How We *Do Things*
v.2

Hinge

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How We Do Things

How We Got Here

Justin McLeod → Hinge's 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 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 redesigned 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. As of 2021, 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 four principles. The first edition of this book was published in 2021. For this version, we've refined some of the key ideas based on what we've learned since then and how our organization has evolved. Just like last time, we asked Hinge team members to tell their own stories to 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 the United Nations. 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.

Mission & Vision

Our Mission

Inspire intimate connection to create a less lonely world.

Our Vision

The most trusted way to find a relationship, for all.

Our Core Values

Authenticity

We share—never hide—our words, actions, and intentions.

Courage

We embrace lofty goals and tough challenges.

Empathy

We deeply consider the perspectives of others.

How We Do Things

ACE values function like a venn diagram and work best at the intersection of all three. When we over-index on one value, we inherently risk the integrity of the other two. Real authenticity comes from caring about the values of others. But we can't do that without equal amounts of courage and empathy. To live at the core of all three, we must regularly practice and demonstrate each one, all at once.

This looks like: Embracing radically candid behavior in every interaction. We care deeply about others while maintaining our truthfulness. Authenticity is an act of selfless individuality and great honesty.

This looks like: Not being afraid to fail, no matter how scary failure might feel. We give ourselves enough grace to openly share our thoughts and opinions. Each ambitious goal we set and each act of honesty are innately courageous. Courage is taking calculated risks and understanding how to navigate murky waters.

This looks like: Having a keen awareness of the perspective of others. We practice radical compassion and seek to learn more about what we don't understand. We see empathy as a powerful tool for cultivating relationships, building emotional intelligence, and resolving conflicts.

Love the Problem

How We Do Things

The original idea for Hinge, a friends-of-friends dating app, was a solution to a very specific problem: ending the stigma of online dating for American twenty-somethings. (This was 2011, when "dating app" wasn't even a term and most people didn't meet online.) We wanted to change that and help this demographic get out on great dates. However, it wasn't long before we started developing a lot of new "solutions" that didn't have anything to do with that. In retrospect, we sometimes weren't even sure what problem we were trying to solve in the first place.

The main issue was that we had too many goals, and achieving those goals didn't actually help our users. We were focused on engagement: growth, retention, and time-in-app. We lost sight of why our users came to us in the first place, which was to go on great dates that led to relationships.

At the same time, we had developed an unhealthy obsession with our competition. Other apps were growing faster and shipping new, head-turning features. We would spend our time copying them and, therefore always be a step behind.

We also tended to get distracted by shiny new things: off-the-cuff feature ideas or the hottest new technology. But we've come to realize that just because a solution is new or exciting, it doesn't make it the right one for Hinge. This is something we're thinking about a lot today, given the explosion of AI across consumer apps.

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While novel features and technologies have the potential to be transformative for our business, they only achieve that potential when they are grounded in a deep understanding of the actual problem we're trying to solve.

"Love the Problem" is our first and most foundational principle.

And the ultimate problem we are here to solve is getting users off our app and into relationships—hence our tagline,

"Designed to be Deleted."

How We Do Things

It seems counterintuitive. Skeptics often question the wisdom of driving users off our app. But if they stay on Hinge forever, we're not solving the main problem.

> On the other hand, every time we improve the quality of our matches, we grow faster.

That's because happy new couples do the marketing for us, spreading the word about Hinge to their friends and networks. Over and over, when we focus on the problems that matter to our users, the scoreboard takes care of itself.

Defining the Problem

How We Do Things

The first step to solving a hard problem is to define and deeply understand it.

It can be tempting—especially when we're excited—to jump straight to building solutions. But having the patience to dig deeper into the nuance of a problem (for example, *who* is actually experiencing it? What are the root causes?) usually makes the difference between finding a solution that's good enough and one that's great.

When we develop conviction on an important user problem, it gives us the patience to solve it––even if the path to get there is long.

Some companies think of innovation as a numbers game—throwing a bunch of minimum viable product (MVP) features against the proverbial wall to see what sticks. And while we do believe in iterative development and testing to learn, we believe that's a tool for executing strategy—not determining it. When we commit to a problem and hone in on it, we can endure the early failures and false negatives inherent to any major innovation.

Business Problems are User Problems in Disguise

Our number one problem at Hinge is getting our users out on great dates.

But as a growing global business, there are inevitably other important problems that need solving.

How We Do Things

Some are user problems—like safety—while others are categorized as more traditional "business problems" like revenue growth, publicity, and regulatory compliance. But here's the thing:

almost every "business problem" can be solved more effectively and sustainably when it's reframed as a user problem. For instance, instead of jumping to a flashy new marketing campaign to increase users, we ask ourselves: What problems are non-users facing that might make them reluctant to try Hinge?

The same process goes for government regulations. Rather than just satisfying a legal requirement, we also want to understand the underlying intent of policy (for instance, a desire to protect sensitive user data) and then create a long-term, sustainable solution that addresses that intent directly.

This even applies to "internal problems" related to things like HR, tech platforms, or business intelligence. Here, the "users" are actually employees at Hinge. In these cases, we still work to understand and empathize with the needs of our respective stakeholders. This lets us design internal tools and programs that serve our end goals of maximizing employee productivity and fulfillment.
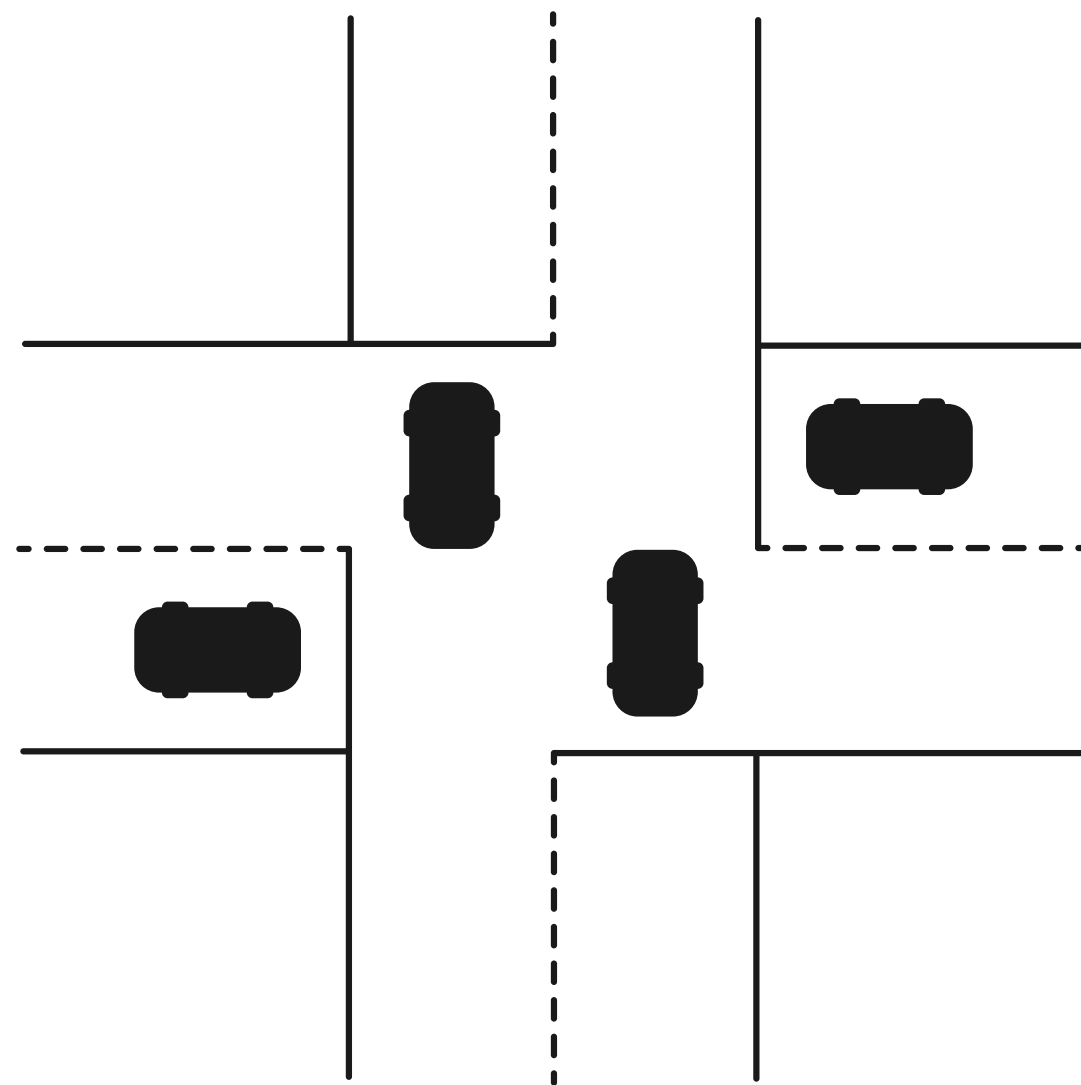
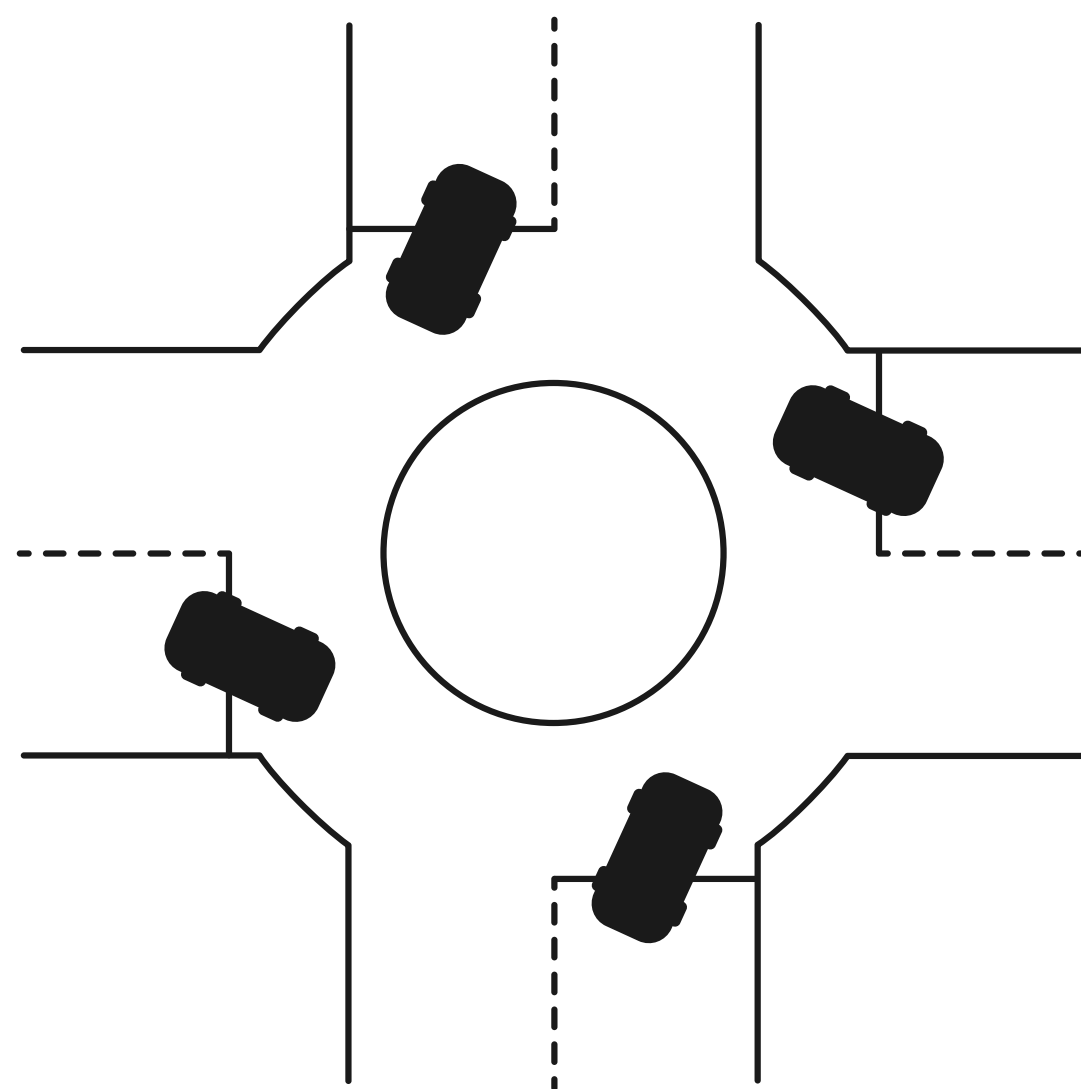## Keep in Mind

