of them didn't last.

To be fair, we weren't looking for perfect cohesion: the new hires were brought in to execute, not work as a team. But this pattern of hiring fast and firing fast was exhausting for everyone involved. It was like we were trying to bake a cake by pulling random, tasty ingredients out of the cupboard and throwing them in a pan (sugar, eggs, almond butter, Doritos...) It didn't work. And it took a huge toll on morale and our overall success.

It was like we were trying to bake
a cake by pulling random, tasty
ingredients out of the cupboard
and throwing them in a pan
(sugar, eggs, almond butter, ~~Doritos...~~)

Hire Thoughtfully

Every company does hiring a little differently. And what works for one company now might not work for that same organization in five or ten years. When we rebooted Hinge in 2016, the first thing we did was identify the qualities shared by our most successful employees.

We found that they tended to embody our core values: Authenticity, Courage, and Empathy. But there were other attributes that also surfaced:

Growth Orientation	They were curious learners who asked questions and sought continuous improvement.
Ownership Mentality	They saw themselves as creators, not clients, of company culture, and took personal responsibility for company success.
Grit	They persevered and were resilient in the face of challenges and setbacks.
Empathetic Communication	They could express complex ideas in a way that could be understood by anyone at the company.
Critical Thinking	They could question and analyze complex information and form good judgments.

These are the criteria we think are important for any employee to succeed at Hinge, regardless of their role. And so for every single applicant, in addition to more conventional skills and narrative interviews, we have a dedicated interview to specifically screen for these attributes. We call it our "Culture Interview," and no one is hired at Hinge unless they pass it. Much to the chagrin of our recruiters, we've actually turned down a lot of candidates who had just the right experience and skills but didn't excel on the culture side.

The Culture Interview

So, how exactly do we screen for culture? First, we don't think of culture as a "vibe." That is, we're not looking just for likable people we'd like to sit next to on a long plane ride. We're looking for individuals who embrace the specific qualities described above. When we lean on this system, we also help reduce the influence of unconscious bias in the hiring process.

During the Culture Interview, we like to ask behavioral questions to assess a candidate's experience in each category. To gauge authenticity, we ask: "Tell me about a time when you chose to share something with a colleague that was difficult to say." To understand whether they have an ownership mentality, we ask: "If you were your boss, what's one thing you would change about how your team works?" We also have candidates undergo this session with multiple interviewers to lessen the influence of any single perspective.

Homogeneous → Hingeneous

There is one question that we tend to hear a lot regarding our hiring policies. It's something like this: doesn't being prescriptive about culture and values lead to a homogenous culture? Is everyone at Hinge... kind of the same?

After about two minutes of working here, you'll see that isn't the case. There are lots of ways to be courageous, demonstrate ownership and show grit. We are proud of our diversity, not only related to gender, race and sexual orientation but also in terms of qualities like introversion, assertiveness and communication. We've found that hiring for cultural attributes and diversity aren't mutually exclusive—they are mutually reinforcing.

We've found that hiring for cultural attributes and diversity aren't mutually exclusive—they are mutually reinforcing.

Showing Up With Heart

Who we bring into Hinge matters a lot. But just as important is what happens once we're all here. Building a great culture takes work. These attributes aren't necessarily innate. They're things we have to practice every single day, often imperfectly.

That's the thinking behind "Hinge Has Heart." In every all-hands meeting, we include this special session to call out colleagues who embody our core values in a big way. That might mean speaking up with authenticity during a tough meeting, or taking a courageous leap on a new product launch. We also consider our core values during promotion and compensation meetings. All of these practices serve to reinforce the attributes that brought us to Hinge in the first place.

People with *Heart*

We hire *team players* who
embody our *core values*.
Once here, we show up with
heart as active *co-creators*
of Hinge culture.

Sounds Like

“She seems to incorporate feedback into everything she does. Let’s hire her.”
“She has so much talent. But does she demonstrate our values?”

Beware Of

“I loved her. She was so fun and easy to talk to. Let’s make an offer.”

