

The Manual

BIG SPACESHIP

OUR MANUAL

A Big Spaceship book
New York (and beyond)
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Distributed by the internet (a series of tubes)

1. Lead What's Next
2. Earn the Wow
3. Explore Together

109876543210

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5753-4E41-4D43

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‘Sup

Big Spaceship is different.

The weirdness makes it special, but it can be a bit jarring if you’re used to another way of working. We wrote this manual to give you everything you need to survive and thrive here, whether on day one or day one thousand.

This book won’t provide details about your 401(k), show you how to access the Shared Drive, or help you set up your email account. It will help you begin to understand our values and the way we make decisions as a team and as a company.

Our manual belongs to you. Read it. Share it. Change it. Keep it close when you swim into the deep water.

Our core values

Lead what's next

We don't wait for the future, we build it

Earn the wow

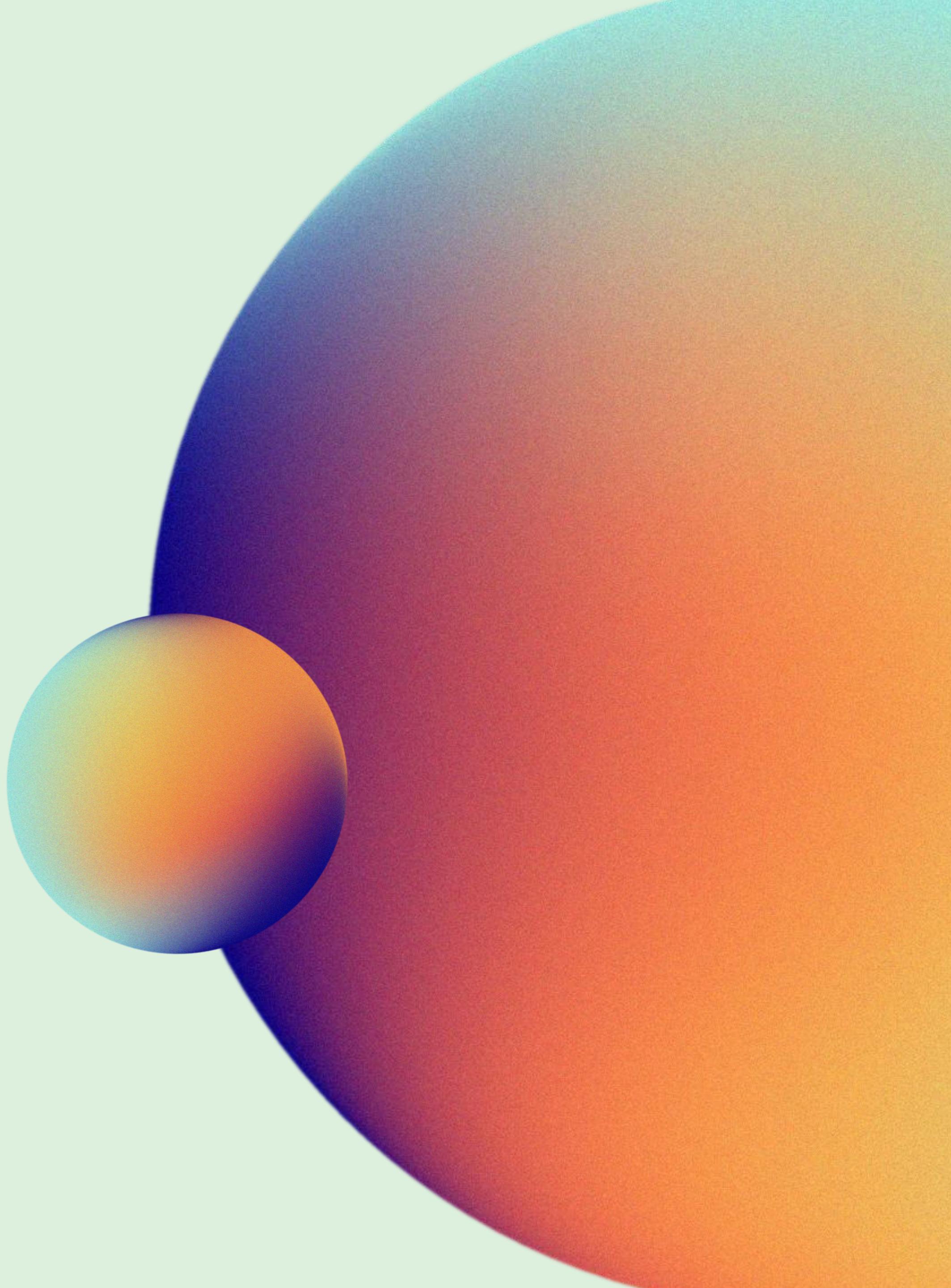
We obsess and make it look effortless

Explore together

Unity is our rocket fuel

SECTION 1

Explorers, not settlers



We're a boldly human crew
built for uncharted territory.

You are not here by accident

We hired you for a reason. There's no need to prove yourself or worry about "fitting in." You're here. You made it. You get it. Let your work do the convincing.

We hire differently

People aren't a line item on a spreadsheet, a percentage in a budget, or the work they produce. People are the reason we do the work and run the numbers, not the other way around.

So when it comes to finding and connecting with new crew members, we treat the process with care. We look for those who see the world a little differently, who will force us to think in new ways, who might even make us feel a little uncomfortable. We're looking for crew members with something – a perspective, a skill, a killer pie recipe – that they're excited to share with the rest of us.

We'll give you the best of us. We just ask that you give the best of you in return.

