



# Patreon Culture

April 2017

## Disclaimers:

1. The material in this deck is not necessarily “right” or “wrong.”  
However, it is how we choose to operate together in order to be effective and efficient.
2. Our culture evolves over time. This deck covers what works for Patreon today, and we expect you to create our future slides.

# Overview

This deck covers :

Mission

Core Behaviors

Transparency

Manager Expectations

Inclusivity and Diversity

Spending

People

Compensation

# Mission

# We Have Two Missions

1. Fund the emerging creative class
2. Create a company where teammates build fulfilling lives

It's not an acceptable outcome to complete only one of those things.

Why?

**Because we don't want to accomplish our mission at the expense of our teammates.**

**And we don't want to create a happy, fulfilled team if we aren't getting creators paid.**

# Our entire company is built on value for value

We believe that **CREATORS** should be able to make a living doing what they love.

We believe **YOU** should be able to make a living doing what you love.

Our philosophy is shaped around the belief that when you give value to Patreon, we deliver that value back to you in the form that's important to you (e.g., compensation, responsibility, autonomy, and personal development).



# Core Behaviors

**Core behaviors are the most important aspect of our culture.  
Individuals who adhere to the behaviors receive ownership  
and responsibility faster.**

# What is culture?

Culture is a group of people repeating behaviors.

When people say they like our culture, they're saying they like the way we treat each other, our visitors, our creators, and our patrons.

# Why call them “Core Behaviors” instead of “Core Values?”

Because behaviors are actions you can take and things you can do. In order to build a thriving culture, we live these behaviors and talk about them frequently in our interactions. It is not enough to simply memorize these behaviors. We proactively discuss them and ground all feedback in them.

Most companies have core values. Few companies have cultures that reflect them. You need to be willing to make decisions based on your values, by hiring and promoting people who adhere to them, and letting go of people who do not.

Our core behaviors were created by the first two dozen team members at Patreon and have evolved over time. We audit them each year to make sure they still accurately reflect the things our teammates value. You were brought here because we believe you value the things we value.

Adhering to these behaviors is how you create a fulfilling career at Patreon.

**Here are the 7 things that your teammates care deeply about...**

# #1

## Put creators first

Deliver unusual care to creators.

Our business is creators' income and rent checks, so we do not take our responsibility lightly. We exist because of, and in service of, creators. There is a creator behind every text, email, call, request, bug, and payment issue, and we treat them as human beings, not users.

We will fight to keep the human spark in our relationships as we scale. As a business we invest in teams like Community Happiness and Creator Care who are on the front lines taking care of our creators. We revere these teammates on the front lines.

## **When creators visit our building, we show respect.**

When creators perform in our space, we are so quiet you can hear a pin drop. We are not distracted on our devices because we want creators receiving our undivided attention.

When creators finish performing, we are so loud that we shake the building.

When a creator leaves Patreon, they should feel like it was the best show of their lives.

Artists are often surprised by the experience of performing at Patreon because they are accustomed to being treated poorly at corporate gigs. We hold each other to a ridiculously high standard as an audience so that creators leave feeling amazing.





When Patreon creator Strangely bikes from Oregon to San Francisco to perform a show at Patreon HQ... do this.



## #2

# Be an energy giver

Inspire those around you with a positive attitude.

Ohio State football coach Urban Meyer says “Every individual on every team I’ve coached can be divided into 1 of 2 categories: an energy giver or an energy taker.” Be an energy giver. Energy giver does not mean that Patreon only hires outgoing people.

The types of folks who have success at Patreon often ask themselves, “How can I ADD something to this meeting/interaction/room I am about to enter? “

There are several ways you can provide energy:

- Provide recommendations when surfacing a problem
- Arrive on-time and prepared to a meeting
- Package information in a consumable way
- Be the strongest listener in the room

# #3

## Be candid, always

Be extremely caring and extremely direct in all you do at Patreon, especially when it comes to giving positive or constructive feedback.

Our candor and open feedback culture is what sets us apart from most teams.

We expect you to speak up and have hard conversations regularly in order to help your teammates grow.

We offer materials and training to help you learn how to deliver and receive feedback. Below are some tips to help guide you when giving feedback.

- [This article](#) is a great guide for those new to giving feedback.
- Ask yourself: “How can I be extremely direct and extremely kind in this conversation?”
- Lead with your intentions. Share why you are sharing.
- Bring concrete examples.
- Consider using the framework: “When you did X, it made me feel Y.” This will ensure you are talking about a behavior and not attacking a person.

# #4

## Move fast as hell

Err in favor of action and speed. Ask yourself, “Is this the fastest way I can test my hypothesis?”

