

Atlan Leadership Handbook

A guide to leading when no one's telling you how to lead

This compilation reflects a decade of observations of leaders who demonstrated exceptional care, particularly when no one was watching. These patterns aren't meant to be prescriptive rules or a universal management framework for leadership. Instead, they represent the leadership qualities we value and seek to nurture at Atlan.

How to Use This Handbook

Culture, derived from the word "cult," is about the shared beliefs and practices that make an organisation unique. Consider Facebook and Spotify – two phenomenally successful companies with dramatically different approaches. Facebook's famous "Move Fast and Break Things" mantra embraced rapid shipping and accepted imperfection in service of speed. Meanwhile, Spotify believes that "Talk is Cheap" prefers extensive discussion before building to ensure they create precisely the right thing. Both approaches have built extraordinary companies. Neither is inherently right or wrong.

What makes great companies remarkable isn't their adherence to universal leadership principles – it's their commitment to their unique way of doing things. Every enduring company has something distinct that makes it unique, a core DNA that shapes how they operate and lead.

This handbook captures Atlan's DNA. It's a guide to our way of leading, our way of working, our way of thinking. As an Atlan leader, you are first and foremost a steward of our values and culture. Your role isn't just to deliver results – it's to do so in a way that strengthens and perpetuates what makes Atlan special.

Use this handbook not as a manual for "good leadership" but as a guide to being a great Atlan leader.

Stewardship Over Ownership

As a leader at Atlan, you're a **steward** of our culture. As a leader at Atlan, you're a **team captain** on the field. A great captain doesn't try to rewrite the team's playbook based on their personal style – they embrace the team's established strategy and culture while bringing their own strengths to elevate everyone's game. Their role is to exemplify and reinforce the team's core values while helping each player perform at their best.

A leader's personal values, experiences, and preferred operating models might not align perfectly with Atlan's – and that's okay. We don't expect or need 100% alignment. Maybe 60-70% of a leader's natural approaches match ours, while some aspects differ from how they'd instinctively operate. This is normal and healthy.

However, as a steward of Atlan's culture, a leader's actions must align with Atlan's values and operating model, even when they differ from personal preferences. It's like how a great aunt might handle situations differently with her nieces and nephews than she would with her own children – not because one way is right and the other wrong, but because she respects and upholds the family's chosen approach.

If you find less than 50% alignment with our values and operating model, this handbook should help you recognize that early. Every company is a tribe, and not every tribe is for everyone. It's better to understand this clearly and find your true tribe than to fight against a company's fundamental nature.

On the other hand, some of you will fall so deeply in love with Atlan's way of operating that it will become part of your DNA, something you carry forward throughout your life. Some of our values might seem different at first, and you might struggle with them, but over time, you might embrace them and realise that it is a value you will carry with you for life. At the end of the day – what matters is that while you're here, you act as a faithful steward of what makes Atlan special.

Remember: Your role isn't to remake Atlan in your image, but to enhance and perpetuate what makes Atlan unique, even when it means operating differently than you might naturally choose.

Your First Reality Check

Leadership at Atlan isn't what you might expect. It's not about titles, hierarchy, or conventional notions of management. It's about a deep commitment to a larger mission than any individual or team. It is not power or influence but a responsibility - so it needs commitment.

Before we dive deeper, let's address the fundamental question: Why does Atlan exist?

Our mission is to help the humans of data (and AI) do their life's best work.

This isn't just a mission statement that hangs on our walls. It's a responsibility we carry every day. It shapes our decisions, guides our priorities, and defines our measure of success.

Only Hierarchy That Matters

At Atlan, we operate with a single, uncompromising hierarchy: [Customer](#) > [Company](#) > [Team](#) > [Me](#)

This hierarchy isn't just a nice idea – it's the framework for every decision we make. It's easy to nod along with these words. **It's much harder to live them when they challenge your comfort, preferences, or personal goals. This handbook is structured to help you operationalise this hierarchy day-to-day.**

Caring for Customers

Our duty comes in two forms:

1. Build something that truly solves our customers' problems
2. Ensure every potential customer who could benefit from our solution has access to it

This dual responsibility should weigh on you. It should influence every decision you make. If that sounds intense, good. It should. Remember that hierarchy we talked about? Customer > Company > Team > Me It's time to put it into practice.



Missionary vs Mercenary:

<https://www.startuparchive.org/p/brian-chesky-s-response-to-the-samwer-brothers-cloning-airbnb-missionaries-will-outlast-mercenaries>

Start with Why

When President Kennedy visited NASA in 1962, he encountered a janitor carrying a broom. "What do you do here?" Kennedy asked. The janitor replied, "I'm helping put a man on the moon, Mr. President." This wasn't just a clever response – it reflected a deep understanding of purpose that transcended job descriptions. At NASA, everyone understood they were part of something greater than their own roles.

As an Atlan leader, creating and maintaining this sense of larger purpose isn't just an inspirational exercise – it's a fundamental part of your job. As Simon Sinek articulates in his Golden Circle principle, great leaders start with "why" before moving to "how" or "what." They understand that people don't buy what you do; they buy why you do it.

This principle takes on particular weight at Atlan because of who we serve. When we talk about our customers, we never reduce them to revenue figures or deal sizes. We talk about their missions: The largest bank in the United States working to protect millions of people's financial futures. Biotech companies leveraging data to find cures for cancer. Healthcare organizations striving to make treatment more accessible and effective. Research institutions pushing the boundaries of human knowledge.

These aren't just customers – they're partners in missions that matter. When they trust us with their data, they trust us with their ability to achieve these vital goals. There is never a moment where we can devalue the importance of that work. Every line of code we write, every feature we ship, and every support ticket we handle serves these larger missions. This shapes how we celebrate success at Atlan. When we win a new customer or expand a relationship, we don't focus on the contract value. We celebrate the expanded impact their mission can now have: How many more patients might receive better care? How much faster might breakthrough research happen? How many more lives might be positively affected?

As a leader at Atlan, reinforcing our mission isn't optional – it's a core part of a leader's role. Consider how this played out with our SEO team: When they first started, we didn't just tell the team to "create traffic." We helped them understand that every piece of content they wrote was an opportunity to further our mission of helping the humans of data do their life's best work. This deeper purpose transformed their approach, leading them to create genuinely valuable content that resonated with our community. The result? SEO became one of our fastest-growing channels, not because they were just chasing metrics, but because they were serving a mission.

This is why we expect our leaders to take the time to deeply understand how customers use Atlan and the impact it has on their work. In every team session, every all-hands meeting, every strategy discussion, you should be sharing stories about the real people behind our “MAUs” – the data scientists, analysts, and engineers whose daily lives we're improving. Help your team see that improving our metadata extraction isn't just a technical challenge – it's about giving a data scientist back hours of their day to focus on solving critical problems. Show them that enhancing our collaboration features isn't just about user experience – it's about enabling entire data teams to work together seamlessly to drive their organizations' missions forward.

Equally important is what we don't accept at Atlan. We never diminish our mission by saying we're "just building software" or treating our work as merely technical. Any language that devalues the importance of our mission or suggests that what we're building isn't meaningful is unacceptable. This isn't about giving it a positive spin – it's about acknowledging the real responsibility we hold in enabling the work of data teams worldwide.

Remember: Your team's understanding of their purpose directly impacts the quality and care they put into their work. When a data engineer at a healthcare company can find and trust data faster because of Atlan, lives are impacted. Companies iterate faster when an AI team can collaborate more effectively through our platform. As a leader, you must ensure every team member understands this connection between their daily work and the vital missions we serve. This isn't just about motivation – it is the fundamental reason we exist as a company.

Beginner's Mindset to solve problems

At Atlan, when someone says, "[Famous Company] does it this way," our response is simple: "Let's talk about what our customers need."

This requires:

- Temporarily setting aside what you know
- Approaching problems with fresh eyes
- Questioning everything, especially industry "best practices"

But having a beginner's mind doesn't mean starting from zero or reinventing the wheel. It means:

- Learning from everyone
- Understanding every context
- Applying that knowledge to the specific problem at hand

Dive into the details

We believe that leaders earn respect at Atlan by being in the trenches with the team. Atlan leaders dive deep. This isn't optional. It means:

- Understanding the full context before making decisions
- Getting into the details when necessary
- Never being satisfied with surface-level understanding

Embracing The Messy Middle

The space between identifying a problem and finding the right solution is inherently messy. It requires:

- Comfort with change
- Willingness to shift priorities
- Rapid iteration and learning
- Letting go of plans when evidence demands it

This is where real innovation happens. It's uncomfortable. It's necessary.

Comfort with change in roadmap and plans

At Atlan, change isn't just inevitable – it's essential. Being the fastest learning company in our space means having the courage to change course when data and customer feedback demand it, even if that means letting go of carefully crafted plans. Our strength lies not in our ability to make perfect plans but in our willingness to adapt them as we learn and grow. We don't stick to plans, priorities, or structures just because "that's what we decided."

Atlanisms

"This is a CX problem" or "This is a Product problem"

- Reality: This is a customer problem. We solve it together.

"This is making me look bad in front of a customer"

- Reality: No one owns the customer. We all own their success.

"I'm advocating for this to happen"

- Reality: We don't need advocacy when we're aligned on putting customers first.

"I need your sponsorship to start this program"

- Reality: Great ideas that help move the needle for the company don't need sponsorship - they need a strong execution plan and owners to drive it forward.

Leadership Dilemmas and Their Resolution

Scenario 1: Urgent Customer Crisis vs. Team Well Being

Dilemma: "The customer needs this solved by next week/there's a war room situation impacting a majority of our customers. However, I'm worried about asking my team to work the weekend/long hours to solve the problem."

Resolution:

1. First, validate the urgency and impact. Do your due diligence to understand that this is truly a time-bound customer problem.
2. If confirmed, treat Atlantians as true owners who care just as deeply as you do about delivering to the customer:
 - Call them personally
 - Provide full context on the customer situation
 - Be transparent about both urgency and impact
3. Make the request with humanity:
 - Ask about personal constraints they can't move
 - Offer compensatory time off after the delivery
 - Be clear about expectations and timeline
4. Lead from the front:
 - Be equally involved in the work
 - Showcase hands-on leadership
 - Demonstrate you're invested in solving the problem alongside the team

Remember: These situations often bring out the best in teams. When handled well, they become moments that strengthen both team bonds and customer trust. Don't forget to genuinely appreciate the team's 120% effort and commitment once the crisis is resolved.

Scenario 2: Organizational Change vs. Customer Experience

Dilemma: "We made this internal org structure change and in the shuffle, customer experience is suffering (e.g., slower lead response times)."

Resolution: The customer doesn't care about our org chart. No internal change – no matter how strategically important – justifies degrading customer experience. Your responsibility as a leader is to:

- Plan transitions that maintain or improve customer experience

- Create redundancies during changes
- Take personal responsibility for gaps
- Course-correct immediately when customer impact is detected

Scenario 3: Performance Patience vs. Customer Impact

Dilemma: "I know this Atlanian isn't solving customer problems as well as they could, but I want to give them more time to improve."

Resolution: As an Atlan leader, you are directly responsible for how your team's talent and care density impacts customer experience. This means:

- Taking immediate action when customer experience suffers
- Not compromising customer success for internal development
- Being proactive about performance gaps
- Remembering that every day of subpar performance means a day of subpar customer experience
- And remembering that one person who isn't pulling their weight, is unfair for the rest of the team

The moment you notice an impact on customer experience, the clock has already been ticking too long.

Scenario 4: Team Morale vs. Customer Needs

Dilemma: "Will changing priorities to fix usability impact team morale?"

Resolution: Frame it correctly. We build team morale through customer impact.

Scenario 5: Leadership Conventions vs. Customer Outcomes

Dilemma: "I want to let this Atlanian make their own mistakes/learn/I don't want to micromanage their work."

1. Do whatever it takes:
 - Step in immediately when needed
 - Provide detailed guidance if required
 - Be hands-on where necessary
2. Be transparent about your actions:
 - Explicitly explain why you're taking a more hands-on approach
 - Reference the Customer > Company > Team > Me hierarchy
 - Make it clear this is about customer outcomes, not lack of trust
3. Frame it properly:
 - This isn't about "micromanagement" - it's about customer care
 - Learning should happen, but not at the customer's expense

- Development plans flex around customer needs, not vice versa

Remember: The time for learning through trial and error is not when customer outcomes are on the line. In these moments, your role is to ensure customer success first, then create learning opportunities that don't compromise customer experience.

Scenario 6: Process Improvement vs. Speed

Dilemma: "Adding this step will improve customer experience but slow down our sales cycle."

Resolution: If it's right for the customer, do it. Find creative ways to handle other constraints.

Scenario 7: Internal Priorities vs. Customer Needs

Dilemma: "Should I prioritize an internal meeting or a customer request?"

Resolution: Customer request wins. Everyone is in guest relations.

Scenario 8: Team Events vs. Customer Support

Dilemma: "Our team was at an offsite, impacting customer response time."

Resolution: Plan ahead. Customer experience doesn't take holidays.

Scenario 9: Recognizing Exceptional Effort

Dilemma: "How do we celebrate exceptional effort without promoting an unhealthy work culture? When someone 'works day and night,' should we highlight this as positive?"

Resolution: There is zero doubt that if someone at Atlan has worked day and night, they must be appreciated for their effort.

But at Atlan, "120% effort" isn't just about hours worked – it's about impact delivered and care density demonstrated. We celebrate: Tangible customer outcomes, Problems solved elegantly, Initiative taken willingly

As a leader, when recognizing exceptional effort, also focus on: The impact created, The value delivered to customers, and the bar of excellence set for the team

Remember: We never celebrate long hours for their own sake. We celebrate the extraordinary impact that comes from caring deeply about our customers' success. **However, there are many forms of 120% - and out working everyone else to drive impact for customers is absolutely one of them.**

Scenario 10: Diving Deep vs Micromanaging

Dilemma: "I want to dive deep but I don't want people to think I am micromanaging them:

- Diving deeper with someone I manage
- Diving deeper with another leader

Scenario 11: Cross-team Conflict

Dilemma: "How do we resolve cross-team conflict? How do we encourage teams to resolve conflicts without involving team managers? For example: if an SE and an AE have a conflict, the SE goes to the SE manager, AE goes to the sales manager and now the managers have to get together to resolve and not everyone has context

Scenario 12: Managing Customer Expectations when Roadmap Changes

Dilemma: Customers don't always agree because they have roadmap, if we change the roadmap, how do communicate, make them understand

Scenario 13: Prioritizing between Customer Asks in the Sales Cycle vs Post-Sales Cycle

Dilemma: How do I help the team prioritise between sales tickets & support tickets?

A Final Reflection

Every day, you'll face decisions that pit different priorities against each other. In these moments, remember:


1. Customer > Company > Team > Me
2. If it's right for the customer, find a way
3. We're building for the long term
4. Care is our competitive advantage

The weight of these decisions should feel heavy. That weight is the responsibility of building something that matters.

Further Reading & Resources

The following resources deeply resonate with our philosophy of leadership and customer care at Atlan:

The Ordinary Heroes of the Taj Hotel

 **The Ordinary Heroes of the Taj Hotel: Rohit Deshpande at TEDxNewEngland**

A powerful illustration of true customer care in its most extreme form. During the 26/11 attacks, Taj Hotel employees stayed back to help guests despite grave personal danger. They didn't do this because of protocols or training, but because of a deeply ingrained culture of customer care. This talk demonstrates what it means to truly put customers first and how organizational culture shapes individual actions in critical moments.

