



Leaving the Office Behind: A Guide to Remote Work

How employees & managers can build the best culture for remote work

What is “remote work” anyway?

If you thought remote workers were just folks who work from home in their pajamas, think again. Remote work is working from any location that’s remote from a primary office—which means remote workers are also frequent travelers working from hotels and airports and trains. They’re people who work from coffee shops or smaller satellite offices one day a week. They’re freelancers or contractors with clients in multiple locations. And the list goes on. So much so, in fact, that as of 2014, almost a quarter of the US workforce spends part of every week working out of the office.¹

That’s a lot of people unchained from the traditional desk and all its trappings.

This is a good thing. Employees are gaining flexibility and work-life balance. Companies are seeing spikes in productivity and creativity. And everyone seems to be saving money.

But make no mistake: Remote workers are still working. They have to be productive. They need to connect with their teams and customers. They have to be managed effectively. And these demands can create challenges, particularly in areas like communication and data accessibility. The question now is: How do we create a work culture that’s ideal for everyone—no matter where they plug in day to day?



In this guide, you’ll learn:

- Why remote work matters—for employees and their companies
- Tips to help remote workers elevate productivity
- What managers can do to connect meaningfully with remote team members
- How everyone can avoid common pitfalls

¹ <http://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/technology-remote-work-stats-infographic>

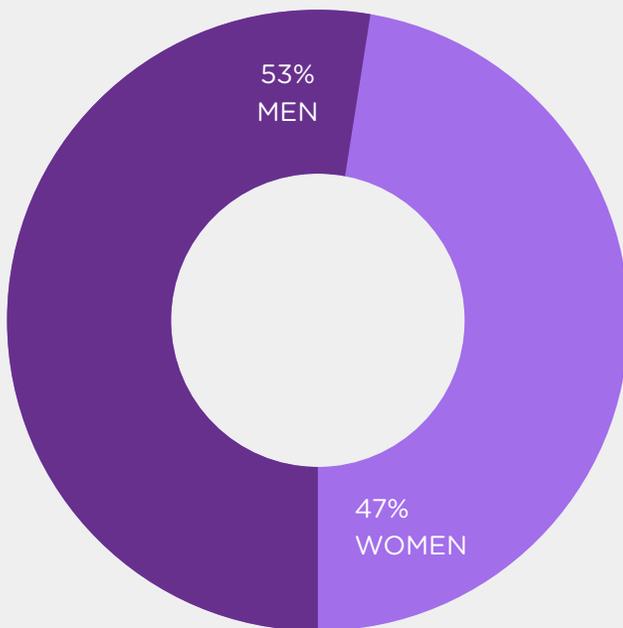
Remote work is a growing trend...

- + Between 2005 and 2011, the number of remote workers climbed 60% from 1.5 million to 2.4 million.

Source: TeleworkResearchNetwork.com



...that reaches everyone.

