



Controversial Principles

Introduction

In this document, we discuss certain key principles that profoundly impact the Spooner experience and how Bending Spoons operates. We invite every Spooner to consider whether they believe each of these principles is, on the whole, beneficial to Bending Spoons and a net positive for their experience at the company.

This document doesn't constitute a comprehensive list of principles we follow. Rather, **each principle under discussion—which we call *controversial* throughout—verifies the following two criteria:**

- We're confident that implementing it is *critical* to helping Bending Spoons make significant progress
- It's the source of more debate and difference of opinion than most of the principles we implement at our company

Controversial principles

The list of our controversial principles now follows:

Uncompromising excellence. Bending Spoons isn't willing to compromise on its demand for excellence. A Spooner who's starting out on their journey strives toward making an outstanding impact within a reasonable timeframe. And one who's already making an outstanding impact strives to stay at the top of their game as the requirements of their position evolve. We direct enormous effort in the recruiting process toward ensuring a new Spooner has a high probability of succeeding here. Nevertheless, occasionally a Spooner falls short of expectations. When that's the case, we support the Spooner in their efforts to reach the desired levels. Naturally, differences of opinion on progress and performance can occur, and we encourage constructive, good-faith discussion. However, if the appropriate conversations and supportive measures have been taken and it's clear that the relevant shortcomings aren't only temporary, then we respectfully part ways with the Spooner. While nobody relishes such a situation, every Spooner should recognize that there's no reasonable alternative if we're to uphold our principle of uncompromising excellence.



Radical candor. Radical candor is a necessary component of achieving world-class levels of trust, cohesion, and—ultimately—overall performance. Assuming they've formed their opinion rationally and thoughtfully, a Spooner accurately portrays what they *really* think—with empathy, respect, and supportiveness, but without sugarcoating it. And when they're the recipient of challenging feedback, a Spooner is emotionally mature and resilient enough to take it in the constructive spirit that it's intended. Finally, when a Spooner sees those around them failing to be radically candid, they flag it up and remind those involved of our collective commitment to this principle.

Prioritizing talent when hiring and assigning responsibilities. Experience can be valuable, and we bring on board plenty of experienced candidates. However, as we primarily hire for long-term impact, talent matters most of all. Many of today's most admired Spooners joined with modest experience, demonstrating how exceptional talent can translate into substantial impact once paired with high-quality learning opportunities. A Spooner embraces this approach, and helps recruit others even when the new joiner's experience is limited. Similarly, a Spooner entrusts a new joiner with an unusually high level of responsibility, helping them gain valuable experience at a rapid rate.

Efficient discussion and decision-making. It's wasteful to involve every relevant Spooner in every discussion or decision. The Spooner driving the effort determines whose counsel to seek and whose time it isn't worth making demands of on this occasion.¹ An individual not involved in the discussion or decision understands that working in a team means dividing responsibility and trusting one another. As such, they appreciate the efficiency brought about by keeping discussion and decision groups small, and they don't harbor any resentment over not being consulted. The Spooner responsible for making a decision of any significance shares both the decision and the underlying rationale broadly, and encourages others to critique it.

Embracing change. A Spooner combats sunk cost and change aversion biases, and buys into the company's commitment to the pursuit of positive change—even when it causes disruption to the individual's plans. For example, the acquisition of a high-potential business may necessitate an organizational reshuffle. A Spooner sees beyond any personal inconvenience this causes them, and instead gets excited about the opportunities for increased growth and impact that such positive change can bring them, their fellow Spooners, and Bending Spoons at large.

Hard work. We're massive advocates of working *smart*. But there's no avoiding the fact that working *hard* is a big part of excelling in a competitive world. A Spooner doesn't coast, and offers constructive feedback when encountering a colleague operating at a lower level than they're capable of. A Spooner is self-motivated, ambitious with their objectives, demanding of their colleagues, and dedicated and

¹ Learning potential and diversity are among the factors considered when composing a discussion or decision group.



tenacious in their efforts to deliver. They find it exciting and fulfilling to be a part of a team whose members operate with such a high level of ambition and drive, viewing it as a force multiplier for their own growth. The company is committed to supporting each Spooner in handling any stress they may experience from time to time as a consequence, and in designing a life balance they find enjoyable and sustainable. Nevertheless, we're candid about Bending Spoons being a company where challenges, workloads, and expectations are considerable—which, we recognize, isn't for everybody.

Pragmatism. A Spooner directs their efforts toward maximizing the rate of impact they contribute. As neither a scrappy solution delivered at record pace nor a polished one that takes a long time to produce is *intrinsically* desirable, a Spooner seeks the optimal tradeoff between speed and quality depending on the particular situation. While it's possible to later invest more time to improve an imperfect solution, time unnecessarily invested can never be regained. Therefore, the Spooner recognizes that speed is generally the tiebreaker in uncertain cases.