Unreasonable Hospitality ([Link](#))

The remarkable story of Eleven Madison Park's transformation into the world's best restaurant through radical customer care. Guidara shows how going above and beyond reasonable expectations - what we at Atlan call "120% effort" - creates extraordinary experiences. This book illustrates how attention to detail, empowered team members, and a culture of care can transform an organization.

The Messy Middle ([Link](#))

An essential guide to navigating the volatile middle period between starting and succeeding. Belsky's insights perfectly align with our understanding that the space between identifying a problem and finding the right solution is inherently messy - and that's exactly where innovation happens. This book provides practical wisdom for leading through uncertainty and maintaining focus on a long-term mission during short-term chaos.

Caring for Company

A conversation with Frank Sloodman fundamentally changed our perspective on building companies. When asked about balancing company culture while scaling, his response was disarmingly simple: "You have one job."

Here's the truth: No one will thank you for creating a great culture for the many years they spent at Atlan if the company fails. The great culture becomes irrelevant if we don't succeed in our mission. **You have one job, and that job is clear: Make Atlan insanely successful.**

The implications of this truth ripple through every decision we make as leaders

The First Hat always wins

As a leader at Atlan, you wear two hats:

The Owner Hat

This is your primary identity. **Before you're a function head, before you're a team leader, you're an owner of Atlan's success.** This means:

- Thinking at the company level
- Making decisions for Atlan's long-term success
- Taking responsibility for company-wide outcomes

The Functional / Role Hat

This is your role-specific responsibility. While important, it's always secondary to your owner hat. This involves:

- Executing within your functional area
- Delivering on your specific mandates
- Leading your team effectively

Remember: We all exist to serve the company. Our functional roles are simply the parts we play in service of that larger mission. **When these hats conflict, the owner hat always wins.**

Plant the Flag

Great leaders don't just set goals - they plant flags that people rally around. This isn't just about metrics or targets; it's about declaring a worthy objective that excites and unites people in pursuit of something meaningful.

Consider JFK's moon mission declaration in 1962. He didn't just say "let's explore space." He planted a specific flag: put a man on the moon and bring him back safely before the decade ends. This wasn't just ambitious - it was specific, time-bound, and galvanizing.

In startups, being audacious isn't just an option - it's a necessity. Playing it safe is often the riskiest strategy. Every day, we are fighting to prove to the world that we deserve to exist as a long-term enduring company - and anyone who thinks otherwise is kidding themselves.

Let's be clear about something: Startups are intentionally hard. If this were easy, someone else would have already done it. We exist precisely because we're tackling problems that don't have obvious answers. **There will never be a moment when you set a target with perfect visibility into everything it will take to achieve it. If you have that level of certainty, we probably aimed too low.**

You might have heard that tired management mantra: "You can have time, cost, or quality - pick two." That's the kind of mediocre thinking that builds mediocre companies. At Atlan, we reject this false choice. We're not here to make comfortable trade-offs or settle for "good enough." We're here to do what others consider impossible.

And once they have planted the flag, great leaders find a way to deliver. Period.

This isn't about good effort, noble attempts, or valiant tries. This is about impact. The real, measurable impact that moves Atlan forward.

This means:

- Building high-performance teams
- Setting ambitious goals
- Meeting and beating targets
- Rising above setbacks
- Never compromising on excellence

Don't run at half throttle

As Frank Sloatman famously noted at Snowflake, "The velocity of the leader determines the velocity of the team."¹ At Atlan, this isn't just a catchy phrase – it's a fundamental truth about how we operate. **We have a saying here: one Atlan year equals three human years.** This isn't hyperbole – it reflects the pace at which we must operate to achieve our mission.

Intensity isn't about working longer hours but bringing focused energy and urgency to everything we do. When leaders operate with intensity, it creates a ripple effect across their teams.

They don't just hit targets – they hit them ahead of schedule. They don't just solve problems – they solve them with a sense of urgency that matches our customers' needs. "You can't run a startup at half throttle," Sloatman emphasized, and we couldn't agree more. You're either all in, or you're just pretending. Every day, every week, every month matters because velocity compounds – minor delays stack up into missed opportunities, while small accelerations

compound into market leadership. **In a rapidly evolving market, the difference between good and great often comes down to velocity of execution.** That's why great Atlan leaders constantly ask: Are we moving fast enough? Are we matching our customers' urgency? Are we creating enough space between us and our competition? The best leaders don't just deliver results – they deliver them at a pace that makes Atlan unstoppable.

Have a Can-Do Attitude

In startups, the difference between success and failure often comes down to a simple yet powerful mindset: "We'll figure it out." At Atlan, we expect our leaders to embody and cultivate this can-do attitude, regardless of the complexity of challenges or constraints they face.

A can-do attitude isn't about blind optimism – it's about approaching challenges with the fundamental belief that solutions exist, even if we haven't found them yet. **When faced with seemingly impossible requests or tight constraints, great leaders at Atlan don't start with "we can't because..." Instead, they ask "how might we?" This shift in mindset often reveals possibilities that pessimism would have hidden.**

We recognize that people have different personal risk tolerances. Some leaders might naturally be more cautious, preferring to see all potential pitfalls before moving forward. Others might be more comfortable with uncertainty, ready to jump into the unknown. Both perspectives have value, but at Atlan, your personal risk tolerance cannot become the limiting factor for your team or the company.

Here's what this means in practice:

- When a customer needs something done in half the usual time, we start by assuming it's possible and work backward from there
- When resources are constrained, we look for creative solutions rather than using constraints as an excuse
- When facing technical challenges, we approach them as puzzles to solve rather than roadblocks
- When dealing with uncertainty, we move forward with the best information available rather than waiting for perfect clarity

Optimism is infectious. When leaders consistently demonstrate a can-do attitude, it ripples through their teams. People begin to see challenges as opportunities rather than obstacles. They become more creative, more resilient, and more willing to tackle difficult problems. This collective optimism becomes a powerful force multiplier, enabling teams to achieve what might have seemed impossible at first glance.

However, a can-do attitude doesn't mean being reckless or ignoring real constraints. It means:

- Acknowledging challenges while focusing on solutions

- Being realistic about what's needed while remaining optimistic about finding ways to deliver
- Understanding risks while not letting them paralyze action
- Being transparent about difficulties while maintaining confidence in the team's ability to overcome them

Remember: In startups, the easy problems have already been solved. We exist precisely because we're willing to tackle the hard ones. Your role as a leader is to cultivate this mindset in your team, showing them that with enough creativity, persistence, and optimism, most "impossible" problems become merely difficult, and difficult problems become routine.

Act Like an Entrepreneur, Not a Budget Owner

As a leader at Atlan, you're not just managing a budget - you're running a business within a business. This means thinking like an entrepreneur, not like someone with an expense account.

The Entrepreneur Mindset

Being an entrepreneur means being a P&L owner - and it means every decision you make impacts the company's ability to serve more customers and build for the long term. When you have this mindset:

- You don't think "I have X budget to spend"
- You think "How do I generate maximum value from every dollar?"
- You don't ask "Can I spend this?"
- You ask "Should I spend this?"

Think Like the Entrepreneur You Are

Great P&L owners:

- Understand that every dollar spent is a dollar we can't invest elsewhere
- Make decisions based on ROI, not allocated budgets
- Question expenses even when they're "within budget"
- Look for creative ways to achieve more with less
- Think about long-term impact, not just short-term needs

Remember: You're not spending Atlan's money - you're investing it. The question isn't whether you have the budget for something. The question is whether this is the best possible use of company resources to serve our mission.

Pick Up the Broom

Leadership at Atlan isn't about titles or hierarchy. It's about being the first to pick up the broom when something needs to be done. This isn't metaphorical – we mean it literally and figuratively: There was an early morning when our yet-to-be first customer was visiting our only ever office in 2019. The team had worked through the night to prepare the demo, and before the customer arrived, those same team members were sweeping the office. That's what true leadership looks like.

It means:

- Flying across continents because a customer needs you or a customer problem needs personal sacrifice
- Actively engaging with prospects at conference booths regardless of your title
- Cleaning the office after yourself and the team after team meetings
- Doing whatever it takes to serve our customers

The Anti-Pattern of Status: As companies scale, it's easy to fall into the trap of thinking certain tasks are "beneath" your role or level as a leader. You might have heard in other companies:

- "That's not my job"
- "We should hire someone for that"
- "I'm too senior for this"

These are the first signs of gravity pulling us down. Every time we refuse to pick up the broom, we lose a bit of what makes Atlan special.

The Truth About Service: At Atlan, your real role isn't whatever your business card might say. Your real role – everyone's real role – is guest relations. Everything else is just a way to serve that purpose.

Levels and titles exist to reduce chaos and create scope for impact. They don't exist to determine who picks up the broom. That's everyone's responsibility.

Leadership Through Action

When you see someone picking up the broom:

- The VP who stays late to help wrap up after a conference
- The engineering lead who takes customer support calls
- The senior executive who makes coffee for a customer meeting

This isn't them doing something extra. This is them showing what leadership at Atlan means.

Remember: Every single person who's ever achieved extraordinary things at Atlan has their own "pick up the broom" stories. These moments aren't distractions from your real work – they are your real work. They demonstrate that you understand what truly matters: serving our customers, building our company, and showing others what real leadership looks like.

The next time you see something that needs to be done, don't look around for someone else to do it. Pick up that broom. That's what leaders at Atlan do.

You Don't Ship Your Org Chart

At Atlan, we approach organizational design with a beginner's mind. Our org charts start with two fundamental questions: What problem needs to be solved? And what capabilities are required to solve it?

We deliberately avoid starting with industry standards or traditional reporting structures. Instead of asking "How do other companies structure their teams?" we ask "What problems are our customers facing, and how do we organize ourselves to solve them?"

The org chart is meant to be dynamic. Our org charts aren't static monuments– they're dynamic tools that evolve with our needs. This requires three crucial ingredients of what we call GWC: Gets it (truly understands the requirements), Wants it (genuinely desires to take it on), and has the Capabilities (a unique mix of context, skills, and capacity) to deliver. Sometimes this means a highly skilled new hire might report to someone with less experience but deeper context. Other times, the "obvious" person for a role might not have the capacity to take it on.

For leaders, this dynamic approach means your charter might expand or contract, your scope might grow or shrink, and your team size might fluctuate over time. **If you tie your self-worth to the size of your team or the breadth of your charter, you'll struggle at Atlan. What shouldn't change is your impact – in fact, these fluid changes often enable greater impact by putting the right people on the right problems at the right time.**

Being a great cross-functional leader is fundamental to your role

Remember: You don't lead "your" team – you lead a part of Atlan's team. The org chart exists to reduce chaos, not to create boundaries.

This approach is particularly crucial at Atlan because of how we think about organizational structure. **We believe talent should flow to impact, regardless of reporting lines. We expect people to work through and across org structures, transcending traditional power dynamics to do what's right for the company. As an Atlan leader, it's your responsibility to uphold and enable this fluid approach to organization.**

When a leader says "We need to focus on our team's priorities" or "This would distract from our team's core objectives" to prevent someone from contributing to company-wide initiatives, they're often masking territorial behavior with seemingly reasonable management principles.

This mindset fundamentally conflicts with how we operate. Here's what great cross-functional leadership looks like at Atlan:

- When you don't have clear answers on prioritization, create channels for the team member to get clarity across functions
- Ensure regular updates flow to all involved leaders, not just through your reporting line
- Actively look for opportunities where your team members can create company-wide impact, even if it doesn't directly benefit your team/ function
- Champion cross-functional work as a way to strengthen the entire company, not view it as a distraction

Don't Pass the Buck, Pass the Ball

At Atlan, we have zero tolerance for cross-functional blame. The moment you become involved in something, you become an owner – not just of your piece, but of the entire outcome. There's no such thing as "that team dropped the ball" or "it failed because they didn't deliver." If you saw it coming and didn't act, you share ownership of that failure.

This ownership mindset means:

- Problems belong to everyone who sees them, not just to those officially responsible
- Early warnings are a responsibility, not an option
- Impact matters more than org charts or formal responsibilities
- The success of other teams is your success

The true test of leadership isn't how you handle things when they're going well – it's how you respond when you see potential problems in other teams. At Atlan, we expect you to:

1. Flag issues early, before they become crises
2. Offer help, not criticism
3. Focus on solutions, not blame
4. Take ownership, even when it's "not your job"

We deliberately avoid phrases like "throwing under the bus" because they betray a fundamental misunderstanding of our mission. If you're thinking about exposing problems in terms of personal vindication or blame, you're missing the point entirely. When you see something that isn't working:

- Start from trust – assume others might not see what you see
- Address the problem, not the people
- Share context that might be missing
- Offer specific ways you can help

Remember: Our mission is too important to let problems fester because they're "someone else's responsibility." Great leaders at Atlan don't pass the buck when they see issues – they pass the ball, enabling others to succeed while taking active ownership of outcomes. The question isn't "Whose fault is this?" but "How can we solve this together?"

This requires separating the "who" from the "what." Instead of asking "Who messed up?" ask "What isn't working and why?" This isn't just semantics – it's about creating an environment where people can raise issues without fear, where problems can be solved before they become critical, and where everyone feels ownership of our collective success.

The moment you find yourself thinking "that's their problem, not mine," stop and remember: At Atlan, every problem you can see is your problem to help solve. Don't wait for permission, don't worry about territory, and don't pass the buck. Pass the ball, and help the whole team win.

The Sub-Optimal Decision is the Worst Decision

At Atlan, we reject the false binary of "right" versus "wrong" decisions. The worst outcome isn't making a wrong decision – it's making a sub-optimal one. While some companies pride themselves on being democratic in decision-making, we are explicitly not a democracy when it comes to decisions. We care deeply about the quality of decision-making, which requires deep context, comprehensive data, and the humility to change course when new information emerges.

While, we are not a democracy when it comes to decisions - we also are open to as many signals and data as possible to change our mind about a potential decision (before and after it's made). The best leaders in the world keep evolving their decisions as they get more context and signals, and in Atlan - there is neither ego OR blowback ever associated with a decision being evolved due to more information being presented to us.

Like Amazon, we believe in the critical distinction between Type 1 and Type 2 decisions. Type 1 decisions are reversible and can be made quickly by those closest to the problem – like most day-to-day operational choices. Type 2 decisions are irreversible and high-stakes.

For example, at Atlan, all people's decisions are Type 2 decisions. This includes hiring, promotions, role changes, and team charters. Why? Because we are unreasonable about talent. A sub-optimal hire doesn't just affect their immediate team – they can lower the bar for future hires, impact team dynamics, and ultimately affect our ability to serve customers. Similarly, a premature promotion or poorly thought-out team charter can create long-lasting ripple effects across the organization.

New leaders sometimes struggle with this, interpreting our rigorous approach as a lack of trust. "Don't you trust me?" they ask. The CEO of Mulesoft had an answer to this that we strive to emulate - he said to one of his new execs "of course I don't, I don't even trust myself when it comes to this. We're all human! If we didn't believe in your capabilities, you wouldn't be here. But if you've been here a month or you haven't made this type of decision before, you

simply don't have enough context about Atlan to make an optimal decision. This isn't about ego – it's about outcomes. Great leaders at Atlan remain open to changing their minds when new signals emerge, knowing that optimal decisions require both confidence to act and humility to change your mind.

Beat the Drum

Communication isn't complete when you've said something – it's complete when others have heard and understood it. As a leader at Atlan, it's your responsibility to "beat the drum" until your message truly lands. This might mean communicating the same thing ten different ways, in ten different forums. If someone hasn't understood, that's not their failure to listen – it's your failure to communicate effectively. Cross-functional alignment doesn't happen through org charts; it happens through persistent, clear communication.

