



# Guiding Principles & Philosophy

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## Purpose and Scope

The purpose of this code or philosophy is to provide a guide for interactions between Spireworks partners, contractors, and the clients that ascribe to these principles. It may not always be possible to honour the guide in full when in a client setting, where culture does not permit and/or where doing so will result in unnecessarily adverse outcomes. Most notably, this comment pertains to the principle of “radical transparency”, which is only effective when individuals have opted in.

This document serves as a guide and not as a doctrine. It is important to appreciate that no two instances or situations we face are the same, so each scenario will have a differing set of available actions and outcomes. Many of the ideas referred to in this document are inspired by Ray Dalio (ex-CEO and founder of Bridgewater Associates) and his book Principles, available [here](#).

## Spireworks Culture

Organizational culture is defined by the collective values, beliefs and philosophy of the organization's members. Culture governs how people behave in organizations. Shared values have a strong influence on the people within an organization and govern how they act, dress and perform their work.

Spireworks is a [Teal Organisation](#):

*“Teal organizations take shared values to the next level either through clear ground rules or sharing beliefs about what is acceptable or unacceptable. Most Teal organizations spend a lot of time during the recruitment process informing candidates about the values of the organization to determine whether there is a good culture fit. Teal organizations also set practices to frequently review and question culture and values to ensure they are truly lived by those in the organization. Some values that are often present are trust, transparency, collective intelligence, wholeness and authenticity.”*

Spireworks also seeks to be a Deliberately Developmental Organisation (DDO). A DDO is organized around the simple but radical conviction that organizations will best prosper when they are more deeply aligned with people's strongest motive - to grow. We do not want you to

operate as you have to in other organizations, managing your reputation by covering your weaknesses, and trying to look your best. We believe this is wasteful and demoralizing, and that it will prevent you and us from reaching our full potential. We commit to deliberately creating a culture that identifies your strongest contributions and supports your development. We expect that all of our conversations, meetings and routines will incorporate this idea of developing ourselves, our colleagues and our collaboration, personally and professionally. The culture we create **IS** our strategy - and the key to our success is developing everyone. You can read more about DDOs [here](#).

The foundation of our culture hinges on our key, shared values:



Deliberate development, feedback and interactions are seen through the lens of these values.

- **Purpose:** We want to make your work better and our team rallies around this shared purpose.
- **Courage:** We aspire to courageously say what is often unsaid. We believe conflict and criticism are the agents of change.
- **Curiosity:** We want to know how things work, how people think and how to make business and life better. Our curiosity ensures we never stop learning.
- **Honesty:** We believe that trust is built on transparency. We are honest about our failures, we seek to learn from them, and we encourage our clients to do the same.
- **Adaptability:** We believe that the speed of change in this world is unprecedented and survival will depend on our ability to adapt and evolve.
- **Kindness:** We count kindness and understanding among the key ingredients necessary to embrace change in order to achieve success, whether in organizations or in life.

## Expectations

In our age of automation and artificial intelligence, we believe that the look and feel of all organizations must change. The truly human characteristics of creativity, story-telling and fallibility must be put back at the centre of how we work together. This is how Spireworks wants to operate.

We base our principles and values on the reality that we are all flawed beings. We all, at times, engage in unhealthy, counter-productive behaviour; we are all shaped and often blinded by our own experience. The fundamental expectation of you, as a Spireworks agent, is that you understand this fact and that you behave in a manner that demonstrates kindness, understanding and acceptance of others. You are expected to listen attentively to the perspectives of others, however they may differ from your own. You are expected to accept the flaws and limitations of those with whom you interact, and demonstrate an appreciation for each others' positive contributions. Your interactions should meet people where they are, NOT expect them to meet you where you are. This means that you are responsible for communicating your message, with the positivity and respect that your listener deserves. Consider the potential marginalization or historical unfair treatment of your listener, and acknowledge this openly, wherever possible. Try to be aware of your own privilege and your own impulsive reactions and consider this in your conversations and collaboration with others. Treat your colleagues and our clients with the kindness, understanding and humility that is necessary, to get the best out of you, each other and us all.

It is inevitable that our values and principles, and our focus on development, will lead to conflict, and conflict can be triggering and distressing for many of us. The Spireworks network relies on the strength of relationships and on our ability to communicate and collaborate effectively. But professional discussions and disagreements can often trigger personal baggage and reactions beyond the scope of the conversation at hand. Life and work comes with innumerable stressors, and we all must understand that a single interaction does not define a relationship. If you make a mistake, speak out of turn or impose your tension or stress on others, return and apologize for it. Apologies should be accepted willingly and openly, and should be seen as an opportunity to reset a relationship.

