




A THINKING APE
OWNER'S MANUAL
2ND EDITION





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2ND EDITION

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Welcome

Hello

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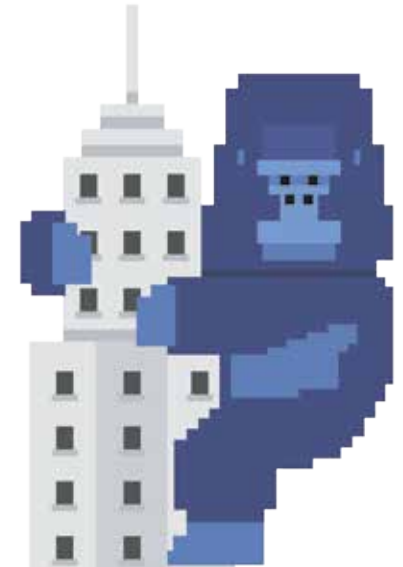
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Welcome

Hello

Welcome to A Thinking Ape!

We like working with smart people. That said, we know even exceptional people sometimes need a point in the right direction, that's why we've created this manual. Here you'll discover "How to ATA." Think of the contents of these pages as our DNA. All of the things that are most important to us are in this book: our raison d'être, our core values, food, our ambitions, how we hire, food, how we communicate, how we celebrate and food. Our intention is to give you a good idea of what it's like to call ATA HQ your second home.



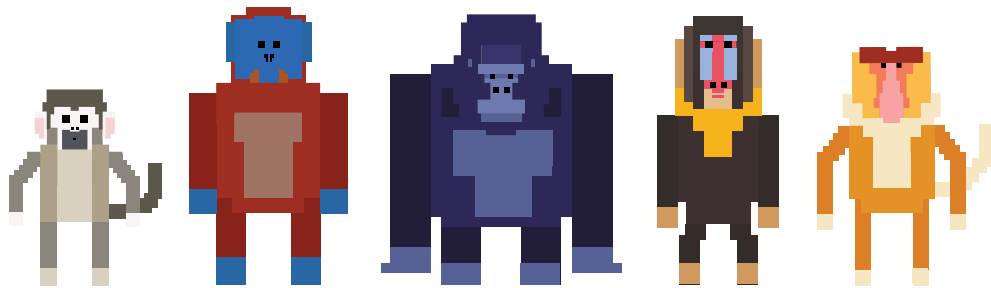
Welcome

Our commitment to our team

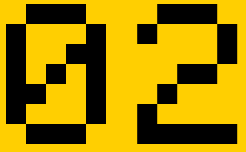
As you're reading this you may have already joined our team, you may be highly considering joining us or you may just be simply interested in how we operate.

We're going to get out of your way shortly, but first we want to make clear our two promises to anyone that joins our team.

1. We aim to help our team do their best work by giving them challenging projects with as much ownership as they can take, alongside all the professional development and skills training we can offer.
2. Anyone that joins ATA can rest assured that they will be surrounded by the smartest colleagues they've ever worked with.



We help our team do their best work by giving them challenging projects with as much ownership as they can take.



What Matters

Core Values

- Ownership
- Have Wonderful Arguments
- The Best Ideas Win
- Keep Growing

Core values

When we set out to make great games with massive online communities, we knew that we first had to create the ideal environment for building ambitious things. A place where brilliant and inspiring people could come together and build games that make millions of players happy. We realized that we needed to find incredibly talented people and get out of their way. Since then, we've paid careful attention to how we like to work together. These are our core values.



What Matters



Ownership

What It Is

We take complete ownership of our work and trust everyone to make decisions that act in the best interests of the company. Team leads are there to offer guidance and ensure we're not hitting any roadblocks, but individually we're responsible for how we approach our tasks or projects.

