

dabble lab

Our vision & philosophy

As Dabble Lab enters a new chapter, we—Steve and Alex—thought it would be helpful to take a moment to write down some of our thoughts about our direction and future.

Work makes up such a large part of our lives; it seems absurd to not consider the “why” behind it. To some, this document might seem a little odd. What kind of company asserts its life philosophy? Well, the first point of clarification is that we’re not trying to be a “company” in the traditional sense. We are largely informal in our structure and instead think of Dabble Lab as a “collective,” united by the ideas that follow. We hope this essay serves as a philosophical North Star for Dabble Lab, as the ideas here reflect how we choose to live and what we hope to promote in the world.

We humans find ourselves in an extraordinary situation. We exist as conscious individuals with many desires but few answers. We don’t definitively know *why* anything exists, but we are overwhelmingly aware of the feelings and senses that define our existence. One notable characteristic of this existence is its perpetual motion, often summed up by the saying, “the only constant is change.” One of the first truths we discover is that change doesn’t always align with our desires.

The art of living is, most simply, navigating the universe to maximize your fulfillment. However, fulfillment in life is different from “fulfillment” in other contexts. While most situations have definite measures of success,

life fulfillment is a moving target. We believe this concept is the objective of life and is best referred to as “the pursuit of happiness.”

It would be arrogant to be overly prescriptive on how individuals should pursue happiness. However, it’s also relevant to acknowledge that each of us doesn’t exist in a vacuum. All life is interconnected, and it has been our shared experience that happiness isn’t best pursued alone. While collaboration is critical, individuality and autonomy are equally so. Individuals or systems that pursue their happiness without concern for the pursuits of others are myopic and, at best, unsustainable; at worst, harmful. We prefer mutually fulfilling approaches.

This perspective produces three principles. First, the pursuit of happiness is achieved by a combination of collaboration and individual action. Second, success in our pursuits requires a commitment to continuous self-improvement and quality on all fronts—doing great work; being a great friend, family member, and person; being kind and caring to ourselves; and so on. Third, because we are chasing moving targets, we must maintain an enthusiasm toward novelty and experience, such that we are always learning to bring new fulfillment into our lives.

The first idea that unites us and therefore earns us the title “collective” is largely our being a collaborative group of humans whose personal fulfillment is top-of-mind. One of the critical ways we see maintaining this alignment is by loudly stating our values and

goals, so anyone can easily identify their ideal relationship to our collective.

At Dabble Lab, we're driven to inspire, educate, and enable people to work toward a world where people are increasingly able to do more with less—an idea called “ephemeralization”—which we believe is the beautiful, true purpose of technology. As individuals, we are technical optimists who find joy in building these systems and tools, and enjoy sharing what we discover.

We are, at any moment, united not by a specific business or financial opportunity, but a sense of fulfillment from working toward this ideal. How we approach our vision will evolve as technology does. And as personal fulfillment is a moving target, it is reasonable to assume that people will fall in and out of alignment with our collective at various points in their lives—ourselves included.

Being a collective with philosophical clarity—particularly clarity that asserts mutual well-being, personal responsibility, quality, and exploration—we believe we are primed to be a valuable asset to the world, as well as ourselves. However, while we have the fortunate opportunity to get to do work that we love, the difficult part is execution. On this topic, we have a few ideas.

The well-being of each of us in this collective is a prerequisite to our success. However, our vision is always higher—to contribute to the well-being of all life. We want to avoid producing a culture that is too focused on

attracting talent through benefits, excessive compensation, and prestige that people stick around even if they are unfulfilled. The challenge of structuring and leading an organization is balancing these objectives. While we must ensure all our members are well taken care of, we must also be prudent in avoiding undue structures that could be detrimental to our larger impact. Of course, that last sentence is perhaps better written in inverse. We must be prudent in avoiding focusing excessively and relentlessly on our larger impact, that we forget about the well-being of the individuals making that impact.

We want to promote a culture that eschews dividing forces like titles and symbols of hierarchy as much as possible. Our first strategy is being adamant about our values, which should help filter who wishes to join our collective. Second, we believe being a largely “democratic” organization is the best format to safeguard our vision. While we must assign leadership and create hierarchies to stay organized, we expect everyone to take ownership, not just those in assigned “leadership” positions. We should hear each other's ideas, desires, and concerns as a united force of equal individuals and collectively own the responsibility to support each other's prosperity—of course, balancing this with our collective's longevity and the well-being of all life.

It's at this point where we want to emphasize how we understand compensation. Value is one of those tricky ideas that is fluid and deceptively hard to measure. Money is a

powerful tool that attempts to quantify value, but it suffers from myopic market urges and inflation. In practice, this often means individuals who earn cash compensation do not receive the full worth of the value they are providing, not because of any fault of their employer, but a lack of general education of, or interest in, the complex financial system. The modern corporation abstracted this complexity by providing non-cash benefits such as health insurance and pensions to their employees; however, we as people have realized how much power becomes consolidated when we become dependent on these abstractions.

In line with our life philosophy, Dabble Lab values our team members' autonomy. We should always work toward a compensation model that is transparent and allows those in our organization to choose their ideal form of compensation, with incentives to encourage behavior that is in the best long-term interest of the collective.

For example, Dabble Lab pays members for time spent dabbling and learning, even though that time is usually not billable to clients. To an extent, this choice cuts into how much we can compensate our team members, but we believe, at least for now, that this incentive promotes our collective's longevity.