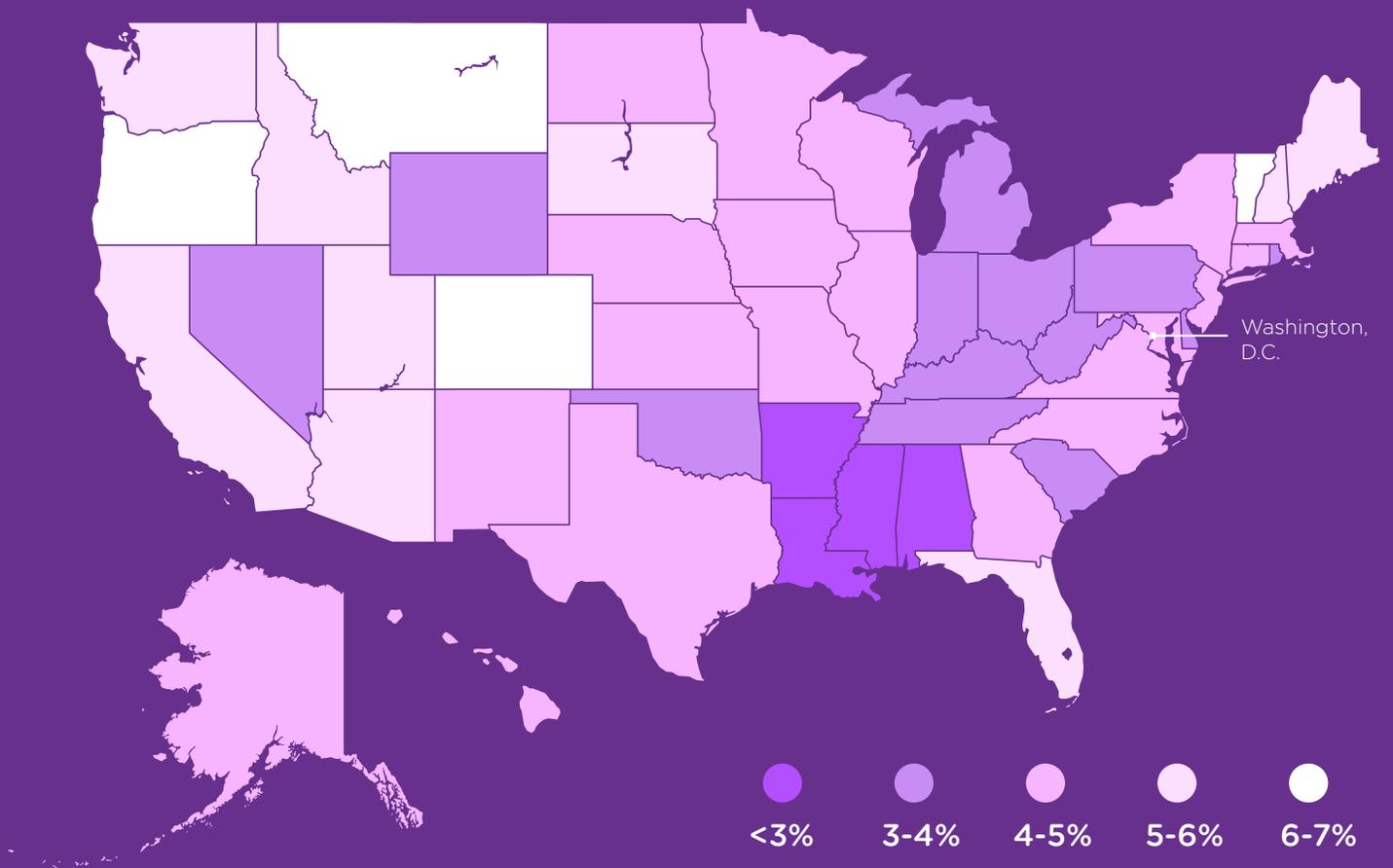


- + More men work remotely than women. (53% men, 47% women)
- + There are just as many parents working remotely as there are working in-office. (77% of remote workers have kids, 75% of non-remote workers have kids)
- + Almost 80% of all workers admit they'd like to work remotely some of the time.

Source: <http://www.incmagazine-digital.com/incmagazine/201304/?pg=34#pg34>

Where do they live?

Remote work is happening across the U.S. Here's the percentage of people who work remotely full-time across all 50 states (and Washington, D.C.), per the most recent Census data.



+ A GROWING REMOTE POPULATION

79.7% growth in remote workers between 2005 and 2012

Why is remote work so enticing?

Technology has helped remote workers unleash their productivity potential. Because they can connect to anything from anywhere at any time, and they have the flexibility to control their schedules, most remote workers are actually more productive than their in-office counterparts.

How much more productive? [One study](#) found that remote workers put in 40+ hour weeks almost twice as often as their office-bound counterparts. [Another study](#) by Stanford Economics Professor Nicholas Bloom found that employees who worked from home were 13.5% more productive than those performing the same jobs in an office.

This increase in productivity isn't lost on remote workers either. In fact, [one recent survey](#) asked respondents where they'd most want to go if they had something really important to do for work—and only 19% said they'd head to the office during office hours. The majority said they'd actually prefer to get critical work done from home. Why? Because that's where they function best.