01: Listen, But Don't Always Follow

The insights we receive from users should serve as information and inspiration—not as directives. Most of the time, real innovation means solving a problem for users in a way they didn't exactly ask for. As the famous (misattributed) quote from Henry Ford goes, "If I had asked people what they wanted, they would have said faster horses."

02: Build With, Not For

03: Context is Key

Expected


**Unconventional**

Keep in Mind

02: Build With, Not For

To build the best product, we must understand the problems *all* users face—not just the most visible ones. A great way to do that is by including marginalized or in-need users in our design and research process, ideally from the very beginning. We've seen repeatedly that when we focus on these users and their needs, we often end up building the best solutions for everyone.
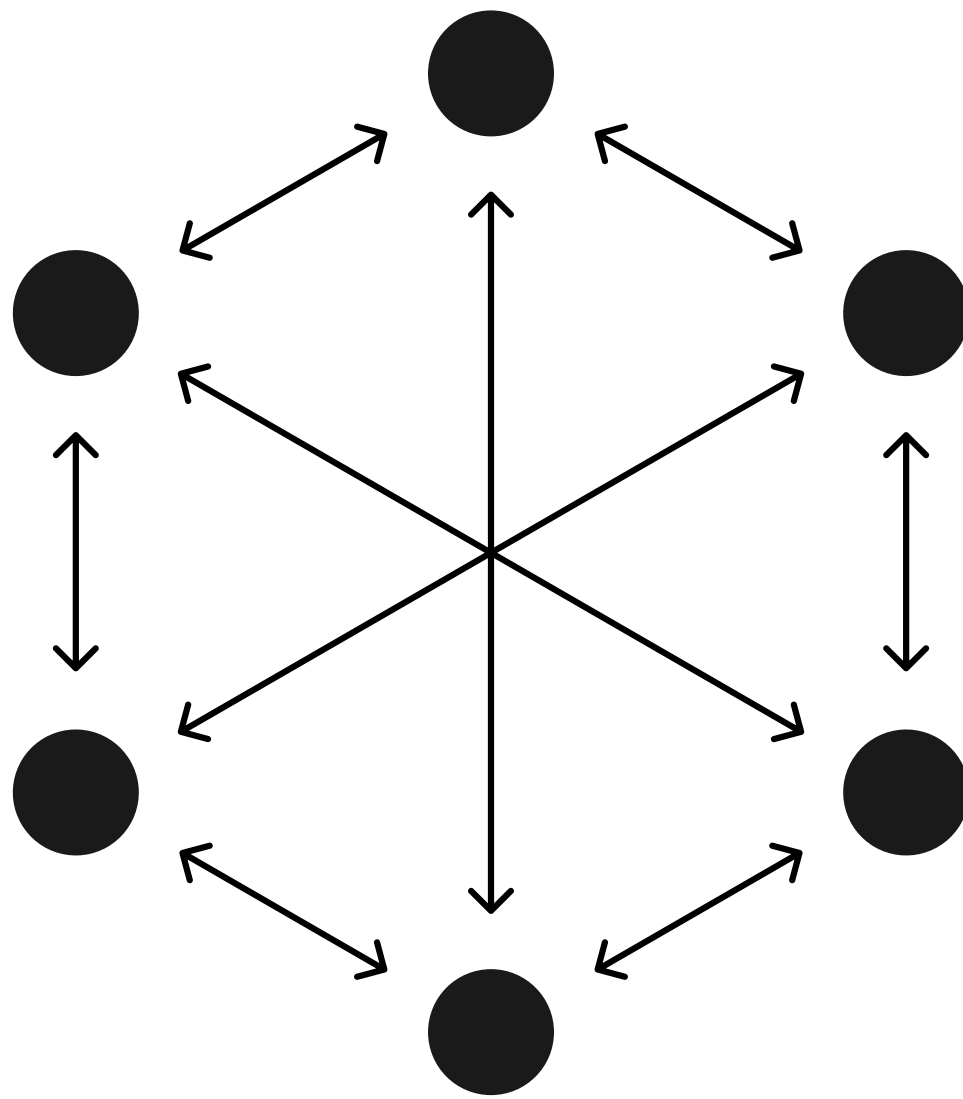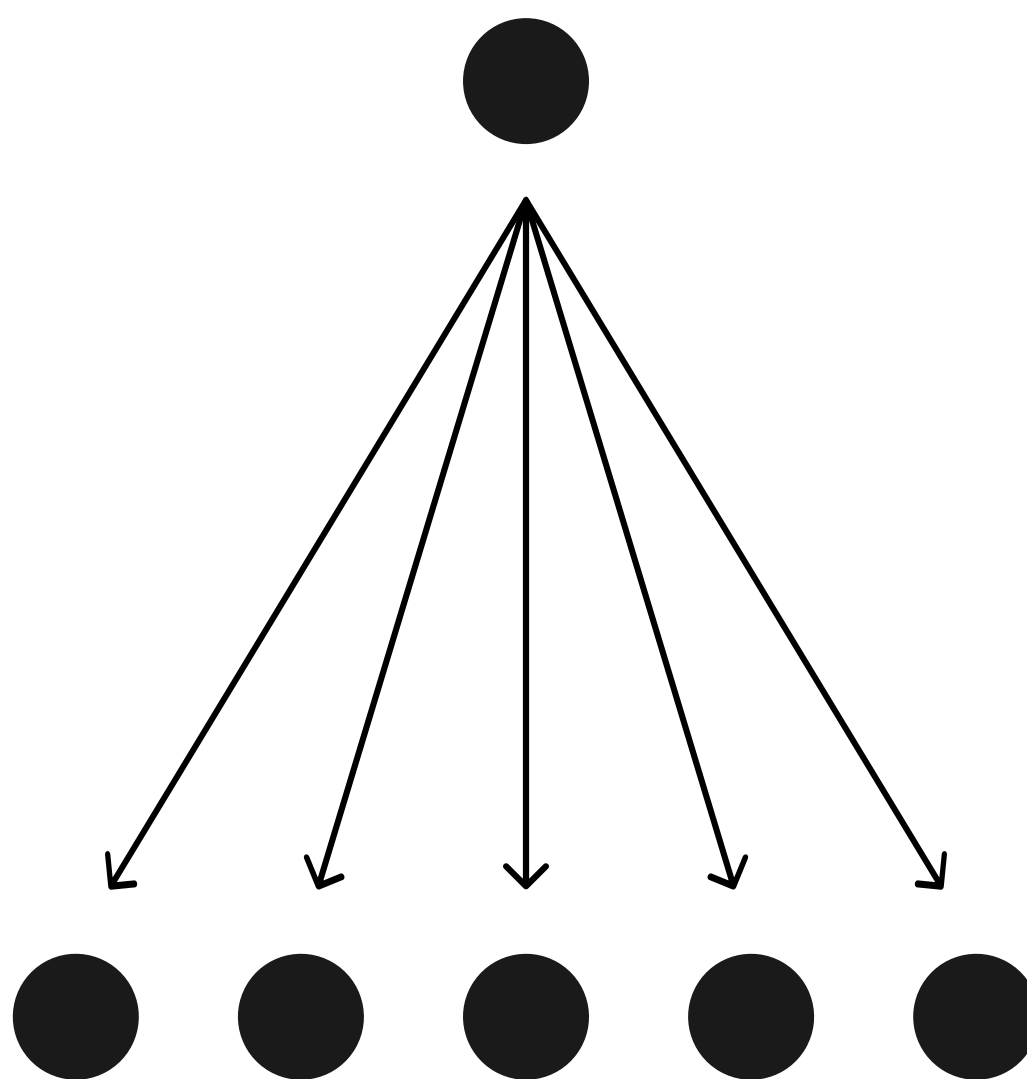
Build with

