

Ginny Fahs: User Guide

Many people I work with have written [user guides](#) to smooth collaboration and spark connection on their teams. I like how this exercise accelerates the “getting to know each other” process. Hopefully what follows can help you better see me and sense how we might work together. It’s a work in progress and will adapt with time.

Things to know about me

- I am a white, straight, single, wealthy, able-bodied, cisgender female from the United States, as well as a dual-citizen of the UK. I have roots in Cincinnati, OH and New York City, as well as England, Ireland, and Germany generations back. This [social location](#) shows up in my work; it permeates how I show up and what I believe is possible.
- I am the first of three siblings from a close-knit family that moved around a lot. Change and re-invention were constants in my upbringing. Both my parents worked in business. Around the dinner table, we’d talk about the ethical dilemmas of their days. Organizations are imperfect and yet they spark real change, good and bad, all the time. They’ve always fascinated me.
- When I think of home, I think of Atlanta, GA where I attended middle and high school (and waited out a chapter of the pandemic). My parents always referred to Atlanta as our “expat assignment in our home country” since we moved there after spending 5 years in the UK. Now I legitimately dig country music, college football, and Chick-Fil-A, but the South felt foreign for a long time.
- There was no question that I would go to college, out-of-state if I wanted, and graduate debt-free. Considering how rare this is, I think it qualifies as growing up “upper class.” In college, I studied History & Literature, threw myself at tons of activities including the newspaper and outdoor club, and made brilliant friends. I live with college friends in Brooklyn now.
- I graduated college at the height of tech optimism, which surely influenced my decision to move to San Francisco and start my career in tech startups. I knew nothing about software and had never written a line of code at the time. The next five years involved both deep study and learning in-the-trenches. At some point along the way, I began to identify as a technologist. An “ambidextrous brain” (both analytical left-brain and creative right-brain) is core to who I am and what I contribute.
- I have been fortunate with places. England, Tanzania, India, Singapore, and France are all countries I’ve lived in for some time. They’ve opened my mind. I love working with people from different cultures and contexts and hearing how things happen in other parts of the world.
- I crave movement, adventure, new places and fresh air. Hence my love of biking and all things outdoors. I start most days with a workout and tend to avoid looking at a computer when not at work.

Collaboration

- I have a very high sense of responsibility on teams I'm part of – it's the "older sister" in me coming out. It matters to me that we're putting our best foot forward and doing work we can all be proud of. Why else do we show up?
- I'm not a perfectionist. Progress matters more. At the same time, it pains me to see balls drop. I will swerve (sometimes beyond reason) to pick them up. I'm working on keeping this part of myself in check.
- I want to know the deadline. When I know it, I can start working in advance. I prefer to be "[quick to start but slow to finish](#)" so I have space to noodle and let good ideas emerge. I'll put [shitty first drafts](#) in front of you so we can refine them together. While I'm capable of delivering at the last minute, doing so drains my energy.
- I'm a visual learner. I love whiteboards and taking notes as I go, even if I rarely look at the notes later. I tend to be a little slide-happy since slides help me visualize ideas.

Product innovation philosophy¹

- Product is artistry. People want to be surrounded by beauty. We want beautiful things in our lives. You need to go with your gut to arrive at something beautiful. Research is good for refining ideas and optimizing experiences, but it's not always the right input when building something totally new.²
- Young ideas need a sacred space to breathe and grow. Getting too many people involved too quickly can spoil their becoming.³
- Storing artifacts of self in a product is what makes a product sticky.⁴ The best products teach us something about ourselves and help us see ourselves and our place in the world differently.
- Better to be nine people's favorite thing than a hundred people's ninth favorite thing.⁵

Communication

¹ As I've mostly worked on consumer products in my career, these are consumer product philosophies.

² This comes from my mentor Brian Croll, who spent his career at Apple. Another wisdom nugget from him that I think of often is "When you have the right product, describe it as an object of desire."

³ My favorite proof point for this is the advent of Spotify's Discover Playlist as told by Matthew Ogle in [this talk](#). Total skunk works.

⁴ From Benchmark VC Sarah Tavel, at a talk she gave at Google Playtime way back in 2016 that I attended.

⁵ [Song lyrics](#) from the musical [title of show] (and Paul Graham says [something similar](#)).

- I send weekly update emails to stay on track and keep people across the organization aware of our progress. If you're not on the list for these notes and would like to be, let me know.
- During the week, I get a lot of inbound. I monitor all channels but sometimes can't respond right away. If you're worried about whether or not I've seen something or you urgently need an answer, don't hesitate to keep ping me on slack or to additionally text me.
- Talking live for 5-10 minutes works wonders for clearing up misunderstandings. Don't be surprised if I call to chat quickly, particularly if we're in a sustained back and forth in DMs.

Scheduling

- I am both [a maker and a manager](#), which means I keep a hybrid schedule and balance meetings with bigger blocks of time for strategic thinking and deep work (I try to clear Wednesday mornings and all day Friday for this).
- My calendar can be gridlock. Because of this, I decline most recurring 1:1s. That said, I love taking 1:1s ad hoc when you have something you want to discuss.
- If I send the meeting invite, you can expect me to bring the agenda. If I receive an invite from you, I'll assume you are the agenda owner. Blessed are those who circulate agendas in advance.