Why It Matters

We operate in an industry of innovation. That's why we've gone to great lengths to hire the brightest, most creative people we can find. But our comprehensive hiring process would mean nothing if we didn't give our team the freedom to make impactful decisions. At ATA everyone's role is what they make it, we trust that everyone knows what they're doing and that they'll do it to the best of their ability. Of course, like any business, we have projects that need to get done, but how these are approached is completely up to each individual.

We encourage everyone to take initiative, with the knowledge that we're behind them every step of the way.



Have Wonderful Arguments

What It Is

We're comfortable thinking deeply about important issues, and we care about our products enough to respectfully challenge decisions when we feel there could be a better approach. The best outcomes stem from productive debates, built on mutual respect and checked egos.

Why It Matters

In order to have a true meritocracy and foster real discourse, we need to be able to hash things out with each other. This requirement necessitates the ability to filter out our own cognitive biases. Everyone needs to be able to make decisions irrespective of ego and understand that a challenge to an argument is not a personal attack.

This value may push people the furthest out of their comfort zone, but we legitimately love a productive argument. Nobody should be afraid to speak up, especially when they think things could be done a better way. We like to think a little candid debate leads to bigger, better ideas.

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The Best Ideas Win

What It Is

We aim to challenge our assumptions and make data driven decisions when possible, nothing is ever set in stone. We encourage our team to seek out new approaches or ideas that will improve our products and processes. If they're confident in the data behind their ideas then let's test them.

Why It Matters

We want the best ideas to surface. Whether from an intern or a founder, if it's an informed idea with data to back it up, that idea should drive the decision-making process.

Numbers don't lie, but they also don't tell the whole story. We believe in using data to make decisions whenever possible, but we also know that games are creative and communities are complex. We pride ourselves in our ability to know when to trust our gut and when to trust the numbers.



Keep Growing

What It Is

We're always building and improving our skills and processes. We understand that when we learn, we see exponential improvement in ourselves, our products and our company. We're never finished learning.

Why It Matters

This one is all about continually leveling up. It condenses down to how we think ATA should run, both as a whole and broken into its constituent parts. We repeatedly iterate on the scientific method because we believe the potential for exponential growth in the right environment must never be underestimated.

Our focus on optimizing for growth has huge implications for each individual on our team. Creating a space that inspires personal and professional growth puts the ability to shape our career in our hands. We're big fans of building expertise internally in areas in which we lack knowledge. If someone's interests and aspirations align with an untapped opportunity for ATA, then we're all ears, we want them to show us how we can continue to grow.



About ATA

Mission statement

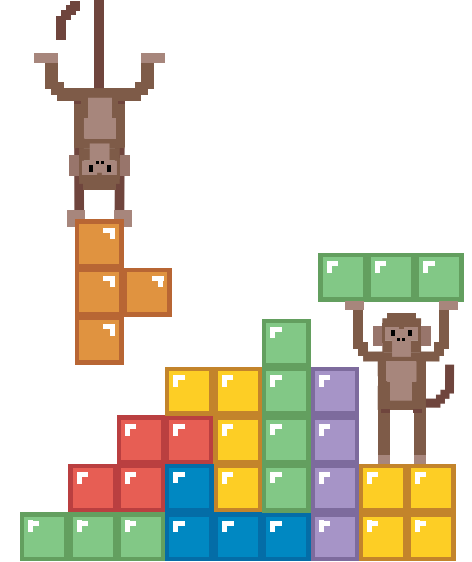
What we're trying to do

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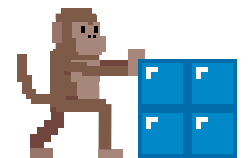
About ATA



Mission statement

We build communities.

On the surface ATA is a mobile gaming company, that's the simplest way to describe what we do. Behind the scenes, we've become really good at building social communities and it now frames every decision we make. It's not just a games thing—it's a very human thing to do. And this focus is multifaceted. We're enthusiastic about building communities on every level, from our players to our internal team and externally with the people and organizations we interact with. What does this look like on each of those levels? Let's take a look.