Not for

Keep in Mind

01: Listen, But Don't Always Follow

02: Build With, Not For

03: Context is Key

Understanding the user is necessary, but not sufficient, to find the right solution. Hinge and its customers exist within a complex, evolving culture that shapes how the app is received and used. As emerging technologies like AI make completely new solutions possible, we need to be especially careful to understand the wider cultural and technological contexts.
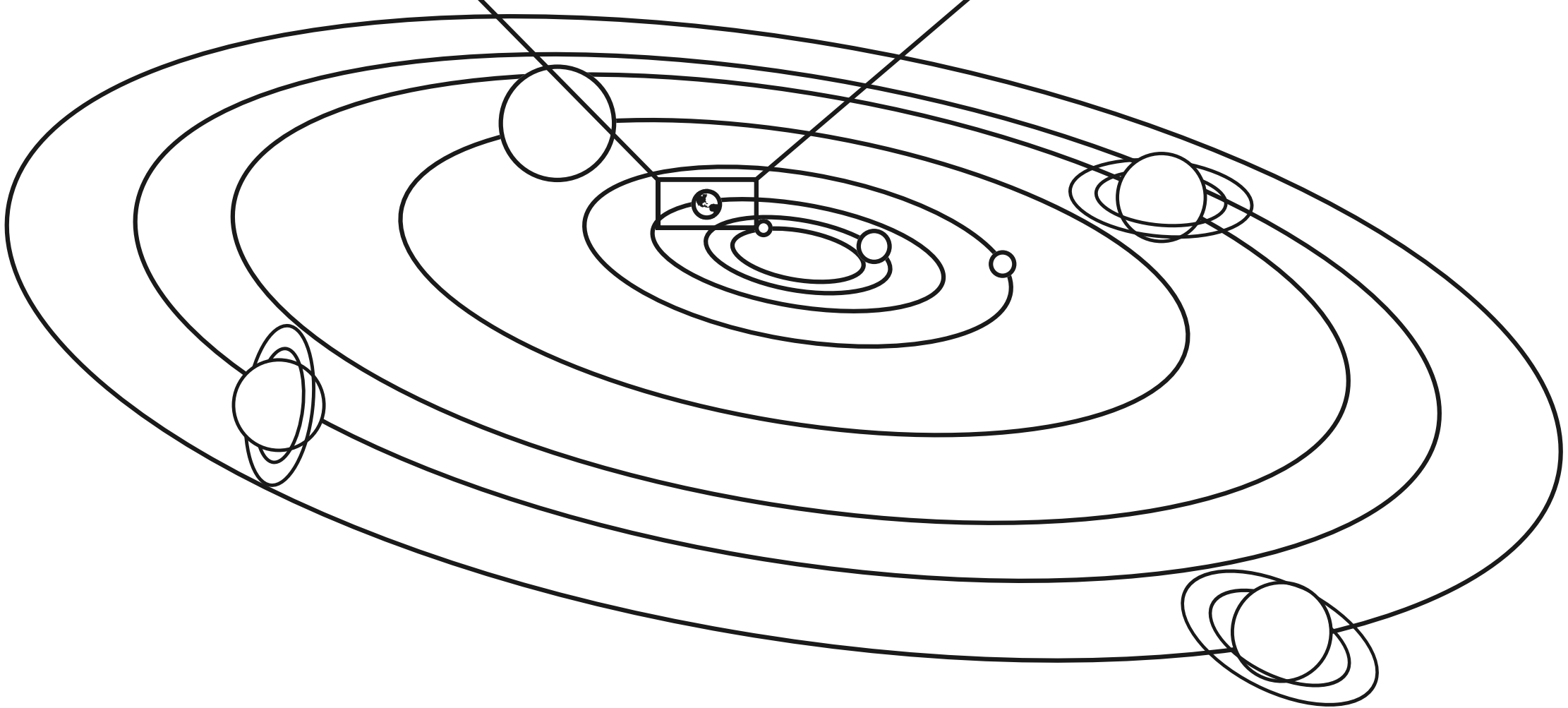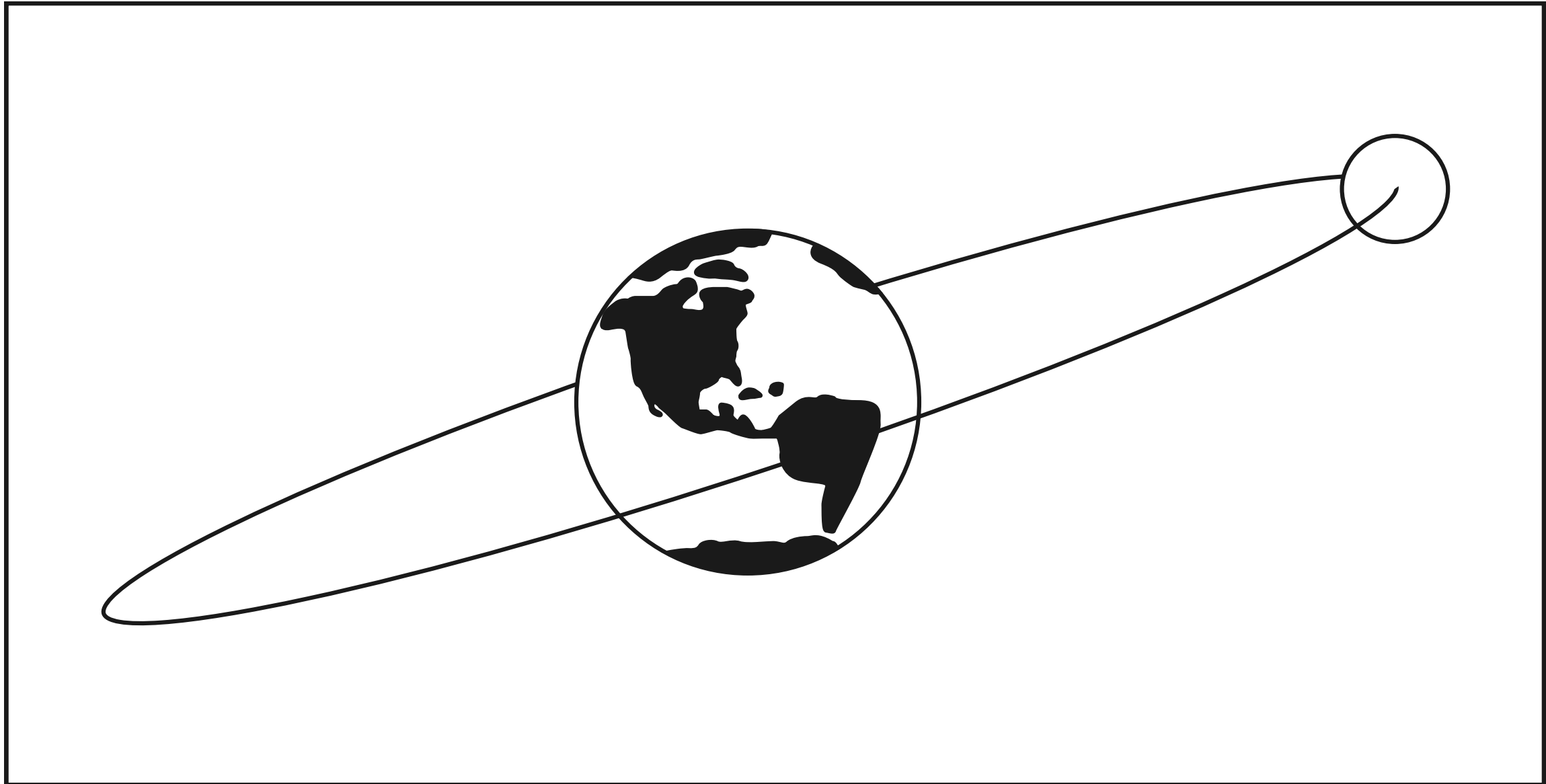
The Most Important Number

Stéphane Taine → **Chief Product Officer**

Any company needs to ensure that the metrics it uses to gauge success line up with its core mission. For years, the #1 metric at Hinge was GDPU (Great Dates Per User). But in 2023, we realized GDPU might be leading us astray. The major concern was that it's easily distorted: more great dates per user doesn't mean a larger number of people are going on great dates. Instead, a small minority of highly active daters could be pulling up the numbers. And facilitating a lot of dates for a small number of people is not our mission

So, that year, we decided to change our guiding metric to Monthly Average Daters (MAD)—the percentage of active users who actually go on a date each month.

This is a far better reflection of our goals as a business. While the results of this shift—and the product decisions related to it—are ongoing, there is a basic lesson here: to focus on the right set of solutions, you need to get ridiculously clear on what you're actually trying to solve.

The State of the User Base

Elaine Cheung → **Lead UX Researcher**

Emily Hittner → **VP, Research**

Hinge exists to help our users go on great dates. But in 2021, we learned through an internal survey that only about half of employees felt they truly understood the Hinge user experience or core user needs. How could we "love the problem" if half our team didn't fully understand it?

Later that year, Hinge Labs created the State of the User Base (SOTUB). In that first presentation, we took Hinge employees on a deep dive through our users' dating journeys. We covered the composition of our user base, shared user stories, and reported on some of their key pain points using the app. In the four years since, this quarterly presentation has become a cultural pillar at the company, anchoring teams to the real needs of users. We also bring in presenters from across disciplines, including research, design, product, marketing, and data science, to deepen our understanding.

"Loving the problem" through SOTUB has produced material results. Over the past three years, Hinge has increased the percentage of employees who understand the user experience from 53% to 85%. Few companies even measure this, and even fewer attain that level of knowledge.

SOTUB has also directly influenced product development. Since the onset of SOTUB, users have consistently named non-responsiveness in chat among their biggest pain points. Out of this insight, Hinge Labs conducted follow-up research to explore a few different ways to limit unresponsiveness. We found that users didn't respond well to many of the constraints that were common across other apps, like timers and fixed limits on the number of matches you could have at a time. Instead, they preferred features that limited negative behavior while preserving users' autonomy—for example, limits on the number of unanswered messages. This work inspired Hinge's Interaction team to design Your Turn Limits, a first-to-market feature that helped to limit unanswered messages and keep users focused on quality conversations.

Hidden Words

Courtney Nam → Product Director, Trust & Safety

Some users don't want to see certain kinds of inbound messages. So, we built the Hidden Words feature to let users proactively filter out unwanted engagements based on a list of keywords we selected as a company.