- You will hear team members talk about 80 / 20 solutions on a daily basis.  
This means they are seeking the solution that gets them 80% of the impact with 20% of the time investment.
- End work conversations with “\_\_(person)\_\_\_ will do \_\_(action)\_\_\_ by \_\_(date/time)\_\_\_” to ensure next steps are clear and a timeline is agreed upon by you and your teammates.
- Operate with a sense of urgency. If you are unsure about whether you move with enough urgency, seek feedback from your peers.

Speed can be a controversial topic, so it requires clarification.

Speed at Patreon DOES NOT mean:

- Cutting corners
- Deciding in isolation to reduce scope
- Performing sloppy work
- Excluding key stakeholders
- Shifting responsibility to another teammate

Speed at Patreon DOES mean:

- Decisions that increase speed in the long term so that we keep speed as a competitive advantage against larger companies.
- Short feedback cycles and iteration
- Rapid experimentation before selecting a proper scope/investment

## Seek learning

We want to surround ourselves with people who are obsessed with learning and development.

- Patreon will pay for you to take the extra class or attend the workshop. Investing in you is the best investment Patreon can make.
- Our employee handbook has all of the details about our learning benefits.
- We recommend you find several mentors, both internally and externally. Ask your manager for help finding a mentor if you have trouble and we will do our best to connect you with someone you look up to.



In Asana, many teammates publish their personal development goals so that they can receive help and support from teammates.

☆ **Personal Development Objectives** ▾

List Conversations Calendar Progress Files

TP [User Icons] +  
Shared with ALL STAFF

✓ HOW TO USE >

**Seeking Learning [Work Related]:**

- ✓ Work on the most impactful things that push Patreon's mission forward most. Say "no" to things that are not tr TP
- ✓ Learning Python via Codecademy and Udemy 1♥ TP >
- ✓ Getting better at leading projects 4♥ [User Icon]
- ✓ Writing more efficiently & effectively 1♥ [User Icon]
- ✓ Self-sufficient SQL 1♥ [User Icon]
- ✓ Making Data-Driven Decisions 2♥ [User Icon]
- ✓ Asana best practices/ tips/ better utilization [User Icon]
- ✓ Online Forum Moderation Strategies/Best Practices [User Icon]
- ✓ Being a great manager 8♥ [User Icon]
- ✓ Not avoiding conflict 1♥ [User Icon]
- ✓ Building structures, systems, and processes [User Icon]
- ✓ Focusing on only the most important things, letting other things go 1♥ [User Icon]
- ✓ Database Internals 1♥ [User Icon]

**DESCRIPTION**

1. Read through the tasks. If you see an area where you want to learn, ♥ it and comment to coordinate with other learners or mentors!

2. Add tasks for areas where you're seeking learning or able to offer learning and assign yourself.

3. Get to learning from and with the amazing talented people of Patreon!!

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Also feel free to hang out in the [See more...](#)

# #6

## Respect your teammates' time

**We are students of communication. We place high value on clear and succinct communicators.**

Time is our most precious resource and we treat it that way. In order to move fast as hell, we need to respect each other's time.

When it comes to our work, if you can have a conversation in two minutes instead of ten, we expect it to happen in two minutes.

Do not be long-winded. Think about what you need to say before approaching a teammate.

## #6

# Respect your teammates' time

Our VP of Growth and Marketing, Adam Fishman says it best:

Patreon turns good communicators into great communicators. If you are a poor communicator, a career at Patreon will not work out for you.

# #6

## Respect your teammates' time

We don't want to sit in boring meetings and we don't want you sitting in boring meetings. Below are our meeting expectations:

- **Ask yourself if a meeting is the best way to solve your problem before calling one.** Is it possible to solve your problem or gather the info you need over Asana, Slack, or email?
- **Each meeting should have an owner** and that owner should arrive with a set agenda, keep the group on track, and help the group progress quickly towards the goal of the meeting.
- **Default your meetings to 25 or 50 minutes.**
- **Attendees can and should leave during a meeting** if they are not receiving or adding significant value. This is not seen as "rude" at Patreon. It's seen as valuing time and aiming to be maximally productive.
- **Aim to have as few attendees as possible in your meeting.** If there are additional stakeholders who could have joined the meeting, take notes and send them to stakeholders afterward.
- **Give each other feedback.** Because each meeting is unique, it's tough to have guidelines that work for every situation. The best thing we can do is give each other feedback if meetings don't feel as productive as you want.

# #6

## Respect your teammates' time

Here is an example of this behavior in practice:

We once had someone walk out of the cultural onboarding session at Patreon.

At other companies, this might be an unheard of thing to do on your first day. At Patreon, this action is used as an example of how to use your time effectively.