The Evolution of the Culture Interview



Hannah Greene
Operations Director

The “Culture Interview” at Hinge has lived many lives. Over the years, we’ve kept challenging ourselves to make it more useful, equitable and effective. And in order to get there, we’ve had to ask some really tough questions.

At first, the Culture Interview was designed to assess candidates vis-a-vis our three core values—Authenticity, Courage and Empathy. After some time, we began to notice that there were some candidates who made it through that filter but still didn’t really thrive at Hinge. There were other attributes that contributed to their success, ones that related more to execution. Eventually, we identified five more attributes that we consider in addition to the original three values: growth orientation, ownership mentality, grit, empathic communication, and critical thinking.

We ask behavioral questions that prompt candidates to open up about how they’ve practiced each one. Over time, though, we started to notice some additional blindspots. For example, what if someone had never felt safe to be “Authentic” in the workplace? Or, how might their most recent work experience have prevented them from practicing empathic communication? We also found that having just one question on each value paved the way for a lot of false negatives. For these reasons and others, it was clear that our Culture Interview needed some work.

The New Rubric

The core change to our Culture Interview came in how we think about culture itself. We’ve eliminated the idea of a “culture fit.” Instead, we think about whether someone is truly interested in the project of preserving and co-creating our culture at Hinge. Put another way: will Hinge bring out the best in them, and in turn will they bring out the best in their colleagues? These are the questions that inform how we grade performance on the Culture Interview.

The rubric we use is as follows:

4: Will thrive in our culture

3: Will benefit from our culture

2: Questionable

1: Will be a threat to our culture

We made another key change to the Culture Interview in order to avoid false negatives. For each value, we give candidates two opportunities to succeed. If they receive a 3 or a 4 based on the first question, we move on to the next category. But if they only get a 1 or a 2, we ask a second question and use the greater of the two scores.

Overall, this interview has served as an important reflection of the way Hinge thinks about culture and inclusion. I’m sure that as that thinking evolves in the years to come, so too will the interview itself.

Values at Work



Tessa Tookes
People Team
Specialist

So many companies talk (and talk and talk) about their values, but the experience of being inside an organization often falls short of those ideals. I can say that, as skeptical as I might have been, the Hinge community delivers on its core values. And in the last year, they've inspired me to open up in huge new ways.

In the days after George Floyd was murdered, I was shaken. Like so many others, the trauma and the grief of that summer had changed how I was showing up. Hinge organized an all-hands meeting in direct response to these events in order to raise awareness and provide support both inside and outside the company. During the all-hands, my colleague Jamel prompted me, with little warning, in front of everyone: "I think Tessa has something to say." Can you think of a more nerve-racking moment? But I am grateful to Jamel for putting me on the spot.

I spoke about my Black experience, and what that summer had opened up for me. Having grown up in Connecticut and attended boarding school around mostly white and well-off friends, I became adept at "masking." That is, pretending to be perfect and happy and presentable. Speaking different cultural languages depending on where I was. This was a defense mechanism. I didn't want my (mostly white) peers to group me into other ideas of "Blackness" that I thought were negative.

Taking Off the Mask

The summer of George Floyd and national #BLM protests taught me that this needed to stop.

By hiding parts of myself, I was hurting myself.

I needed to let go of that "performance" and own my experience as a Black woman. And so, in front of my entire company—on Zoom, no less—I sobbed and I healed and I shared this revelation. But I knew, staring at those 100 or so tiny boxes on my screen, that I was safe. That I would be met with kindness, and empathy.

In the hours and days after the all-hands, I was inundated with support from colleagues—Slack messages, phone calls and even hand-written letters. Team members asked how they could be more supportive, and assured me that I could be my authentic self with them. Others (especially women, other BIPOCs and LGBTQ+ team members) shared that my story reminded them of their own struggles with "masking."

Usually, we lean on our friends and family to process things that happen at work. I leaned on Hinge to process a defining issue in my life. And it opened up a year of self-discovery and healing that changed my life. I was grateful for Jamel's courage in asking me to share; I'm proud that I showed up authentically, and I am lucky to work at a company that puts empathy first.