Atlanisms

Let's talk about words we don't use at Atlan:

"Managing up"

Rolls eyes moments

Vanity celebrations

Leadership Dilemmas and Their Resolution

Scenario: The Bystander's Dilemma

Dilemma: "I spotted this problem in another team, but I thought it wasn't my place or my problem to share."

Resolution: At Atlan, every problem you see is your problem. This mindset of "not my place" or "not my problem" fundamentally conflicts with our core principle of Customer > Company > Team > Me. The moment you become aware of a problem, you become responsible for helping solve it.

Here's how to act:

1. Start from trust / Assume good intent
 - a. Start tentatively + 1202 alarm
 - b. assume the other team isn't aware of the problem or might be missing crucial context that you have
2. Address the problem, not the people - focus on what isn't working rather than who isn't working
3. Share context directly - don't let concerns about hierarchy or org boundaries stop you from raising issues
4. Take ownership - offer to help solve the problem rather than just pointing it out

Remember: The question isn't "Is this my place to say something?" The question is "How might this impact our customers and company?" If it matters to Atlan's success, it's everyone's responsibility to speak up.

Scenario: Gaming the Estimates

Dilemma: "Should I pad my estimates/forecasts to make them easier to achieve? This could be sales targets, product timelines, hiring goals, or any other metrics."

Resolution: This mindset fundamentally conflicts with putting Company > Self. At Atlan, we need real numbers, not managed ones, because critical company decisions are made based on these estimates. Whether it's a product team adding buffer to release dates, sales sandbagging their pipeline, hiring teams inflating recruiting timelines, or marketing padding their goals - gaming numbers for personal performance optics isn't just sub-optimal decision making – it's a failure of leadership.

Here's how to think about it:

1. Share your most accurate assessment, along with:
 - The assumptions behind it
 - The risks and opportunities

- The dependencies and unknowns
- The context needed to understand it
- 2. Remember that the goal isn't to look good – it's to help the company make optimal decisions. Padded estimates might:
 - Cause other teams to miss opportunities (product could have shipped sooner)
 - Create false resource constraints (hiring more slowly than necessary)
 - Lead to poor prioritization (focusing on the wrong initiatives)
 - Erode trust in our planning process
- 3. Instead of managing expectations:
 - Be transparent about your confidence levels
 - Share updates as circumstances change
 - Highlight both challenges and opportunities
 - Trust that great results come from optimal decisions, not managed expectations

Remember: Leaders who consistently share accurate, unvarnished assessments build trust and credibility. Those who manage numbers for optics might win in the short term but ultimately fail the company's needs.

Scenario: The Uncertainty of Ambition

Dilemma: "I don't have visibility into how I'm going to make this target work or this number work. So how do I sign up for it?"

Resolution: At Atlan, we believe that if you have perfect visibility into how to achieve a target, we've probably set it too low. Startups exist to solve problems that don't have obvious answers. The absence of complete clarity isn't a reason to back away – it's the very reason we exist.

Here's how to think about it:

1. Start with the mission-critical question:
 - Is this target what the company needs?
 - If yes, then the question isn't "how will we do it?" but "what will it take?"
2. Break it down:
 - What do you know?
 - What don't you know?
 - What capabilities/resources might you need?
 - What assumptions need testing?
3. Remember that great leaders:

- Don't wait for perfect visibility
 - Start moving and create clarity through action
 - Adjust course as they learn more
 - Focus on solving problems rather than having all the answers upfront
4. Set clear milestones:
- Create shorter-term checkpoints
 - Identify early indicators of success or failure
 - Be transparent about progress and learnings

Remember: The difference between a good leader and a great one often comes down to their comfort with ambiguity. Your job isn't to have all the answers – it's to be relentless in finding them.

Scenario: The Blame Game

Dilemma: "My function did its job and hit our target. The problem was with the other team, that's why I missed my overall goal."

Resolution: This mindset fundamentally contradicts our core principles at Atlan. When you start dividing success or failure along functional lines, you've already failed as a leader. We don't ship org charts to our customers - they don't care which team dropped the ball.

Here's how to think about it:

1. Start with our hierarchy:
 - Did the customer get what they needed? No.
 - Did the company achieve its goal? No.
 - Therefore, no team can claim success in isolation.
2. Take ownership:
 - If you saw the problem coming, why didn't you help solve it?
 - If you didn't see it coming, why weren't you paying attention to critical dependencies?
 - What could you have done differently to support the overall goal?
3. Lead differently next time:
 - Proactively identify cross-functional dependencies
 - Build relationships across teams before you need them
 - Offer help even when it's "not your job"
 - Think like an owner of the company, not just your function

Remember: Great leaders at Atlan take responsibility for overall outcomes, not just their piece. The moment you say "my team did our part," you've stopped thinking like a company leader and started thinking like a function manager.

Scenario: The Cost Overrun

Dilemma: "The company needs to pay extra because the project took longer than expected/there were communication gaps/I didn't have complete visibility into costs."

Resolution: At Atlan, we expect leaders to treat company resources as their own. This isn't about who failed to communicate or who didn't provide information - it's about ownership. If you're spending company money, you're fully accountable for those decisions and their implications.

Here's how to think about it:

1. Take complete ownership:
 - The moment you commit to spending company money, you become responsible for understanding all aspects
 - "I didn't know" or "I wasn't told" are not acceptable explanations
 - If you didn't have visibility, it was your job to get it
2. Operate like an owner:
 - Would you make this commitment with your own money without understanding the full costs?
 - Would you proceed without a clear scope and timeline?
 - Would you wait until after the fact to raise concerns about costs?
3. Moving forward:
 - Always get complete clarity on costs upfront
 - Build in checkpoints to monitor spending
 - Raise red flags early when you see potential overruns
 - Have a backup plan for when things don't go as expected

Remember: Every dollar we spend is a dollar we can't invest elsewhere. Great leaders at Atlan treat the company's money with more care than their own, not less.

Scenario: The Budget Justification

Dilemma: "I have this budget allocated, so I might as well hire someone, even though our team could manage without this hire."

Resolution: At Atlan, we don't think in terms of "using up budgets." Every hire, every dollar spent, must be justified by real need and optimal impact. Having a budget isn't permission to spend – it's permission to make optimal decisions about resources.

Here's how to think about it:

1. Challenge the premise:
 - Just because you can hire doesn't mean you should
 - A budget is a ceiling, not a target
 - Every hire impacts company runway and adds organizational complexity

2. Think like an owner:
 - If this was your own money, would you make this hire?
 - Could these resources create more impact elsewhere in the company?
 - Are you hiring because of real need or just because you can?
3. Consider the full impact:
 - Every hire means less resources for other critical needs
 - Each addition impacts team dynamics and communication overhead
 - Unnecessary complexity makes it harder to move with velocity

Remember: Great leaders at Atlan optimize for company impact, not resource utilization. The goal isn't to spend your budget – it's to create maximum value with minimum resources.

Scenario: The Personal vs. Company Tension

Dilemma: "I know giving up management of this team is right for the company, but I'm worried about how it impacts my external perception, career trajectory, and resume."

Resolution: This is a defining moment that tests whether you're truly building a company or just building your LinkedIn profile. At Atlan, we believe that optimizing for personal optics over company success is not only shortsighted – it fundamentally misunderstands how real career value is created.

Here's how to think about it:

1. Reframe the opportunity:
 - Your resume's worth will ultimately be determined by Atlan's success, not your title
 - Being part of building something extraordinary matters more than managing a large team
 - The most impressive career stories often come from making hard choices for company success
2. Think long-term:
 - Would you rather be able to say "I led a large team" at a company that failed, or "I made the hard choices" at a company that succeeded?
 - The market respects leaders who put company success first
 - Your tenure at Atlan only becomes valuable if Atlan itself becomes valuable
3. Lead by example:
 - Show your team what true leadership looks like
 - Demonstrate that we mean what we say about Customer > Company > Team > Me
 - Create a culture where doing the right thing matters more than looking good

Remember: The best leaders at Atlan understand that their long-term career success is inextricably linked to the company's success. Personal discomfort in service of company needs isn't career limitation – it's career acceleration.

Scenario: The Industry Standard Excuse

Dilemma: "In other companies, this would normally take X months to ship/Y weeks to implement. That's just how long these things take."

Resolution: At Atlan, "industry standard" is often code for "industry mediocrity." One Atlan year equals three human years because we reject the comfortable pace of conventional thinking. If other companies take six months to ship something, that's not a justification – it's an opportunity to create competitive advantage.

Here's how to think about it:

1. Challenge assumptions:
 - "Normal" often means "what people do when they're not really trying"
 - Industry standards are usually built around large, slow-moving companies
 - Just because everyone else moves slowly doesn't mean we should
2. Ask better questions:
 - What would it take to do this in half the time?
 - What assumptions are we making that slow us down?
 - Are we mistaking process for progress?
 - What would be possible if we completely reimaged the approach?
3. Lead with intensity:
 - The velocity of the leader determines the velocity of the team
 - Every day we're slower than necessary is a day our competitors can catch up
 - Speed is a competitive advantage that compounds over time

Remember: We didn't start Atlan to be normal – we started it to transform how humans work with data. That doesn't happen by accepting industry standards. It happens by breaking them.

Scenario: Career Aspirations vs. Company Needs

Dilemma: "I know this person would be perfect for this role that the company needs, but it doesn't align with their career aspirations. As their leader, shouldn't I prioritize their career goals?"

Resolution: At Atlan, we believe in Tours of Duty - where company needs sometimes require us to take on roles that weren't part of our original career plans. As a leader, your first responsibility isn't to manage someone's career aspirations; it's to help them understand how to think about growth in the context of company impact.

Here's how to think about it:

1. Start with our hierarchy:
 - Customer > Company > Team > Me
 - Career growth serves the individual (Me)
 - Company needs serve everyone (including customers)

2. Have the right conversation:
 - Be transparent about why they're the right person for this role
 - Help them understand the bigger picture of company needs
 - Explain how this "detour" might lead to unexpected growth
 - Frame it as a Tour of Duty, not a permanent deviation
3. Lead by example:
 - Share your own experiences of taking on unexpected roles
 - Demonstrate how company success creates more opportunities for everyone
 - Show how the best career stories often come from saying "yes" to company needs

Remember: The company's success will create more opportunities for career growth than any predetermined career path. Your job as a leader isn't to protect people from company needs - it's to help them understand how serving those needs leads to their own growth.

Scenario: The Hiring Assignment Question

Dilemma: "Why do we require assignments as part of our hiring process? Won't this turn away good candidates who are too busy or senior for this?"

Resolution: At Atlan, we believe that hiring is one of the most important Type 2 decisions we make - it's irreversible and high-stakes. While experience and interviews matter, nothing predicts success better than seeing someone's actual work. The assignment isn't just a test; it's our chance to see how candidates think, solve problems, and deliver results.

Here's why we're unwavering about this:

1. Real work predicts real performance:
 - Past roles and interviews tell us what someone has done
 - Assignments show us what they can do
 - The best predictor of future performance is current performance
2. It demonstrates mutual commitment:
 - We invest significant time reviewing and discussing each assignment
 - Candidates who invest time in the assignment show they're serious about Atlan
 - It's better to find out about misaligned expectations during hiring than after
3. It reflects our values:
 - We care more about capability than credentials
 - We're unreasonable about talent
 - We believe in demonstrating skills, not just talking about them

Remember: Every sub-optimal hire impacts our ability to serve customers and build an enduring company. If someone isn't willing to demonstrate their capabilities through an assignment, they're probably not right for Atlan - regardless of their experience or seniority.

Scenario: The Industry Pattern Default

Dilemma: "This is how other companies in our industry do it, so we should do it the same way." (Whether it's org structure, processes, features, or any other decision)

Resolution: Starting with what others do is learning, but stopping there is laziness. At Atlan, we learn from everyone but think for ourselves. Your job is to understand our unique context, our customers' needs, and make the optimal decision for Atlan, not copy others.

Here's how to act:

1. Start with first principles:
 - What problem are we actually trying to solve?
 - Why does this matter to our customers?
 - What makes our context unique?
2. Do thorough research:
 - Study how others approach similar challenges
 - Understand their context and constraints
 - Identify what problems their solutions solve and don't solve
 - Look for opportunities they might have missed
3. Think independently:
 - Challenge every assumption
 - Ask "why" something is done a certain way
 - Consider if there's a better approach that others haven't tried
 - Focus on our specific circumstances and needs
4. Make and own your decision:
 - Present your reasoning, not just your conclusion
 - Acknowledge what you learned from others
 - Explain why your approach is optimal for Atlan's context
 - Be ready to defend and adapt your decision based on results

Remember: Great leaders at Atlan use industry patterns as input, not answers. Your job is to make the best decision for our customers and company, not to follow the crowd.

Scenario: The Benchmark Trap

Dilemma: "My team is too small compared to industry benchmarks, so I need to hire more people." **Resolution:** Team size isn't a measure of success or impact. We build teams based on problems to be solved, not industry averages. The question isn't "How big should my team be?" but "What capabilities do we need to solve our customers' problems?"

Scenario: The Role Resistance

Dilemma: "As an engineering leader, I won't do debugging." **Resolution:** At Atlan, no one is too senior to pick up the broom. If debugging is what's needed to solve a customer problem, that's what leaders do. Leadership isn't about what you're above doing – it's about doing whatever it takes.

Scenario: The Title Chase

Dilemma: "I can see my impact in the next 12 months but can't see if it gets me to X title."

Resolution: If you're thinking about impact in terms of titles, you're thinking about it wrong. Focus on creating maximum value for customers and company. Titles follow impact, not the other way around.

Scenario: The Slack Assumption

Dilemma: "I shared it on Slack so I assumed everyone read it." **Resolution:** Communication isn't complete when you send it – it's complete when others understand it. Beating the drum means ensuring critical information is received and understood, not just broadcasted.

Scenario: The Morale Concern

Dilemma: "My team is worried about morale due to organizational changes." **Resolution:** Change is constant at Atlan because we optimize for customer and company needs, not team comfort. Your job as a leader is to help your team understand why changes are necessary and how they serve our larger mission.

Scenario: The Speed Over Substance

Dilemma: "We're moving at high velocity so I didn't do proper research." **Resolution:** Velocity never justifies sub-optimal decisions. Speed is about eliminating unnecessary delays, not skipping necessary steps. Moving fast means being efficient, not careless.

Scenario: The Assumption of Others

Dilemma: "I knew about the customer problem but assumed another function would handle it." **Resolution:** Customer problems are everyone's problems. The moment you become aware of an issue, you become responsible for ensuring it gets solved. Beat the drum until it's resolved.

Scenario: The Career Optics

Dilemma: "I don't want to move this person to an IC role because it looks bad on me as a leader." **Resolution:** Making decisions based on how they look rather than what's right for the company is the fastest way to fail at Atlan. Your job is to make optimal decisions, not protect your image.

Scenario: The Complacency Question

Dilemma: "We're doing better than many companies – why push for more velocity?"

Resolution: Being better than average isn't our goal. One Atlan year equals three human years because we're not here to be slightly better – we're here to transform how humans work with data.

Scenario: The Ambitious Roadmap

Dilemma: "Why are we over-ambitious in our roadmap?" **Resolution:** If we have perfect visibility into how to achieve our goals, they're probably not ambitious enough. We exist to solve problems that others think are too hard. Our ambition matches the scale of problems we're trying to solve.

Caring for Team

Build the Best Damn Sports Team

At Atlan, we're building a championship team, not managing a family. While families love unconditionally, great sports teams are built on a different kind of love – one that demands excellence, embraces challenge, and puts collective success above individual comfort. You can love your sister unconditionally, but you wouldn't keep her on your basketball team if she couldn't play at the required level. This isn't about being harsh; it's about being honest about what we're building.

