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Chapter 1

Auriemma FAQ

Welcome to the team! Most of the people reading this are likely managers and by this point you've probably already learned that dealing with people is less predictable than developing software (even the most complicated distributed systems).

Assuming you're reporting to me, our job is to work together to produce an efficient and effective team of people proud to be here and proud of the stuff we're making together. To make that happen, I'm going to need your help and you're going to need mine.

1.1 Our Week

One-on-Ones

Every week we'll have a 30-minute one-on-one. I'll sync with you before our first meeting to find a good standing time for the both of us and I will move mountains and cancel meetings with people more important than me to avoid moving or missing it. I hope you'll do the same.

In our first one-on-one we'll agree on the format of the meeting. Before that meeting I'll send you a list of questions that will form

an informal contract we'll fill out together about our needs from each other. An example might be: "How do you like to receive feedback?" We'll both talk about the answer, codify it, and then we'll use the answers as a guiding star as we work with each other.

In our regular one-on-ones I'll come prepared with questions, concerns, and action items for both of us. In my humble opinion this time I get with you is the most important time I'll spend all week because you are closer to the engineers (and probably the product) than I am, and while I will keep my finger on the pulse of our teams via several quantitative metrics, I typically get a better feeling of how things are *actually* going by working closely with my reports and skip-levels.

Weekly Sync

Once a week we'll meet together with all your peers. This meeting is intended to discuss issues that affect all or most of our teams – not for status updates (we'll focus on those to a limited extent during our one-on-ones).

I will create a shared document for this meeting to track the discussion and I encourage you to add to it before we meet with your proposed topics for discussion.

1.2 Guiding Principles

There are some north star principles that always try to keep in mind.

People First

I truly believe that happy and fulfilled people build the best software. Other leaders here will optimize for the business or the technology but I will optimize for the people. That is not to imply that other leaders are optimizing for the wrong thing, but for me,

optimizing for people has led to better outcomes. Much of our conversation will surround keeping a finger on the pulse of the team and the individuals keeping this place running smoothly.

We're All Equally Important

I have a very strict interviewing rule – if I think the person in front of me would join the team, meet our most junior QA person, and think to themselves, "I'm [*more important/better/smarter*] than them" then they don't get an offer. This rule holds true for software engineers all the way to VPs.

I have had the most junior QA person catch a bug no one else caught and she saved me and the senior engineer who built the feature from looking foolish. We all have important roles to play and I won't tolerate anyone treating anyone else as inferior. That rule goes for me too – if you ever get a whiff of me talking down to someone I hope you'll call me out on it.

Communication Must Be Open

I was part of an organization with a vocal and often polarizing celebrity at the helm in the past. When news stories broke that painted him in a particularly negative light my team was extremely upset. I spoke with dozens of angry people over the next few days, hearing them out, and offering my own personal thoughts.

On other teams, leaders were telling me they weren't hearing a peep. At the time I wondered if I had done something wrong such that my team was an outlier or generally in a bad place prior to the stories breaking. I later learned when some of the folks on other teams ended up reporting to me that they and many of their reports were also upset but they didn't feel comfortable raising up their concerns to senior management.

That is a long way to say that you do not ever have to worry that I won't be sympathetic to how you're feeling. I will always

hear you out, respectfully, and with an open mind. I reserve the right to respond accordingly, however, if we're rehashing the same topic repeatedly.

No Smart Jerks

Like many tech leaders, I am guilty of keeping around the smart jerk who was a genius coder because it seemed like we needed him to hit our deliverables. I will never make that mistake again. As soon as we let him go I heard both from the team and supporting teams that the atmosphere changed drastically and the team was immediately more productive. I will never let myself feel held hostage to the smart jerk again because the truth is that if we're doing our jobs well, the loss of one person should never seriously affect the team (and that includes us).

1.3 man auriemma

Communication

I encourage you to make heavy use of Slack when communicating with me. Slack is my preferred method of communication and I typically respond quickly unless I'm otherwise engaged. You are welcome to slack me 24 hours a day and I will likely slack you 24 hours a day. **However**, I have no expectation that you will reply to me outside business hours so please do not feel that you have to reply to a 9pm Tuesday Slack message until the next morning you're working. In fact, I encourage you to make good use of Slack and your email notification scheduler so that you don't receive work notifications outside your working hours.

In the rare event that I need your help outside business hours, I will preface my Slack message with **URGENT:** and bypass any activated notification snoozing you have on. I won't abuse this

privilege and so I ask that you respond to me promptly when you receive a message like that as soon as you're able.

#auriemma-public

Please make sure you're added to the #auriemma-public Slack channel. If you want to DM me, ask yourself if any other person in the organization could benefit from the resulting discussion. If they could, you should @mention me in #auriemma-public rather than DMing me for the benefit of your colleagues. If no one else would benefit — or if the message is personal or confidential in nature — then by all means DM me.

Vacations

I take vacations and will occasionally disconnect and occasionally do some work. *This is my choice because I love what I do.* I am in fact drafting this document by the beach in Mexico.

You should not feel pressured to replicate my vacation behavior. My expectation is that when you're on vacation you're unavailable. We have a generous vacation policy and I hope you'll make use of it and use it however you see fit (although I encourage you to disconnect entirely once in a while due to the well-documented mental health benefits).

Calendar

My calendar is open and accessible to everyone on the team. If you're curious how I'm spending my time I invite you to have a look. The only meetings I make private are either personal or confidential.

Most of my time is spent in meetings because that's how I tend to get things done. It's not uncommon for me to take meetings from my car or while taking a walk. If you need me to be in front

of a screen for your meeting please feel free to communicate that and I'll make sure I have one available. Similarly if you send me a presentation deck reasonably ahead of the meeting I will make sure to have reviewed it before we meet.