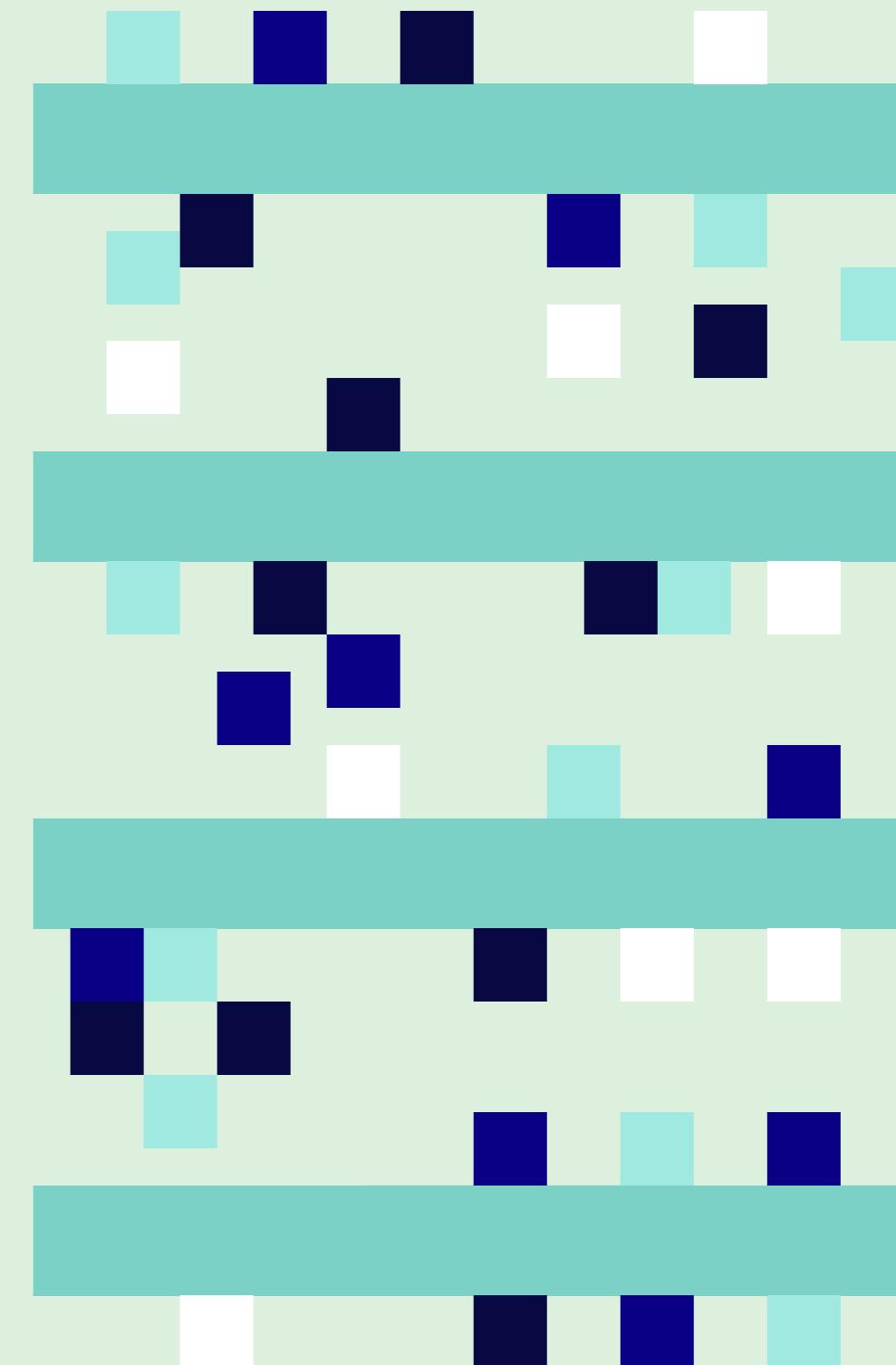
Get autonomous

You're given an incredible amount of freedom and autonomy at Big Spaceship. That goes for everyone – from interns to freelancers to our CEO. It's up to you to figure out how to approach a problem. No one is going to make you do it their way. We know that sounds awesome, but here's the rub: With freedom comes a ton of ownership and responsibility.

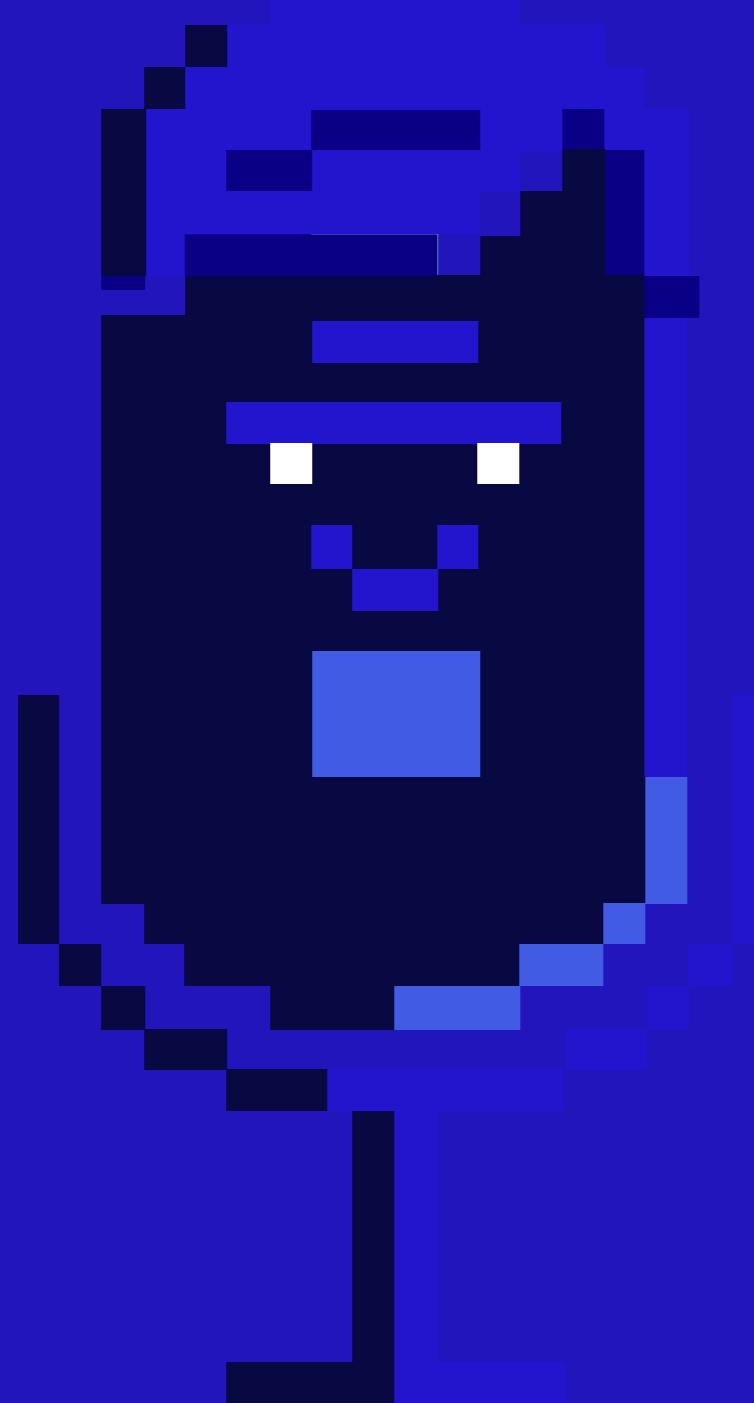
Life is easy when someone is telling you what to do. It's also boring, and it prevents you from being invested in what you're doing. Since you control your own destiny here, you'll likely be more invested in your work. That may mean you eat, sleep, and breathe it sometimes. But we believe that's better than the alternative. Can you imagine coming to work each day and not caring? We can't.

Work together

Our flat structure calls for it by necessity. Being a leader, or supervising leaders may feel unnatural at first, but we expect everyone to step up and own the work. It's kind of like playing basketball: When someone passes you the ball, you're in charge of what to do with it next.



Talk like a human



There's a lot of bad work out there. One of the culprits is the way we talk to each other. In an industry that requires a ton of communication between clients, agencies and vendors, it's important not to let acronyms, "proprietary processes," and buzzwords lead to confusion and time lost.

Avoid robot speak by following three simple rules

01. Pretend you're talking to your parents

Your parents don't know what "CPG" or "CX" mean. And it's not because they're not smart people. They're just not entrenched in industry jargon.