For context, this individual cared deeply about the culture of their next company, so they heavily researched it. Before joining, several teammates shared elements of this deck multiple times and the individual practically had it memorized.

In a direct and kind way, the individual stood up and said, “I think I could find a way to use this time more impactfully for Patreon. I feel knowledgeable about the material you’re covering, and would love to use this time to get up to speed on items I am less familiar with. Would it be ok if I dipped out?”

**Kind. Direct. Acceptable.**

## Just fix it

Seek to define the undefined.

- Some things at Patreon are defined well and some things are not. If you find something that could use more definition, please bring solutions to the table with a positive attitude.
- Hunt for ways to improve our company and our product. You can either complain when something is broken, or fix it.

# Core Behaviors Recap

We don't like the term "culture fit" at Patreon. We look for "culture add" and "core behavior fit." We hire people who bring new experiences, backgrounds and perspectives to the table, but you must demonstrate these behaviors to succeed at Patreon.

1. Put creators first
2. Be an energy giver
3. Be candid, always
4. Move fast as hell
5. Seek learning
6. Respect your teammates' time
7. Just fix it

Thanks to Patreon creator Li of [Exocomics](#), you will be reminded of our core behaviors every day in our cafe.







**We operate with complete transparency to give our team the context needed to make great decisions.**



## Patreon chooses transparency. However, we should be aware of the potential downsides:

- Key information could leak and damage the company.
- The team could feel information overload via oversharing.
- Information could be misinterpreted without proper context.
- Folks might share problems before having solutions; too much of that could shake confidence in leadership.

Despite these costs, we operate with high transparency to give our team the context they need to make great decisions.

# Here are things we do to disseminate important information:

- We hold open Q&A at all hands meetings
- The Executive team weekly agenda is public in Asana
- 20% of Executive team meetings are open attendance for the entire company
- All weekly team meetings have public agendas viewable in Asana
- We share board meeting notes and takeaways with the company after each meeting
- All metrics for the business are available in public dashboards
- Data Science and Finance present on company growth and our financial plan every month
- Each time we do a company-wide employee engagement survey, we share results and our actionable next steps
- All team goals are published in a single place and can be tracked by anyone at Patreon

We will continue to share all of the top-level company information with the team until information is leaked and we cannot. We are yet to have any sensitive information or materials leak.

So long as this is true, we will continue operating this way. There may come a time when we need to change this, but we would like to delay that as long as possible.

# Manager Expectations

**Managers at Patreon are expected to invest in their team by helping prioritize, coaching instead of telling, and providing visibility on their team's impact.**

# To be a manager at Patreon:

- **Care deeply about your teammates**
  - Invest in their success, happiness, and productivity
  - Our beliefs and manager expectations are influenced heavily by [Google's Project Oxygen](#)
- **Recruit and retain only top talent that deliver outstanding results on ambitious goals**
  - While we see value in appreciating and praising effort, we make our decisions based on impact individuals have to the business
- **Build a diverse and inclusive environment**
  - This is so important that it has its own section later in the deck
- **Ensure your team is working on only the highest impact projects**
  - Every hour at Patreon is important. Time not spent on the most impactful work is time wasted.
  - Build a system to make sure individuals on your team have the right context to set the right priorities
- **Measure and provide visibility into the team's progress**
  - Include your most impactful objectives in Patreon's quarterly battle plan.



Given that we are knowledge workers who work with information and not assembly line workers, the best way to level up the company is to level up our problem solving abilities.

For this reason, we ask our managers to invest in their team's development via coaching. We prefer to hire and retain “coaching” managers who help teammates think through their challenges over “teaching” managers who give advice.

Coaches ask questions and build problem solving muscles. Teachers give advice.  
We prefer the former.

If you feel you are not receiving strong coaching or guidance from your manager, give them that feedback. Help Patreon hold your manager to a high standard and tell them if you would like more or less direction in your work.





McKinsey & Company analysis (and several other studies) shows that diverse and inclusive teams outperform teams that lack diversity and inclusivity.

We must be a team that is as diverse and wonderful as the community of creators and patrons we seek to serve. It's the right thing to do.

We want ideas at Patreon to be challenged by different ideas to ensure we land on the best thing for Patreon. That world cannot exist without a diverse team with various perspectives.