> But we soon realized we were solving a problem before truly understanding it. We needed to "build with, not for"—that is, partner directly with the communities most commonly experiencing the problem, namely, trans and BIPOC users. When we did, we quickly learned that they wanted to be able to select words for themselves.

Now, users can build their own custom list of words, emojis, or phrases based on their unique needs—rather than us selecting for them. These types of adjustments may seem minor, but they have an outsized impact on our users' experiences. And giving users from these communities this kind of autonomy helps to build long-term trust. The feel of features like Hidden Words could be the difference between going on a great date or leaving the platform all together.

Keep It Simple

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How We Do Things

When we built the very first version of Hinge in 2011, it had *so many* features. As a friends-of-friends dating app, we wanted to make it fun and social. You could answer questions about your friends to help them build out their profiles. You could see which of your friends were getting the most attention. You could send many different types of likes that demonstrated varying levels of interest. And...virtually no one used it. People were confused and overwhelmed. Plus, doing so many things meant we couldn't focus on doing any one thing particularly well.

Today at Hinge, "loving the problem" can lead to a ton of new ideas for solutions. That's not a bad thing. The "wonder phase" of innovation is absolutely essential, as it's critical to explore and flesh out all kinds of ways to potentially solve a problem.

That said, it is important to remember that every additional feature, system, or program makes our business more complex and can add technical and/or organizational debt. Most of us know that intuitively. But in practice, companies that reach Hinge's size tend to sprawl. Employees pursue experiments that have little to do with core values or goals. Users end up with screens cluttered with so many features that they forget why they're on the app in the first place.

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Keeping it simple is how we build world-class solutions.

How We Do Things

We are extremely selective about which projects we choose to work on—and when we do focus on something, we seek to make it as elegant and simple as possible.

Staying Focused

Energy spent adding new features comes at the cost of refining what already exists.

And refinement is always necessary: most of the best improvements to the business have come from iterating on what already exists, not adding new things.

Our signature feature, Prompts, is the quintessential example. Over time, we've refined and categorized the questions, created custom questions for specific groups, added the ability to respond with rich media, et cetera. But despite all this work, it still feels like one simple feature rather than a host of new ones.

In a crowded, competitive market, it is always better to do a few things extremely well than a lot of things just okay.

Elegance and Simplicity

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For us, keeping it simple means striving for elegance and simplicity.

Think the original iPhone or Audrey Hepburn's dress from *Breakfast at Tiffany's.*

Achieving this level of quality demands consistent, long-term attention to detail—and requires being really selective.

We work to "keep it simple" across every detail at Hinge. You'll also see this principle in our marketing campaigns and in our office decor. Even the app itself is still mostly black and white.

And the bigger Hinge gets, the more important keeping it simple becomes.
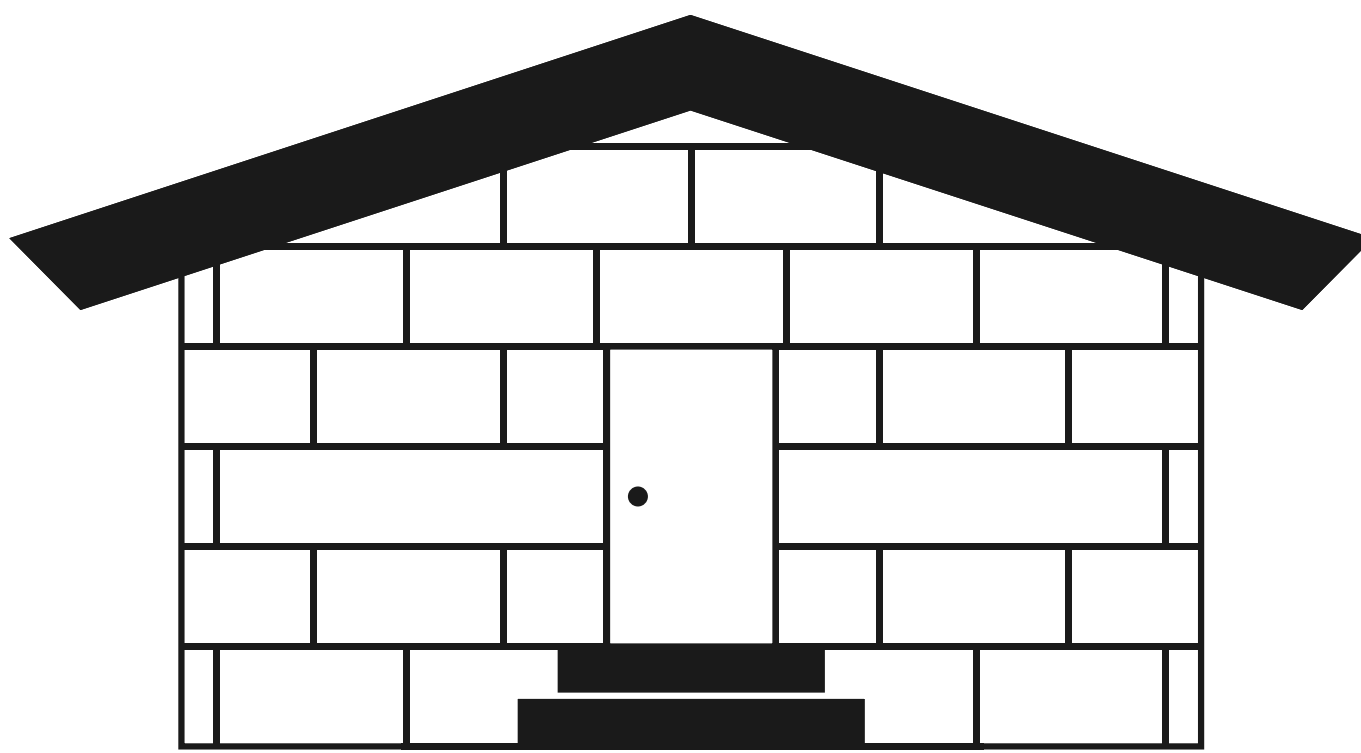
Keep in Mind

01: Nothing Lasts Forever

Even the most elegant and simple systems decay over time without new infusions of energy. While we work hard to refine and maintain what we have, this isn't always enough. Sometimes, we simply need to scrap what has been successful in the past and rebuild from scratch.