Kind vs Nice Leadership

What does it mean to truly care about your team? At Atlan, we draw a crucial distinction between being "kind" and being "nice." Nice leadership focuses on making people feel good at the moment. Kind leadership focuses on helping people grow and achieve their potential, even when that means having uncomfortable conversations.

Consider this simple example: If we're at lunch together and I have spinach stuck in my teeth, a nice leader would avoid the discomfort and say nothing. A kind leader would pull me aside and have the awkward conversation to help me avoid further embarrassment. This same principle applies to every aspect of leadership at Atlan.

Think about the people you care about most deeply in your personal life. If you saw them making a mistake or failing to reach their potential, what would you do? Would you stay quiet to avoid conflict? Or would you have the difficult conversation, risk the argument, share the hard truth? True care often means being willing to engage in conflict because you're more invested in someone's growth than in their momentary comfort.

Kind leadership means:

- Having hard conversations early, not late
- Giving direct feedback even when it's uncomfortable
- Challenging people to reach higher standards
- Being honest about performance gaps
- Addressing problems head-on instead of hoping they'll resolve themselves
- Investing time in helping people improve, not just pointing out issues

Nice leadership, on the other hand, often means:

- Avoiding difficult conversations to maintain harmony
- Sugarcoating feedback to protect feelings
- Lowering standards to prevent discomfort
- Ignoring problems until they become crises
- Making excuses for underperformance

- Prioritizing short-term comfort over long-term growth

Remember: At Atlan, caring about your team means being invested in their success, not their comfort. When you see someone with spinach in their teeth – whether that's metaphorical or literal – the kind thing to do is help them fix it. This might mean having uncomfortable conversations, giving direct feedback, or making tough decisions, but that's what real care looks like.

The best leaders at Atlan understand that true care isn't about making people feel good in the moment – it's about helping them become the best versions of themselves. Sometimes that means challenging them, sometimes it means supporting them, but it always means being honest and direct in service of their growth and the team's success.

This isn't about being harsh or uncaring – quite the opposite. It's about caring enough to do the hard things that help people and teams excel. Like a great sports coach, your job isn't to be everyone's friend – it's to build a championship team where every player can achieve their full potential.

The Burden of Leadership: Being Respected vs Being Liked

As a leader at Atlan, you carry a burden that isn't always visible but is always present: the responsibility to choose what's right over what's comfortable. This often means accepting that you won't always be liked – and that's not just okay, it's necessary.

Think about it: The best coach you ever had probably wasn't the one who let you skip practice or praised everything you did. It was likely the one who pushed you harder than you thought possible, who gave you tough feedback when you needed it, who demanded excellence even when you thought "good enough" was fine. In the moment, you might not have liked them. But years later, you probably respect them deeply for helping you achieve more than you thought possible.

Being a great leader means accepting that:

- You will have conversations that make you personally uncomfortable
- People might be upset with you after receiving tough feedback
- Team members might temporarily dislike you for holding them to high standards
- You might lose sleep over decisions that impact others' lives
- Your natural desire to be liked will often conflict with your responsibility to do what's right

This isn't easy. As humans, we're wired to seek approval and avoid conflict. Every time you give tough feedback, a part of you might worry: Will they quit? Will they hate me? Will this damage our relationship? These fears are natural, but they can't drive your decisions.

The Truth About Leadership

If being liked by your team members is fundamentally important to you, leadership at Atlan might not be your path. This isn't a judgment – it's about understanding what drives you and what drains you. Great leaders aren't those who don't feel these concerns; they're the ones who feel them but act anyway because they're more committed to their team's success than their own comfort.

Remember: Great leaders earn respect in difficult times, not easy ones. Anyone can be popular when things are going well. True leadership emerges when:

- You have to deliver tough feedback that might hurt in the moment but will help in the long run
- You need to have an uncomfortable conversation about performance issues
- You must maintain high standards even when it would be easier to lower them
- You have to make decisions that won't be popular but are necessary for the team's success

Your role as a leader isn't to be your team's friend – it's to be their guide to excellence. This means:

- Seeing potential they might not see in themselves
- Pushing them beyond their comfort zones
- Having hard conversations when they're needed
- Standing firm on standards even when it's uncomfortable
- Caring more about their growth than their momentary happiness

The Reward of True Leadership

While this might sound daunting, there's profound satisfaction in this kind of leadership. The real reward comes not from being liked in the moment, but from:

- Watching someone achieve something they didn't think possible
- Seeing your team reach heights they couldn't have imagined
- Having a former team member tell you years later that your tough feedback changed their career
- Building a team that consistently delivers excellence because that's who they've become

Remember: The people who have had the biggest positive impact on your life probably weren't always the ones you liked in the moment. They were the ones who cared enough to tell you hard truths, who pushed you to be better, who held you to standards you didn't think you could meet. That's the kind of leader we need at Atlan – someone who understands that true care often means carrying the burden of being temporarily disliked in service of helping others achieve their best.

If you're ready to accept this burden, to prioritize respect over popularity, to choose what's right over what's easy – then leadership at Atlan might be your path. If not, that's okay too. But understanding this distinction is crucial for your success and happiness in whatever role you choose.

The sections below outline how we think about building and leading this team:

1. The whole company is your team, there is no “my team” at Atlan : Start From Trust #One-Team

Leadership at Atlan begins with a fundamental choice: to start from a place of trust. This means believing your teammates share your commitment to excellence, even when their actions might suggest otherwise. When something isn't working, resist the instinct to ask "who messed up?" Instead, ask "what isn't working and why?" The moment you make it about the person, you've lost the opportunity for real problem-solving.

Most people don't wake up planning to do a poor job. If their actions aren't aligned with what's needed, it's usually because they're missing context, don't fully understand the problem, or lack the tools to solve it effectively. Starting from trust means assuming positive intent and focusing your energy on bridging these gaps rather than assigning blame.

2. Own your Talent Density

At Atlan, we measure talent density as the proportion of your team operating in the top performance quadrants. This isn't just a metric – it's a fundamental leadership responsibility. Every leader owns their team's talent density. Think of it like a sports coach: your job is to ensure everyone is not just in the right position, but playing their best possible game.

The Full Talent Lifecycle

As a leader at Atlan, you own the complete talent lifecycle. This isn't the responsibility of HR, recruiting, or anyone else – it's yours. Saying "I couldn't hire because I didn't have recruiter support" or "I couldn't handle this exit well because I didn't have an HR Business Partner" are excuses. Great leaders find a way. Here's what you own:

1. Sourcing & Recruiting
 - Building your talent pipeline
 - Running thorough backchannel references
 - Selling the mission and opportunity
 - Maintaining our uncompromising hiring bar
2. Development & Performance
 - Setting clear expectations
 - Providing direct, timely feedback
 - Identifying and closing skill gaps
 - Moving people to positions where they'll excel

- Celebrating exceptional performance
- 3. Hard Decisions
 - Having difficult conversations early
 - Making tough calls about performance
 - Managing exits with dignity
 - Never compromising on standards

The biggest injustice you can do to someone who isn't performing well is keeping them on the team. It's often selfishness disguised as kindness – you're avoiding a difficult conversation at the expense of both the individual and the team.

Remember: People and Talent teams are here to support and enable you, not to own these responsibilities. Your job as a leader is to build and maintain the highest possible talent density. Everything else flows from this.

Hiring for the Best Sports Team

The most profound secret in building great teams is deceptively simple: hire phenomenally well, and 90% of your management challenges disappear. While many leaders focus on downstream solutions – better processes, performance frameworks, management techniques – the truth is that hiring exceptional people who take initiative and embody excellence solves most problems before they begin.

At Atlan, when new leaders encounter our rigorous hiring process, they sometimes interpret it as a lack of trust in their judgment. "Don't you trust me to make hiring decisions?" they ask. We often share the wisdom of the MuleSoft CEO's response to a similar question: "I don't trust myself when I make hiring decisions. How can I trust you?"

This isn't about trust – it's about acknowledging the sobering reality of hiring. Research shows that even experienced executives make poor hiring decisions 50% of the time. The average company needs to conduct 27 interviews to make one great hire. These aren't just statistics – they're a humbling reminder that hiring excellence requires extraordinary rigor and dedication.

The difference between leaders who scale phenomenally at Atlan and those who struggle often comes down to one factor: their ability to hire effectively. This isn't a natural talent – it's a skill that requires deliberate practice and constant refinement. The best leaders at Atlan actively work on becoming better hiring managers, treating it as a core competency rather than a periodic task.

The Hiring Paradox

Hiring presents a fascinating paradox. You must simultaneously be:

- A charismatic recruiter, attracting the best possible talent
- A rigorous evaluator, assuming "guilty until proven innocent"

- A compelling storyteller, making candidates fall in love with Atlan
- A skeptical judge, looking for evidence that might disqualify

This duality is challenging but essential. While you're selling the opportunity and building excitement, you must maintain unwavering standards. Think of it like a criminal justice system – you start with skepticism and look for evidence to prove innocence, not guilt.

I. Attract the top candidates into the funnel

Managing the Hiring Funnel

Great hiring is a numbers game. The difference between mediocre and exceptional hiring often comes down to how rigorously you manage the funnel. At Atlan, this means running a weekly review call with your recruiter (or reviewing metrics yourself if running the search personally) where you inspect:

- How many candidates applied for the role this week
- How many candidates recruiters were able to reach out to
- Conversion rate from outreach to first calls
- Drop-off rate after the hiring manager screen
- Time spent in each stage of the process

This granular inspection helps identify bottlenecks early. For instance, if you're seeing low conversion from outreach to first calls, you might need to revisit your initial pitch. If there's high drop-off after hiring manager screens, you might need to align better with recruiters on the caliber of candidates being passed through.

Job Description & Value Proposition

The job description isn't just HR documentation – it's your primary marketing tool. At Atlan, we insist that hiring managers write the core job description themselves rather than delegating to recruiters. You should be able to clearly articulate:

- Why would an exceptional candidate choose this role over others in the market?
- What makes this position unique at Atlan?
- What specific problems will they solve?
- How does this role contribute to our larger mission?

Maximizing Top-of-Funnel

Building a strong candidate pipeline requires proactive effort:

- Have you reached out to everyone inside the company for referrals?
- Have you contacted every great IC you know who might be suitable for this role?
- Have you identified your top 5-10 dream candidates and built a plan to reach them?

- Are you personally sharing the role on your social media with context about why it's exciting?

Remember: Research shows it takes an average of 27 qualified interviews – meaning candidates who have passed the hiring manager screen and progressed to the assignment phase – to make one great hire. This reality check helps explain why building a massive top-of-funnel is so crucial. If you need 27 qualified candidates to find one exceptional hire, imagine how many initial applications and screens you need to get those 27 qualified candidates. This isn't meant to discourage you – it's meant to help you understand why managing your hiring funnel with rigor and maintaining high standards throughout the process is so critical to your success as an Atlan leader.

Don't wait for candidates to come to you. The best hiring managers are constantly building relationships and creating visibility, not just when they have an open role. Every interaction is an opportunity to connect with potential future teammates who can help us achieve our mission of helping the humans of data do their life's best work.

Nailing the Hiring Manager Screen & Candidate Experience

At Atlan, every candidate interaction is sacred. Whether or not you plan to move forward with a candidate, they should leave the conversation desperately wanting to work with you and Atlan. Remember: you're not just evaluating a candidate – you're an ambassador of Atlan's brand. Each candidate will share their experience with at least thirty other potential future Atlanians. Make every interaction count.

Leading with Humility

We start every interview by introducing ourselves first – before asking the candidate to speak. This isn't just courtesy; it's about setting the right power dynamic. Take time to craft and nail your personal story:

- Why are you the best possible hiring manager they could work with?
- What makes you passionate about the problems we're solving?
- How does your journey connect to theirs?
- What excited you specifically about their profile?

Build credibility through authenticity and demonstrate that you've invested time in understanding their background. Show them why this particular role is exciting and how it connects to Atlan's larger mission.

Deep Discovery

Your goal isn't just to assess skills – it's to understand what drives this person:

- What gives them energy in their work?
- What are they looking for in their next role?

- What would make them excited to join Atlan?
- How do their personal goals align with our mission?

Use these insights to craft personalized touches throughout the process. This isn't just about selling – it's about finding genuine alignment between their aspirations and our mission.

Raising the Tractor Beam

We're caught in a tractor beam! It's pulling us in!

For Star Wars Fans, A tractor beam is a projected force field that manipulated gravitational forces to push or pull objects.



When we meet an exceptional candidate, we "raise the tractor beam" – a Star Wars reference that signals all hands on deck to bring this person aboard. This means:

- Breaking standard process if needed (getting early conversations with leadership)
- Swarming the candidate with relevant team members who can speak to their interests
- Creating personalized experiences that show we understand what matters to them
- We can have LinkedIn messages sent out from anyone in the team (including our board and investors)

Personal Touches Matter

Small gestures make a big difference:

- Send a book related to their interests before their challenge exercise
- Follow up personally after they meet other team members
- Send thoughtful notes about connections to their past work or interests
- Stay in touch via text if they're particularly promising
- Leave them with a small token of appreciation after onsite interviews

Responsive and Respectful

Whether moving forward or not:

- Provide specific, constructive feedback to candidates who complete our challenge
- Respond promptly to questions and concerns
- Be transparent about timelines and next steps
- If rejecting, explain why – especially if they've invested significant time

Remember: You can be unreasonable about talent standards while still running a process that makes every candidate feel valued and respected. The best hiring managers at Atlan combine rigorous evaluation with genuine care for each candidate's experience.

When you find someone exceptional, don't let process stand in the way. Need an early conversation with Varun or me? We'll make it happen. Think another team member could help convince them? Make the connection. The goal is to show exceptional candidates that Atlan is exceptional in how we treat people – from the very first interaction.

Your candidate experience should reflect what makes Atlan special: high standards paired with deep care. While we never compromise on our bar, we ensure every candidate walks away thinking "That was the best interview process I've ever experienced."

Edit

Understanding and Assessing the Bar

Before you start interviewing candidates, you need to have a crystal clear understanding of what exceptional looks like for your role. This isn't about intuition – it requires deliberate preparation and calibration.

Building the Scorecard

Your first step is creating a detailed scorecard:

- Work with your manager and cross-functional peers to identify key competencies
- Stack rank these competencies in order of importance for the role
- Create specific, measurable criteria for each competency
- Align with all stakeholders to ensure everyone understands what "great" looks like

Calibrating Against Excellence

Intensely evaluate whether they are the best players for this role on the team (Raise the bar)

One of the most powerful ways to understand the bar is to actively engage with top performers:

- Identify and reach out to the top 2-3 people in your network who are exceptional at this role
- Even if they're not looking to move, ask for a conversation about their work
- Use these discussions as calibration interviews – what does truly great look like?
- Ask them who else they consider exceptional in their field
- Learn what interview questions they find most effective in evaluating candidates
- Understand what interview processes they've found most impressive

For example, if you're hiring for a senior product role but haven't hired many product leaders before, reach out to the best product leaders in your network. Even if they're not interested in moving, these conversations will help you understand:

- What exceptional product leadership looks like in practice
- Who they consider the best in their field
- What questions they use when interviewing product candidates
- What processes have worked best in evaluating product talent

Learning to Improve Your Process

Turn every interaction with top talent into process improvement:

- Ask what their best interview experiences have been and why
- Learn what questions have most effectively evaluated their abilities
- Understand what processes made them excited about opportunities
- Use these insights to continuously refine your interview approach

Remember: If you're not sure what great looks like in a particular role or domain, don't guess. Reach out to your network's top performers. Not only will these conversations help you calibrate your bar, but they might also lead to referrals or insights about where to find exceptional talent.