Firstly, our player communities, they're a powerful (and hilarious and colourful and sometimes NSFW) illustration of our mission. Our games connect people from around the world. We've been the catalyst for marriages, group vacations, even precious DNA mixtapes (read: babies). We witness the full spectrum of human emotion in our games, and it's fascinating. Take, for example, our players' enthusiasm to contribute to global disaster relief efforts by purchasing in-app charitable options. Our games create opportunities for people to come together—to socialize, to voice what's important to them—and we find ways to leverage the power of those communities. The results of these organic interactions often blow us away.

Internally, we're hugely invested in building a strong community vibe at ATA HQ. Our team is a diverse one, and we believe the more connections we make among ourselves, the stronger we become. That's why we work hard to foster a dynamic environment that allows for cross-team collaboration, communication and cooperation. Outside

of their roles, we want our team to step away from their desk and get to know their colleagues on a more casual level. We host a ton of events to bring everyone together, after all, we're a games company, it'd be super ironic if we didn't like to have fun.

And finally: we strive to build communities with external stakeholders. We are constantly exploring and expanding our contribution to outside collectives. Whether it be through sponsorship or event hosting partnerships, opening our doors to students interested in learning more about the industry or competing against our tech counterparts in the name of charity. Heck, we extend this mission to our vendors too. We have a sneaking suspicion our coffee guy spends an above-average amount of time chatting with our team.

Point being: our mission informs all of our interactions, whether it's with an avid player, a teammate or a student visiting the studio for the first time. So yeah, you could say we're mildly obsessed with building communities.

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We believe great communities only become stronger when they are set in compelling universes that we've created; in other words, original intellectual property, or IP.

About ATA

What we're trying to do

Taking a step back and looking at what exactly we make at ATA is a good place to start.

We create games that encourage emergent behaviour. Games where players individually can perform simple actions, but as a collective demonstrate far more complex behaviours. For instance, the PvP (player versus player) mechanics and the simple chat in our games, allow players to create their own content, turning otherwise trivial online banter into a blood feud. We kid you not: people locked in real-life love triangles have spawned adversarial in-game relationships more intense and compelling than any story arc we might have otherwise created for them.

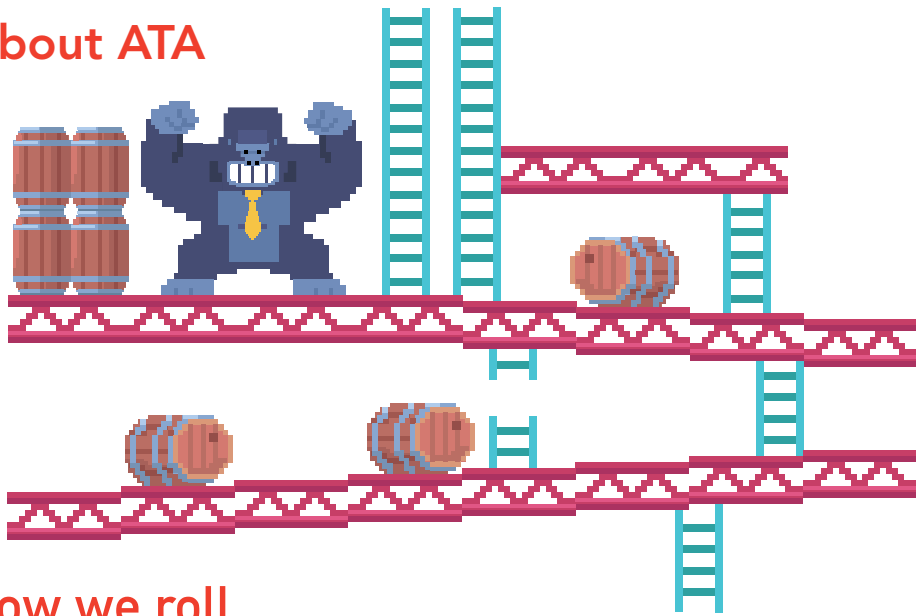
Emergent behaviour allows for a rich player-driven history, with real friendships, rivalries and even political intrigue. It forms the foundation upon which we build player communities.