### 02: Build from Strength
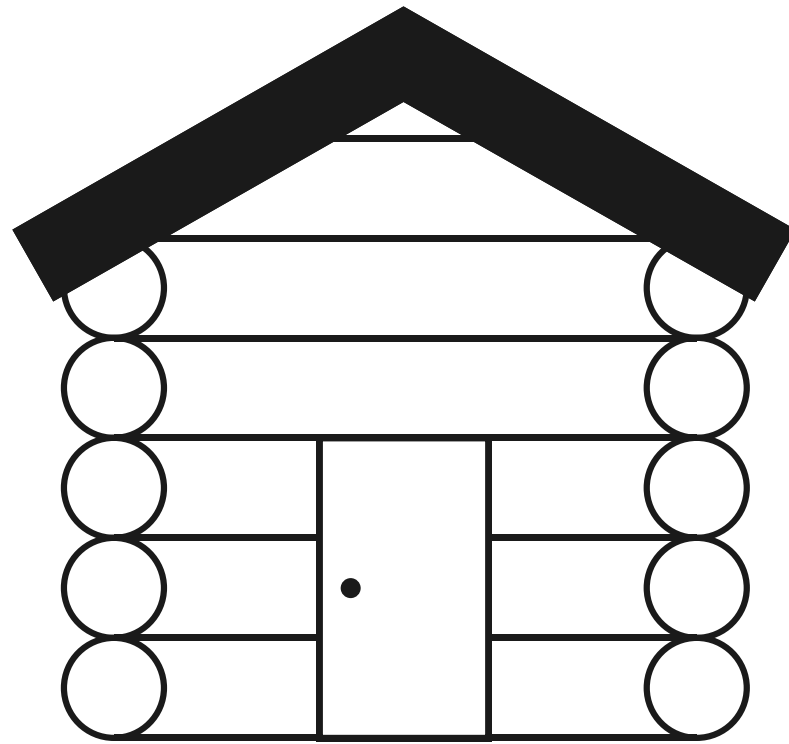
Successful past

Rebuilt future

Keep in Mind

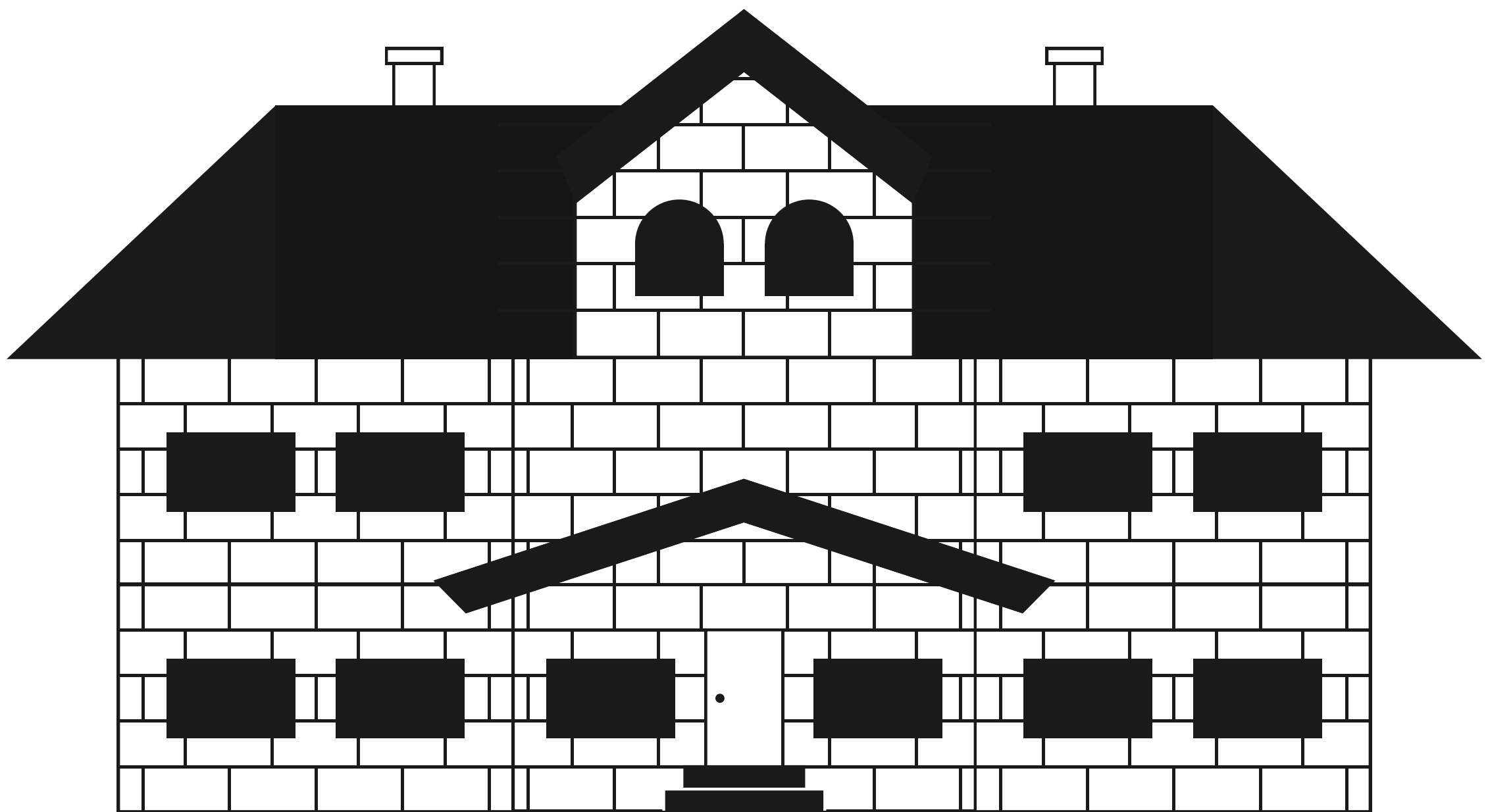## 02: Build from Strength

Of course, we're a business and we need to grow. But we never launch an initiative or enter a new market to compensate for weakness. First, we fix what's not working. Then, we build outward from a foundation of knowledge and success. (You don't hire an architect to build a new wing of your house until you've fixed the plumbing!)
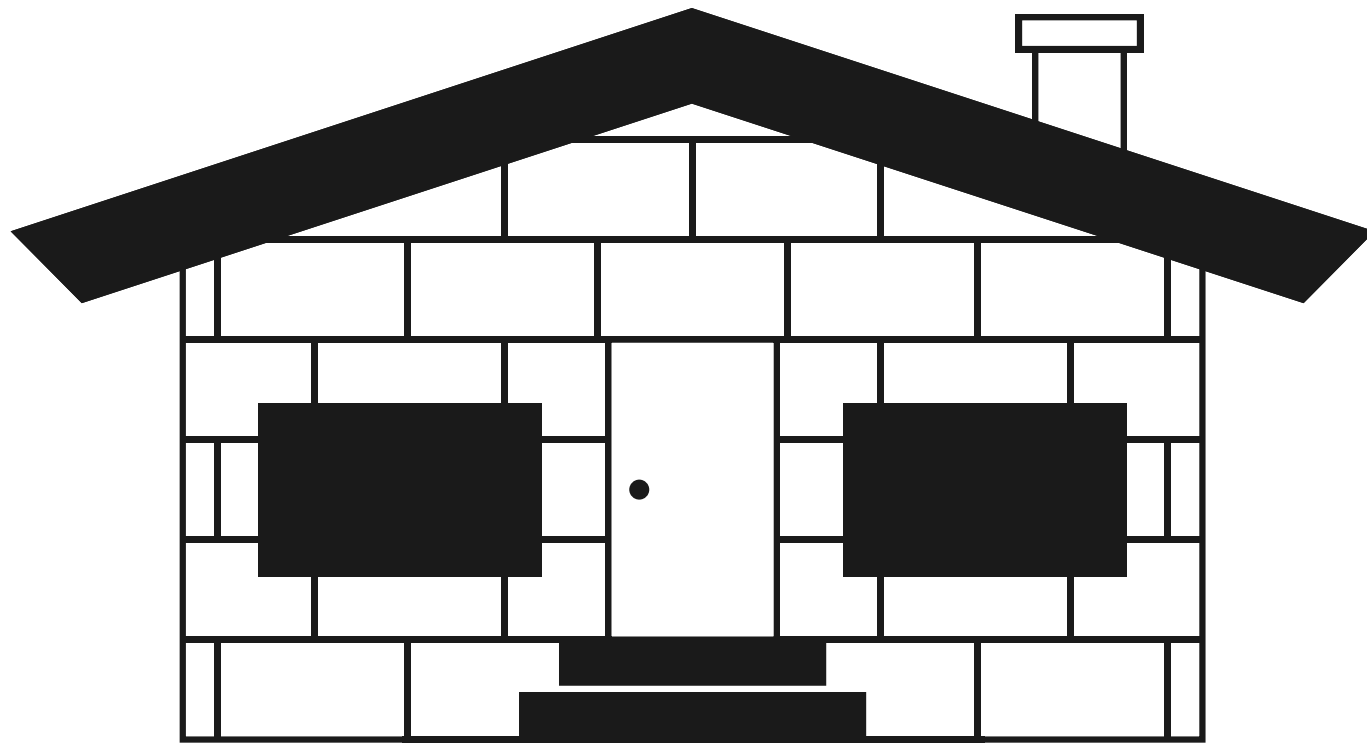
Fix what's not working

Build outward

Studying Abroad

Nikki Hunt → VP, Global Marketing

Historically, Hinge was only available in a handful of English-speaking countries. But in 2021, we finally decided to expand internationally. We didn't wait that long due to lack of demand. We waited because each new market is exceptionally complex. Dating practices can be incredibly different across borders. And rushing into countries too fast without properly studying cultural norms, regulations, and safety concerns could have been a disaster.

So, we took it slow—one country at a time, starting with Germany. The lessons from each launch were extensive, to say the least. For instance, in France, we quickly learned that direct translations of our English-language prompts weren't landing. As one survey respondent wrote, "These sound like my grandma wrote them." *Merde*. Now, we're keenly aware of how important it is to get tone and language right. And we know that, wherever we launch, we must work with local talent to tailor our product and marketing copy to the specific audience we're serving.

In this case, "keeping it simple" meant saying no to seven launches so we could carefully focus on one. And the results speak for themselves: we've grown over 500% in European markets since first launching in 2022.

Keeping Our Header Above Water

Molly Boyd → **Senior Lead Product Designer**

It might sound nuts, but it's true: we've spent hundreds of hours laboring over the 200-pixel header atop each profile. But I think our journey in designing this tiny space is a great example of keeping things simple amidst a maelstrom of competing priorities.

Originally, the header was just a name at the top of the profile. Then, we brought in indicators of whether a user was active that day, followed by badges for new users. Next, we added preferred pronouns. After that came the "pills" ("Nearby", "Compatible", etc.), selfie-verification, and finally voice pronunciation. Our 200-pixel header had become something of a party.

Here's the thing: there is a case (and often a very good one) to be made for each of these elements being at the top of the profile. And behind each is an entire team (Trust and Safety, Growth, Core Experience) with a long list of quarterly goals. Still, the outcome is the same: too many ideas, too little space.

> Our solution had two components. First, we created a hierarchy with clear rules about what is truly the most important information on a particular page. Second, we defaulted to elegance and leaned on the minimalist design system we've built at Hinge (heavily inspired by brands like Nike, Apple, and *The New York Times*).

These principles led us to the clean and impactful header we have today. By staying disciplined and working to keep it simple, we've been able to protect Hinge's UX from bloat and decay.

Lessons in Chemistry

Mitch LaPoff → Lead Product Manager, Dating Outcomes

Courtney Lett → Lead UX Researcher

Beginning in 2021, we began to explore incorporating voice and audio into Hinge. We knew that voice provided a layer of intimacy and vulnerability that our users craved and could help establish chemistry in a way that text and images simply could not. But including voice could also fundamentally change how Hinge was used.
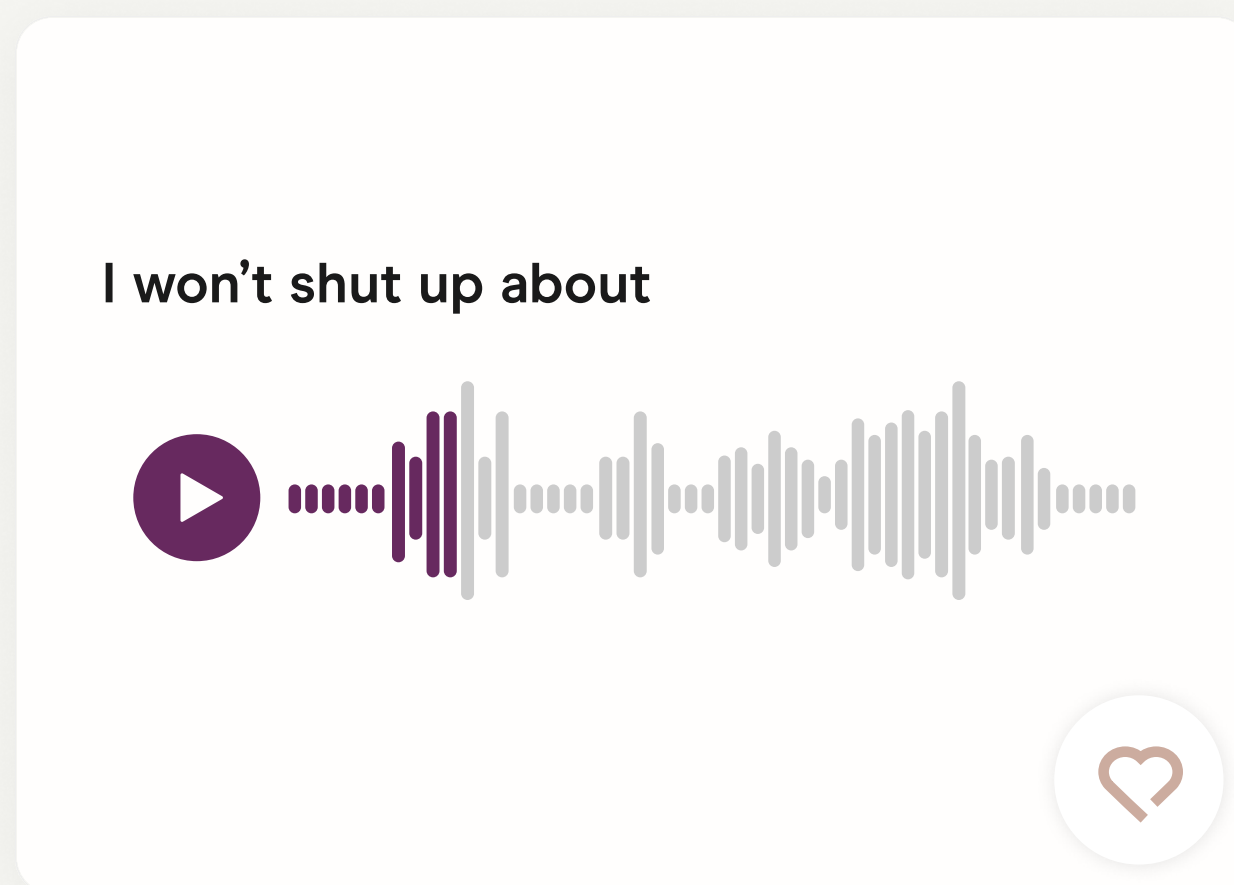
The most important question was: where would voice be most useful in actually generating matches and more great dates without adding clutter? In order to "keep it simple," we assessed our pre-existing feature set and mapped out where voice could make the greatest impact. This led us to initially limit voice to prompts. By introducing this innovation to something that was already easy and familiar, users adopted it more quickly and with more confidence. We had created a whole new vehicle for expression without adding any extra bulk to the app. This type of simple solution is what we strive for—that is, adding value without additional complexity.