PRINCIPLES IN PRACTICE

Our five core principles serve as a guide for most of what we do at Hinge. But they're just the beginning. Over the years, we've built out more detailed principles that apply to specific parts of our business, from Corporate Social Responsibility and Meetings to User Data and Feedback. In the following section, which we call the Handbook, we'll dive into these topics and much more.

- 01 | *How We Show Up in the World*
 - OUR BRAND
 - DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION
 - CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY & SOCIAL IMPACT
- 02 | *How We Get Stuff Done*
 - OBJECTIVES AND KEY RESULTS (OKRS)
 - THE COSI MODEL
 - MEETINGS
 - EXTERNAL REQUESTS
- 03 | *How We Get Better*
 - FEEDBACK AND RECOGNITION
 - RETROSPECTIVES
- 04 | *How We Build our Team*
 - RECRUITING AND SELECTING TALENT
 - CAREER GROWTH AND COMPENSATION
 - PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT AND EVALUATION
- 05 | *Our Basic Responsibilities*
 - OFFICE AND SCHEDULE
 - TIME OFF
 - USER DATA ACCESS AND PROTECTION

OUR BRAND

These attributes define how Hinge presents itself to the world.

Personable

*We are warm,
inviting and caring.*

NOT reserved: we aren't minimalist or austere.
NOT cutesy: we aren't quirky or cheesy.

Aesthetic

*We are modern,
intentional and
detail-oriented.*

NOT utilitarian: we aren't about function alone.
NOT artsy: we aren't abstract, surreal or inaccessible.

Insightful

*We are practical,
credible and
research-backed.*

NOT ideological: we aren't fundamentalist or political.
NOT nerdy: we don't lead with math, stats or theory.

Hopeful

*We inspire toward
higher ideals.*

NOT pandering: we don't celebrate cynicism or status quo habits or attitudes. NOT exclusive: we don't imply we're only for certain types of people.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION

At Hinge, we believe that a healthy dating culture is grounded in the same core values that drive our company: authenticity, courage and empathy. Our service welcomes anyone and everyone who shares these values. To that end, it is critical that we continually seek to understand, empathize with and account for the different perspectives people bring to love and to work as a result of their diverse backgrounds, beliefs, disabilities and identities. This cultural competency helps expand our community, enabling an ever greater number of people to find relationships.

Open the Circle

Our organization and our user community exist within a very imperfect world. We have a duty to counter the ongoing cultural inertia on issues of diversity and inclusion. It's not about not discriminating; it's about actively welcoming and including. It's not about being colorblind; it's about being colorful.

Lead With Love

We lean into important conversations with open minds and open hearts. When we believe we see bias or insensitivity, we speak up. We assume positive intent. We bravely admit when we can do better and share our learnings broadly.

Know Our Unknowns

We strive to be aware of the gaps in our knowledge and experience. Leaning into curiosity and empathy we try to avoid making assumptions and instead embrace asking questions.

No Spokespeople

We recognize that each person can only share their individual perspective. While we encourage this sharing, no one person speaks or should be asked to speak on behalf of a broader group. When seeking perspective, we use Employee Resource Groups or standard research methods.

Zero Hate

We have a zero-tolerance policy for hateful speech or action, especially when it relates to someone's background, beliefs, disabilities or identity. Any incidents should be immediately reported to your manager and/or our Head of People.

Full Equity

We strive to treat every member of our community equally, regardless of their background, beliefs, disabilities or identity when it comes to employment, compensation or community membership. Any concerns or questions should be directed to your manager and/or our Head of People.

CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY & SOCIAL IMPACT

We know that as a company, the biggest impact we will have on the world is through our core product. That said, we can still make other meaningful, positive contributions to the world using our voice and resources.

Stand for Love

We focus on causes that relate to our mission to help anyone looking for a relationship to find it.

We recognize that trying to be an activist everywhere may lead to being impactful nowhere.

Speak from the Heart

We use our voice when we can speak authentically.

We always walk the walk before we talk the talk.

Real impact requires sustained effort

We take a long-term, outcomes-based approach rooted in our values and research.