02. Don't be afraid to ask

Sometimes you need to stop and ask the room to define what exactly "engagement" or "authenticity" means to them. It's OK. Nobody is going to think you're a dummy and ask you to leave the room. When you're part of a team - clarity is speed.

03. Get on the same page

Sometimes the words don't matter as long as everyone's speaking the same language. Acknowledge when words are getting in the way and do something about it.

THINGS YOU SHOULD SAY:

- "Why are we doing it this way?"
- "Is there a better alternative?" "_____ worked really well last time."
- "Can we do it even better on this project?"
- "Let's take a walk and discuss it."

THINGS YOU SHOULDN'T SAY:

- "It is what it is." No, it's not. It is what you make it.
- "That's not my job." If you ever hear someone say this, start flipping desks. It's all your job.
- "Who cares?" Well, we do.

You're more than your title

Most workplaces (intentionally or not) train people out of normal human behaviors in the name of efficiency. They want you to be predictable. They want you to be replaceable. They don't want you to challenge the status quo.

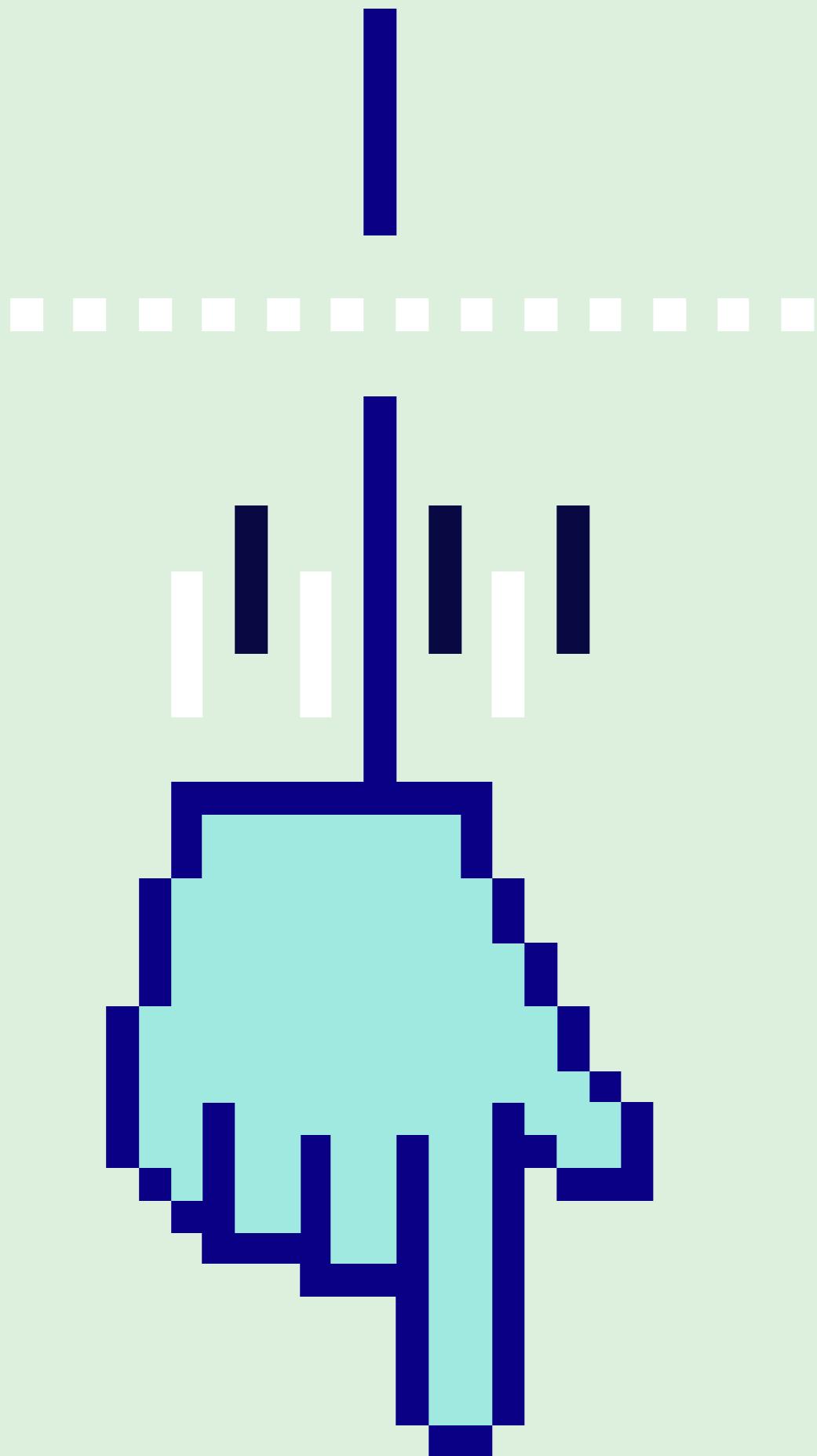
But humans don't work that way. Humans are unpredictable. You can't replace one person with another the same way you swap tires on a car. Workplaces that try to control human nature become miserable fast.

People who talk about themselves in terms of their title freak us out: "I'm a producer, so I do things like this." No. You're a person first and a producer second. Go with the gut feelings that make you successful as a subway rider, neighbor, partner, citizen. Try something, even if you aren't sure if you're going to be the World's Greatest at it.

Everyone is creative

Creativity is a human quality, whether or not it's in your title. So don't ever say, "I'm not creative." We will find the creativity inside you and drag it out, kicking and screaming because your perspective matters, regardless of the discipline you work in.

We don't put our energy into questions like, "Whose name goes on the award entry?" Instead, we ask questions like, "Is this the right work for us?" and "How can we make an impact?"



Nobody's gonna hold your hand

This is a busy place, and you'll often be on your own to figure things out. Don't be afraid to ask for help, but don't wait for someone to hold your hand.

You might be tempted to say something like, "It would be nice if someone would organize the [Google Drive, kitchen, next group hang]." At Big Spaceship, you are that someone. If you want to update, change, or fix something, go for it. Seriously. And we'll support you to make it happen. Every awesome thing you see is like that because someone like you decided to do it.

Three truths about humans

01. Humans are not perfect.

Don't be afraid to fail. This is how we grow and learn.

02. Humans have voices.

Yours is as valuable as anyone else's. Use it. Singing out loud is encouraged and it happens often.

03. Humans are unique.

Do you love Norwegian death metal? Do you prefer your desk covered with sunflowers? There's no need to hide it. Be yourself. That's how you'll fit in here.

We have ten disciplines

- Strategy
- Art Direction, Copy Writing & Creators
- Design
- Production
- Program
- Account
- Studio
- People & Culture

We tried to write a definition for each one, but we couldn't do it. Our disciplines aren't slots into which we can drop an identical replacement. If you want to know more about what someone does, just ask 'em. We're a team of experts, and while we may be experts in different areas, these differences don't build walls or make collaboration a clusterf&lk.

Getting to work with a team of experts means always being able to find someone who can answer your niche question (or point you in the right direction). It means getting to tap into a collective brain, and that makes us that much stronger.