Games with strong communities are also important to us because they have greater longevity. For example, Party in My Dorm, one of our oldest games, is still growing.

We believe great communities only become stronger when they are set in compelling universes that we've created; in other words, original intellectual property, or IP. We believe in original IP because it gives us full control over how we grow our communities.

Today, our player communities live within the boundaries of our mobile games. In the future, we see our communities growing and expanding outside of mobile to a multitude of different mediums; games, toys, comic books, movies, augmented reality, virtual reality...who knows? And that's really interesting to us because it means that our communities, and the universes we create, will have a massive cultural impact on the world.

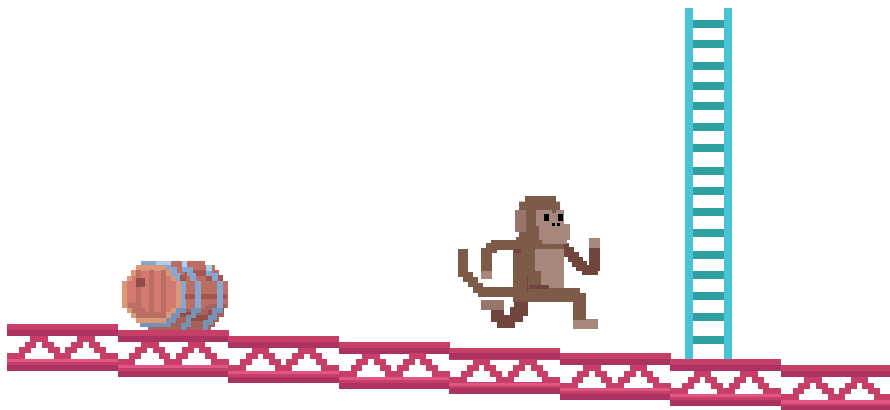
About ATA



How we roll

Ok, let's dive into how we operate. We don't believe in the traditional hierarchy structure, it doesn't fit with our values or how we like to work. Why would we go out of our way to hire the best people if we're not going to give them the ownership that they deserve? Decisions should be driven by those on the front lines, and the CEO should play a supporting role, think Luigi to Mario, Flounder to Ariel, Gunther to the whole Friends cast.

This is not to say that we don't have a leadership team, our leads are integral in creating a supportive work environment where our employees can function at their highest potential. At the core of our leadership philosophy are 1:1 meetings, delivering feedback and coaching. Our leads inspire their teams towards new levels of growth and achievement by ensuring our mission and core values inform their leadership style.



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About ATA



How we work

Our teams are structured in a way that creates a training ground for the next generation of leads and promotes a bottom-up decision-making process. Each game team operates as its own business unit and consists of multiple product cells, and each product cell consists of individuals from different disciplines. Rather than getting blueprints to execute on, these teams are given open-ended problems to solve that have a high impact on our products and the business. The

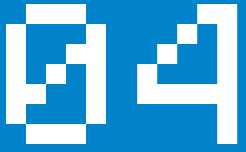
goal is that these cells will create new game founder teams, allow us to execute on ideas faster and ultimately strike gold on the next top-grossing game.

Fun fact, all our teams and projects are named after sea creatures, real and mythical. This began with Project Squid, as the founders began exploring different areas of growth for the company, just like a squid's tentacles reaching out in different directions on the ocean floor.