There are other advantages to working remotely. The lack of a commute saves employees valuable time and money, while enabling them to start earlier or work longer. By the same token, because

it's easy to dive back into a project after hours, remote workers have the flexibility to tend to other important tasks during the day—things like doctor appointments or school performances.

Business reap the benefits, too

These perks are becoming a competitive advantage for companies as well. In the survey mentioned above, 83% of respondents professed they'd have greater loyalty for an employer that provides flexible work options, and 46% had actually quit or turned down a job that didn't offer this kind of flexibility. In other words, businesses that allow people to work outside the office can improve employee retention and happiness while attracting more qualified candidates.

Let's not forget, too, that companies can save thousands of dollars a year when people work remotely. In Professor Bloom's research, he found that one company saved \$1,900 per remote employee over a nine-month study period, simply on office space and furniture alone. And many employees will even take salary reductions, or exchange vacation time or benefits, just for the ability to work out of the office on occasion.²

² <http://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/technology-remote-work-stats-infographic>

Desk jockeys no more

+ SO WHO'S WORKING REMOTELY THESE DAYS?

- **Distributed teams, small satellite office workers & cross-functional groups**

Often, several members of a team won't work in the same office as their peers—or in an office at all.

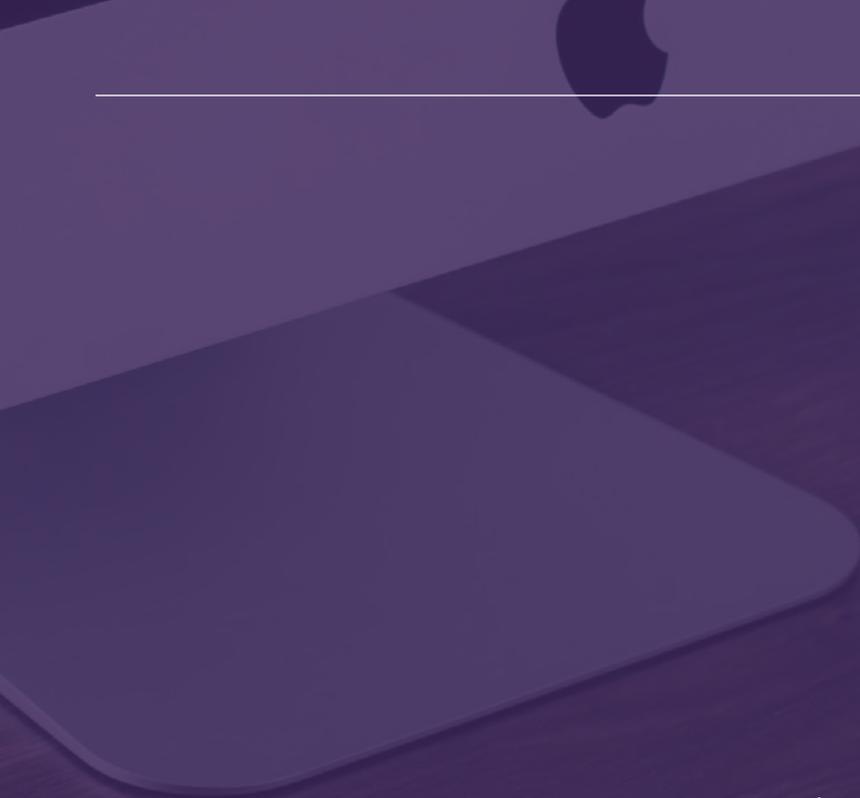
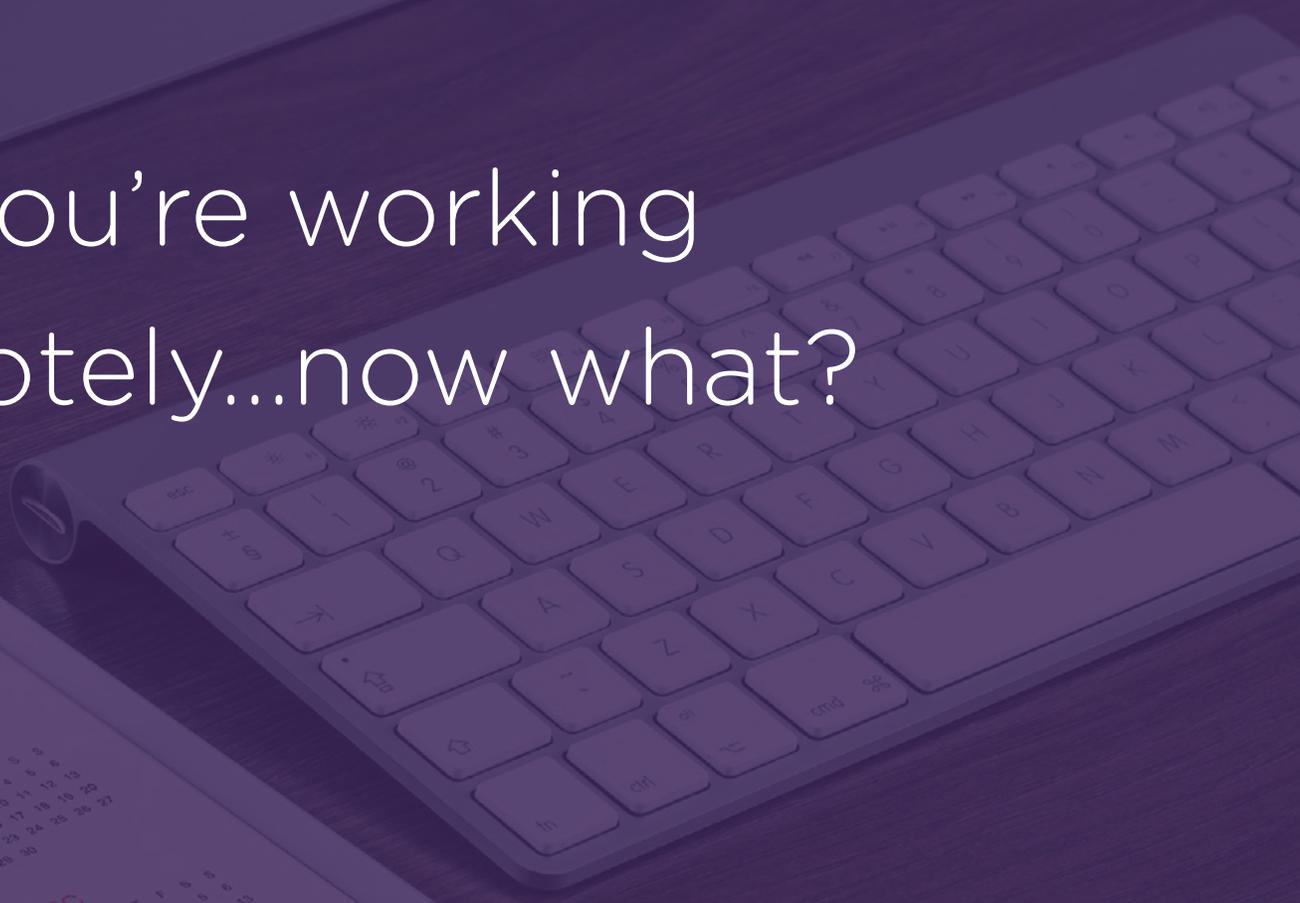
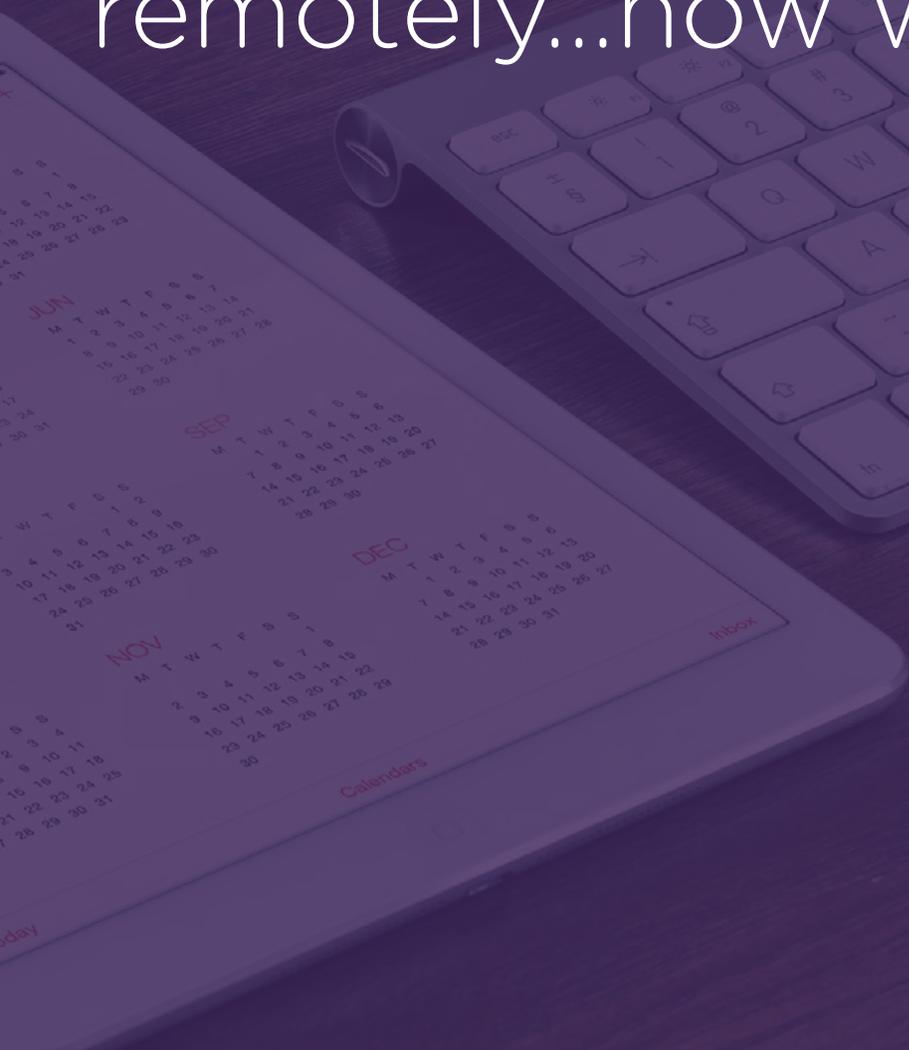
- **Work-from-home employees, freelancers & contractors**