Humans are not “resources”

Human Resources. What an awful phrase. We don't have an HR department. We have a People & Culture discipline that's focused on creating the best possible candidate and employee experience. Potential hires are interviewed by the people they'll actually work with. This ensures we're hiring for the right team and the right reasons. So get ready to care a lot about the people working with you.

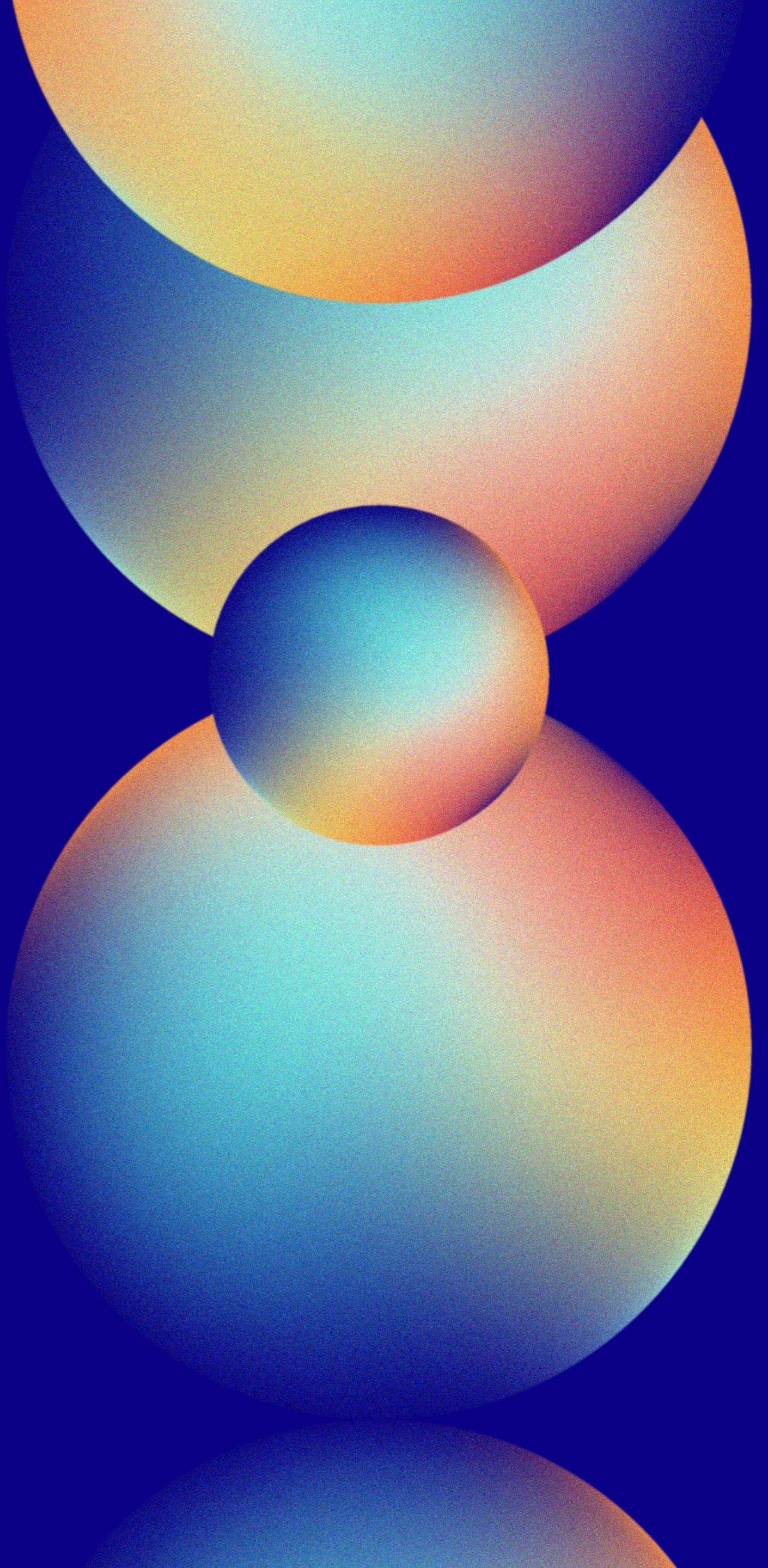
Cultural “fit” sucks

You're encouraged to bring your unique perspective, personal history, and band t-shirts to work every day. But that goes both ways. You need to not just accept, but do the work to understand and value what everyone else brings to the table.

Big Spaceship doesn't work unless we all feel heard and respected. You belong. And everyone else does, too.

Explore together

We bring diverse voices to the table, take care of each other, and know the best ideas win when everyone shapes them.