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Communication

Transparency

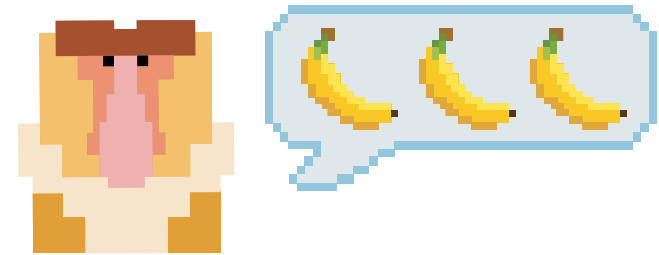
OKRs

Get Curious

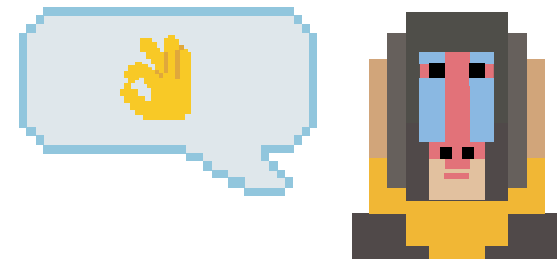
- State of the Ape
- Mid-Quarter Updates
- Ask A Founder Friday
- Trade Secrets & War Stories
- Skip Level 1:1s
- Slack
- Wiki

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Communication



Communication is everything. This section is all about our approach to communication at ATA, why we care about transparency and how we like to keep the discourse flowing.



Transparency

Transparency is at the core of how we approach communication. The reason we hold transparency so central is because we hire smart people—people we trust, people we believe in—and we want to provide the right context for them to succeed. How do we do this? By giving them the optimal amount of information to make decisions.

This level of candor may be unfamiliar to those not used to it, so we infuse it into how we communicate. It informs how we set and measure our goals, align our work to the company's mission, share information and learn from each other. We have a bunch of channels for bringing transparency to life, some more formal than others.

It's not surprising to hear our CEO chatting about projected revenues in the kitchen, in fact it's completely normal.

We see transparency as a two-way street, not that we're expecting everyone to disclose their life story, but we challenge our team to speak up when it matters, question what they don't understand and provide honest feedback. Heck, we encourage everyone to respectfully disagree with their colleagues when they think there could be a better outcome (remember that Have Wonderful Arguments core value?). Be open with us, be honest with us, trust us.

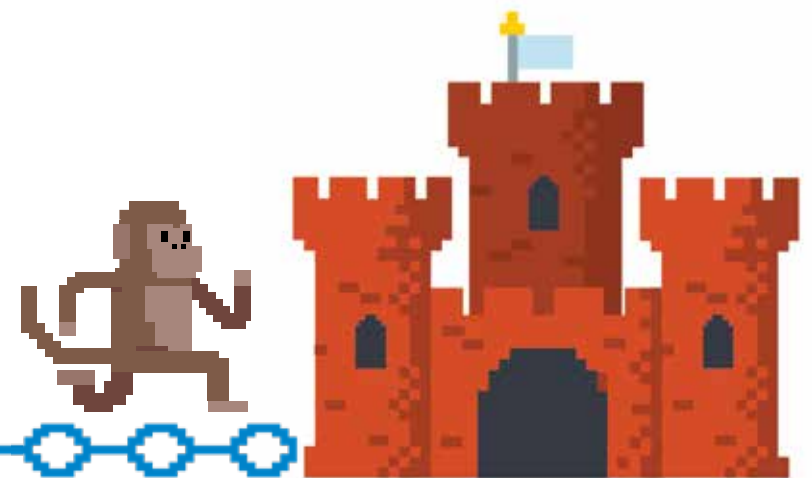
We embrace our failures. We do better going forward. We're huge fans of not making the same mistake twice.



OKRs

Of all the ways we communicate at ATA, our use of the objectives and key results (OKR) framework is the most fundamental to our success. OKRs are how we not only share company and team goals but also make clear the contribution of each person, all of which promotes transparency. And like a persistent child on an endless quest for a greater understanding, they beg the question, so what? (And the subsequent questions, What are we trying to achieve? Why are we trying to achieve it? What is the outcome?) Ultimately, they align our people with our purpose and cause us to think deeper.