We aren't fair-weather friends during press and media storms.

OBJECTIVES & KEY RESULTS (OKRS)

OKRs are how we set goals as a company.

An objective is a qualitative, ambitious goal. We pair each objective with key results: three to five measures that help us understand whether or not we accomplished our objective.

Stretch Goals Are the Key to Outperformance

OKRs are often big, hairy, audacious goals with a medium-to-low probability of achievement. They are often set without knowing exactly how we're going to achieve them. They stretch us beyond what anyone may have thought was possible.

OKRs Must Be Lived Daily

It's easy to set exciting goals then fall back to a comfortable routine that doesn't put us on a trajectory to achieve them. It's critical to develop and execute plans, rituals and checkpoints to ensure we prioritize work that will help us meet our objectives.

OKRs Are Set Through Conversation, Not by Mandate

Goals are more motivating when we set them ourselves. Teams and individuals should set their own OKRs, although leaders and managers still need to be aligned with them. Conversely, leaders must get buy-in for company-wide OKRs.

OKRs Are a Tool, Not a Weapon

OKRs help us focus and stretch. Promotion and compensation are not based on achieving them. We don't set easy goals just so we can exceed them.

THE COSI MODEL

We've found that many of the traditional decision-making frameworks like RACI and RAPID don't quite work for us. As part of our commitment to radical trust and radical transparency, we developed our own framework, called COSI. We use the COSI model whenever there's ambiguity regarding the roles and responsibilities for a given project or team.

COSI is an acronym for the four key roles that make up any project:

Contributor

Key person working with the owner to carry out the project.

Owner

The directly responsible individual and decision-maker who drives the project forward and is accountable for delivering results. There is only one.

Sponsor

Manager(s) and/or leader(s) who assigns the project to the Owner and agrees to the project brief. The Sponsor is kept informed throughout the project and given the opportunity to provide feedback and guidance.

Informed

People who need to be kept informed or give ancillary approvals (such as Legal, Finance or HR.)

MEETINGS

We've all been to far too many meetings that felt like a waste of time. These are our principles for getting the most out of our time together.

Meetings Naturally Default to Sucking

Unless meetings are thoughtfully managed, they will naturally take too long, include too many people and make too little progress.

Meetings Need Leadership

Every meeting should have a designated leader who is responsible for setting the objective and agenda. They are also responsible for ensuring all voices in the meeting are heard and considered.

Meetings Are a Measure of Last Resort

Scheduling a meeting should not be the default response when something needs to be discussed or decided. We schedule a meeting only when necessary.

Meetings Should Be Distilled to What Can Only Be Accomplished in a Meeting Format

We don't waste people's time with meetings. We keep them efficient and scoped to only the things that require every attendee's attention. Pre-reading is always helpful!

Meetings Are Distraction-Free Zones

We don't use our phones or laptops during meetings, unless we absolutely need them for presenting or taking notes. If we're on video conference, we close other windows and silence notifications.

EXTERNAL REQUESTS

Sometimes, requests from outside our team will compete for our time and attention. By approaching these collaborations thoughtfully, we can help support our colleagues and the greater organization while not putting our own priorities at risk.

Understand the Need

We ask questions until we fully understand the ask as well as the underlying intent. Cross-team requests are highly susceptible to misinterpretation, and problems can often be solved in ways other than what was originally proposed.

Escalate Before Disrupting

If an outside request puts roadmaps or OKRs at risk, we always escalate to our managers prior to disrupting that work.

FEEDBACK AND RECOGNITION

Constructive, heartfelt feedback is the lifeblood of Hinge. While receiving tough feedback can be challenging, we embrace it for what it truly is: a caring gift in service of making us all better.

We Care Personally and Challenge Directly

The foundations of Radical Candor insist that we are courageously direct, empathetic and authentic with the person to whom we are giving feedback.

Feedback Is for Everyone

Feedback is not just what a manager gives to their direct report. We expect feedback to flow 360 degrees—to managers, peers and direct reports.

The Best Way To Get Feedback Is To Ask

In an ideal world, our colleagues would give regular and thoughtful feedback without being prompted. But oftentimes, other things get in the way. The best way to guarantee we receive feedback is to ask for it ourselves.