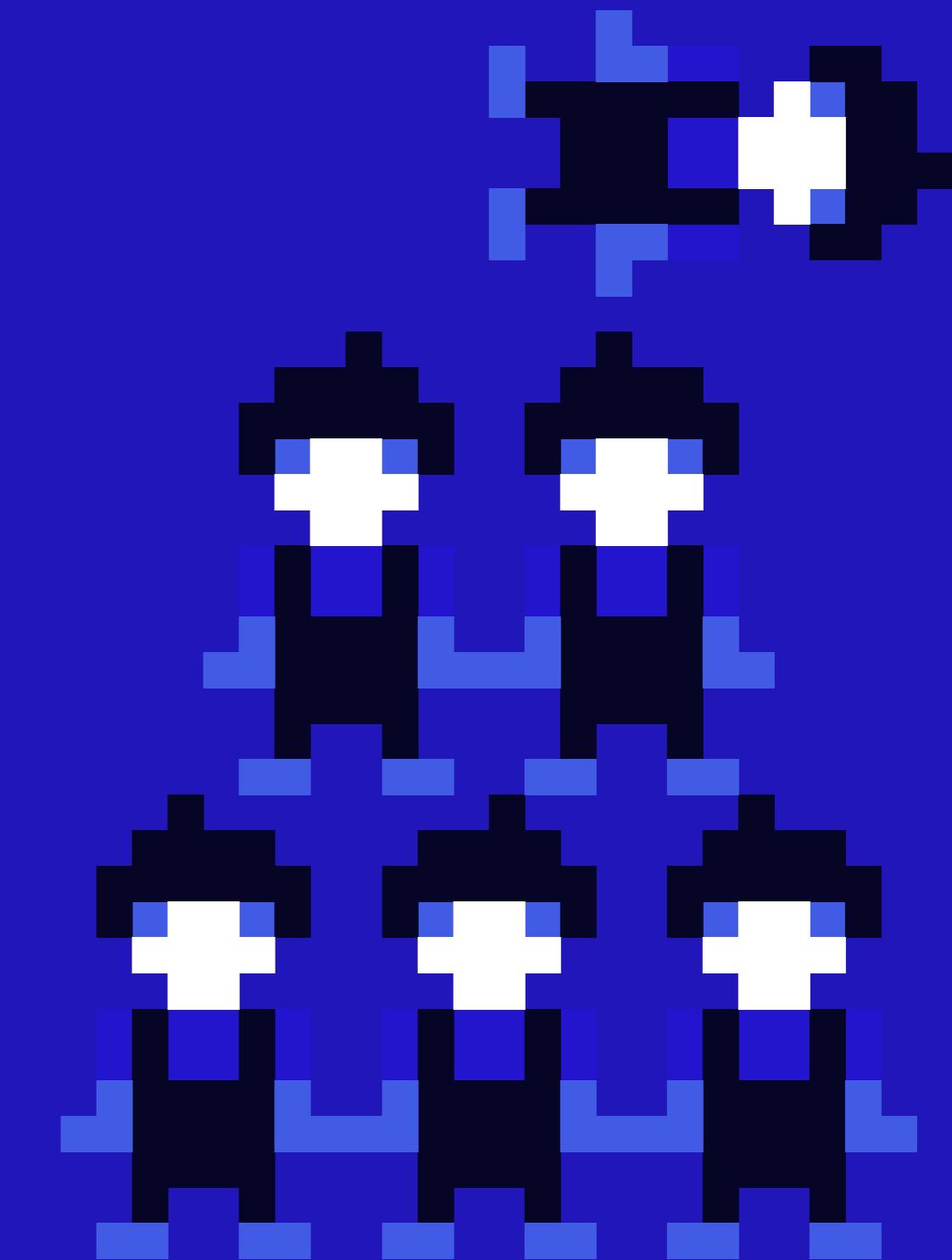
We aren't big on hierarchy

Traditional hierarchy forms a bottleneck –the whole idea just isn't who we want to be. We work to have mentors and collaborators, not commanders. In other words, you may have a boss, but you shouldn't get bossed around. The folks who speak up* regardless of their experience level, are the ones who thrive.

*It doesn't mean talking the most, or the loudest.

Speaking up can mean:

- Initiating a hard conversation
- Challenging something we didn't think of (no matter where in the process we are)
- Questioning homogenous lines of thinking
- Asking someone who's an expert



Play is important

We've created an environment where work and play often intertwine. But there's a difference between childish and child-like. We are adults. But that doesn't mean we can't have fun.

There's no reason to pretend you're busy. You don't need to hide the video you're watching if someone walks by your desk. No one is monitoring the websites you look at. We aren't going to report you for taking a long lunch. Just do great work.

Show don't tell

This is something we tell our clients all the time, and it's important that we live by these words as well. A better way to put it might be: Don't talk about it, do it.

We create for people, not at them

We make things for people. Not for "consumers". We always ask ourselves (and our clients), "Would I want to watch/use this?"

Take care of your crew

Much of the work we do is technical. But there's another skill we all need to have: the interpersonal kind. It isn't optional. Some people like to pretend that their output is all that matters. They're wrong. This isn't Rambo; there are no teams of one here.

We know that sometimes it can be difficult to work with others. Our solution is simple: Get to know everyone. No one is just a designer or a strategist. No one is just the mood they're in on that particular Monday. We're people, with many dimensions. Understand one another and it'll be much easier. You are part of a team, and the health and harmony of your team is part of your job.

We are smaller by design

Every decision about how to structure a company has some upsides and some downsides. When you encounter something that's a little frustrating about how we work, remember that it's likely the result of something else about this place that you love.

We've carefully managed our growth for more than 20+ years, which allows us all to sit in the same room, or Zoom, and know each other personally. It also means we've had to sacrifice the economies of scale that come with thousands of employees. Sometimes things break or get dirty. We don't have a maintenance department, so it's up to you to keep things tidy.

Don't make a 100 person company feel like 1,000

We're glad we don't work at a place where you've never met whole groups of colleagues. Try not to over-formalize communication. There's no need to send an email to the person sitting one desk (or slack message) away.

Aesthetics are important

If you make something that doesn't look good or isn't usable, you're going to get called out on it. Don't worry—this is how we get better. We are ruthless about this, and soon you will be too.

Our designs should be flawless. Our presentations should be elegant. Details are everything. Find one and make it awesome.

We hate silos

At some companies, people are organized into departments and purposefully sit separately away from their fellow team members.

That terrifies us. And it's why everyone just Slacks who they need when they need them.

You're surrounded by smart people from every discipline. Talk to them. Learn from them.

We are all students, we are all teachers

This has nothing to do with seniority. We all snatch the pebble from each other's hand. The idea of student becoming teacher and teacher becoming student is one of the greatest aspects of what we do. We share and learn from each other, daily.

And while we don't expect you to hold anyone's hand, we encourage you to be a mentor as much as possible. Maybe you'll learn something too.

Be respectful, but don't be delicate

We've found that the best creative breakthroughs happen when people can have a good, passionate argument about an idea, not when they spend weeks tiptoeing around each other. Don't be afraid to speak your mind. Just be honest and respectful. And don't forget to listen in equal measure.

Our clients are part of the team

Sometimes, our clients pay us to do the things they may not be able to do by themselves. Whatever the assignment, we should always work with them, not for them and obviously not against them (that would be dumb). Consider them a part of the team, and apply the same values partnering with them as we would do for ourselves here at Big Spaceship.

Oh, and use their real names. It'll remind you that we're all just groups of human beings trying to do good work.

We are professionals

But we hate professionalism. Professional means handling your business with respect. Professionalism is when you're so buttoned up that you stop being yourself. It sands down all the most interesting parts of you.

Take your client beyond their comfort zone

The best work happens when everyone leans into the unknown together.