The goal isn't just to hire good people – it's to build a team of exceptional individuals who raise the bar for everyone. This requires knowing exactly what that bar looks like through direct engagement with exemplars in the field.

Challenging Conventional Hiring Wisdom

There's a common piece of management advice that you should "hire people you would work for." While well-intentioned, this creates a problematic framework. As a leader at Atlan, you might love to hire someone like Cheryl Sandberg, but realistically, she's not likely to join us right now. This mindset can lead to either setting an impossibly high bar or, worse, using it as an excuse to avoid hiring truly exceptional talent.

Instead, we follow Brian Chesky's more nuanced approach. When talking to his direct reports about hiring, he doesn't say "hire someone you'd work for." Instead, he tells them: "Hire someone who would want to report to me (your manager), not to you." This is a profound shift in thinking that accomplishes several things:

- It raises the bar while keeping it achievable
- It forces you to think about the larger organizational context
- It ensures you're building for the next level of scale
- It challenges you to grow as a leader

This is particularly relevant in startups like Atlan, where the traditional hierarchies of experience don't always apply. Here's why:

- Your context about Atlan is incredibly valuable
- You might be hiring someone with more years of experience or deeper technical skills
- Your ability to earn their respect comes from your understanding of our mission and challenges
- Successfully bringing on someone more experienced actually levels you up as a leader

Overcoming Hiring Insecurities

Some leaders feel insecure about hiring people who might be "better" than them in certain areas. This is a fundamental misunderstanding of leadership at Atlan. If you successfully convince someone with more experience or deeper skills to join your team:

- You've demonstrated exceptional leadership ability
- You've created an opportunity to learn and grow
- You've strengthened Atlan's overall capability
- You've proven your ability to earn respect through context and vision, not just tenure

The most impressive leaders at Atlan actively seek out people who exceed their own capabilities in specific areas. They understand that:

- Their value comes from context and leadership, not just technical skills

- Bringing in exceptional talent reflects well on them, not poorly
- They can learn from their teams while leading them
- The ability to attract and retain exceptional talent is itself a crucial leadership skill

Remember: At startups like Atlan, you earn respect through your understanding of the context, commitment to the mission, and ability to enable others' success. Don't let insecurity prevent you from hiring exceptional talent. Instead, see it as an opportunity to level up your leadership and strengthen the entire organization.

The Challenge: Our Great Equalizer

At Atlan, our "one team" value means that nothing matters except outcomes – not pedigree, not resume, not past experiences. The challenge is our way of putting this value into practice, creating a level playing field where every candidate can demonstrate their true capabilities.

Why We Never Compromise on the Challenge

The challenge is intentionally rigorous and time-consuming. This isn't bureaucracy – it's a core part of our hiring philosophy. Every single person at Atlan (except Varun and Prukalpa, as the joke goes) has completed a hiring challenge. This isn't something we started doing at scale; we've done this since our earliest days, and it's a standard we'll never relax.

Data shows that challenges are the best predictor of on-the-job performance. They also reveal alignment with our core values:

- Did they demonstrate 120% effort by diving into our documentation?
- Did they show "never be satisfied" by refining details like fonts and colors?
- Did they go above and beyond the basic requirements?

Designing an Effective Challenge

One of the biggest mistakes hiring managers make is not investing enough time in challenge design. A poorly designed or ambiguous challenge makes it impossible to properly evaluate candidates. Here's how to do it right:

1. Design it like a real first-week assignment:
 - Provide clear context and expectations
 - Give access to necessary information
 - Allow candidates to ask questions and seek clarification
 - Make it a true simulation of the role
2. Don't water it down:
 - Resist the urge to over-simplify
 - Trust candidates to navigate ambiguity
 - Provide resources but let them figure out how to use them
 - Set expectations that reflect real job demands

Setting the Right Bar

When evaluating challenges:

- Judge the work as you would judge it if they were already on the team
- Don't make excuses for poor performance
- Don't let hiring pressure lower your standards
- Remember: a bad hire is far worse than a delayed hire

Calibration for New Hiring Managers

If you're new to hiring at Atlan:

- Review challenges from your team's top performers
- Understand what made past successful challenges stand out
- Never make your first hire solo
- Have an experienced Atlan hiring manager join your challenge reviews
- Use these sessions to calibrate your understanding of our bar

This isn't about trust – it's about ensuring we maintain our standards. When a hiring manager or leader experienced in hiring at Atlan asks to review a challenge you're evaluating, they're not questioning your judgment. They're helping ensure we maintain the bar that's made Atlan successful.

Remember: The challenge isn't just another hiring step – it's a fundamental expression of our values and our commitment to building the best team possible. As a hiring manager, your job isn't to get candidates through the challenge; it's to use the challenge to identify truly exceptional talent that will strengthen Atlan.

When candidates hesitate about the time investment, that's on you as a hiring manager to help them understand why it matters. If you believe in someone's potential, invest the time to get them bought into the process before they start the challenge. The worst outcome isn't a candidate declining to do the challenge – it's a candidate doing it halfheartedly because they weren't properly set up for success.

Above all, remember this fundamental truth: There has never been a case at Atlan where someone did a mediocre challenge and ended up being exceptional on the job. Never. If you're tempted to rationalize or make excuses for a mediocre challenge performance, stop. The challenge isn't just a test – it's a preview of how someone will perform in their role. A candidate who demonstrates anything less than excellence in the challenge will never suddenly become excellent on the job. This isn't harsh; it's a reality that's been proven time and time again at Atlan. Trust the challenge – it's the most reliable predictor of future performance we have.

Understanding Signals vs. Flags vs. Vetoes

Great hiring managers at Atlan operate like detectives – gathering evidence, analyzing patterns, and making informed judgments. Every candidate will have strengths and weaknesses. Your job isn't to find a perfect candidate, but to answer two critical questions:

1. Are their strengths truly exceptional?
2. Are any of their weaknesses deal-breakers?

The Evidence Collection Process

Your evaluation should draw from multiple sources:

- Scorecard alignment
- Challenge performance
- Interview feedback
- Cultural alignment indicators
- Reference checks

Non-Consensus Decision Making

At Atlan, we explicitly reject consensus-based hiring for two important reasons:

1. The hiring manager makes the final call
2. The hiring manager earns this right by first proving themselves in the Atlan way of hiring

This doesn't mean we ignore feedback – quite the opposite. Today, veto rights rest with the founders, and we're carefully expanding this to a select group across the company. However, most feedback should be treated as signals rather than vetoes.

Processing Interview Feedback

When you receive mediocre or concerning feedback from an interviewer:

- Treat it as a signal, not a verdict
- Investigate the underlying concerns
- Look for patterns across multiple interactions
- Determine if it's a manageable weakness or a true deal-breaker

The 360-Degree Feedback Document

One of the most powerful tools in our hiring process is the comprehensive feedback document we prepare for final-stage candidates. This serves multiple purposes:

1. Demonstrates Deep Care:
 - Shows candidates we've invested significant time understanding them
 - Proves that "At Atlan we care" isn't just a slogan
 - Creates transparency in our evaluation process
2. Opens Dialogue:
 - Enables deeper conversations about strengths and growth areas
 - Creates opportunity for candidates to demonstrate self-awareness

- Helps validate our assessment of their potential
3. Provides Final Signals:
- How do they respond to constructive feedback?
 - Do they ask thoughtful questions?
 - Are they curious about understanding themselves better?
 - Will they thrive in Atlan's feedback-rich culture?

Remember: Your goal as a hiring manager isn't to achieve consensus or to find a candidate without weaknesses. It's to:

- Thoroughly understand your candidates
- Make informed decisions about what matters
- Distinguish between manageable weaknesses and true deal-breakers
- Set up your future team members for success by understanding their growth areas

Watch carefully for how candidates engage with this feedback. Their response often reveals more about their potential success at Atlan than the feedback itself. Someone who demonstrates curiosity, asks insightful questions, and shows genuine interest in understanding themselves better is often better suited for our culture than someone who receives perfect feedback but shows little interest in growth.

When you receive mixed feedback about a candidate, don't immediately reject them or try to build consensus. Instead, use it as an opportunity to dig deeper, understand better, and make a more informed decision about whether this person will truly strengthen Atlan.

References and Back Channels: Critical Evidence Collection

At Atlan, reference checking isn't a bureaucratic checkbox – it's a crucial part of your evidence collection as a hiring manager. You personally own this process, not your recruiter. Each hiring packet must include documentation of 3-4 back channel references that you've conducted yourself.

Understanding Reference Language

Learn to decode reference language:

- "This is the best person I've ever worked with" = Glowing reference
- "I would hire them again" = Average reference
- An average reference = Actually negative
- Hesitation or lukewarm praise = Major red flag

Conducting Effective References

1. Build Rapport First:
 - Introduce yourself personally
 - Share why you're excited about the candidate
 - Explain the role and its importance

- Discuss Atlan's focus on ikigai and helping people do their life's best work
- 2. Ask Forcing Questions:
 - "Out of all the [role] you've worked with, where would you rank this person?"
 - If they say "top 3," ask who's #1 and #2
 - "What would it take for them to be #1?"
 - "How many similar roles have you managed in your career?"
- 3. Dig Deep on Culture and Behavior:
 - "What demotivates them?"
 - "How do they handle difficult situations?"
 - "What's your advice on bringing out their best?"

The Power of the Six-Month Question

At the end of your reference conversation, almost as an afterthought, ask this crucial question:

"If it's six months from now and I call you and it's not worked out with this candidate, why do you think I might be calling you?"

This question is particularly powerful for two reasons:

1. Its timing at the end of the conversation, presented almost as an afterthought, catches people off guard when their defenses are down
2. By shifting the hypothetical responsibility for the hire not working out from you to the reference giver, it prompts them to take more personal responsibility and often results in surprisingly candid answers

The psychological shift from "Why might they fail?" to "Why might you be calling me about their failure?" often reveals concerns that wouldn't surface through more direct questioning. References feel personally invested in preventing a bad outcome, leading to more honest and thoughtful responses.

Serious Red Flags to Watch For

Reject candidates immediately if you discover:

- Any history of harassment or inappropriate behavior
- Misrepresentation of information (especially numbers/achievements)
- Discrepancies between stated and actual performance metrics
- Different behavior with different interviewers (e.g., discussing hierarchy/titles with recruiters but not hiring managers)
- Inconsistencies in how they present themselves across interactions

Verify Everything

For roles with targets:

- Cross-check their stated numbers with references
- Verify quota attainment claims
- Confirm team size and scope of responsibility
- Validate major achievements they've claimed

Pay Attention to All Signals

Consider feedback from everyone who's interacted with the candidate:

- How do they treat recruiters vs. hiring managers?
- Are they consistent in their communication style?
- Do they show different faces to different levels of the organization?
- How do they behave during compensation negotiations?
- Pay particular attention to feedback from Executive Assistants (EAs) and operations teams about how candidates handle travel arrangements and logistics. Remember: The way someone treats EAs and operations staff is often more telling than their behavior in formal interviews.

At Atlan, we care deeply about how people interact with every member of our team, regardless of role.

Remember: Rejecting a candidate at the reference stage is painful, especially after investing significant time. But it's far less painful than dealing with a bad hire who impacts your team's culture and performance six months later. Trust your references, trust your evidence, and never compromise on red flags.

The goal of references isn't just to validate what you know – it's to uncover what you don't know. Use this process to truly understand how to set up your potential hire for success or to identify deal-breakers before they become problems.

Your role as a detective doesn't end until the candidate has signed. Stay vigilant throughout the entire process, including offer negotiations. A candidate's true colors often emerge when discussing compensation, titles, and organizational structure.

In-Person Evaluation: The Ultimate Team Simulation

For key roles and high-leverage positions – whether they're leadership positions or critical customer-facing roles – we never hire without an in-person evaluation. This isn't just another interview; it's a carefully orchestrated simulation of what real collaboration at Atlan looks like.

Designing the Experience

The in-person evaluation serves two crucial purposes:

1. Live Working Session:
 - Simulates actual team collaboration
 - Tests problem-solving in real-time
 - Reveals working style and thought process
 - Shows how they handle ambiguity and feedback
2. Team Dynamic Assessment:
 - Brings together cross-level participants
 - Includes peers they'd work with
 - Involves potential direct reports who are cultural champions
 - Creates opportunities for informal interaction

Structured Interactions

We deliberately design both formal and informal interactions:

- Work sessions that mirror real projects
- Team problem-solving exercises
- Informal settings like lunch or coffee
- Conversations with people at different levels

Key Questions to Ask Yourself

As you observe these interactions, focus on:

- Would you genuinely enjoy solving problems with this person?
- Do they bring energy to collaborative situations?
- Can you see them elevating team discussions?
- Would they make the work more engaging and effective?

Important Distinction

Remember: We're not testing for personal likability – we're assessing collaborative potential. The question isn't "Would I want to hang out with this person?" but rather "Would they be an energizing force in tackling hard problems?" The goal is to find people who:

- Enhance team problem-solving
- Bring valuable perspectives
- Create positive working dynamics
- Make the hard work of building something meaningful more engaging

Remember: Enjoyment in this context isn't about personal chemistry – it's about the professional pleasure of working with someone who makes the team better at achieving its

mission. Look for candidates who would elevate the entire team's capability and energy level when solving complex problems.

Firing People: When Caring Means Letting Go

The biggest injustice you can do to someone who isn't performing well is keeping them on the team. It's often selfishness disguised as kindness – you're avoiding a difficult conversation at the expense of both the individual and the team. Think about it: No one wants to wake up every day knowing they're not adding value. By keeping someone in a role where they're not succeeding, you're not just failing them – you're failing everyone around them. Their teammates are picking up the slack, their own growth is stagnating, and the company's mission is compromised.

The True Cost of Delay

If you truly care about someone, the worst thing you can do is delay an inevitable termination. Here's why: If you let someone go in their first 4 weeks, they never have to put Atlan on their resume. But if they've been here a year? That's now a permanent part of their employment history. Your hesitation hasn't helped them – it's created a record that will follow them throughout their career.

You Know Earlier Than You Admit

Leaders almost always know in the first one or two weeks when someone isn't going to work out. If you're firing someone at six months, that's not something to be proud of – it's a failure of leadership. Remember this hard truth: We will fire them in a year because that's the right thing to do for Atlan. We will continue to raise our bar, not lower it. The question isn't if, but when – and the when matters enormously for the person involved.

The Three-Month Rule

Here's how we think about leadership accountability for terminations at Atlan:

- First 3 months: Get a free pass. If you recognize and act quickly, that's good leadership
- 3-24 months: This is on you as a leader. You should have known and acted sooner
- The period between 3-12 months is particularly problematic – you've let someone invest enough time to need to include Atlan on their resume, but not enough to show significant accomplishment

Separating Decision from Implementation

When facing difficult decisions about termination, leaders often struggle because they combine two distinct elements:

1. The decision itself (usually clear when viewed objectively)

2. The implementation (often emotionally challenging)

This combination leads to paralysis, as fear about the implementation clouds our judgment about the decision. Here's how to separate them:

1. Start with "Who do we serve primarily?"
 - At Atlan, this is our customers
 - Let this guide your thinking, not your emotions
2. Ask "What serves them best?"
 - This is your answer
 - Write it down clearly
 - Don't let implementation fears cloud this step
3. Address Implementation
 - Acknowledge it will be difficult
 - Consider the impact on all parties
 - Plan how to help the person transition
 - Think about what matters to them and how you can support their next steps

Practical Guidelines

- Don't let it come as a surprise
 - Regular feedback should make performance issues clear
 - The person should be aware of concerns well before termination
- Once you've made the decision, don't delay
 - The situation is usually worse than you think
 - Delay helps no one
 - Every day of hesitation impacts the team and the individual

If you're struggling with the decision, find a thought partner who isn't emotionally invested. They can help you see clearly because they don't carry the fear of implementation that you do.

