

# Hiring for culture add, not culture fit

Reflections on building a higher-signal, less-harmful hiring process

# about://

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# Where I work

SaaS observability product for software systems

TL;DR: for this talk:

- Small-ish startup (<100)
- Highly technical product
- Strong engineering brand



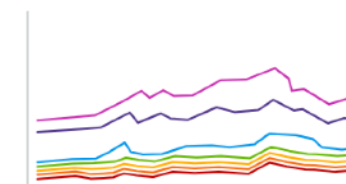
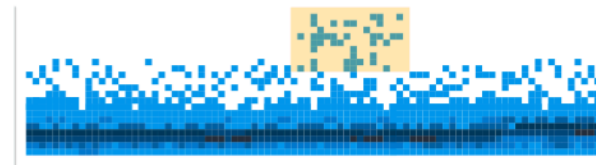
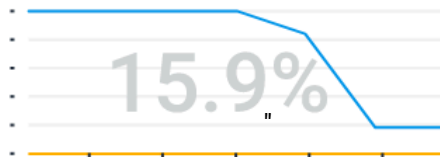
## Retriever Query

No retriever hosts fail,  
take less than 10 seconds

99.5% of eligible events  
retriever-traces collection  
will succeed over a period

## Remaining Budget

How much of the error budget  
after the last 7 days.



■	*/account *	57,811	ap
■	*/dashboard *	46,533	ap
■	*/status *	25,299	ap
■	*/login *	16,205	ap
■	*/cert *	13,865	ap
■	*/account/update *	10,658	ap
■	*/application *	8,345	ap

Hiring is *kind of*  
broken



# Interviews are *rarely* predictive of success on the job

<https://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/20/business/in-head-hunting-big-data-may-not-be-such-a-big-deal.html>

<https://www.businessinsider.com/how-google-hires-people-2013-6>

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/quora/2013/06/28/is-there-a-link-between-job-interview-performance-and-job-performance/#7125ed53458b>

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesleadershipforum/2012/02/07/stop-being-deceived-by-interviews-when-youre-hiring/>

*“We looked at tens of thousands of interviews, and everyone who had done the interviews and what they scored the candidate, and how that person ultimately performed in their job. We found zero relationship. It’s a complete random mess, except for one guy who was highly predictive because he only interviewed people for a very specialized area, where he happened to be the world’s leading expert.”*

- Laszlo Bock, former SVP People Operations, Google

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So... culture?

Culture fit?





Culture add!



# What to look for when seeking “culture add”

Instead of looking for candidates who are like current successful employees, focus on identifying & adding complementary elements that your culture lacks.

1. Can they be effective in the company as it is today?
2. Will they bring a perspective or skill we are missing?
3. Can they work in a way that aligns with stated company values?

How can we hire for “culture add?”

# 1. Define your values



# Honeycomb values



**Fast and close to right is better than perfect.**



**We hire adults.**



**Everything is an experiment.**



**Feedback is a gift.**



**Act with autonomy and ownership.**

# Beneath values: foundational behaviors

- Truthfulness / integrity
- Ethical conduct
- Diversity, equity, inclusion
- Customer focus
- Respect for others (colleagues, customers, community)
- Communication
- Working as part of a team
- Being results-oriented
- Pride in our work

# Honeycomb values



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## 2. “Hire for strengths, not lack of weaknesses”

