

Rahul Desai

This document is a perpetual work in progress, because I expect to change over time (hopefully for the better!)

ABOUT ME

- What motivates me?
 - Velocity / Momentum
 - I like solving problems, unblocking people, and resolving inefficiencies. If I can have a streak of those in quick succession, it motivates me to work really hard. Note that, because of this, you may see me working odd or long hours; I do not expect anyone else around me to do that unless explicitly asked for an objectively important / urgent reason.
 - Praise
 - I grew up in a very achievement-oriented household. Because of that, I am strongly motivated by praise, specifically for achieving high-quality results at tasks / projects that an objective observer would find complex or difficult.
 - Interestingly, I am *demotivated* by praise / thanks for completing tasks I consider mundane or easy.
 - Fear of disappointing others
 - The flipside to the point above about praise is that I am also motivated by a fear of falling short of what those around me expect of me.
 - Coaching others and seeing them succeed
 - My prior company, Upslope, was an online business school. I started it because one of my great joys is giving people tactical advice to advance in their careers.
 - Through my work at Sylva, I have coached 1000s of people. My writing on topics like salary trends & career progression has directly impacted at least \$1M of compensation increases for readers.
 - I would be very happy to help anyone with career services (e.g. resume review, salary negotiation, job search coaching, etc).

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- What drives me nuts?
 - Different forms of disorganization, such as:
 - Messy thinking
 - It grinds my gears when people jump from premise A to conclusion Z without indicating their assumptions, research, trade-offs, etc. I prefer it when people “show their work”. I find that written memos really assist with making a cogent case for what you want to do / recommend.
 - Poor record-keeping
 - Leaving a meeting without written notes, takeaways, and todos really annoys me. This is because my short-term memory gets unwieldy when I’m context-switching, so I rely on written material that I can reference to remind myself what happened and was agreed-upon.
 - Lack of follow-through
 - I don’t like to nag people to complete work. It takes up time and creates negative feelings for everyone involved.
 - If you need to change plans (such as pushing a deadline back), I prefer to know as soon as you know.
 - Inefficiency
 - I don’t like it when things take more steps than needed. Fortunately, I really like resolving inefficiency, so if you’re feeling stuck about how to make something faster, let’s work on it together.
- How can people really impress me?
 - Cadence of shipping - I’m extremely impressed by people who release products, complete tasks, etc. with high quality at a blazing fast speed.
 - An outside observer should wonder “how did you deliver something so good in so short a time?”
 - Anticipate a problem and solve it before I notice it’s a problem.
 - I want to say “wait, you’re already done with that?!”

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- What qualities do I particularly value in people who work with me?
 - [Resourcefulness](#) - I admire people who show grit in trying as many new avenues as it takes to achieve their goal.
 - Curiosity - I admire people who never stop learning and who consistently challenge assumptions.
 - Competence - this to me means knowing “what to do” and “how to do it”. I admire it when people can figure these things out, even for types of work they’ve never done before.
 - Transparency - I like it when people voluntarily give status updates, both good and bad.
- What are some things that people might misunderstand about me that I should clarify?
 - I don’t sugarcoat things – I will tell you what I feel and think in a very frank and direct manner. That can come off as cold or exigent. While I may not be warm and fuzzy, I will always be there to help you with your problems, professional or personal.
 - I don’t respect authority simply because of someone’s title or tenure. I believe in a meritocracy of ideas. I will debate hard. Similarly, you should feel free to push me hard on things I believe that you disagree with.
 - I am extremely assertive and this can unintentionally steamroll others. I am trying more to hold back so that others can speak first. I have strong opinions, weakly held. Again, challenge me.
 - I can be terse. This comes from the notion of respecting others’ time as well as my own.
 - Assume someone makes \$100k – every second of their time is worth 1 cent. It adds up and I wouldn’t want to pay the balance for wasting someone’s time. I act accordingly.
- What are some honest, unfiltered things about me?
 - I sometimes struggle to read other people’s emotions, especially over text or Zoom. I’m trying my best to get better at this. The book *Nonviolent Communication* has really helped me with this. It espouses a framework of:
 - Observations - see what’s going on in the environment, in your behaviors, and in other people’s behaviors

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- Feelings - understand how this causes you to feel and try to understand how it causes others to feel
- Needs - identify which of your needs are unmet by the current state of things
- Requests - request a specific thing that the counterparty can do to help meet your needs and vice-versa

WORKING WITH OTHERS

- What's the best way (medium and style) to communicate with me?
 - If you're asking me to do something, please assign me a task with proposed due date in Asana; include context in the task description
 - If you're sending an FYI:
 - Email is good for long-form / things I'll need to reference again
 - Slack is good for short-form
 - If you need me synchronously:
 - Slack huddles are good for impromptu meetings
 - Zoom calls are good for scheduled meetings
 - You can call or text my cell in case of crisis *only* OR on an offsite (as I don't have work apps installed on my cell). The only exception is if we've previously agreed on doing a phone call as our communication medium.
- How do I like to give feedback?
 - I try to give praise in public and constructive feedback in private.
 - I try to give feedback as close to whatever behavior triggered the feedback as possible.
 - In constructive cases, I try to ask the person if it's a good time for them to hear feedback (will loop back if not) and I'll let them know a topical heading of what the feedback is about, because I know it can be scary not to know what someone wants to talk about.
 - I also try to note whether feedback is stylistic (optional because it's subjective) or substantive (mandatory).

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- How do I like to receive feedback?
 - Same as above.
 - I also like to take some time to mull over constructive feedback before I come back with an action plan.