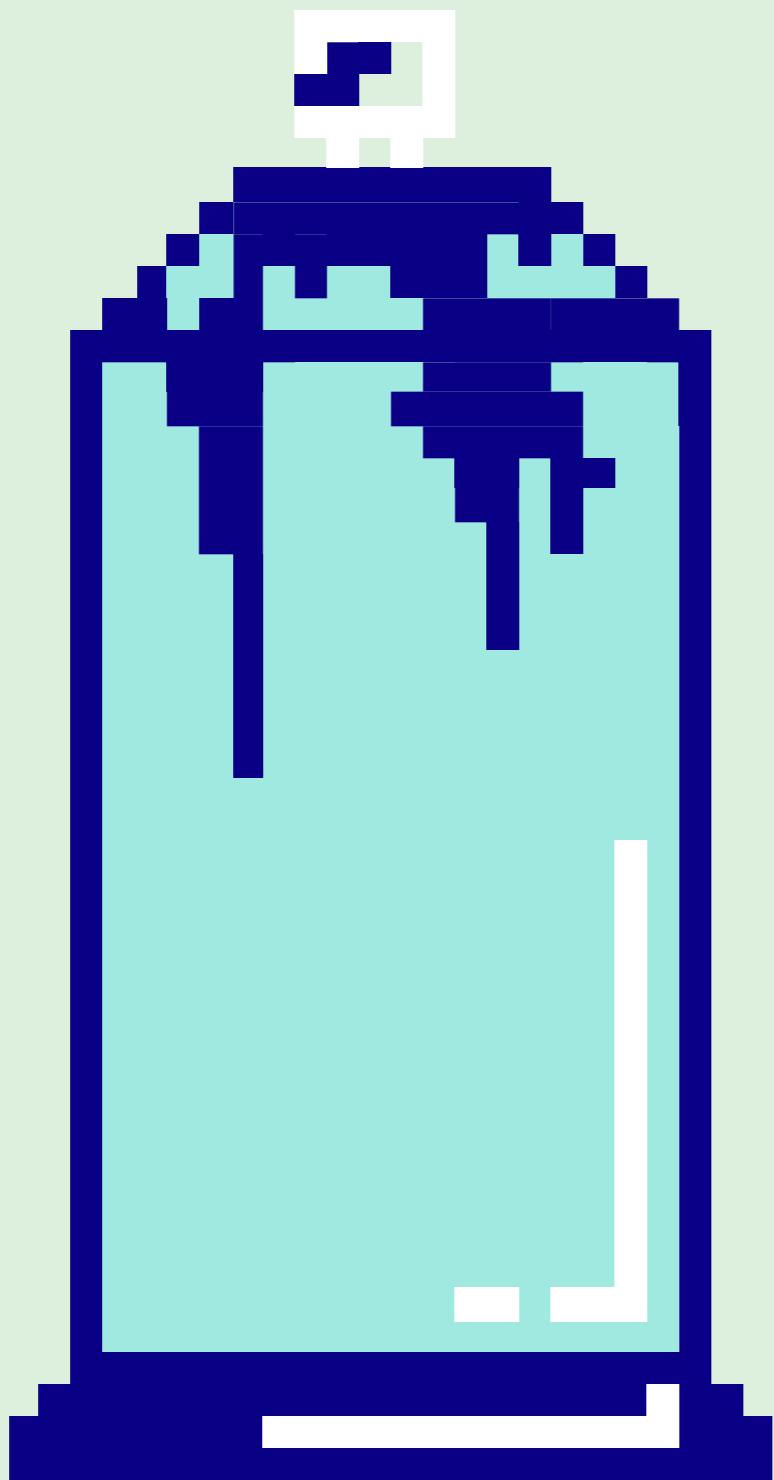
Great exploration requires trust. We push clients (respectfully) because that's how breakthrough happens. And we expect the same in return. Challenge us. Make us better. That's the partnership.

A FEW THINGS WE FREQUENTLY HEAR:

- "We didn't expect that at all."
- "Can we do that?"
- "That's wild."

No one gets in trouble for pushing the limit. It's your job. It's the reason people look at our work and say, "That's the kind of work I want to do."

WE ENDEAVOR TOGETHER



Write on the walls, comment in the chat

Open spaces mean real-time conversations and solutions. We sketch out our thoughts as they occur and we share them with the crew. We prefer to work this way: openly and transparently.

And when we're not physically together, the same principle stands - whether via Figma, Zoom, Slack (just remember to use threads), or anything else. We work together, even when we're apart.

We are a quiet bunch

Exploration requires focus. Many of us do our best thinking with headphones on, heads down, working through problems that don't have obvious answers yet.

If someone doesn't wave when you pass their desk, they're not being antisocial, they're just plugged in. That's the kind of focus that finds whitespace before anyone else sees it.

We protect this time. Calendar blocks for deep work. The space to think without interruption is how we see what doesn't exist yet.

Noise

According to Science, the best noise level for a creative workspace is somewhere around that of a vacuum cleaner. Hence, tunes. But when we share spaces, if you need some quiet time, don't feel guilty about finding a hideout or popping on some headphones.

Sometimes, you need quiet not for your own peace of mind, but because we have a guest who doesn't want to walk into a meeting and have to shout over the sounds of Wu Tang Clan.

Dogs: We have them

STUDIES HAVE SHOWN:

- When dogs are around, most people feel relaxed and happy.
- Being in the presence of a pet, for instance in the workplace, lowers blood pressure and cortisol (stress) levels while heightening endorphins and oxytocin, the hormone linked to maternal bonding.
- It's healthy for a dog to be with its owner throughout the day.

THINGS TO KNOW:

- Dogs will be dogs. Most of them aren't afraid to steal your sandwich, so keep food away from the edge of your desk.
- It's not unheard of for a dog to wander into a meeting and sit on your client's lap.
- In the winter the dogs will wear sweaters.





Internal projects

Some of our favorite things we've ever made weren't client work at all. One of us had an idea, and they made it real. Taco Finder™. Corpsify™. The Most Awesomest Thing Ever™. In fact, this very manual began as an internal project when a few of us just decided that it needed to exist. Some companies assign a number for how much time you're allowed to spend on side projects. We know if it matters to you, you'll make it happen.

Wear a helmet

We encourage you to get some fresh air and exercise by biking to work or turning a meeting into walking meetings. Moving boosts creativity and your mindset. A healthy you is your best you.

A note on interns

The title “intern” isn’t always a glamorous one, but at Big Spaceship, it’s one of the best jobs you can have. Interns get to make all the fun mistakes.

We value our interns as contributors, not as taskrabbits. We give them real work and real responsibility – and we rarely send them on a coffee run. They’re on the team to help make things and solve problems. Show them the same respect you’d give anyone else. Besides, many of our crew started off as interns.