Nexus

Michael Johnson → VP, Engineering

There is inherent risk in working with third-party vendors. As an example, we used to partner with a chat service provider whose technology was deeply integrated into our platform. When they shut down unexpectedly in 2019, we had less than a month to find and deploy an entirely new chat service. Luckily, our team was able to swiftly transition to a new company and thus prevent any outages. But this wasn't an isolated incident. We had a similar problem with an AI/ML/NLP provider when they were acquired and abruptly terminated our contract.

> **In short:** these third-party relationships were a headache. They also added complexity and technical debt to our codebase.

So, we created Hinge Nexus to simplify the process and reduce the vulnerabilities that come with working with third parties. Now, instead of integrating their SDKs directly into our codebase, these partners go through a portal. This enables seamless switching between services, reduces risk, and keeps our codebase clean. This is crucial—not just for users, but for employees who have to build and navigate our systems every day.

Tend to Trust

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In the early days, Hinge was a small team. We worked side by side in a small space, so alignment and trust came naturally. Everyone had a clear picture of what was happening in the business—leaving little room for misunderstanding. But as we grew, we began to lose some of the "connective tissue" of visibility and intimacy that kept all corners of Hinge aligned. Teams started working on conflicting or duplicative projects. Rivalries and resentment started to bubble up. Leadership often didn't give input until too late, leaving employees feeling whiplash and frustration when decisions were made. Trust at Hinge began to erode.

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Everything we do at Hinge depends on trust.
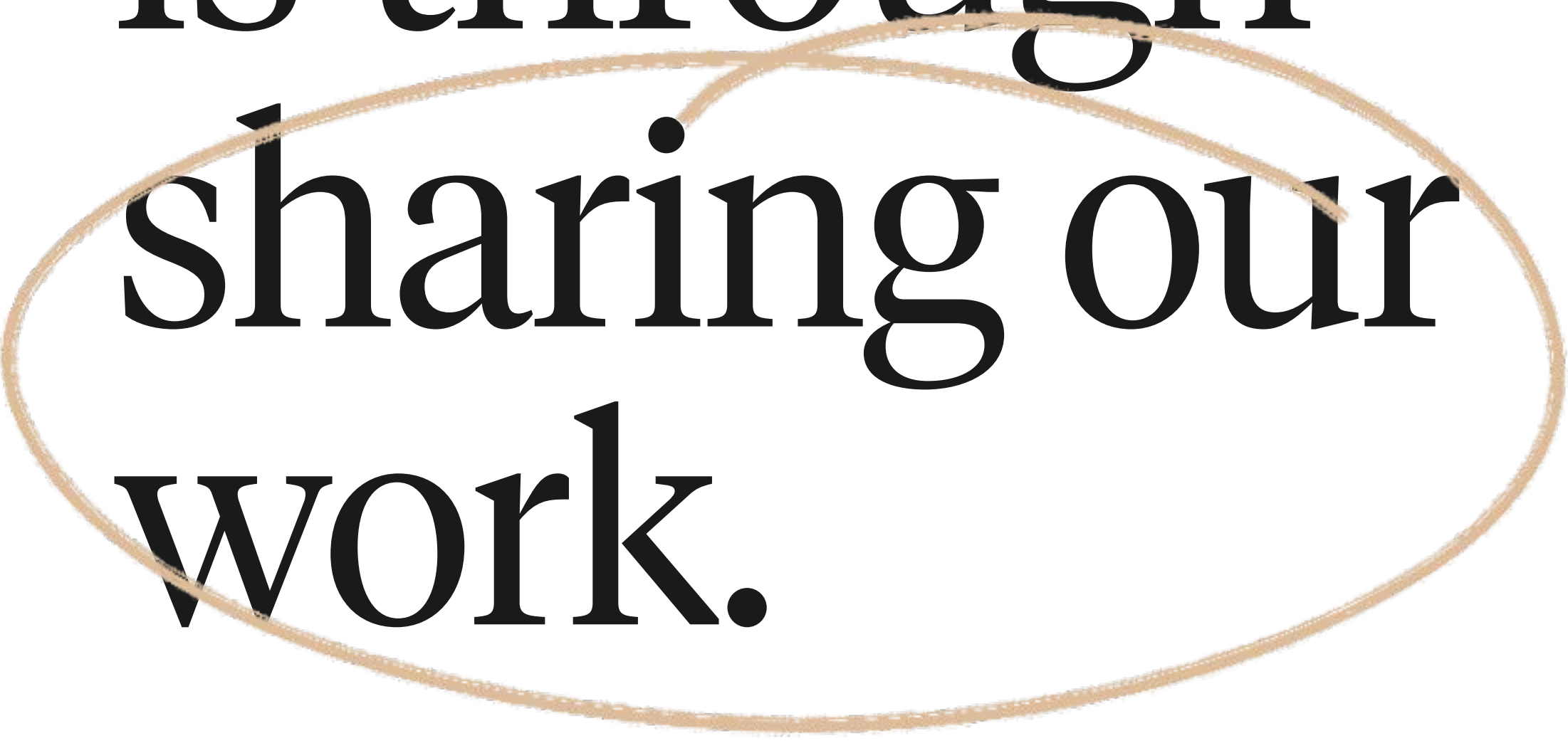
How We Do Things

Communication, collaboration, and building great products all require it. Crucially, two colleagues can't really have a productive disagreement unless they trust each other and their intentions.

Trust is also fragile. That's why we need to consciously build and nurture it across the organization, ensuring that the "connective tissue" that binds us together is strong. We do this as individuals, as teams, and as a company. Let's walk through what this looks like.

Bringing Everyone Along

One key way we build trust is through sharing our work.

No one is an island.

When you own a project, you are responsible for the major decisions that drive its success.

How We Do Things

But with that power comes a responsibility to keep your teammates aligned and informed—not just for their benefit but for yours.

That means sharing work with colleagues, soliciting feedback, and collecting insights early and often. The good news is many teams have a built-in process for doing this well, from product crits to scheduled check-ins and 1:1s. (Wrap is another key venue for building trust and alignment company-wide.) The point is: WIP isn't just okay—it's encouraged! We'd much rather stay aligned throughout a project than get to the finish line and see that your work has suffered because it missed some important context or insight.

To work this way is to cultivate 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.

Showing Up

Trust is also built by each individual bringing their whole, authentic selves to work.

Here, we can take inspiration from our users, who take a huge leap in sharing their personalities and vulnerabilities across the app.

Similarly, we want to create a workplace where everyone feels empowered to share who they are and what they're experiencing—both professionally and personally—while making sure that others have space to do the same. By letting others into our world (as much as we're comfortable), we build empathy between teammates and strengthen the entire Hinge community.

Practicing Radical Candor

Finally, trust is built through the way we communicate with each other and give feedback.

Over the years, we've taken a lot of inspiration from Kim Scott's book *Radical Candor.*

How We Do Things

Practicing radical candor means being able to challenge someone directly while simultaneously showing that you care for them personally. In any context, delivering clear and direct feedback can be hard and uncomfortable.

> The key is to ensure that our words are grounded in respect, openness, and kindness.

This is exactly why we spend so much time building trust and rapport across Hinge—so that we can be both honest and respectful. The benefits to this are vast and compounding. Practicing radical candor reinforces trust, helps us solve problems faster, and helps us make better decisions as an organization.