All OKRs are recorded and tracked quarterly using an organizational performance management tool. At the halfway point of each quarter, our leadership team provides an update on how our teams are performing, and at the end of the quarter, we grade our results and share any wins, and frequently, any roadblocks. This last point is especially important and again brings us back to the principle of transparency. We don't minimize our shortcomings; rather, we embrace our failures. We leverage what we learned to make better decisions going forward and we find new strategies for the stuff that didn't work. We're huge fans of not making the same mistake twice.



Communication



Get Curious

We have a ton of other communication channels to satisfy the curiosity of our team. ATA is a busy place filled with independent teams, so we like to offer a mix of information-sharing platforms where we can all get together, find out what's good and keep things transparent.

Mid-Quarter Updates

As the name suggests, we find out how our teams are performing against their objectives at these mid-quarter-marking meetings. We dig deep into the data to get a good sense of how we're trending across departments. But unlike the State of the Ape, we hear from the leadership team, not our CEO. (Something else we're huge fans of: sharing the floor.) Still space for Q&As, still casual-yet-mandatory, still no suits.

State of the Ape

This is our take on a town hall meeting. At the beginning of each quarter, we gather for a high-level overview of what's going on in the company. Our CEO goes over the progress we made, the challenges we faced last quarter and presents our goals for the future. There's always a Q&A where burning questions are welcome. This casual-yet-mandatory meeting is about as formal as we get. No suits in sight.

Ask A Founder Friday

Basically an AMA with our CEO. We host these open forum, candid conversations in our kitchen. They're usually themed, so we can have a focused conversation. That said, our CEO is always at our disposal to answer any hard questions that may raise their head.

Trade Secrets & War Stories

The employee-driven Trade Secrets & War Stories series, our spin on a tech talk, is a channel to share information, knowledge and learnings across teams. This bi-weekly lunchtime gathering gives us the opportunity to teach, inspire and inform our colleagues. Working on something cool? Found a program that could send our productivity off the charts? Really excited about a new tool? C'mon, share a little! TS&WS is open to everyone in the company, regardless of their role or tenure.

Skip Level 1:1s

Each month our CEO and leadership team hold skip level 1:1s allowing anyone at the company to book dedicated time with them. This is probably the best opportunity to get close to the mechanics behind the machine and better understand how those gears work. This is also a fantastic time to ask any questions that we may have held back at the latest State of the Ape or Ask A Founder Friday, or even hash out challenges we're facing. We want everyone to really understand. ATA and how they fit in with what we're doing.

Slack

Ah, Slack. Our favourite messaging tool. We use Slack to communicate with each other, be it one-to-one, one-to-some or one-to-many. We have a huge number of Slack channels. Some are pretty par for the course (#general, #companyupdates, #benefits), while others tend to be more niche (we see you #dankmemes). And with roughly 250 custom emojis, we communicate in a quintessentially ATA fashion.

Wiki

If we have a not-entirely-novel question we can most likely find the answer on our wiki. Our wiki houses buckets of information, from company policies to technical documentation, to the OKR's we mentioned previously. It's written, re-written and maintained by everyone in the company. We refer to our wiki often. That's why it exists.



Our Culture

We're all a little quirky here

Mistakes happen

IRL gold coins

Go ahead, sleep in

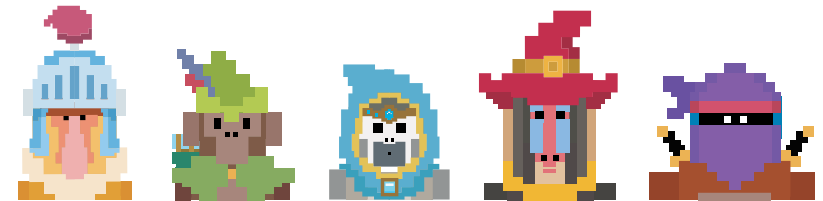
Share our space

Feedback, please

Chew on this

Cheers!