Remember: Your role as a leader isn't to be liked – it's to do what's right for your customers, your company, and yes, even the person you need to let go. Sometimes the kindest thing you can do is help someone find a role where they can truly succeed, even if that's not at Atlan. The sooner you act on what you know, the more you're truly serving both the individual and the company's mission.

This isn't about being harsh – it's about understanding that swift action, while difficult, is often the kindest choice. Every week you delay is a week someone could be spending finding their right fit elsewhere, without the burden of explaining a short-term role that didn't work out. Your hesitation isn't kindness – it's avoidance that ultimately causes more harm than good.

Set Clear Standards

Championship teams aren't built on vague expectations or inconsistent feedback. They're built on crystal clear standards that everyone understands and strives to meet. At Atlan, this means:

Defining Excellence

Great sports teams know exactly what winning looks like. Your team should too:

- Goals and outcomes are explicitly defined and measurable
- Expectations are consistently communicated and reinforced
- Performance standards are clear and non-negotiable
- Success criteria are understood by everyone
- Excellence is celebrated and rewarded specifically, not generically

The Art of Feedback

Feedback isn't just about pointing out problems – it's about helping people grow. We follow principles similar to Radical Candor:

- Challenge Directly: Be clear and specific about what needs to improve
- Care Personally: Show that your feedback comes from a place of wanting to help
- Be Timely: Address issues when they're fresh, not months later
- Focus on Growth: Make it clear that feedback is about helping them improve, not criticism

Rethinking "Micromanagement"

At Atlan, we reject the conventional wisdom that all micromanagement is bad. There's a crucial distinction between micromanaging the person and micromanaging the work:

Micromanaging the Work

- If closely managing the work helps someone improve, do it
- Be explicit: "I'm going to be very hands-on with this project to help you level up"
- Set clear expectations about the level of oversight and why it's happening
- Create a path to autonomy through demonstrated excellence

Micromanaging the Person

- Controlling how someone works rather than what they deliver
- Creating unnecessary dependencies
- Undermining confidence and growth

- This is what we avoid

Inspect What You Expect

One of our biggest frustrations at Atlan is leaders who don't dive deep into their team's work. Great leaders:

- Understand the details of what their team is producing
- Can assess quality firsthand
- Know enough to give specific, actionable feedback
- Stay connected to the actual work, not just the reports about the work

Managing Cross-Functional Excellence

Sometimes you'll lead teams in areas where you weren't an IC (Individual Contributor). This isn't an excuse for poor leadership. Great leaders at Atlan:

- Learn enough about the domain to assess quality
- Build strong relationships with subject matter experts
- Ask good questions to understand the work
- Focus on outcomes while learning the craft
- Maintain high standards even while learning

Remember: Your job isn't to be the best technical expert – it's to create an environment where technical experts can do their best work. This means:

- Setting clear standards even as you learn
- Being humble about what you don't know
- Leaning on team expertise while maintaining leadership
- Focusing on outcomes and impact
- Building trust through honest communication about your learning journey

The best leaders at Atlan combine high standards with deep care. They're not afraid to dive into the details, give direct feedback, or closely manage work when needed. But they do all of this in service of helping their team achieve excellence, not to control or diminish them.

Your role is to create clarity, maintain standards, and help each team member reach their full potential. Sometimes this means being hands-on, sometimes it means stepping back, but it always means being clear about expectations and unwavering in the pursuit of excellence.

Enable Individual Ikigai

The Japanese concept of Ikigai (生き甲斐) translates roughly to "a reason for being." It's where what you love, what you're good at, what the world needs, and what sustains you intersect. At Atlan, we believe each person's journey to their Ikigai is unique, and our role as leaders is to enable these individual journeys.

Performance vs. Growth: Two Different Conversations

Performance is non-negotiable. It's about meeting the baseline expectations of your role, delivering what the company and customers need today. But growth – that's deeply personal.

Think of performance as the price of admission: everyone playing on our team needs to perform at a certain level. But growth? That's about where each player wants to take their game:

- Some will want to grow 10x and revolutionize their field
- Others will prioritize steady, sustainable progress
- Some might choose to excel exactly where they are
- Others might need to step back during certain life phases

All of these paths are valid at Atlan. We're building a company where both the ambitious fast-tracker and the steady performer can find their place.

Understanding Your Team Deeply

As a leader, your fundamental responsibility is to help people do their life's best work. This requires understanding people better than they understand themselves:

Tools for Understanding

- Use frameworks like Working Genius or StrengthsFinder
- Conduct regular energy audits with team members
- Map activities across two axes:
 - Skill Level (How good are they at it?)
 - Energy Level (Does it energize or drain them?)

This creates four quadrants:

1. High Skill, High Energy: Optimize for these
2. High Skill, Low Energy: Potential burnout zone
3. Low Skill, High Energy: Growth opportunities
4. Low Skill, Low Energy: Delegate or eliminate

Your role is to help people maximize time in the top-right quadrant while having honest conversations about the trade-offs in other areas.

Managing Modern Careers = Career Lattices, not ladders

The concept of a 30-year linear career ladder is obsolete. Consider how many roles today didn't exist five years ago, or how AI is transforming traditional career paths. At Atlan, we believe in career lattices, not ladders:

- Career Lattices connect backwards, not forwards
- Growth isn't always vertical
- Skills matter more than titles
- Flexibility beats rigidity

Promote Before We Promote

At Atlan, we create opportunities for people to test new roles before formal promotions. This is crucial because:

- People don't always know if they'll enjoy a new role (especially management)
- Different paths require different trade-offs
- Real experience beats theoretical attraction
- It's better to discover misalignment early

Fighting FOMO and Understanding Trade-offs

One of your most important roles as a leader is helping people navigate career FOMO. In today's world of carefully curated LinkedIn updates and internal announcements, it's easy for people to feel they're missing out or falling behind.

Help your team understand that:

- Different paths have different trade-offs
- Fast growth requires significant sacrifice
- Sustainable progress is a valid choice
- Someone else's path isn't necessarily right for them

When someone chooses a high-growth path, be brutally honest about what it requires:

- It might mean working weekends
- It could require significant upskilling
- The learning curve will be steep
- Comfort zones will be challenged daily

Equally, when someone chooses a more sustainable pace:

- Help them feel confident in their choice
- Prepare them for seeing peers advance faster
- Focus on their unique value proposition

- Celebrate excellence at their chosen level

Your Role as a Leader

Your responsibility is to:

1. Don't Project:
 - Your personal growth ambitions onto others
 - Your definition of success onto your team
 - Your work preferences onto different personalities
2. Enable Choices:
 - Help people understand their options
 - Be clear about trade-offs
 - Support different growth paths
 - Create space for different approaches
3. Be Clear About Trade-offs:
 - Want to grow 10x? Here's what that requires
 - Need to step back? Let's figure out how
 - Choosing stability? Let's excel within that choice
4. Support Transitions:
 - Help people adapt as their priorities shift
 - Enable different seasons of life
 - Create frameworks for flexibility
 - Maintain high standards while being human

Remember: Your job isn't to judge or shape people's choices about growth and harmony. It's to help them understand their options, be clear about what each path requires, and support them in executing their choices effectively while maintaining their performance standards.

The Myth of Work-Life Balance => Work Life Harmony

We reject the notion of "work-life balance" because it implies a false dichotomy and an impossible mathematical equation. Instead, we think about three core relationships that every person must nurture:

1. Relationship with Work & Purpose
2. Relationship with Self
3. Relationship with Community (family, friends, society)

These relationships are never in perfect balance. There's no magical 33-33-33 split. Instead, we strive for harmony – understanding that different relationships take precedence at different times:

- Sometimes work demands more attention for growth or critical projects

- Sometimes family needs require stepping back
- Sometimes self-care becomes the priority

Your Role as a Leader

As a leader at Atlan, your responsibility is to:

1. Don't Project:
 - Your personal growth ambitions onto others
 - Your definition of success onto your team
 - Your work preferences onto different personalities
2. Enable Choices:
 - Help people understand their options
 - Be clear about trade-offs
 - Support different growth paths
 - Create space for different approaches
3. Be Clear About Trade-offs:
 - Want to grow 10x? Here's what that requires
 - Need to step back? Let's figure out how
 - Choosing stability? Let's excel within that choice
4. Support Transitions:
 - Help people adapt as their priorities shift
 - Enable different seasons of life
 - Create frameworks for flexibility
 - Maintain high standards while being human

Remember: Your job isn't to judge or shape people's choices about growth and harmony. It's to help them understand their options, be clear about what each path requires, and support them in executing their choices effectively while maintaining their performance standards.

Create a Culture of Merit

At Atlan, we believe that a true meritocracy is built on clear standards, objective metrics, and a relentless focus on outcomes rather than optics. This means making conscious choices about how we evaluate, reward, and promote people.

Separating Personal from Professional

One of the biggest threats to meritocracy is the natural human tendency to favor people we personally like or relate to. While it's normal to develop stronger personal connections with some team members than others, great leaders at Atlan:

- Make decisions based on performance, not personal affinity
- Evaluate outcomes objectively, regardless of relationships
- Hold everyone to the same high standards

- Never let friendship cloud professional judgment

Clear Metrics Over Stories

We reject the "storytelling culture" that's become prevalent in many organizations, where narrative ability can overshadow actual impact. Instead, we focus on:

- Establishing clear, measurable performance indicators
- Creating transparent evaluation criteria
- Documenting specific achievements and outcomes
- Making data-driven decisions about performance and promotion

Values Matter

At Atlan, demonstrating our values isn't optional – it's fundamental to how we define merit. We will not promote people who show "yellow" signals on our values, no matter how strong their technical performance might be. This is because:

- Who we promote sends a powerful message about what we value
- Leadership roles amplify both positive and negative behaviors
- Our values are core to how we serve customers and build our company
- Technical excellence without values alignment is ultimately destructive

Merit-Based Decision Making

When making decisions about roles, responsibilities, or promotions:

- Start with clear, objective criteria
- Gather specific examples and evidence
- Focus on demonstrated capabilities
- Consider both performance and values alignment
- Remove personal bias from the equation
- Document your reasoning clearly

Remember: Your job isn't to be everyone's friend – it's to build the strongest possible team in service of our mission. Sometimes this means making decisions that might disappoint people you personally like, or advocating for people you might not naturally gravitate toward. The only thing that matters is creating the most capable, values-aligned team possible.

The best leaders at Atlan understand that true meritocracy requires constant vigilance against natural human biases and a commitment to making decisions based on what's right, not what's comfortable. This isn't always easy, but it's essential for building a truly exceptional organization.

Remember: A true meritocracy isn't just about rewarding high performers – it's about creating an environment where everyone knows that their work, not their relationships, determines their success. This creates the trust and motivation that drives exceptional teams.

Mastering Crucial Conversations

At Atlan, our ability to have effective crucial conversations often determines our success as leaders. A crucial conversation isn't just any difficult discussion – it's one where stakes are high, opinions vary, and emotions run strong. Getting these conversations right is fundamental to building high-performing teams.

Anatomy of a Crucial Conversation

Every effective crucial conversation contains four essential elements:

1. **Honesty:** Speak the unvarnished truth
 - Be direct about the situation
 - Share specific examples and observations
 - Don't sugarcoat or minimize issues
2. **Authenticity:** Come from a place of genuine care
 - Share your real concerns and motivations
 - Acknowledge your own role or feelings
 - Be human, not just a manager
3. **True Care:** Demonstrate investment in their success
 - Show you've thought deeply about their growth
 - Listen actively to understand their perspective
 - Make it clear you're on their side, even in difficulty
4. **Inspires Action:** Drive towards clear outcomes
 - End with specific next steps
 - Create shared understanding of expectations
 - Set clear timelines for follow-up

Common Leadership Pitfalls

Leaders typically face three challenges with crucial conversations:

1. **The Avoidant Leader**
 - Postpones difficult conversations hoping issues will resolve themselves
 - Allows small problems to grow into major issues
 - Prioritizes short-term comfort over long-term success
2. **Solution:** Schedule crucial conversations immediately when you notice issues. The longer you wait, the harder they become.
3. **The Unclear Communicator**

- Has the conversation but fails to create true understanding
- Leaves room for misinterpretation
- Gets frustrated when actions don't follow
- 4. **Solution:** Confirm understanding by having the other person reflect back what they heard and what actions they'll take.
- 5. The Demotivating Director
 - Gets the point across but crushes spirit
 - Achieves compliance but loses engagement
 - Focuses on problems without offering support
- 6. **Solution:** Balance directness with encouragement and support. Show the path forward, not just the current gap.

Doing Hard Things with Deep Care

Leadership at Atlan means embracing the tension between maintaining high standards and showing deep care. This manifests in several ways:

1. Early Intervention
 - Address issues as soon as you see them
 - Don't wait for problems to become crises
 - Show care by not letting someone continue down the wrong path
2. Performance Conversations
 - Be direct about gaps or concerns
 - Offer specific examples and feedback
 - Create clear action plans for improvement
 - Demonstrate support through the process
3. Crisis Management
 - Stay more involved during difficult times
 - Show up fully for your team when stakes are high
 - Balance urgency with empathy
 - Lead by example in challenging situations

Making Crucial Conversations Effective

1. Prepare Thoroughly
 - Gather specific examples
 - Anticipate reactions and concerns
 - Plan your key messages
 - Choose the right time and place
2. Open Strongly
 - State the purpose clearly
 - Show care and good intent
 - Create psychological safety
 - Set the right tone
3. Navigate the Discussion

- Listen actively
 - Ask open-ended questions
 - Acknowledge emotions
 - Stay focused on outcomes
4. Close with Clarity
- Summarize key points
 - Agree on specific next steps
 - Set follow-up timeline
 - Express confidence and support

Remember: The goal of a crucial conversation isn't just to deliver a message – it's to create understanding and inspire positive change. Your success isn't measured by whether you said what needed to be said, but by whether you achieved the outcome needed for both the individual and Atlan.

The best leaders at Atlan understand that crucial conversations, while difficult, are opportunities to demonstrate both their high standards and their deep care for their team members' success. When done right, these conversations don't just address issues – they strengthen relationships and build trust.

Leading Across Time Zones: The Global Remote Reality

At Atlan, being a global remote team creates unique dynamics that can either be our greatest strength or our biggest challenge. Let us share what this looks like in practice.

Imagine it's 7 AM in San Francisco. A product leader is starting their day early, having just dropped their kids off at school (or maybe even missing that morning routine). Meanwhile, in Bangalore, it's 7:30 PM, and their team members have already put in a full day. This isn't just about different time zones – it's about real people making real sacrifices to make global collaboration work.

The Reality of Global Work

We call 7 AM - 11 AM Pacific time our "AST" (Atlan Standard Time). These precious hours are when our entire global team can collaborate. But here's what it really means:

- For our US colleagues, especially on the West Coast, it might mean missing morning family time
- For our India teammates, it means extending their workday into the evening
- For everyone, it means being intentional about when and how we work

Let's be direct: This isn't always comfortable. When someone joins Atlan, they're choosing to accept these constraints. Pretending these sacrifices don't exist doesn't help anyone. But here's where great leadership makes a difference.