Our values and principles, documented herein, seek to provide a framework for your everyday participation in Spireworks operations. Like us however, they are not infallible. We ask you to apply these principles, to the best of your ability, to seek out the feedback and support you need from others in the network to develop your own interpersonal and collaboration skills, and to welcome the input and suggestions of others with openness, curiosity and courage.

We want you to aspire to be self-aware, to seek to understand your impact on others and the limitations of your own knowledge and experience. We hope that you will aspire to develop your emotional intelligence in the performance of your work and in your interaction with our network. This is difficult work and we ask that you are patient with others and with yourself. We hope that the principles outlined below will help you in this endeavour.

## The Principles

### 1. Be Radically Transparent

We strive to be radically transparent in all of our actions and endeavours. This includes openness about ourselves, our organizational structure, strategy and remuneration scales. Perhaps, more importantly, it encompasses provision of criticism and feedback. This principle has been popularized by Ray Dalio. Ray advocates that whilst this process may be uncomfortable, pain provides us with an opportunity to reflect. Self-reflection is an important skill, as nobody can see themselves objectively.

It is the responsibility of each individual to manage radical transparency (feedback) they receive well. Information received in this manner is data and should be seen as just that. It is expected that the data is received intelligently. Try saying - “thank you”.

In addition, when providing honest and responsible criticism the expectation is that the focus is placed squarely on the behaviour that merits discussion and *not* the individual in question. Specificity is also required. So instead of saying “you always miss deadlines”, one should say “you missed a deadline on January 21st”. The reason for the criticism must be understood and the tone of delivery should exclude anger and sarcasm as these are counterproductive.

## 2. Fail Well

We embrace risk-taking, an essential ingredient of innovation and creativity. We don't fear failure and when failure does occur, as it inevitably will, we allow those failures to be held up under the light. It is essential that we learn from our failures. It is an inability to do so which is unacceptable. This we commit to with our clients and with each other.

Of course, there are acceptable mistakes (e.g. exploration, innovation, learning) and unacceptable mistakes (e.g. waste, security, health & safety).

### 3. Be self-aware and get to know what makes us all unique

Know what your personal characteristics are, your strengths and, more importantly, what challenges you. Appreciate that we are all wired differently and that an ability to communicate our preferred styles of operation and modes of practice will aid collaboration and increase success.

For example, know which camp your collaborators fall into:

<p><i>Introversion vs. Extroversion</i></p> <p><i>Intuiting vs. sensing</i></p> <p><i>Thinking vs. Feeling</i></p> <p><i>Planning vs. Perceiving</i></p> <p><i>Task focused vs. outcome oriented</i></p> <p><i>Creators vs. refiners vs. advancers vs. executors vs. flexors</i></p>
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Spending time on getting in sync with your collaborators is time very well spent. The best teams know one another's strengths and weaknesses and play to those strengths and weaknesses. Consider use of a workplace personality inventory or a Myers Briggs Personality Test.

### 4. Make room for conflict

It is imperative that we recognise that conflict is both un-avoidable and essential for growth and success. Our organization's success is hinged on development and maintenance of a network of strong relationships; conflict allows people to determine if their values and ethics align, to resolve their differences and to envisage solutions beyond each individual's capabilities.

### 5. Act with integrity

Don't say anything about a person that you wouldn't say to them in person. Be brave, say what needs to be said, even when that is difficult, especially when it is difficult. Don't worry about

saving face; we do not concern ourselves with winning favour, rather we deal in what is accurate and what is inaccurate. Blame serves no purpose when accuracy is the guiding principle.

## 6. Take personal responsibility

It is human nature to ascribe blame external to ourselves for negative or painful outcomes. Doing so, however, undermines our autonomy (our ability to better manage a similar situation in the future) and the potential for growth and learning. We, Spiireworks, operate on fact. Accept responsibility for your shortcomings. Accept that there is always room for improvement and if you fail to identify ways in which you can improve, be proactive in obtaining this information from your collaborators. Everyone can benefit from a “challenge network” - a network of peers and mentors who will challenge your actions, opinions and decisions. Seek out your challengers. This is the behaviour we value, not perpetual achievement.