Our core values go a long way to describe ATA's culture, largely because they started with the founders and have been rearticulated over the years by our team. Still, they don't cover everything that defines who we are and how we like to take care of business (or what we like to do when we let our hair down in the studio). So consider this section our cultural potpourri bowl.



We're all a little quirky here

Take a walk by the quote wall or Faces of ATA photo board to get a sense of our bizarre humor. As we said in our commitment to inclusion, we support diversity and strive for inclusion, partly because a variety of different perspectives promotes better decisions. We care that our people feel comfortable being, unapologetically, themselves.

Mistakes happen

If an idea doesn't take, it's no big deal, as long as we learn from it and launch the next iteration quickly. We carry this attitude of experimentation into pretty much everything we do, from product decisions to recruiting pipelines. We can't expect to get it right every time. Mistakes happen; what's important is that we recover quickly and don't repeat them. We have the freedom to fail because we understand uncharted success can only result from taking risks, and we like that tradeoff. (We just don't forget to document our slip-ups along the way.)

IRL gold coins

Compensation is a large part of ATA's total rewards and recognition program. Our goal is to make sure our compensation is highly competitive. In light of our core value of Keep Growing, we emphasize compensating our employees as they grow in skills and experience. This is reflected in our compensation reviews, that happen twice a year.

We have developed salary levels that reflect the responsibilities and skills required for each role. These levels reduce risk of salary bias and support equal pay for all employees among peer working groups. This is why we don't negotiate salary when sending out job offers for new employees; if we're not competitive enough with our offers we'll adjust the ladder for everyone. We encourage employees and leads to have ongoing development conversations so that both parties know what employees need to achieve in order to be considered for promotion to their next salary level.

We care deeply about our internal community and work hard to ensure our employees are rewarded, recognized and thoughtfully cared for. Compensation is just one piece, and we will continue to evaluate our compensation and benefits offerings annually.

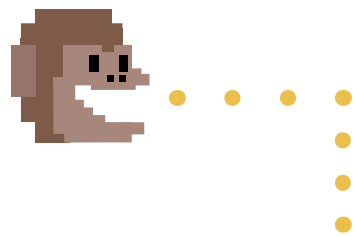
We have the freedom to fail because we understand uncharted success can only result from taking risks, and we like that tradeoff.

Go ahead, sleep in

We're a diverse mix of night owls and morning birds, so we let our team choose the hours that suit their lifestyles. We have core hours in place to encourage collaboration, but we trust our employees to do their best, and we want them to work the hours when they feel they're the most productive. Quality results matter more to us than hours clocked.

Share our space

Everyone owns and shares our studio, and it's ours to use after work hours. People have hosted industry events, art shows and had friends over for a board game night. For many of us, the studio is our second home, and we all share the responsibility of keeping it clean and secure. We make sure not to leave it a mess, and although we say the doors are always open, we do make sure to lock up each night.



Feedback, please

Great feedback makes for great decisions. An engineer might see something an artist might not, and vice-versa—that's why we encourage feedback from everyone. We don't pull any punches, but we do keep our criticism constructive.

We're fully open to ad hoc feedback, though we gather it in some structured ways too. On a personal level, our most formal feedback mechanism is the 1:1 meeting with our leads. We approach performance development as a continuous conversation. Discussions between leads and their teams ensure we all have a common understanding of performance expectations and a forum to talk about individual progress, growth and anything else that's on our minds. And don't forget feedback goes both ways. If we have something constructive to share with our lead? This is the place.

In terms of our work environment, we gather feedback through our quarterly Culture Pulse Checks. We care about maintaining an awesome culture, so four times a year we circulate a survey to gauge how things are going for everyone at work. Our goal is to improve our

workplace and our productivity. We take the feedback and create an action plan to address key themes. On the product front, we gather feedback through playtests. These sessions provide teams with valuable criticism on early prototypes, and we don't restrict these to those that see themselves as "seasoned gamers". The most novice of players can shed valuable light on our projects.