The Art of Global Leadership

The best leaders at Atlan have learned to turn these challenges into advantages. Consider this: If you structure it right, a global team can actually work around the clock. A team in India can make significant progress during their day, hand off to their US colleagues who are just starting, and create a 24-hour cycle of productivity. But get those handoffs wrong, and you've just created a 48-hour delay.

Here's what this looks like in practice:

- A leader in the US might take their team meetings at 7 AM so their India colleagues can end their day earlier
- A leader in India might structure their team's day to start later, using mornings for personal time
- Everyone learns to protect AST hours like they're gold, because they are

The Travel Reality

The Travel Reality: Going Beyond Time Zones

When we bring people together at Atlan, we're not just managing calendar coordination – we're orchestrating global movement. This creates unique complexities that require both understanding and commitment from our leaders.

Company Events: More Than Just Meetings

When we plan offsites, dungeon sessions, or team gatherings, understand that:

- Some colleagues face 48+ hour travel times
- We've likely evaluated dozens of date combinations
- Every event represents significant company investment
- These aren't casual requests - they're critical company moments

Leadership Expectations Around Travel

As a leader at Atlan, here's what we expect:

1. Personal Sacrifice Over Personal Preference
 - Save your "get out of jail free" cards for true non-negotiables
 - A best friend's wedding? We understand
 - Personal preference or convenience? Not a valid reason
 - Remember: These dates weren't chosen lightly
2. Prioritizing Company Events
 - If your team member is invited to a dungeon session, even if your role in the company event isn't immediately clear, remember that the invite is for a specific reason: you have context that is critical for the discussion. Make it happen so you can contribute
 - Help remove obstacles to their attendance

- Understand these invitations reflect significant company investment
- Recognize the rare nature of these requests
- 3. Supporting Your Team's Participation
 - Help rearrange workloads to enable attendance
 - Buffer their responsibilities before and after travel
 - Show that you value these company moments
 - Lead by example in your own attendance and attitude

Understanding the Investment

When we plan global gatherings:

- Every date chosen impacts multiple time zones
- Travel costs are significant
- Logistics are complex
- Time investment is substantial

This is why we expect leaders to:

- Minimize personal date change requests
- Help their teams prioritize these events
- Understand the ripple effects of changes
- Support the success of company gatherings

Remember: These moments where we bring people together physically are rare and valuable. They represent not just significant company investment but crucial opportunities for building the relationships that make Atlan special. Your role as a leader is to help make these moments successful, even when it requires personal sacrifice.

The Remote Advantage

But here's the flip side: Working in a truly remote company brings remarkable flexibility. You can:

- Be there for your kids' school pickup
- Run errands during traditional "office hours"
- Work from anywhere in the world
- Structure your day around your peak productivity hours

In a world where many companies are pushing for return to office, this flexibility is invaluable. But it comes with the understanding that when the company needs us to come together, we do.

The Leadership Challenge

As a leader at Atlan, your job isn't to eliminate these challenges – it's to help your team navigate them effectively while maintaining our high standards. This means:

- Being thoughtful about calendar management
- Preventing anyone from burning both ends of the candle
- Understanding that different team members will find different rhythms
- Making personal sacrifices when company needs demand it
- Creating systems that turn our global nature into a competitive advantage

Remember: The goal isn't to make everyone comfortable – it's to make our global nature a strength while caring deeply about sustainable success. The best leaders at Atlan don't just accept these challenges; they embrace them as opportunities to build something truly extraordinary.

Understanding and Managing Global Rhythms

Let's talk specifically about what "burning the candle at both ends" looks like, because this is something we actively prevent at Atlan:

For India-Based Teams:

- Typical rhythm starts around noon IST
- Core work hours stretch into evening
- Latest calls should generally end by midnight
- Mornings are free for personal time

What we don't want:

- An India teammate taking a 6 AM call and then still being online at midnight
- Someone feeling pressured to be available during both their morning and late night
- Teams feeling they need to mirror traditional 9-5 hours plus evening calls

For US-Based Teams:

- Early start (often 6-7 AM Pacific)
- Core work done during their daytime
- Wrapping up around 5-6 PM their time
- Evenings protected for personal time

What we don't want:

- A US teammate taking both 6 AM and 9 PM calls
- People feeling they need to be available 24/7
- Teams missing important personal time (like school drops) unnecessarily

Personal Rhythms in a Global Company

The beauty of a global remote company is that it allows for personalized rhythms that work with individual lifestyles. Here are some real examples we see at Atlan:

For US West Coast teams:

- Some leaders take an intentional break from 3-7 PM Pacific
- Use this time for family, exercise, or personal needs
- Log back in for 1-2 hours in the evening for India team handoffs
- This creates natural overlap with India's morning

For India teams:

- Many start their day around noon with deep work until 4 PM
- Take a break from 4-6 PM for gym or personal time
- Return for AST hours with US teams
- Create flexible morning schedules

Your Role as a Leader

1. Design Sustainable Rhythms:
 - Help each team member find their optimal schedule
 - Encourage breaks and personal time
 - Ensure rhythms serve both individual and team needs
 - Have open conversations about what works
2. Challenge Industry Defaults:
 - Don't accept "this is how global teams work" thinking
 - Question traditional 9-5 expectations
 - Find creative solutions that serve all time zones
 - Remember: most companies aren't as globally distributed as Atlan

The Gift of Global Experience

Working on a truly global team is a career accelerator. Help your team understand:

- The unique opportunity to work across cultures
- The professional growth from global collaboration
- The skills they're developing for future roles
- The advantage of understanding multiple markets

Rejecting the Onshore/Offshore Mindset

At Atlan, we explicitly reject the traditional onshore/offshore model where one region dictates terms to others. Here's what this means:

- We are not a North American company with overseas offices
- We are not an Indian company with US presence

- We are a truly global company, built by every region
- No region's working hours take precedence over others

Leaders must demonstrate this through:

- Equal respect for all regional needs
- Balanced scheduling across time zones
- Recognition of all regional contributions
- Language that reflects true global partnership

Remember: Your job as a leader is to create sustainable global rhythms while rejecting old models of regional hierarchy. This isn't just about managing schedules - it's about building a truly global company where every region is an equal partner in our success.

Leadership Expectations

As an Atlan leader, you own the responsibility to:

1. Understand These Rhythms
 - Know when your global teammates start and end their days
 - Be aware of local contexts (school times, family commitments)
 - Actively manage your calendar to respect these patterns
2. Teach Your Team
 - Help team members understand global working patterns
 - Create empathy across time zones
 - Set clear expectations about availability
3. Make Thoughtful Choices
 - If you're in the US, take that 7 AM call so your Asia colleague can end their day
 - If you're in India, structure your team's schedule to start later
 - Be intentional about when you schedule global meetings
4. Act Human
 - Show flexibility when you can
 - Make personal adjustments that help others
 - Don't default to what's convenient for you
 - Remember there are real people managing real lives across these time zones

Calendar Management Best Practices

For Leaders:

- Reserve AST hours (7-11 AM Pacific) for truly global needs
- Schedule same-region meetings outside of AST
- Be thoughtful about when you book people
- Show you understand and respect different time zones

For example:

- Don't schedule a US-only meeting during prime AST hours
- If you're booking someone in Asia, try for your early morning
- Create clear handoff points between regions
- Build in buffer time for people to have breaks

Remember: Your role as a leader isn't just to manage your own schedule - it's to create sustainable rhythms for your entire team while maintaining our high standards of execution. This requires constant awareness, intentional choices, and genuine empathy for the global nature of our work.

*While we often use India and North America in our examples (as they represent significant team concentrations today), Atlan's global reality extends across many regions. Whether you're in:

- Europe (managing time zones between Asia and Americas)
- Singapore (bridging APAC with global teams)
- Canada (balancing multiple North American and global times)
- Or any other region where Atlan operates

The principles remain the same: we are a truly global company where every region is an equal partner in building Atlan.

Creating Culture Champions

At Atlan, if we could measure performance, it would be 100%. When we talk about 120%, we're talking about that unmeasurable extra that makes Atlan special. As a leader, your core responsibility isn't just delivering results – it's maintaining and growing care density in your team. Care density isn't a soft metric or a nice-to-have – it's fundamental to how we operate. High performance without high care density isn't success at Atlan.

Culture and values can't be written on a wall. We can write as many handbooks as exist, but if you as a leader and manager don't exhibit these in real life on a daily basis, you will not propagate the values. Values are learnt through apprenticeship. People watch your actions.

This can be showcased through big and small things -- for example, you'll notice people introduce themselves through their work, not their titles:

- "I work with the product team" not "I'm the Head of Product"
- "I work on making our product more intuitive" not "I'm the UX Director" This isn't about hiding seniority – it's about emphasizing what truly matters: the work we do and its impact.

The Non-Negotiables

1. No Behind-the-Back Conversations
 - Never discuss someone who isn't present

- This is a zero-tolerance policy at Atlan
 - If you have feedback or concerns, raise them directly
 - No exceptions, regardless of seniority or situation
2. The Poison of Gossip Let's be clear about what gossip is at Atlan:
- Sharing information about others that isn't meant for problem-solving
 - Discussing personal or professional matters without clear intent to help
 - Creating narratives about situations without full context
 - Spreading unverified information or speculation
3. Why is gossip so dangerous?
- It erodes trust
 - Creates artificial divisions
 - Promotes indirect communication
 - Undermines our one-team culture
 - Wastes energy that could be used solving real problems

The Power of Direct Disagreement

No Rolling Eyes: Active vs. Passive Disagreement

At Atlan, we believe passive disagreement is more damaging than active conflict. Those eye-roll moments in cross-functional meetings - when someone mutters "that sales target isn't realistic" or quietly scoffs at a product timeline - they might seem harmless, but they're actually toxic.

Why? Because passive disagreement:

- Erodes trust without offering solutions
- Creates undercurrents of doubt that can't be addressed
- Wastes energy that could be spent solving problems
- Undermines our ability to work as one team

Instead, we expect direct, professional disagreement. When you have doubts:

- Voice them openly and constructively
- Bring data and context to the discussion
- Focus on solving problems, not expressing skepticism
- Remember: being human doesn't mean being unprofessional

Addressing Scar Tissue: The Hidden Trust Killer

Think of trust like skin - when it's wounded and not properly treated, it leaves scar tissue. In professional relationships, scar tissue forms when:

- Conflicts aren't fully resolved
- Hurt feelings are brushed aside
- Disagreements are papered over rather than addressed

- Small resentments are allowed to fester

Over time, this scar tissue becomes the biggest eroder of trust. While addressing it is difficult, ignoring it is fatal to team relationships. As a leader, you must:

- Recognize when scar tissue is forming
- Create space for honest discussions about past hurts
- Address underlying issues, not just surface conflicts
- Help your team develop healthy conflict resolution habits

Feedback is a Gift: Protecting the Truth-Tellers

Here's a hard truth about leadership: getting real feedback gets harder the more senior you become. There's a natural power imbalance that makes people hesitant to tell you difficult truths. That's why at Atlan:

- Feedback can come from anywhere
 - Direct reports
 - The People team
 - Your manager
 - The founders
 - Anyone who sees an opportunity for you to improve

Remember: When someone shares feedback about you with another leader or the People team, they haven't "gone over your head" - because at Atlan, there is no "over your head." We're one team trying to help each other be better.

Our promise is clear: No one at Atlan will ever face negative consequences for sharing feedback, as long as it comes from a place of good intent. As a leader, it's your job to protect and reinforce this promise.

Leading Through Crisis

Crisis moments reveal leadership character. At Atlan, we have clear expectations for leaders during critical situations:

- Be present when your team needs you
 - If they're working late, you're working late
 - If they're on weekend calls, you're on weekend calls
 - If they're solving problems, you're in the trenches with them
- Lead from the front, not behind
 - Take charge of difficult situations
 - Share the burden with your team
 - Show, don't tell, what commitment looks like
 - Make the tough calls when needed

Remember: Your team will remember how you showed up (or didn't) during critical moments. These situations aren't just operational challenges - they're opportunities to demonstrate real leadership.

Leadership Dilemmas and Their Resolution

Scenario: Cross-Team Feedback

Dilemma: "An IC from my team shared feedback about someone in another team. What should I do?"

Resolution:

1. First, encourage direct communication:
 - Coach them on how to give feedback constructively
 - Help them prepare for the conversation
 - Offer to role-play the discussion if needed
2. If they're hesitant:
 - Understand why they're uncomfortable
 - Help them build the skills to have difficult conversations
 - Consider facilitating an initial conversation
3. As a leader:
 - Share the signal with the other person's manager
 - Be clear that this is secondhand feedback
 - Follow up to ensure the situation improves

Remember: Your goal isn't just to resolve this specific situation but to build a culture where direct feedback is normal and safe.

Scenario: Manager Feedback

Dilemma: "An IC from another team shared concerns about their manager with me."

Resolution:

1. First response:
 - Thank them for their trust
 - Listen fully to understand the situation
 - Acknowledge the courage it takes to speak up
2. Guide them toward direct communication:
 - Help them structure their feedback
 - Coach them on having difficult conversations
 - Offer support in the process
3. Take action:

- Share the signal with the manager's manager
- Involve the People team for support
- Follow up to ensure resolution
- 4. Think systemically:
 - Consider if this reflects a broader issue
 - Look for patterns that might need addressing
 - Use the situation to strengthen feedback culture

Remember: At Atlan, feedback is a gift. Protect the person's trust while ensuring the feedback reaches those who can act on it.

Scenario: Venting vs. Problem-Solving

Dilemma: "Someone came to me just to vent about another team member."

Resolution:

1. Shift from venting to problem-solving:
 - Listen to understand the real issues
 - Ask "What would you like to see change?"
 - Guide toward constructive action
2. Coach for direct communication:
 - Help them frame their concerns constructively
 - Offer tools for difficult conversations
 - Support them in addressing issues directly
3. Your responsibility:
 - Don't participate in gossip
 - Redirect to problem-solving
 - Model direct communication

Remember: Venting without action creates toxic culture. Help transform complaints into constructive dialogue.

Scenario: Cross-Functional Frustration

Dilemma: X-function has been missing its targets, and you don't know why it's not getting solved. This is really frustrating you.

Resolution:

1. Start from trust:
 - Assume good intent
 - Consider what context you might be missing
2. Take ownership:
 - Reach out directly to understand challenges
 - Ask how your team could help

- Share your concerns constructively
- 3. Focus on solutions:
 - Offer resources or support
 - Suggest cross-team collaboration
 - Think company-first, not function-first
- 4. If the situation doesn't improve, raise a 1202 alarm - openly and publicly.
 - Share with the person's manager/ leader
 - Sometimes it isn't a "what" or "how" problem, it is a "who" problem
 - Your signal is important

Remember: At Atlan, there's no "their problem" - only "our problems." If you see an issue, you own helping solve it.

Scenario: Delayed Offboarding

Dilemma: "I didn't offboard this person because it would impact team morale."

Resolution:

1. Recognize the real impact:
 - Delayed action hurts everyone
 - Team knows when someone isn't performing
 - You're not protecting morale, you're damaging it
2. Take immediate action:
 - Address performance issues directly
 - Be clear about standards
 - Show respect through honesty
3. Lead through change:
 - Communicate with transparency
 - Show that high standards matter
 - Support team through transition

Remember: The biggest injustice to someone who isn't performing is keeping them in a role where they can't succeed.

Scenario: Standards Uncertainty

Dilemma: "I don't think we have met the standards that we should on this team, but I don't have enough information to give feedback to the leader."

Resolution:

1. Apply our hierarchy:
 - How is this impacting customers?
 - What's the company-level impact?
 - What standards are we missing?