My definition of a meeting **always includes an agenda and/or intended purpose**, the appropriate amount of productive attendees, and a responsible party running the meeting to a schedule. If I attend a meeting, I'd prefer to start on time. If I run a meeting, I will start that meeting on time. If it's not clear what my role or purpose in the meeting is, or what the agenda for the meeting is, I will ask for clarification before we get started.

If you'd like to book some time with me, just confirm that I have an open slot and book it. You don't need to ask permission. Please don't double book me, though.

Occasionally you may have a difficult time finding a slot that works for you. I might have some flexibility to move things around in that event so feel free to DM me to see if we can work out a time that works for both of us.

1.4 Errata

- **When I ask you to do something that feels poorly defined** you should ask me for clarification and a specific call on importance. I might still be brainstorming. Your clarifications might save a lot of people a lot of time.
- **Ask assertive versus tell assertive.** When you need to ask me to do something, ask me. I respond incredibly well to ask assertiveness ("Auriemma, can you help with X?"). I respond poorly to being told what to do ("Auriemma, do X.") I have been this way since I was a kid and I'm handling it in therapy.

- **Minimize hyperbole.** Don't state an opinion as a fact. Don't tell me that the apps are failing when there's a 0.1% increase in application errors. State the facts and then preferably a suggested course of action.
- **I am data driven.** If you need my help getting something you want, great. Please come prepared with some data for how it will be better for you or the business (preferably both). Please don't tell me something that turns out to not be true during this conversation – it will make me very sad.
- **Law school ruined me.** I will sometimes push you to get you to come to what I think (or occasionally I know) is the correct conclusion. I'm pushing you instead of giving you the answer because I think you can handle it and I think it will make you better at your job to work through logic this way. If it ever makes you feel uncomfortable let me know and I'll try to work through it with you more delicately – it's likely my attorney personality shining through.

1.5 Optional Section: whoami

I expect my reports to have read up to this point but the rest of this document is very much optional for folks who want to get a better idea of what makes me tick.

I did a good deal of my early life growing up in a homeless shelter outside Boston. My therapist would tell you as an adult that has translated to three things (1) I have a chip on my shoulder and something to prove; (2) I appreciate all the opportunities I've been given and try not to take anything for granted; and (3) I don't work well with people who expect things to be handed to them. I work best with people who take initiative.

Background

I was a teenage AOL/IRC hax0r and found my love for coding as soon as I inherited my first computer at 13. I took a VB for Dummies book to a Fourth of July party that year, so that's what we're working with here.

Despite my love for coding, in undergrad I decided not to go the computer science route and instead wanted to focus on how the universe works so I pursued a BS in Physics with a specialty in High Energy / Particle Physics. I was lucky enough to trick some folks into letting me spend some summers at Fermilab and CERN where I tested hardware for the detectors and coded some particle detection software to track the particles produced in the accelerator collisions. During the school year I was an Army contractor coding radar data algorithms to identify military targets in the field.

As much as I love physics, it was clear to me after working with the CERN theorists that the diff between me and them math-wise was not a PhD. So I did what any failed physicist would do and took the LSAT and went to law school. I still really enjoy thinking about quantum mechanics and its implications on how the universe works though so feel free to chat me up about that sometime.

Fortunately, I was objectively better at law than physics and my law degree gave me a lot of amazing opportunities. I was a Summer Fellow at Stanford Law where I represented artists and documentary film-makers protecting their intellectual property, I got to work on some strange and interesting patents, and I ultimately took over the appellate division of a mid-sized Pennsylvania law firm where I would argue regularly to the state Supreme Court and write a couple petitions to the Supreme Court of the United States.

That was fun for a while but I missed making stuff. That's what gets me out of bed in the morning to this day. I had been doing some freelance app development in my spare time to scratch the itch but I knew I needed a change.

Tech Background

My tech career kicked off at a company called Fastcase which is basically Google for attorneys. The CEO had been recruiting me since law school and his pitch was "come work for me and wear a bunch of different hats and gravitate toward whatever seems cool." I did a lot of different jobs but the one I really loved was taking over their mobile app and rewriting a chunk of it.

That led me to take a job in Philly for a video streaming company called DramaFever that was ultimately acquired by Warner Bros. and became Warner Bros. Digital Labs. When we were acquired we were given a bunch of different WB IP to build streaming apps for and I became the lead of the iOS DramaFever vertical.

I left WBDL for The Meet Group. They have a large portfolio of dating apps and their business model at the time was basically to acquire very niche dating apps and integrate advertisements and live streaming (think Twitch IRL) to monetize via virtual gifts. I wasn't there very long but before I left I redesigned the architecture for integrating advertisements into the apps.

I really enjoyed working at The Meet Group but I got an opportunity I couldn't refuse to join Penn National Gaming and build my first team from scratch. So naturally I sat down to figure out the smartest people I'd ever worked with and I started recruiting them all. After some quick wins and a POC we went from about 20 of us in a WeWork in Philly to effectively acquiring Barstool Sports and having a very impressive budget to build out the team. We launched the Barstool Sportsbook in Pennsylvania in about a year, and over the next year we launched 12 more states (5 in one month which is a month that will live in infamy). By the time I left our engineering team had gone from 1 to about 300 engineers.

Today

Nowadays I live in a house on the Delaware River in New Jersey just outside Philadelphia. I have a Pug named Daisy, a mutt named Luna I've effectively adopted that technically belongs to my girlfriend, and four chickens (Gurdy, Flyza, Talula, and Edith). They lay a lot of eggs so I like to give them out as gifts.

When I'm not working I might be: gaming, reading, hiking, playing with or thinking about AI, spirituality, or meditation.