Keep in Mind

Collaboration, Not Consensus

The job of a leader is to ensure that conflicting viewpoints are collected in a structured way and inform any final decision. Now, everyone at Hinge has a right to be heard, but that doesn't mean we'll always get our way. (If we needed everyone's buy-in on every decision, nothing would ever get done!) Leaders must ultimately make hard calls, and when they do, it's important that we're able to move forward even when there's not perfect consensus.
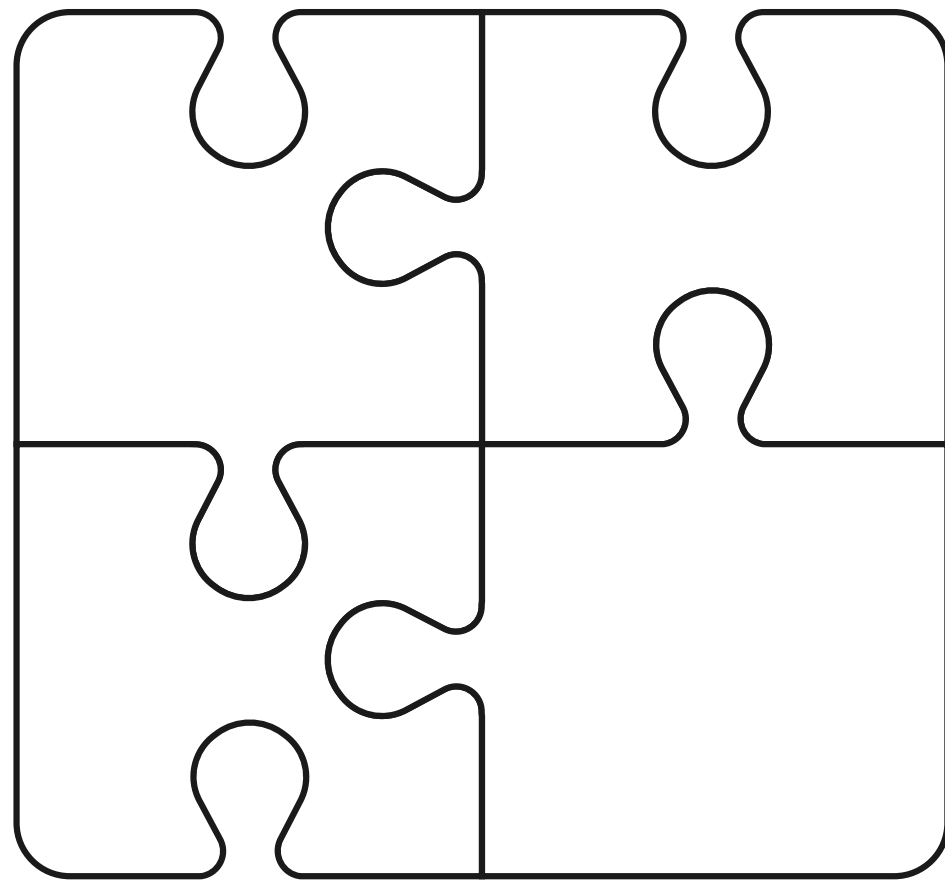
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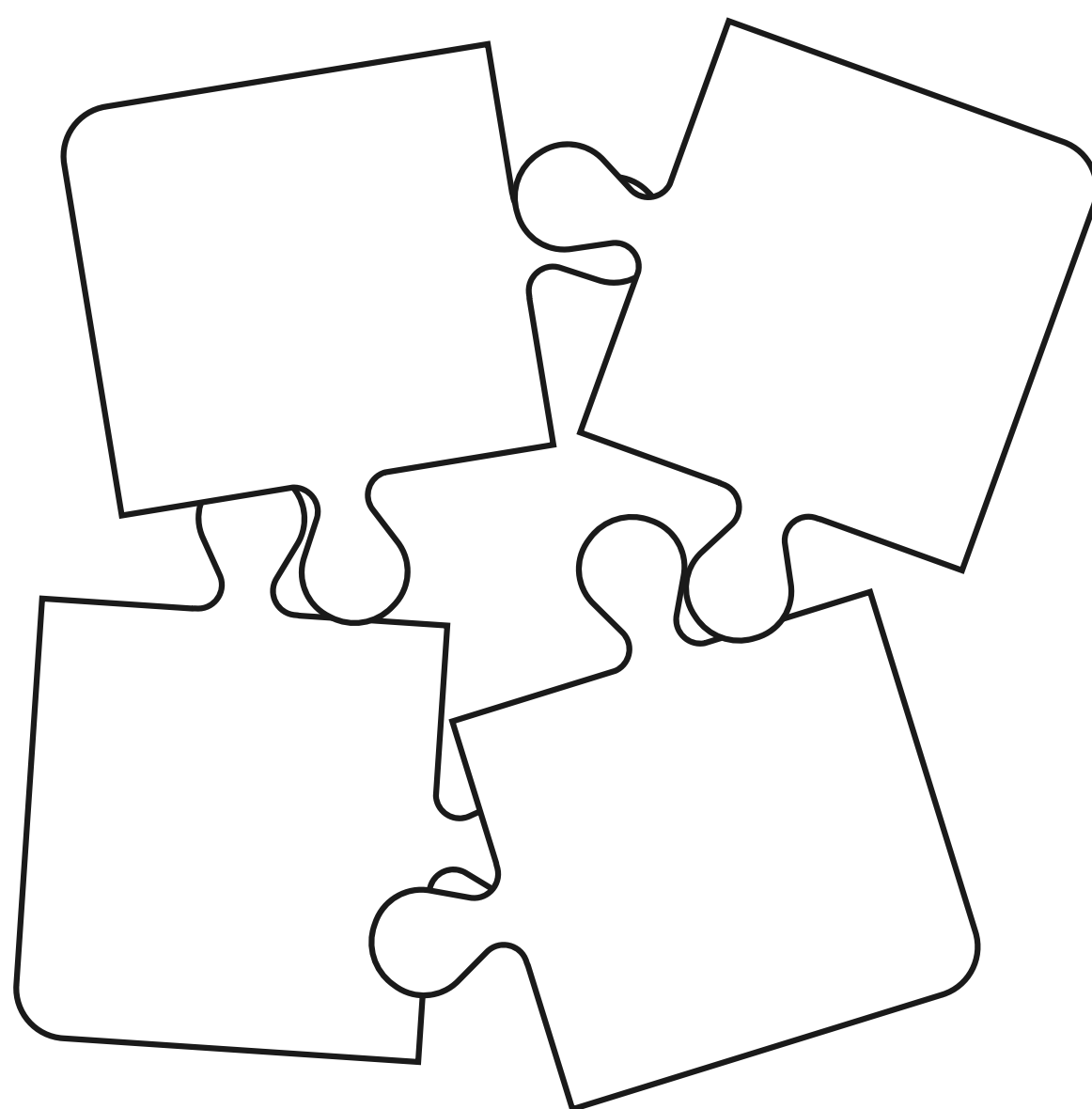
Not Consensus

Level-Setting Compensation

Angel Franklin → **Chief People Officer**

When I joined Hinge in summer 2022, I took a look at our data on hiring and compensation. And I was struck by one statistic: 34% of candidates accepted offers from Hinge, compared to an average of 85% across the broader tech industry. Given Hinge's excellent retention, vibrant culture, and high employee satisfaction, it was clear something was off. And when we dove into the numbers, we found that Hinge was generally paying below market rates.

So, just a few months into the role, I proposed an overhaul to our compensation strategy. Over the next few months, the People Team dug deep into the problem, researching compensation at comparable tech businesses and holding extensive discussions with colleagues at every level of the organization. By the end of 2022, we had crafted a new compensation structure that helped ensure competitive and equitable pay and that could be clearly understood by everyone at Hinge. And we proactively adjusted compensation for all current employees to match the new structure.

I've worked at several Fortune 500 companies. And I can tell you that uncomfortable truths like these are regularly shoved under the rug. Most firms would have just recruited a new cohort at higher salaries without mentioning it. But Hinge doesn't shy away from sticky, complicated problems.

> And in this case, we didn't want to just solve the problem; we wanted to do it in the open, even if this meant "exposing" the issue to everyone at the company.

Candidly, this was the harder path. And this type of transparency comes at a cost. In this case, we weren't just using precious company time to hold these discussions; we were also investing to correct compensation for existing employees.

But it paid off immediately. When we ran another survey in Q1 of 2023, the percentage of employees who felt they were compensated fairly jumped by over 30%. Also, the rate of offers accepted by candidates rose from 34% to 85%. But most importantly, we addressed this problem transparently and kept everyone at Hinge in the loop. Over the long term, that's exactly what helps us build trust.

Keep Us Posted

Emily Bederman → **Organizational Effectiveness Program Manager**

How We Do Things

Transparency has always been important at Hinge. But it was easier to practice when the company was small. By the fall of 2023, it became clear that Hinge's explosive growth was making transparency more difficult—especially when it came to product development work.

A lot of it came down to how different teams were communicating about their work and making sure what they were doing was visible to all the key stakeholders. So we retooled all of our collaboration processes in a way that enabled clarity and inclusion.

To do this, we adopted new automation features in Notion to create an "XFN Checklist". Now, Product Managers can create one simple update in Notion that automatically pings the right internal partners on Slack (e.g., Trust & Safety, Legal, Diversity Equity & Inclusion, etc.). This ensures PMs can give valuable input in time. But it also doesn't bog them down in superfluous details—a tough balance to strike at scale! This simple change substantially raised the level of transparency in our product development process, leading to more trust and effective collaboration.

Taking the Temperature

Bill Archer → Chief Financial Officer

Before I started working at Hinge, I spent most of my career working in finance departments across Wall Street. These could be rough and tumble places with challenging cultures. I did not spend much time considering the deepest feelings of my colleagues. As I prepared to start working at Hinge, I knew from my interviews and from reading *How We Do Things* that the culture was going to be very different. But I didn't know *how* different until I was there.

How We Do Things

At my first executive team meeting at Hinge, I was caught off guard by the "temperature-check." Going around the room, each attendee shared what one thing they were grateful for, one thing making them anxious, and one thing they were hopeful for. Needless to say, this didn't happen during my time at Goldman Sachs.

> This type of vulnerability in the workplace was very new to me. But over time, I realized that you simply cannot separate the business from the humans with whom you work.

We're all people who bring complex emotions and needs into every meeting, whether we acknowledge them or not. And ignoring what matters most to each individual just adds to the potential for misunderstanding.

I've introduced this practice to my own team, and today this small ritual is now one of my favorite parts of working at Hinge. It helps establish a foundation of trust that makes deliberation and planning easier and ultimately improves our decision-making. This has all helped me to become a more connected and empathetic leader. As an added bonus, this baseline layer of communication and trust has made work a lot more fun. The effects have even spilled over into my personal life, with my wife noting that I've become more empathetic and open-minded when we're making decisions as a family. I am a better leader—and Dad—thanks to this practice.

Wrap

Joelle Sherman → Chief of Staff

How We Do Things

Every two weeks, our executive team leads "Wrap," an all-hands gathering designed to keep everyone at Hinge informed and aligned on priorities. In these meetings, leadership shares candidly about strategic decision-making and how we're doing as a company.

Importantly, we don't just cover good news. Every business has challenges. And we trust our people enough to tell them when things aren't going right so we can fix them as a team.

We also use Wrap to share performance and financial information that is often kept confidential at other companies. Hinge shares it with everyone, regardless of their role, because we believe that this consistent practice of transparency and candor is crucial to building and maintaining trust, especially as we grow larger than ever.