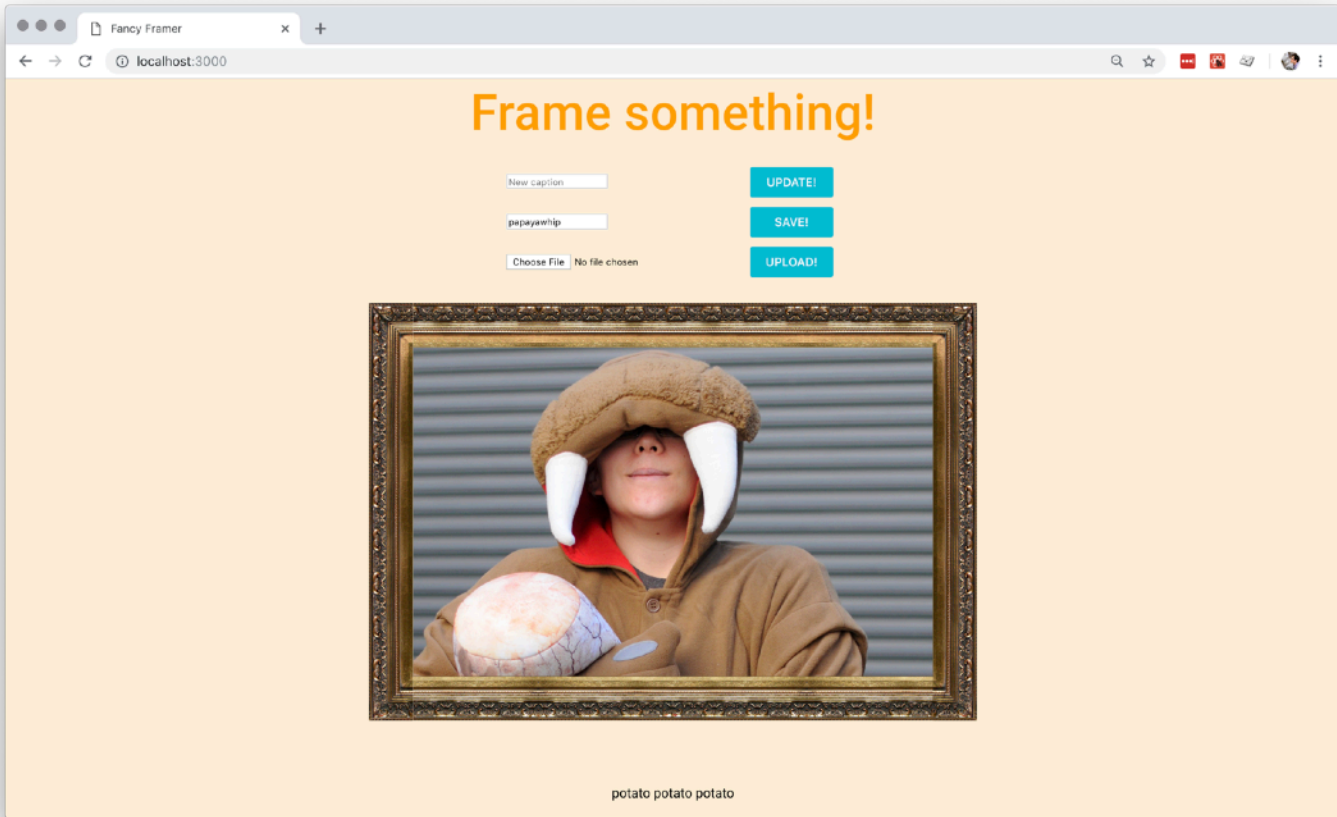
- Charity Majors





# Code exercise

1. Setup the app, and tweak the README to be more helpful if you can
2. Implement one, two or three small features and bugfixes in legacy code
3. Refactor for 20 minutes (or write some notes about refactoring)
4. Communicate about it!



### 3. Test in a production-like environment



## 4. Set candidates up for success




Your interview process should not be like Space Invaders.



You are not defending your base against unqualified intruders.

# Set candidates up for success

1. No adversarial interview processes — it's not Space Invaders! 
2. Ask them how to interview them.
3. No surprises. Tell them exactly what you're looking for.
4. Be transparent.

# 5. Interview *us*



# Interview us

1. Every interview slot leaves at least five minutes for the candidate to ask us questions
2. The interview loop is cross-functional: designers, product managers, etc.
3. At the offer stage, candidates can join a company or team meeting, or do an informational interview with anyone at the company (including execs)




How's it going?

# The bad idea: design your own interview

- We used to ask candidates, *“What’s the best way to interview you? One of the goals of our interview process is to put you at ease and help you show your best work. What’s one thing we could do in our interview process to do this?”*
- This set the wrong expectations — we didn’t actually have the time to customize the interview for each candidate.
- We also found that — counterintuitively — asking consistent questions helped us see each candidate’s culture add more clearly.

# What's good?

1. Actually predictive!
2. “That was actually kind of fun” / declined candidates are a common source of referrals
3. Candidates who aren't a fit have chances to leave the process early
4. Candidates from most underrepresented groups seem to make it through the interview process at or above the rate at which they enter the process 

*Caveat: being a small company means statistical significance is hard*

# What could be better?

1. Hires can still fail if *we* are wrong about *our* needs
2. Hard to assess exceptional skills
3. Optimizing for candidate experience can be time-intensive

# One more time, with feeling

1. Define values
2. “Hire for strengths, not lack of weaknesses”
3. Test in a production-like environment
4. Set candidates up for success
5. Let the candidate interview *us!*





# Thank you

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