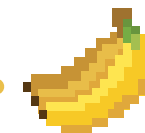
Chew on this

We love to gather around grub. From our weekly catered lunches to our snack program to our company-wide breakfasts before long weekends, we find plenty of reasons to break bread. Eating together allows us to relax, socialize and find common interests (our ramen enthusiasts are an excellent example of this last point). Our #food Slack channel is one of the most active, filled with people ready to debate the best fried chicken in Vancouver or the merits of pineapple on pizza (the jury's still out). And our globetrotters routinely bring the team treats from around the world when they return from their travels. Basically, we like food.

Cheers!

Celebrating each other and ATA's successes tops the list of ways we like to build our internal community. We shout out personal and professional milestones with our monthly birthiversary (birthday + anniversary) bashes. We recognize the ways our team lives our core values and the professional gains they make with our Golden Banana and promotion celebrations. We flex our creative muscles, blow off steam and work in new teams with our game jams. We throw huge company-wide parties every summer and holiday season as a way to acknowledge and thank the team for their 365-day hustle. And then we find quirky ways to mark a bunch of other festivities throughout the year, like Pi Day, Halloween and Diwali. And in case you completely blanked on the last section, we always include food. (Give us a reason to fete and we'll make it a feast.)

We're a diverse mix of night owls and morning birds, so we let our team choose the hours that suit their lifestyles.





Say Whaaat!

Paying homage to
a longstanding ATA
tradition: our quote wall.

Glos·sa·ry, noun. An alphabetical list of terms or words found in, or relating to, a specific subject, text, or dialect, with explanations; a brief dictionary. Sure, that works. Here we pay homage to a longstanding ATA tradition—the quote wall—with a selection of the finest sentences ever assembled in the minds of our team and let loose on the world. This is our glossary.

Say Whaaat!

“Hurray! I get my manager’s sports joke. This is a rare occasion.”

—RAHMAN

“I always accidentally almost misspell ‘athinkingape’ as ‘athinkingapi’.”

—MATT

“I can’t go to trivia tonight. I need to tune my piano.”

—BRIAN

“I feel somewhat bad for taking a classic literary character and having her ‘make it rain’ coins.”

—TYLER

“I hate it when spiders only have seven legs. That’s when you know they’ve been through some sh*t.”

—CHELSEA

“I love imaginary code that works just the way I want it to.”

—MICHAEL A.

“I need a break from my vacations.”

—MEGAN

“I swear this company runs out of Perrier faster than a celebrity baby shower.”

—JIM

“I think we can launch it on a Friday at 4pm, it’ll be fine.”
- Every new game designer we hire.”

—TAYBER

“I’m a dev...I did MySQL once.”

—CHELSEA

“If they have a solutions engineer does that mean they have a problems engineer?”

—MACKENZIE

“It was a fresh of breath air.”

—NATANIA

That’s a 5/10 quote. It’s not great but not terrible.

— KENSHI, ATA CEO AND CO-FOUNDER



“It’s 50,000 lines of code. That’s a f***ing novel!”

—MATT

“Science is a lie.”

—TIFF

“Thom Yorke? Does he play for the Seahawks?”

—MEGAN

“We should put the quote wall on the TV.”

—MATT

“When smart people meet smart people, sh*t happens.”

—ERIC, ATA CO-FOUNDER

“Whoa, this is like Mean Girls but with software developers.”

—MAGGIE

“You can’t spell launch without lunch!”

—FINN-LILY

“Your assumption that bugs get fixed is a bad one.”

—WILKINS, ATA CO-FOUNDER

“You’re a computer nerd, they said. You won’t have to lift things, they said.”

—DAN

“You’re the Wayne to my Garth.”

—JESSICA



We've got this

Alright, that's it, your official ATA primer has come to an end. But this is still only the beginning of our story, and we're excited to see the groundbreaking and ATA-face-changing ideas that are yet to come.

Thanks for reading!

- ATA xo