Feedback

- I only give feedback when I care. If I'm giving you feedback, it's because I want to grow closer to you and invest in our relationship. People avoid difficult conversations out of fear of what will happen next – but the secret is that many difficult conversations make us feel more connected.⁶
- I appreciate having a few days to gather my thoughts before delivering feedback. When asking for feedback from me, give me a heads up and carve out a calendar slot to discuss in advance.
- I like hearing feedback as soon as you have it – no need to sit on something for days, weeks, or longer. Feedback I've received has been clarifying. How else can I know my blind spots? Show them to me. I want you to push me to grow.

What I'm good at and can teach

⁶ My friend Andrea was the first person who told me this and it's stuck with me ever since.

- Vision and story. It's usually easy for me to see many levels of "why" behind a project. Putting words around these "whys" and bringing others on the journey with us is one way I add value.
- Seeking outside perspectives. As a [Connector](#), I enjoy meeting new people, hearing about paths and projects, circulating and brainstorming new ideas, and inviting new minds into the fold.
- Moving from idea to action. I love bringing new things to life. Growing up this meant [lots of cookies](#) and [ridiculous art projects](#); as a professional I've launched [social movements](#) and [products that serve a need](#).

What I'm trying to be better at

- Process process process. My work style can be spontaneous. I get swept up in new ideas and initiate a flurry of activity, and from the outside it may seem a bit erratic. Establishing cadence and rhythm takes discipline. One way I'm trying to be better.
- Documentation. There's so much that needs to be written down, and so little time. I want our team to hold each other and me especially accountable here.
- Overcoming the consensus urge. I have a vocal and dominant [pleaser saboteur](#), which means I instinctively honor others' ideas and knit them together into solutions. But consensus is not always strategic.

On my desk you'll find



When you get these jobs that you have been so brilliantly trained for, just remember that your real job is that if you are free, you need to free somebody else. If you have some power, then your job is to empower somebody else.

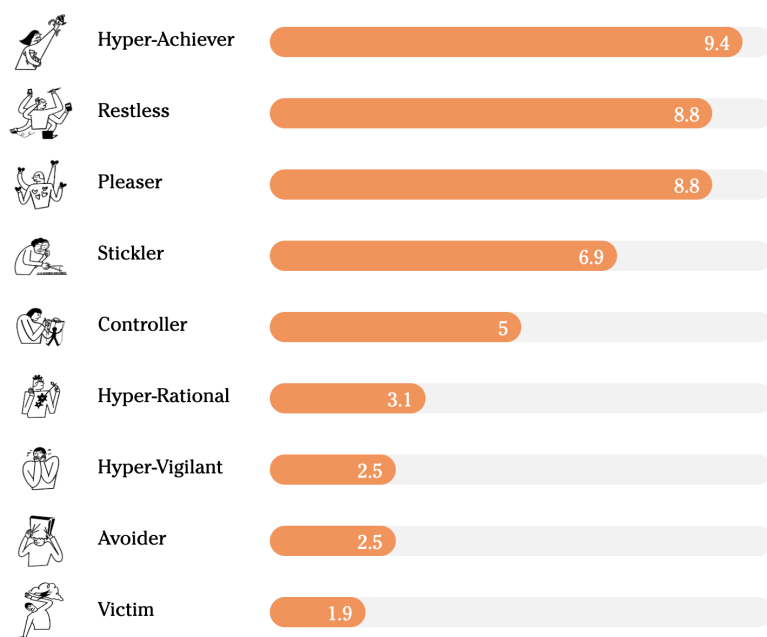
- Toni Morrison

- A photo of me as a kiddo – I’m probably 7 here. Like many achievers, I have high standards and can be hard on myself. I look at little Ginny in these moments. So much for her to learn and practice, and that’s just as true now as it was then.
- I was once told that people either have the social impact gene, or they don’t. I have it. Work is one of the main ways I serve. This Toni Morrison quote reorients me back to what this should all be about. As people with some power, our job is to empower someone else.

What the tests say

Saboteur Assessment

Ginny, here are your results



Strengthsfinder

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

1. Positivity

HOW YOU CAN THRIVE

You have contagious enthusiasm. You are upbeat and can get others excited about what they are going to do.

INFLUENCING

2. Woo

HOW YOU CAN THRIVE

You love the challenge of meeting new people and winning them over. You derive satisfaction from breaking the ice and making a connection with someone.

STRATEGIC THINKING

3. Input

HOW YOU CAN THRIVE

You have a need to collect and archive. You may accumulate information, ideas, artifacts or even relationships.

STRATEGIC THINKING

4. Futuristic

HOW YOU CAN THRIVE

You are inspired by the future and what could be. You energize others with your visions of the future.

EXECUTING

5. Achiever

HOW YOU CAN THRIVE

You work hard and possess a great deal of stamina. You take immense satisfaction in being busy and productive.

I'm looking forward to working with you! If you have questions about anything here or ideas about how to make this guide more useful, reach out. And if you have your own user guide or choose to draft one, I'd love to see what you come up with.