# We put our money where our mouth is when it comes to building a diverse and inclusive environment

- We participate in Project Include.
- We have a program for teammate driven Employee Resource Groups (ERG's).
- We have a Slack channel #diversity to facilitate conversation and information-sharing.
- We have a Diversity and Inclusion Census to collect data that helps us to report on fairness across things like compensation, promotions and other resources.
- All restrooms are gender neutral at Patreon.
- We apply the lens of diversity to our hiring practices by implementing the Rooney Rule.
- We put all managers through Diversity and Inclusion training and expect all hiring managers to build diverse and inclusive teams.
- We have company-wide training sessions each quarter focused on diversity and inclusion.
- We do not shy away from tough conversations around diversity and inclusion and, as with all conversations at Patreon, we ask that these conversations are direct and done with compassion.
- We've audited our benefits to be more inclusive: we've included packages for mental health support, transgender support, as well as conception and fertility packages for all kinds of partners.
- Each team sets inclusivity-based OKRs. We aim to be champions in this space.

# Diversity and Inclusion messaging is important to us

There is no such thing as a diverse “candidate” or “person.”

Please do not use that language.

“Teams” can be diverse or lack diversity, not individuals.

Also, some teammates prefer gender neutral pronouns. You can find pronoun preference in each person’s Slack bio.

If someone slips up and uses improper language, speak up and correct them with compassion. Remember, all feedback at Patreon is KIND and DIRECT.

Spending



**Running a business on 5% of processed payments is challenging. We must be prudent with our spending.**

# Spending

**Patreon raised significant amounts of venture capital for 3 reasons:**

1. It allows us to focus on our work rather than continual fundraising
2. It allows us to make decisions that benefit us in the long term vs. short term
3. It allows us to take big bets when we see a promising opportunity

**We did not raise money so that we could spend lavishly**

# How we think about our spending

## **If it's important and/or crucial to our success:**

Spend and get the thing you need if it inspires you to do better work and materially improves our ability to fund the emerging creative class

## **If it's not important or crucial to our success:**

Pinch pennies and be ruthless in our saving (company travel, office pens, snacks)

# The bottom line

We would want our creators to approve of every spend we make. That's why you won't see things like ball-pits or pinball machines at Patreon.

When creators visit our office, we want them to have confidence that we're not building extravagance off the backs of their paychecks.

# People

**We recruit and retain high-performing and highly  
compassionate people. You cannot be just one of  
those things.**

# We hire and retain world class talent only

When thinking about whom to hire or keep on your team, ask yourself,  
**“Is this individual world class at what they do?”**

We hire people who are actually here to help creators get paid and that's what makes this place really unique.

In our most recent company-wide survey, 100% of our teammates answered “Yes” when asked the question “Is the work that your company does important?”

95% of the company responded that they understand how their individual work directly contributes to the company mission.

We are also externally recognized for our team. The San Francisco Business Times named Patreon one of the top places to work in 2017, and we were named to similar lists in 2016.

People stay at Patreon because they love their teammates and our mission. Our employee attrition rate is ~1/3rd the national average.



Because we hire people who genuinely care about our mission, we can give more autonomy and trust.

**This is why our people decide what they work on.**

During company planning, the executive team shares a vision, strategy, and strategic objectives based on insights and feedback from the company. **From there, our teams decide what they want to build to support the strategy.**

If one falls short of our high expectations, they will know about it because we give and receive candid feedback constantly.

We help our teammates through tough times, just as we expect our teammates to stick with Patreon through tough times - to the extent that it serves our mission.

We don't expect anyone to stay with Patreon if we aren't the best way to fund the creative class. And Patreon won't retain someone if having them on our team is not the best way to achieve our mission.





In my mind, it would be a success if sharing this deck inspired even a handful of folks to consider adjusting 1-2 things at their companies. If anything in this post did inspire you to adjust/create/build something at your company, I would be excited to hear about it.

Or, if this deck helped you make a decision as to whether or not Patreon was right for you, then I hope to see you in our onboarding session soon.

Tyler Palmer

VP Operations, Patreon

Say hello: [tyler@patreon.com](mailto:tyler@patreon.com)



# We look at what the market demands for your skills, talents, and experience.

We use a combination of Option Impact, Option Driver, and Radford to get this data.

We expect our teammates to grow at a healthy cadence  
and our compensation packages grow accordingly.

Our compensation rewards impact on the mission over years of experience.

Our management track is not compensated higher than our individual contributor track.

Both types of work are valued and you can have success here on either track.

# We use the employee-friendly Wealthfront equity plan to reward teammates

You can receive equity 4 ways at Patreon:

1. When you are hired
2. When you are promoted
3. When you are deemed a top performer
4. When you hit 2.5 years and every year thereafter

# Promotions at Patreon

Promotions happen when a significant shift in responsibility occurs, as soon as a candidate deserves it. We do not wait for a certain “time of the year.”

All teams have compensation bands and levels to properly tie skills and experience to compensation. You are encouraged to talk to your manager about where you currently stand and where you would need to develop to reach the next step in your career.