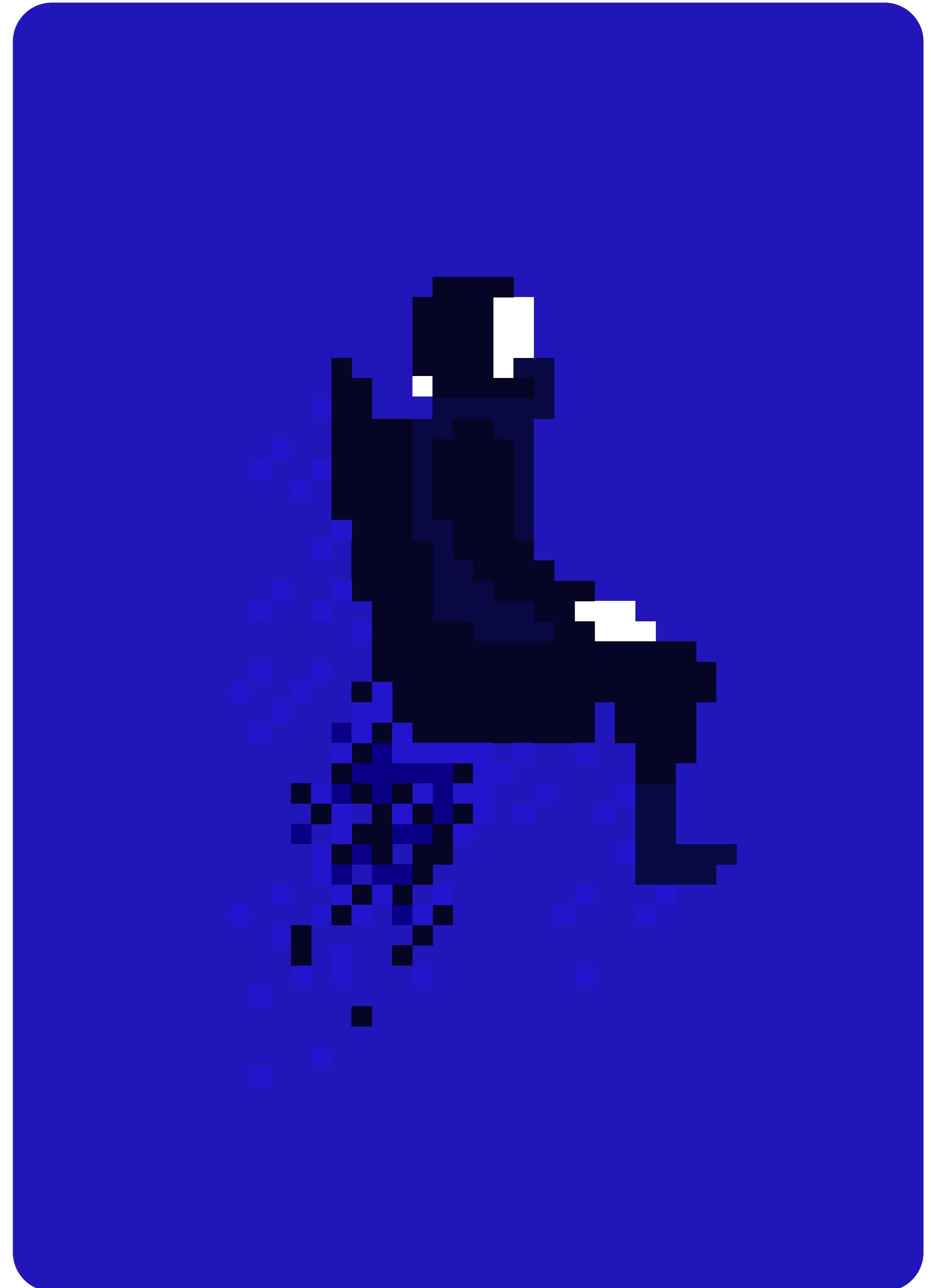
SECTION 3

We change

Nothing is sacred. From our habits to our rituals to our environment. Change is a natural part of human life, and we prefer to embrace it.

Get out of your seat

It's unhealthy to stay seated in the same position for eight hours.
It's also terrible for productivity. You aren't chained to your desk.
Move around. Grab some coffee. Play fetch with a dog. Meditate.
Call your parents. Make a sandwich. Play a game. Go for a walk.
Draw on the walls. Climb a tree. Do yoga. Hit the gym. Get a
haircut. Buy some new shoes. Sing a song. Get a snack. Do your
laundry. Go birdwatching. Dance. Try LARPing. Write a poem.
Learn to juggle. Draw a picture. Hit the roof deck.



Hackday

The world was made to be hacked, and our hackday is one of the most beloved Big Spaceship traditions. Every so often, we pause all our usual work and break into small teams. Then we spend all day (and sometimes all night) creating something that makes the world a better place. The next morning, everyone presents what they've made. It's something you'll never forget.

Show & tell

We frequently invite interesting people from a variety of backgrounds to share their experience with us. These are extraordinary opportunities.

Clapping

Sometimes we erupt in spontaneous applause, for no reason at all. Go ahead, join in.

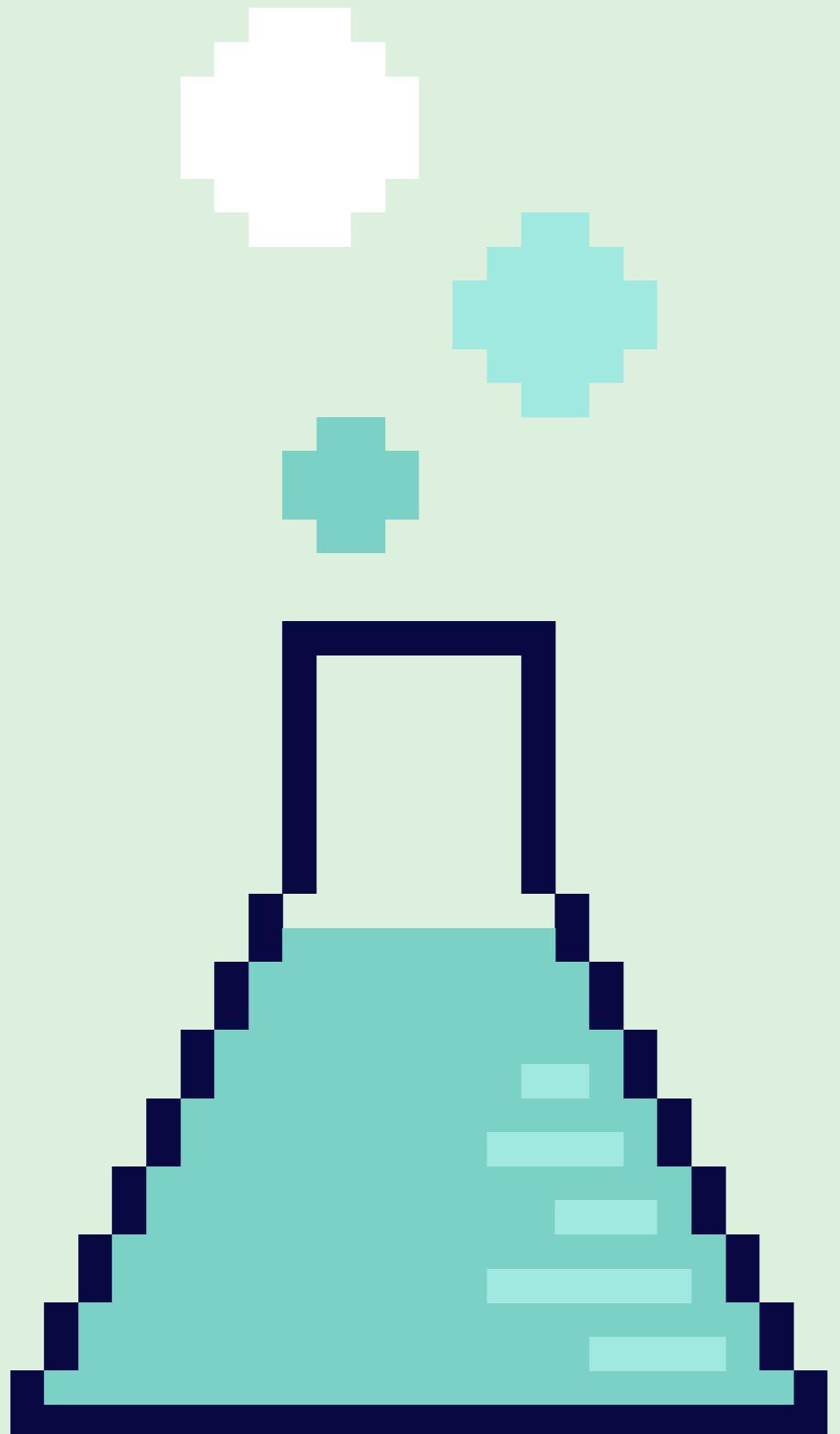
Tear down the walls

If you don't like something, change it. That goes for anything. Seriously. We used to have a giant wall running through the middle of the shop. It blocked all the beautiful Brooklyn light from outside. A few folks put together a proposal to tear down the wall, and a few weeks later, we did. Let there be light.