Regarding compensation and incentives, we think it's relevant to emphasize the important distinction between *value creation* and *delivery*. Value creation is the process of organizing capital—human, resource, or

otherwise—into processes that can deliver value. Delivery is the execution of these processes to provide value. While quality delivery is often understood as a given, we must also be mindful of the fluctuating nature of markets and create ample incentives for value creation throughout our collective.

The specifics of how we are organizationally structured will evolve organically. While it is a new idea, we would love a future where our organization relies on the digital tools of decentralized autonomous organizations. We envision our collective working alongside independent individuals who freely collaborate with us, so anyone could find a work arrangement that works for them.

Structure is not something we believe would be wise to be dogmatic about. If we are clear about our values and maintain the habit of listening to one another, we hope the vast majority of our motives will be in alignment and of benefit to all. This said, we think our current structure is a good start—smaller, fairly autonomous teams that can choose who they work with; a separate team that serves as a counter-weight to maintain our vision and incentivize certain activities to keep the long-term top-of-mind; all within a tight community with shared values and seeking mutual benefit.

While we'd like to see Dabble Lab incorporate a decentralized element to our organization, we also believe community is an important aspect of living and having a strong core culture within our collective is essential.

Obviously, during this critical period in our growth, who we choose to bring into our core collective is extraordinarily important.

We believe the best groups look at what each individual is capable of contributing and assume everyone is capable of doing something great. The challenge is discovering what these talents are in the fast pace of life. Our priorities are the alignment of values and vision, and quality of work. We should be less interested in one's accomplishments than we are in the potential one has shown to be open-minded and disciplined when their heart is aligned with their goals. Opportunity is not distributed equally. Despite having potential, the refinements that come from certain opportunities, while of course requiring hard work, are still tied to matters of circumstance. Similarly, potential is also not evenly distributed, and some people are simply not the best fit for certain problems. Often, fit comes from experimentation, and certainly, fit can change with time. All this said, we'll always strive for mutual prosperity, and while we are limited in our ability to include everyone we'd like to be in our collective, we wish to be a positive force in the communities we intersect (and beyond). Dabble Lab's first office was in a startup accelerator where Steve was a mentor. As a collective, providing community education and sharing our dabbles has been a key way we have lived up to this goal so far. We see the possibilities for engaging with communities beyond our members and those we work with in ways that align with our vision.

Now, it would be inappropriate for us to disregard the disruptive nature of our work. Just as we're writing about the importance of considering why we work, this desire for purpose extends to all people. For many, work has a fundamental role in establishing personal dignity. Despite how uncomfortable the work, it is better to be needed and valued than to sit in a void, dependent, and feeling unnecessary. One of the greatest failures of modern society is the doctrine that prioritizes some efforts over others when evaluating the worth of lives. All effort is contextual, and while we are in the fortunate situation to be able to contribute at this moment, as we all know, this moment is always fleeting.

Creation often requires disruption, which is understandably scary. We should maintain empathy and do our best to ensure those affected have a path forward. Our goal is always to guide and inspire a better situation for all life. This is rarely a smooth process, but maintaining empathy and always trying to create opportunities for anyone who comes in our path is a start. As a collective, one of our most critical challenges is building systems that allow us to be more effective at what we do—which in practice centers around streamlining systems and improving accessibility so no one in our collective, or the world, worries about working to survive, but instead can focus on exploring, learning, and pursuing happiness.

Empathy for those who don't work with us serves as the perfect transition to empathy

within our organization. With our collective's multinational nature, we'd like to touch on how we see this diversity standing alongside our philosophy and ideals.

Difference creates novelty, and novelty is the key to discovering what brings joy and fulfillment to our lives. Of course, at times, we are content. We have routines and lives that we don't want to change. These moments of perfection are not what our organization seeks to automate, streamline, or make uniform. In fact, we want to create more of these moments. However, there is a problem when routine or uniformity is forced. Similarly, there is a problem when exploration is forced. We want to be a community that celebrates the differences that define who each of us are as individuals. We want to learn from the traditions, lifestyles, and habits that each of us hold, and avoid imposing habits that remove fulfillment from people's lives. Our born-digital identity enables this kind of global collaboration that we believe benefits not only our work but also the perspectives, and therefore well-being, of our members.

There is a difficult balance here, because of morals and space. As new ideas, habits, and identities form—especially when these are not in alignment with the existing practices of an area—tensions inevitably arise. The can-do optimism of a “frontier mindset” is rarely met with welcoming arms. Our best recommendation is to, of course, follow your heart, but always try your best to consider the consequences of your actions on others. If

you're searching for fulfillment, it will not come by carelessly pushing aside others around you. Though this care for others must be weighed with your well-being, which at times cannot be contained to the ways of a particularly restrictive culture.

We want “Dabbler” to be an identity our members take pride in as much as people do with their names, families, regions, sports teams, or nationalities. Strengthened by the perspectives of our other identities and personal experiences, we are unified by a commitment to ephemeralization and its role in helping ourselves and all of life pursue happiness.

Hopefully, this essay provides some clarity as we kick start a chapter of rapid growth for our collective. This isn't Steve's first rodeo, but it's the most personal project to date. The search for fulfillment and how it manifests as Dabble Lab reflect the experiences, situations, and conversations Steve, Alex, and Brigid (Steve's wife and Alex's mom) have had over the years. We're excited to continue working with the wonderful like-minded individuals who make up our collective, and see what we are able to do together now and in the future.

Now let's get back to dabbling.

– Steve and Alex
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