Feedback Is a Discussion, Not a Delivery

Each of us has our own unique wisdom and perspective to share. We deliver feedback from a place of humility, often relying on the “Situation, Behavior, Impact” model. We receive feedback with open minds, seeking to truly understand the other’s point of view.

Praise Is the Foundation of Feedback

Inspiring and reinforcing exemplary behavior is more effective (and more fun) than providing criticism alone. We aim to celebrate and praise substantially more than we provide criticism. When possible, we try to do so publicly.

Zero Gossip

We share critical feedback privately and directly with the person it concerns. If we feel that is not appropriate or possible, or we need extra support, we work with our manager, their manager or the People team.

RETROSPECTIVES

As innovators and risk-takers, we are bound to make mistakes. But we succeed in the end because each failure makes us better. We do this through a careful process of reflection in which we get clear on what happened, why, and how we can do better going forward.

“What” Comes Before “Why”

When we run a retrospective, we first get aligned on the timeline, facts, what went well and what went poorly. It's critical to agree on what happened before we dive into the why and the how, so we know what to change next time.

High Accountability, Low Blame

We proactively take responsibility for our part, and we succeed or fail together as a team. Outcomes rarely if ever come down to one person.

People Over Process

We use the introduction of new rules or processes as a measure of last resort. We find many issues can be solved simply with better communication, tighter execution, or clarified principles and values.

RECRUITING AND SELECTING TALENT

If there is one thing we've learned at Hinge, it's that people matter. As Ed Catmull, President of Pixar, once said: "Give a good idea to a mediocre team, and they will screw it up. But give a mediocre idea to a great team, and they will either fix it or come up with something better."

It's Heck Yes, or No

There is nothing more critical to Hinge's long-term success than who we hire. Strategy, execution, resources and culture are all a direct result of who works at Hinge. We hold a high bar and only hire those we're excited about.

Selectivity Necessitates Volume

In order to facilitate a highly selective process, it is essential we strive to source a significant volume of candidates for each role.

Culture Matters

Our ability to work together as a team matters more than any individual's skill set. We hire people with heart who will thrive in a culture that values authenticity, courage and empathy—without exception.

Diversity Matters

Our team thrives by applying diverse perspectives to hard problems. When we hire someone into a new role, they are being hired as part of a team, not in a vacuum. We incorporate diversity at the outset of the hiring process, not as an afterthought.

High Aptitude for Junior, High Experience for Senior

Motivated, high-aptitude candidates are great for entry-level individual contributor roles. But for senior or manager roles, we hire experts with experience who can hit the ground running.

The Best Predictor of Future Success Is Past Success

We look for candidates to show evidence of past success in order to gauge their potential for future success at Hinge. We rely heavily on behavioral interviews and practical exercises; we avoid asking theoretical questions.

CAREER GROWTH AND COMPENSATION

We love watching our teammates grow in their careers and get rewarded for their impact. Most of our leadership and senior management positions are filled by people who started as junior members of the team. We nearly always prefer to promote from within rather than hire from outside.

Management and Individual Contribution Are Both Worthy Tracks for Development

There is nothing more critical to Hinge's long-term success than who we hire. Strategy, execution, resources and culture are all a direct result of who works at Hinge. We hold a high bar and only hire those we're excited about.

We Prove Our Capabilities First

We must first show we are capable of additional scope and greater impact on business results before we are eligible for adjustments in title or compensation. We support lateral moves when candidates proactively demonstrate interest; we are always welcome to apply for any open role within Hinge.

We Aim To Compensate at or Above Market Rate

Compensating our team well is far less costly than losing or failing to attract great talent.

We Prioritize Transparency and Fairness Over Flexibility

We maintain clear role definitions and respective compensation bands. Maintaining internal parity for purposes of equity is paramount. Salary, bonus and equity are determined primarily by role scope. Bonus and consideration for promotion is determined primarily by individual performance and impact.