Start your own ritual

We're friends and coworkers here. We believe that it's much easier to work with someone once you get to know them on a personal level. We have many social rituals and they top the list of our favorite things about Big Spaceship.

Every tradition at Big Spaceship was started by someone like you. Trivia night, the Guac-Off, Friendsgiving, Book Club, Board Game Night, World's Greatest Person, Whiskey Club. Each one exists because someone just decided to do it. Start your own ritual.



An ongoing experiment

This place is constantly changing. And change is something we humans resist more than anything else. It's nobody's fault; it's just a biological remnant from our caveman days. Yet as much as we resist change, it's also how we grow and improve. It's the sign of a healthy community. And it's why each team here has a mix of new and seasoned folks. With new blood comes new thinking – and so we continue the ongoing experiment that is Big Spaceship.

FAQ



You've got questions.
We've got answers.

Q: It seems like everyone is reading each others minds. How do I do that?

A: We use Slack a lot. You'll see.

Q: Why don't we have a Chief Innovation Officer

A: You already fill that role. If you're not innovating, you're not doing your job.

Q: That dog looks hungry - can I feed it?

A: No. Unless it's yours. Then maybe.

Q: Is this an advertising agency?

A: Yes. No. We think up and make things that help brands demonstrate their value and make meaningful connections.

A magazine once called us "a crack team of digital inventors." We thought that had a nice ring to it, but we also make TV spots when it makes sense to. Some of the things we make get covered by trade publications with "advertising" in the title.

We're honored to be an agency of record for some of the world's most ambitious brands. But more important than that title is the lasting, evolving, and mutually invested relationships we have with our partners.

At the end of the day, we think of ourselves as a community of explorers.

Q: Can I bring my cat/iguana/whatever?

A: Eh.

Q: What is fair game to eat in the kitchen?

A: Have at 'em. If you want to keep some personal food in the kitchen, write your name all over it.

Q: Can I erase that writing on the walls?

A: If it says "DON'T ERASE," leave it be.

Q: Do I need to sit at my desk?

A: Not at all. You're free to move about as you please. If you work at a desktop machine, you're going to have a hard time taking it with you. This is why we have notebooks.

Q: Can I come in on the weekend?

A: Yup.

Q: I don't like this song – can I skip it?

A: Don't even think about it.

FAQ

Q: Do dolphins sleep?

A: Yes, they are mammals and they sleep just like the rest of us. Just half of their brain at a time. Think about it.

Q: Is it cool if I put on headphones?

A: Indeed, we encourage it.

Q: Who controls the music?

A: We all do.

Q: Who am I?

A: You are the universe experiencing itself.

Q: Can I get a package delivered here?

A: Sure.

Q: Is this whole thing just a sociological experiment?

A: There are theories...

Q: What if I am allergic to dogs?

A: How allergic?

Q: My boyfriend/ cousin/ mom/ dad/ landlord is coming to town. Can I bring them by?

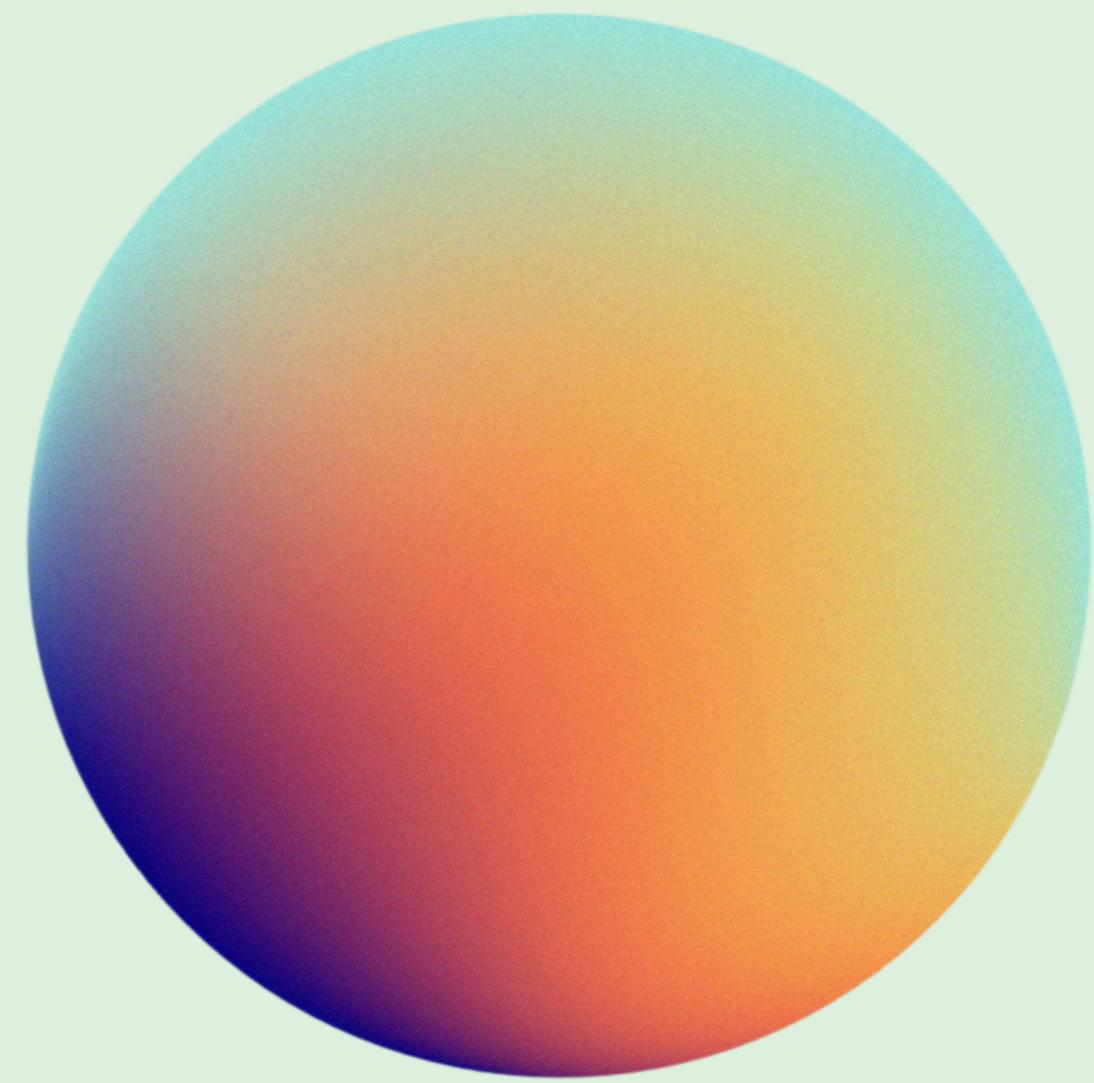
A: Of course. We especially love meeting parents...

Q: Is this place a cult?

A: Kinda.

If all else fails:

Just work hard and be nice to people.
The rest will sort itself out.



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