## 7. Learn how to make decisions effectively

When faced with a difficult decision, have a good understanding of the internal and external influences and the key stakeholders that the decision will impact. Emotions are often the biggest challenge to good decision-making and hence it is oftentimes useful to employ a tool that supports objective analysis of the problem. A model we have found useful is Bond's Six-Step Process (Appendix A). This model is typically used in a therapeutic setting so we have modified the language slightly for use in this context.

## 8. Embrace an idea meritocracy

An idea meritocracy is an environment in which the best idea wins. Put best by [Edward D. Hess](#):

*“An Idea Meritocracy is designed to produce the best possible decision under the circumstances by enabling the best thinking by all team members. It does this by creating a culture that promotes psychological safety, candor, confronting the brutal facts, permission to speak freely and permission to do rapid, small, low-risk experiments. That culture enables and drives iterative learning behaviors. An Idea Meritocracy values collaboration, not competition; teams, not individuals; inquiry exploration and constructive data-driven debate, not “telling”;*

*and learning more than “knowing.” Organizations with Idea Meritocracies recognize that the best ideas come from psychologically safe team environments that encourage transparency, open-mindedness, speaking up regardless of position, reflective listening and a belief in the power of collective intelligence.”*

It is important to understand that having an idea meritocracy requires that you understand the merit of each person's ideas. When making decisions there is benefit in identifying the most believable person who disagrees with you and making an effort to understand their logic. It is the reasoning that led this person to their conclusion or opinion that is most important, so be sure to invite explanation of that reasoning. Inexperienced people can have great ideas, sometimes the most creative ones. Be prepared to express how confident you are in your opinions and ideas.

## 9. Commit and Follow-through

Do what you say you will do. This aligns with personal responsibility but it also contributes to the creation and maintenance of a culture which is positive and motivating for everyone. Work to achieve goals that you and your collaborators are excited about. Plan how to achieve your goals effectively and ensure to take the time to do so.

## 10. Time take to Rest

We do not award medals or honours for most hours worked in a week. Rest, recuperation and self-care are an important part of maintaining your wellness, creativity and productivity. Get to know what your limitations are and learn to strike a balance in your work. Set boundaries where necessary. We advocate that you bring your whole self to work, your complexities and your personal circumstances. If you are sick, take time to recover - we only ask that you communicate appropriately with your team and collaborators. If an emergency crops up, you will receive empathy and support from your team at Spireworks. Do your work when optimal and make work an integral part of your life rather than a burdensome component. When work is on your terms, it changes the game.

## 11. Don't underestimate the importance of learning

Here's five beliefs of [Edward D. Hess](#)' which articulate the importance of being open-minded and continually learning:

- We are defined not by what we know or how much we know, but by the quality of our thinking, listening, learning, relating and collaborating.
- Our mental models are not reality — they are only our generalized stories of how we perceive that our world works.
- We are not our ideas, and we must decouple our beliefs (not values) from our egos.
- We must be open-minded and treat our beliefs (not values) as hypotheses to be constantly tested and subject to modification by better data.
- Our mistakes and failures are opportunities to learn

## 12. Learn to wear different hats

In interactions think about whether you are playing the role of teacher, student, or peer (collaborator) and whether you should be teaching, asking questions or debating. Know when to change hats and how that equates to behaviour. Be willing and eager to change hats.

## 13. Learn to manage your triggers

The Spireworks network relies on the strength of relationships and on our ability to communicate and collaborate effectively. Emotionally triggering events and interactions are likely to occur. First of all, get to know what your triggers are, or (in some instances) who they are. Then take personal responsibility for managing the emotional response that ensues. Once again, we advocate that you familiarise yourself with the concept of the [amygdala hijack](#) and how to manage it in the workplace. The success of the organisation and our mission is founded upon emotional maturity and hence we recommend that we are each aware of, acknowledge and address our triggers and responses to same. Some guidance on diffusing your workplace triggers is available [here](#).

## Appendix A - Bond's 6-step Process

Whenever you are confronted with a problem or dilemma which bring into question ethics, it is useful to approach the problem in a systematic way. The following six-step process is intended to act as a basic framework and to stimulate you to consider a wide range of possibilities before making a decision.

1. Describe the problem or dilemma.
2. Determine whose dilemma it is.
3. Consider all available ethical principles and guidelines.
4. Identify all possible courses of action.
5. Selection the best course of action.
6. Evaluate the outcome.