Over time, we refreshed Wrap with the vision of making it even more enjoyable and useful. We've added recurring segments like Ask-Me-Anythings with execs, "Show & Tells" celebrating team wins, and read-outs of Hinge success stories submitted by users. It's a big commitment to get hundreds of us in one meeting during precious working hours. But rituals like Wrap ensure transparency, create a feeling of being all in this together as a community, and form the foundation of trust upon which all our work depends.

Decide with Principles

How We Do Things

When companies are just starting out, the founders get involved in almost every decision. 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.

Back then, there was a ton of debate about what we should do—and be—as a company. These debates were habitually "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. And too many hasty decisions led to bad outcomes.

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We came to realize that we needed choices to be grounded in a shared understanding of what we do and who we want to be.

How We Do Things

This was especially true as the company became bigger and more complex, and founders and leaders couldn't be involved in every decision. Enter: principles!

Our first set of principles came to life via a shared Google Doc that everyone at Hinge could edit. Over time, we synthesized our core principles to the four in this book.

Working with principles

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How We Do Things

These days, principles are everywhere at Hinge—like WiFi or coffee.

We don't just have these four core principles. We have them for more specific aspects of working at Hinge, like hiring and giving feedback. We have them for departments like Product and People. And we often make new ones at the outset of an individual project.

How We Do Things

Principles function like a compass; we can constantly be testing our progress against them. When a project is not succeeding, we can almost always point to one of two issues: either we're not executing well on our principles or we have the wrong principles. Discerning between the two is critical to resolving the problem. The former indicates we need to address the work itself, while the latter points to strategy.

When kicking off a new project, we consider which existing principles apply. If that's not enough, we draft new ones by asking questions like:

- 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?

# Creating New Principles

How We Do Things

Sometimes, principles lead to major disagreements. And sometimes, they just don't feel right.

When this happens, we step back and ask, "What is causing this disagreement or discomfort?" This often points to the formation of a new principle or a revision of an existing one. In our experience, when smart, thoughtful people are looking at the same information and holding the same values and assumptions, there is almost always a constructive way forward.

Keep in Mind

Room for Judgment

While principles are always our starting point and can usually lead us to the right place, not all decisions happen so neatly. Sometimes, there are conflicts or gray areas that force us to simply make a judgment call. This is when leadership steps in.
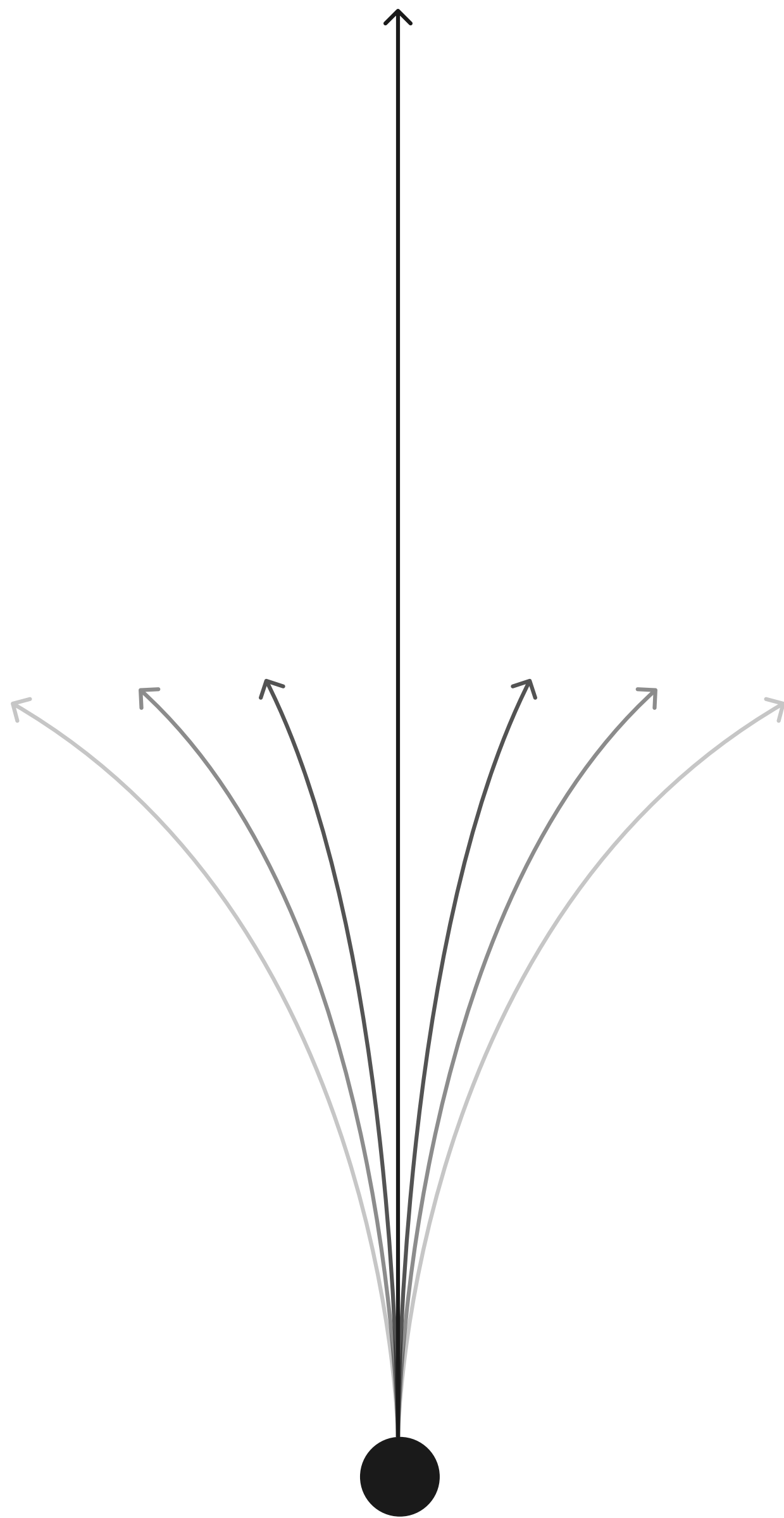
Artificial Intelligence, Human Principles

Amie White → Senior Director, Risk, Ethics, & Policy

Jeff Dunn → VP, Trust & Safety

AI is the future. As more applications demonstrate its power, companies around the world are racing to use AI in their products and across their organizations—often without considering the full implications and risks.

At Hinge, we've been using machine learning for years to help our users get out on great dates. As we look to incorporate generative AI in new and exciting ways, we are committed to deeply understanding this technology and how to use it responsibly. This starts with holding ourselves accountable through clear principles that we share with our users so they understand what responsible AI means at Hinge.

Creating our AI principles wasn't simple or easy. We conducted a cross-functional, in-depth analysis of responsible AI standards and methods to integrate those standards across our organization. This work was done by leaders in Trust & Safety, DEI, AI ethics and informed by our company values. Three things stood out to us as most important. First, we believe AI should coach and support us, but not act on our behalf. We don't want our use of AI to call into question the authenticity of our daters' interactions with one another. Second, we want to ensure our AI models are helping to level the playing field so that more people than ever are going out on dates. Finally, we believe we should always explain the purpose of our features and how they improve the dating experience so that we increase transparency and trust.

We therefore landed on three key ideas to inform our use of AI: authenticity, equity, and transparency. We communicated these publicly, as well as the thinking behind each, and we work to uphold our principles throughout the user experience. We're proud to share information with our daters about how tools like generative AI are being used to help them connect. With this foundation in place, we can continue to harness the power of AI alongside our commitment to user safety, fairness, privacy, and the well-being of all Hinge users.

Finding Our Focus

Josh Penny → Director, Social Impact

Hinge didn't always have a clear approach to social impact work. Without a principled strategy, our public stances and initiatives weren't very tethered to who we were as a company. When different protest movements and social issues bubbled up online or in the press, we found ourselves wondering: Where did we stand? How could we do the most good with our resources? To solve this, we turned to our principles.

Rather than throwing money in lots of directions, we decided to identify a single issue ("Keep It Simple") that was intrinsically connected to our mission. And when we dove into the research ("Love the Problem") on Gen-Z daters specifically, one thing stood out: they were lonelier than any previous generation, and reaching for their phones at the expense of in-person connection. Eventually, we decided to dedicate our social impact program at Hinge to the growing epidemic of loneliness.

To sift through the seemingly endless opportunities and potential partners in this space, we created more specific "Principles for Impact" that have helped us think about what kinds of charities and initiatives are the best fit for us. For example, one of our principles is "Real Impact Requires Sustained Effort," which reminds us to direct our attention to projects that go deep, rather than broad. So instead of funding one-off, in-person events, we launched our $1M One More Hour Fund, which donates to groups who offer recurring gatherings more likely to deepen connection: a weekly surf club for women new to the sport or a monthly hiking group for HBCU students.

Principles run through Hinge in a lot of different ways. Our Social Impact strategy was informed by Hinge's overarching principles, but we also have our own set to help us stay accountable to our goals.

The Culture Interview

Dr. Abena Subira Mackall → **Director, Talent Acquisition & People Analytics**

Hiring someone is a significant investment. It's crucial we ensure candidates aren't just high performers, but high performers who will thrive in our culture. In our early days, we learned the hard way that hiring fast and without enough consideration about day-to-day fit could potentially cost us in turnover, team productivity, and overall confidence in our direction. That's why, after candidates prove they have the skills and aptitude we need, the final step before extending a job offer—regardless of team, role, or seniority—is the Culture Interview.

Our Culture Interview is based on research indicating that the strongest predictors of how someone will perform in an organization are their past experiences and reflections on them. For each role, we design situational questions that uncover the behaviors and attributes for fostering a fulfilling workplace culture and business success. Interviewers use detailed rubrics and Hiring Plans to assess candidates based on concrete, observable criteria.

> We've learned that, along with a commitment to our principles, success at Hinge relies on collaboration, communication, and a willingness to grow through feedback and reflection.

So, the Culture Interview specifically assesses whether candidates can "keep it simple," respond to challenges with elegant solutions, effectively communicate domain expertise in cross-functional environments, or take steps to build and rebuild trust within teams.

The Culture Interview not only provides hiring teams with valuable insights into how candidates will handle situations and make decisions, it also demonstrates to everyone we hire that our principles are the foundation of how we approach everything we do at Hinge.