Individual responsibility for personal growth and well-being. As a company, we offer each Spooner the appropriate conditions and tools to grow and to find the life balance that's most suitable for them. All the same, the only effective path toward sustained personal growth and well-being is the one where the individual is at the helm, proactively leveraging the company's help, and taking full responsibility for the outcomes. For example, a Spooner who gets stressed by receiving Slack messages out of regular hours resolves the issue by turning off notifications and by discussing availability expectations with their colleagues, rather than expecting the company to introduce a dedicated policy. Similarly, a Spooner who feels drained and unfocused proactively adjusts their working schedule or leverages the permission-free, flexible vacation policy to recharge. Such solutions are always available to a Spooner—it's the individual who ultimately determines whether or not to take advantage of them.

Individual boundary setting. This principle is a close cousin of the previous one. For the vast majority of the Spooniverse, the teams set their own goals and, as a result, set their own target workloads.² Within each team, the individual Spooner first determines the level of effort they're willing to make, and then gives their best every day within those boundaries. If their teammates are continually making demands that don't respect these boundaries, the Spooner raises the issue with these teammates and they work toward a solution together. It's common for a Spooner to experience a large and ever-growing backlog, which can be stressful for those with a completionist mindset. However, Bending Spoons promotes an *impact-only* approach, where tasks of lesser importance can stay in the backlog indefinitely while the Spooner tackles the most important ones with focus and relentless determination.³ Finally, when they're

² A few teams at Bending Spoons work toward externally imposed, fixed goals. For example, Accounting must deliver our financial statements to the tax authorities every year by a certain date, and do so while adhering to strict specifications. But such teams are an exception at our company.

³ An ever-growing backlog can be a good thing at a company that promotes an impact-only approach. First, it tends to indicate that a Spooner is being given a lot of responsibility. Second, with every new task that gets added to their



confident that adding members to their team would create value for the company, a Spooner raises the topic with their direct team lead. Nevertheless, a Spooner also recognizes that adding more members to a team rarely results in a lesser individual workload. Instead, as the team's level of ambition remains unchanged, proportionally higher targets get set, and the team members work roughly the same amount as before.

Discussion

We've got strong reason to believe that most Spooners appreciate our unconventional approach and find it inspiring—indeed, **they love Bending Spoons in large part because of, not in spite of, our controversial principles.**

At the same time, there are also Spooners who aren't aligned with us on at least some of these principles. As a company with a lot of independent thinkers, it's inevitable for there to be differing perspectives on complex topics. This is a wonderful thing—it's why **we value debate so highly and gather input from a cross-section of the Spooniverse before making important decisions, including all those on controversial principles.**⁴ Doing so helps us ward off groupthink and arrive at more robust positions.

Nonetheless, while constructive debate is central to our culture, **we must still be wary of the endless dissection of any one topic, which can be inefficient, damaging to unity, and emotionally exhausting.** When a debate becomes unproductive, it's not only the willing participants who endure these negative effects, but every Spooner and Bending Spoons at large.

Therefore, we ask every Spooner whether they believe that each controversial principle is, on the whole, beneficial to Bending Spoons and a net positive for their experience at the company.

To any Spooner who doesn't believe this is the case, we have a great deal of empathy. It's incredibly frustrating for the individual when the company they invest so much in takes positions with which they disagree. We invite the Spooner to once more let their views be known if they so wish. However, such is the importance of these principles that, barring significant new information, insights, or ideas being

backlog, the Spooner might have an opportunity to increase their rate of impact. A simplified example helps illustrate this point: Verity has three tasks on her to-do list—Task A is worth 100 *impact points per hour (IPPH)*, Task B is worth 75 IPPH, and Task C is worth 50 IPPH. With the help of her teammates, Verity prioritizes wisely, and starts working on Task A. Before she finishes Task A, she's also assigned Task D (worth 200 IPPH). By taking on Task D (either immediately or after completing Task A), Verity can increase her rate of impact at the company versus a scenario where her backlog remained limited to Tasks A through C.

⁴ For example, this very document is the result of contributions from more than 20 Spooners.



offered, we'll probably reaffirm the company's position. Then, **we ask the Spooner to decide if they're prepared to fully commit to the course.**

If the Spooner doesn't wish to commit, parting ways is best for all involved: Bending Spoons can continue to follow its chosen path with focus and unity, while the individual can move on to a new adventure at a company that better represents their beliefs. Any departing Spooner leaves as a valued and lasting friend of Bending Spoons.

Conclusion

There are certain controversial principles at Bending Spoons that we're convinced we need to continue fostering if we want to accomplish the incredible feats we're targeting. At least some Spooners won't agree with the company's position on at least some of these principles, which is perfectly understandable.

However, we do ask such a Spooner to reflect on the misalignments and decide whether they're willing to disagree and commit to the company's chosen path. If they are, then we're delighted to move forward together. If they're not, we respect their stance and invite them to leave as valued and lasting friends of Bending Spoons.

This ensures individuals work at companies that reflect their beliefs, and Bending Spoons stays focused, united, and ready to conquer massive challenges in the months and years ahead.