Down Dog Values

We want Down Dog to be the ideal place for extremely smart, productive, and self-motivated people. This is how we believe we can make that happen:

We aim to be as small as possible at every stage

It seems like hiring people should make things go faster, but pretty much everyone who's seen companies grow agrees they get slower as they get bigger. The Mythical Man Month describes some of the reasons why, mainly that communication costs rise with the square of the people, that many tasks can't be partitioned because of sequential constraints ("the bearing of a child takes nine months, no matter how many women are assigned"), and that each new person has to be trained. Almost as bad, as companies grow, they try to reduce these communication costs by rerouting the channels of communication through managers and slotting people into more narrowly defined roles, which is likely why most people who end up working at a big company feel their contributions don't matter. We want you to be able to make big contributions quickly, and we believe that a commitment to staying as small as possible will enable that.

We each work under our own ideal conditions

We don't judge your process, we only judge results. We fully appreciate that different processes work best for different people. We don't care when you arrive at the office, how long you stay, what you wear, whether you take a day off every other week or take a week off every three months. We trust you to allocate your time in the way that makes you most productive.

We don't set deadlines, and we won't manage you

Management at Down Dog is about collaborative problem solving and building tools to clear obstacles out of your way. We're happy to help, but we don't schedule check-ins because interruptions often do more harm than good. If you want help, you should feel completely empowered to rope someone else into the conversation.

We only hire individual contributors

Everyone at Down Dog works on the actual product. No one is here just to make decisions, create internal documents, or facilitate communication between others. We believe that people in those roles often do more harm than good because everything that they do takes up someone else's time.

We move quickly

At a big company you might spend a year increasing page load speeds by 3%. You won't do that at Down Dog because the surface area of problems we can work on is way bigger. You're far more likely to have a big impact going from 0 to 80 on something we haven't started yet, not taking something that's already working from 80 to 100. There are exceptions to this, mostly things that are at the core of every user's experience, but those are rare and fairly obvious exceptions.

We minimize blocking

If someone else can't get started on their thing until you're done with your thing, move even more quickly. Note that, if you're blocking someone else, you have to balance your ideal conditions with theirs, and so this rule cuts back a bit on the complete freedom we otherwise happily grant you to own your time. In practice, this means 2 things:
1) Be in the office between 1:30pm and 5:30pm to enable collaboration since that's the most likely time for everyone else to be there, and
2) Work like a sprinter (we'd rather you work twice as hard on day 1 and then take day 2 off if it means 1 less day of blocking).

We iterate

Reasoning about a problem is way harder when all you have is a blank page, which is why we'll almost always be able to improve on the first solution. For that reason, the best thing you can do is get a rough draft of the answer down so we gain a better vantage point on what the best solution will be. To some people, this iterative process can feel like an attack on their abilities. It's not. Once you're in the door, you've passed our talent bar – we're going to spend very little time judging your talent and a lot of time trying to solve the problems in front of us.

We bail

If in the process of getting a rough draft down you find out that your idea is going to take much longer than you thought, abandon it (or at least re-evaluate whether it's worth it). There are problems that are worth one week of engineering time that are definitely not worth three. Finding out that the road ahead is longer than you thought is also a good indication that you took a wrong turn at the beginning.

We build our own tools

We prefer to figure things out and solve them in-house, rather than outsourcing to existing tools or services. This is often faster because of the time it takes to find, learn, and integrate external tools. In-house tools can also be customized to our exact needs and are easy to iterate on in the future.

We don't make decisions by committee

Committees take longer to decide things, and it doesn't seem that the added time makes it any more likely that the answer will be correct. In fact, committees don't seem to learn from their mistakes as much as individuals do, and committees are often swayed by things like word choice, ego, and relationships, all of which seem uncorrelated with the right answer. Instead, we usually appoint one person to own the decisions in a certain space. Ideally, the person who does the work owns the decision. The person who feels the cost will understand it best, and implementing something you don't believe in sucks. This isn't always possible – usually, people need a fair amount of context before they can make trade-offs correctly. But that's the goal, and you'll get to own your work and the decisions around it more and more through your time at Down Dog. This doesn't mean we won't collaborate – it just means that we'll try to always go into a decision knowing who the final decision maker is. Oddly, when we know who it is, it actually gets easier for everyone to listen to each other.

We create more value than we capture

We care primarily about the impact we have, and unfortunately, moves that capture value (increase revenue) tend to diminish the total value created (usage). One nice byproduct of this focus is that it makes a lot of decisions easier. Another byproduct is that a lot of our friends think we're idiots (as do many venture capitalists). When we do decide to capture value, the main reason we do it is so that we can pay above market rates to our team, which lets the most talented people choose to work here without sacrificing income. Because we aim to be as small as possible at every stage, that constraint is relatively easy to fulfill.