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT AND EVALUATION

When we are confident that we are being evaluated fairly, it helps us stay focused on doing the work that matters. When it comes to evaluating performance, we believe in maximum transparency and clear, candid communication.

We Hold a High Bar for Performance

We hold a high bar for performance. As people who work hard to produce outstanding results, we expect our colleagues to do the same.

Culture Continues to Matter

Our performance is evaluated by both the impact we make and how we make it. Living up to our principles and values is inextricably related to our performance.

We Should Have a Clear Understanding of Standards as well as Our Performance

In order for us to grow into our potential and help Hinge, transparent performance standards and regular feedback are essential.

We Look at the Big Picture When Evaluating Performance

We look for people who generally produce stellar results because they are chasing stretch goals, taking thoughtful approaches and applying sincere effort. Setbacks and critical feedback, which are routine, do not lead us to fear for our jobs. Our managers will be explicit when our overall performance is off-track relative to expectations.

OFFICE AND SCHEDULE

Despite the disruptions and changes resulting from the pandemic, our principles have remained the same. In fact, they helped us arrive at our post-pandemic work-from-home policies which include a hybrid of working from home and in-office.

We Should Spend Plenty of Time Working Together

Much of our work at Hinge is inherently creative, collaborative and cross-functional. That means it is crucial that we spend plenty of time working together, in person, when it is safe to do so. There is no better way to build our work relationships and ensure the frictionless exchange of ideas.

We Should Have the Time and Space for Uninterrupted Focus

Meetings and collaborative work must be balanced with time spent working without distraction. Both are critical to our productivity as a team.

We Should Have More than Sufficient Freedom to Manage Our Personal Lives

We should feel comfortable doing what's necessary to manage our personal lives, so long as we also manage our Hinge responsibilities.

We Balance Casualness and Familiarity with Professionalism

We intentionally create a warm, familial vibe at Hinge where we can be casual and bring our full, authentic selves to work. But we are mindful to always remain professional and comply with company policies, showing respect for one another and for Hinge.

TIME OFF

We can't show up fully at work unless we're also fully taking care of ourselves and our personal lives. Recently, we transitioned from an "unlimited vacation" model to an accrual model, as we found that for many of us, "unlimited" actually meant "almost never." We should all feel empowered to take the time we deserve.

We Take Care of Ourselves and Each Other

It is important to periodically take time off from work for ourselves and our families. At the same time, we need to make sure things continue to run smoothly. When we take time off, we ensure teammates are prepared and that key responsibilities are covered in our absence.

We Work Hard and Rest Hard

When we're on vacation, we unplug. When we're sick, we rest and get better. When we finish for the evening, we stop checking Slack and email. Embracing downtime is critical for us to continue doing great work without burning out.

USER DATA ACCESS AND PROTECTION

The privacy, security and safety of our members is absolutely essential.

We Access User Data in Service of Our Members, the Company at Large or as Permitted or Required by Law

It is never under any circumstances permitted to be accessed or used for personal benefit.

We Restrict Access to Data to a Need-To-Know Basis

While we are trusted to never access data inappropriately, it is still the basic duty of the company to take reasonable precautions to restrict access to data to prevent accidental or intentional misuse. Our policy is to only make data available to those of us who have a legitimate reason to use it.

We Never Share Personally Identifiable User Data With Outside Parties, Except as Required to Enable Them to Provide Services to Us, or as Permitted or Required by Law

At Hinge, we must maintain the trust of our users. There is no reason to share this data with anyone else outside Hinge.

Protecting User Data is a Team Effort That Requires Action and Diligence by All of Us

Because we maintain credentials that allow us to access user data, we must do our part to protect access to those credentials.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In a sense, we've been writing this book since the very beginning. It is the product of thousands of decisions made by hundreds of employees over ten amazing years. Every person who has worked here has shaped our culture and had some influence on the ideas in this book.

That said, we want to give special thanks to Adam Delehanty, who worked tirelessly over the last year to help translate our stories, learnings and culture into the book you're holding today.

We also want to acknowledge a few key individuals whom we have never actually met, but whose ideas have greatly influenced Hinge's culture. We highly recommend you pick up their books.