2. Have the conversation:
 - Share your observations directly
 - You can say “this is just an individual incident that I’m sharing, so please take it as a signal, not patten”
 - Start by saying “the story I’m telling myself is”

Remember: If you see something that could impact our customers or company, you have a responsibility to raise it, even without complete information.

Scenario: Operational vs Strategic Alignment

Dilemma: "My team's work is operational in nature - I am not able to align the team on company's broader goals."

Resolution:

1. Connect the dots:
 - Show how operational excellence enables company success
 - Link daily tasks to customer impact
 - Draw clear lines from operations to mission
2. Create meaning:
 - Share customer stories
 - Highlight downstream impact
 - Show how operational work enables others' success
3. Build broader context:
 - Bring in leaders to share company vision
 - Create opportunities for team members to see bigger picture
 - Show how operational excellence drives strategic success

Remember: Every function at Atlan serves our mission. Your job is to help your team see their crucial role in that mission.

Scenario: Avoiding Difficult Conversations

Dilemma: "This person gets emotional during difficult conversations - so I avoided it."

Resolution:

1. Reframe your responsibility:
 - Avoiding hard conversations isn't kindness
 - Your role is to help people grow
 - Emotions are natural, not a reason to avoid feedback
2. Prepare effectively:
 - Choose timing thoughtfully

- Structure the conversation clearly
 - Have specific examples ready
 - Create a safe environment
3. Lead with care:
- Acknowledge emotions are normal
 - Stay focused on helping them improve
 - Be clear while being human
 - Follow up appropriately

Remember: Difficult conversations are part of leadership. Your job isn't to avoid emotions but to help people grow through them.

Scenario: Hiring Pipeline Quality

Dilemma: "We are not screening the right candidates - our pipeline isn't strong enough."

Resolution:

1. Take ownership of hiring:
 - Work directly with recruiters to refine ICP (Ideal Candidate Profile)
 - Identify target companies and backgrounds
 - Be involved in initial screening
 - Implement pair-screening practices
2. Improve the process:
 - Share clear examples of successful hires
 - Document what "good" looks like
 - Create structured evaluation criteria
 - Participate in sourcing strategies
3. Build long-term solutions:
 - Train team members in interviewing
 - Create feedback loops with recruiting
 - Document learnings from every hire
 - Build relationships with potential candidate sources

Remember: Hiring is too important to delegate. Great leaders are deeply involved in building their teams.

Scenario: Growth Opportunity Distribution

Dilemma: "Why are we providing more growth opportunities to X person and not Y person?"

Resolution:

1. Understand the distinction:
 - Performance is non-negotiable
 - Growth is personal choice

- Not everyone wants the same growth path
- 2. Be clear about decisions:
 - Link opportunities to demonstrated performance
 - Acknowledge different growth ambitions
 - Be transparent about requirements
 - Support different paths
- 3. Create clarity:
 - Have explicit conversations about growth desires
 - Document performance standards
 - Help people understand trade-offs
 - Support individual choices

Remember: At Atlan, we support different growth paths but never compromise on performance standards.

Scenario: In-Person Meeting Investment

Dilemma: "Planning in-person team meetings - these are costly in terms of dollars and time."

Resolution:

- 1. Treat these as investments:
 - Be clear about expected outcomes
 - Create detailed agendas
 - Plan for maximum impact
 - Consider all costs (time, travel, opportunity)
- 2. Make them count:
 - Build meaningful connections
 - Tackle complex problems
 - Create lasting impact
 - Use time effectively
- 3. Set clear expectations:
 - Communicate the importance
 - Get full commitment
 - Plan around global travel
 - Make every moment valuable

Remember: In-person meetings are significant investments. Make them extraordinary when you bring people together.

Caring for Me (being the best version of yourself)

Become Your Best Self

Leadership at Atlan starts with understanding yourself. Before you can help others find their path, you need clarity about your own journey.

Understanding Your Own Ikigai

The Japanese concept of Ikigai isn't just something you help your team find – it's essential to your own leadership journey. As a leader, your first responsibility is self-awareness:

- What energizes you versus drains you
- Where you create unique value
- What the company and customers need from you
- How you can sustain your impact over time

The Leadership Quadrant

Think about your responsibilities in four quadrants:

1. Top Right: Love it + Great at it
 - These are your superpowers
 - Double down here
 - Find ways to do more of this
2. Top Left: Love it + Not Great at it
 - Areas for focused development
 - Invest in improving
 - Be honest about current limitations
3. Bottom Right: Don't Love it + Great at it
 - Opportunities for delegation
 - Train someone.
 - Create systems to handle these
4. Bottom Left: Don't Love it + Not Great at it
 - Delegate or eliminate
 - Be honest about limitations
 - Find better owners for these tasks

The New vs. Nuance Leader

Understanding your natural tendency:

- "New" leaders thrive on fresh challenges and rapid learning. They like getting to 80% but don't love the nuance and depth post that.
- "Nuance" leaders excel at mastering complexity in their domain

Recognize your type and:

- Play to your strengths
- Compensate for blind spots
- Build teams that complement your style

Remember: Great leadership starts with self-awareness. You can't guide others effectively until you understand your own path.

Slope > Y-Intercept

John Ousterhout, Professor at Stanford, argues that your growth rate (slope) matters more than where you start (y-intercept). At Atlan, this principle is existential. In a company growing as rapidly as ours, your learning velocity determines whether you grow with the company or get outpaced by it.

Leaders who stop learning become the ceiling for their teams. It's not enough to rely on your current expertise or title – the problems we'll face tomorrow are different from the ones we're solving today. This is especially true in the age of AI, where the pace of change is unprecedented.

Create active learning systems: curate your information diet (social media, newsletters, books), build peer networks, and most importantly, maintain intellectual humility. Remember: If you're not actively growing your knowledge, you're actually falling behind. The company's growth won't wait – your learning velocity needs to match or exceed it.

[Source: ["Be A Good Neighbor: Slope > Y-Intercept"](#) - John Ousterhout, Stanford]

Time: Your Most Precious Resource

Most leaders think money is their scarcest resource. They're wrong. It's time. Unlike money, time is truly finite – every person gets exactly the same 24 hours, and once spent, it's gone forever. At Atlan's pace of growth, how you invest this resource determines your impact.

Optimize Your Tools

High-leverage leaders obsess over their daily toolkit:

- Communication: Master Slack shortcuts, email filters, Zoom efficiency
- Workspace: Invest in your setup (whether home or office)
- Travel: Turn transit time into productive time
- Documentation: Create systems that scale your time
- Automation: Eliminate repetitive tasks

Don't be penny-wise and time-foolish. That extra monitor, better microphone, or premium software subscription? If it saves you an hour a week, it's worth it.

Remember: Your productivity isn't just about you – it sets the pace for your entire team. When you respect your time, others will too.

How to Succeed at Atlan

Here's a hard truth: If you're spending energy managing perceptions, protecting your position, or trying to be liked, you're already failing at Atlan. We've seen talented leaders stumble not because they lacked capability, but because they couldn't drop their insecurities.

At Atlan, success has a simple formula: solve real problems, help others grow, deliver impact. That's it. No politics. No territory marking. No popularity contests. The leaders who thrive here are the ones who can park their ego at the door and focus on the work that matters.

Don't be a "figurehead" leader. Earn Respect by Diving Deep

Being a "figurehead" leader doesn't work here. Real leadership at Atlan means:

- Getting your hands dirty
- Understanding the details
- Coaching through experience, not theory
- Be the leader who asks "stupid" questions because you care more about getting right than looking smart.
- Being vulnerable enough to learn. Be the first to admit what you don't know and the most eager to learn.

We have a slack channel called #no-stupid-questions for a reason. Remember: At Atlan, your success will never come from managing impressions. It will come from the problems you solve, the people you help grow, and the lasting value you create. Everything else is noise.

Substance Over Stories

At Atlan, we have an almost allergic reaction to the word "optics." Here's why: Every minute spent crafting the perfect story about impact is a minute not spent creating actual impact. Let me be direct: if you're thinking about how something "looks," you're already thinking about the wrong thing.

We've seen this pattern before. Leaders who obsess over:

- How to "position" their work
- When to "showcase" their impact
- How to "tell the story" of their success
- Ways to "increase visibility" of their team

Stop. Just stop.

Instead of crafting stories about value, create actual value. Real impact at Atlan doesn't need elaborate storytelling – it speaks for itself through:

- Customers who succeed
- Problems that get solved
- Teams that grow stronger
- Work that moves the needle

Here's the irony: The best stories at Atlan come from leaders who never thought about storytelling. They were too busy doing the work that matters. Their impact was so substantial it created its own narrative.

Remember: Focus on value creation with maniacal intensity. The story will write itself.

Seek Feedback: You Are Not Your Leadership Style

Patrick Collison, Stripe's CEO, offers a powerful metaphor that every Atlan leader should internalize: Think of your leadership style as a mech suit you wear to work. If someone says "that laser blaster isn't effective," you wouldn't take it personally. You'd think "Great feedback - let me upgrade that component." It's not you they're critiquing; it's just a part of your suit that needs improvement.

This mindset is crucial because feedback gets harder to receive the more senior you become. The natural power dynamics of leadership mean fewer people will tell you the hard truths. And those who do are giving you a precious gift – they're helping you upgrade your mech suit.

Make Feedback Inevitable

Don't wait for feedback to find you. Create systems to get it:

- Schedule regular cross-functional check-ins
- Ask specific questions, not just "any feedback?"
- Create safe spaces for direct reports to share
- Seek input from peers
- Follow up on previous feedback to show you value it

Remember to ask:

- "What should I start doing?"

- "What should I stop doing?"
- "What's one thing that would make me more effective?"
- "Where do you see my blind spots?"

Most importantly, when you receive feedback, your first response should always be "thank you." Whether you agree or not, someone just took the risk to help you upgrade your mech suit. That deserves appreciation.

Be Your Strongest Self

Think of your body as your leadership hardware and your mind as the operating system. When either isn't optimized, everything suffers.

The science is clear: sleep quality impacts everything from decision-making to emotional regulation (get a sleep tracker or cooling mattress if it helps). Exercise isn't about aesthetics but energy (consider a personal trainer for accountability). Nutrition directly affects cognitive performance (work with a nutritionist if needed). We're big believers in therapy as preventive maintenance, not crisis response. Keep a gratitude journal – it's scientifically proven to build resilience.

But here's the key: we're all different. Some leaders need complete disconnection during vacations to recharge. Others need daily meditation breaks. Some thrive on morning workouts, others on evening walks. The "right" routine is the one that works for you.

Remember: We're running a marathon, not a sprint. Yes, there will be times when sprints are necessary, when the company needs extraordinary effort. But sustainable success requires sustainable leaders. If you're hitting a wall or struggling to find your rhythm, speak up. We deeply care about you being your best self, and we're here to help make that happen.

In the juggle between work, community, and self, don't sacrifice your relationship with self. It's often the first to go, but it's the foundation for everything else. Whether it's therapy, regular vacations, daily breaks, or strict sleep schedules – identify what helps you be your best and protect it fiercely. Share your needs openly – we're all in this together.

Remember: You can't pour from an empty cup. Taking care of yourself isn't selfish – it's a prerequisite for taking care of your team and company.

Titles and levels are about scope, and not symbols of status

Our early years as founders were deeply influenced by leaders like Mr. Ratan Tata, who demonstrated that true power lies in humility. Working closely with such leaders taught us something profound: the most powerful leaders are often the most humble, the most service-oriented. They carry their influence with grace and use it to lift others.

Human psychology experiments, like the Stanford Prison Experiment, show that power often corrupts – about 50% of people, when given authority, will abuse it. At Atlan, we're building

the counterpoint to this harsh reality. We believe in servant leadership, where hierarchy isn't about power but responsibility. Where authority comes with the weight of duty, not the privilege of control.

This philosophy manifests in seemingly small but crucial ways:

- How you speak to operations teams
- How you interact with EAs
- How you introduce yourself ("I work with the data catalog team" rather than stating your title)
- How you make decisions (based on impact, not authority)
- How you treat everyone, regardless of their role

Remember: Titles at Atlan aren't badges of power – they're markers of responsibility. The moment you think your title makes you important is the moment you've lost sight of true leadership. Real power lies in how many people you serve, not how many people serve you.

Your Resume Will Write Itself

At Atlan, we often see a fundamental tension: what's right for the company might not always look right on your resume. You might be asked to lead a smaller team after running a larger one, take on a role that seems like a lateral move, or watch your function become less prominent as company priorities shift. These moments test whether you're truly building a company or just building your LinkedIn profile. Here's a hard truth: if you're optimizing for your personal brand over company success, you're not only unlikely to succeed at Atlan – you're missing the bigger picture entirely. The most impressive line on any resume isn't the size of your team or the grandness of your title – it's being part of building something meaningful that lasts.

Think about it: Would you rather be able to say "I led a team of 50" at a company no one remembers, or "I was part of the core team" at a company that transformed its industry? Your time at Atlan will only be worth something if Atlan itself becomes something worth talking about. The most successful leaders we've seen understand this deeply. They know that by doing what's right for the company, even when it's personally uncomfortable, they're not sacrificing their career – they're building the foundation for a much more impressive one.

Consider some real tensions you might face:

- Leading a smaller but more strategic team
- Taking on a role that seems like a step back but is crucial for the company
- Having your function deprioritized for a period as other areas take precedence
- Doing unglamorous work that's critical for success

The leaders who thrive at Atlan don't just accept these tensions – they embrace them. They understand that true career capital comes from being part of building something

extraordinary, not from optimizing for short-term optics. In the end, your resume will write itself through the impact you create, not the titles you accumulate.

Tours of Duty

At Atlan, we believe in aligning personal growth with company needs through what we call "Tours of Duty." Sometimes, the company needs you to step into a role that wasn't part of your own personal career plan. This isn't about derailing your growth – it's about reframing how we think about growth itself. Instead of focusing solely on your 36-month career horizon, consider your 12-month impact horizon. What does the company need right now? What unique value can you bring in this moment? This might mean taking on a role that seems like a detour from your planned path, but these detours often lead to unexpected growth and opportunities. When leaders embrace Tours of Duty, putting company needs above personal preferences, something remarkable happens: the company remembers. Whether through accelerated learning, exposure to new challenges, or future opportunities, the company finds ways to give back to those who step up when needed. It's a fundamental promise we make: when you do what's right for the company, the company will do right by you. This isn't just an operating principle – it's a goal we actively work towards as an organization. As a leader at Atlan, this principle isn't just for you to live by – it's something we expect you to instill in your teams as they think about their own growth journeys. The mindset of embracing duty over personal preference should cascade through every level of the organization.

Resources

Tools for Self-Discovery

At Atlan, we encourage leaders to use proven tools for self-discovery. Here are some we've found particularly valuable:

Energy Audit

Based on Matt Mochary's method. Track your activities for two weeks, rating them from -5 (draining) to +5 (energizing). Look for patterns to optimize your role and schedule. [Resource: [The Great CEO Within](#)]

Working Genius

Patrick Lencioni's assessment identifying your natural gifts across six types: Wonder, Invention, Discernment, Galvanizing, Enablement, and Tenacity. Understanding these helps structure your role and build complementary teams. [Take the assessment: [Working Genius Assessment](#)]

StrengthsFinder

Identifies your dominant talents across 34 themes. Helps articulate your natural strengths and guide your development. [Take the assessment: [CliftonStrengths](#)]

Using these tools together provides multiple lenses to understand your leadership style and optimize your impact. Remember: The goal isn't to fit into a box but to gain clarity for intentional choices.