These folks connect with the offices of their teams, clients, and partners straight from home base.

- **Mobile workers & travelers**

People on-the-go or in the field are still collaborating with team members in the office on a regular basis.

So you're working
remotely...now what?



1

You've got to have the right setup

Productivity starts with a great workspace. Whether you're working from home or a hotel, get yourself situated in a place that is:

- + **Quiet and distraction-free.** Okay, some people like to work with tunes on—and, in fact, [research](#) shows that creativity and productivity can improve with certain types of music played at a specific volume. Just be sure your attention won't easily be diverted by the beckoning sounds of neighborhood kids or boisterous conversations at a nearby table.
- + **Comfortable.** It probably goes without saying, but you're going to work best when you're not cramped, flustered, or cluttered. Whether you like sitting or standing, get set up with plenty of elbow room.
- + **Stocked with all your necessities.** When you're not in the office, you don't have access to a bountiful supply closet full of notepads, printer paper, and pens. Be sure you've got what you need on hand and within reach: printer ink, toner, laptop, headphones, charging cords, stapler, and so on.



PRO TIP

If you're responsible for supporting remote workers at your company, consider assembling a kit of the basic supplies they'll need to be successful. You can ship it directly to new employees or give it to them during onboarding.

2

You must be well connected

This is likely to be the single most important element of any remote workspace. Your connectivity to the rest of your team and/or to your customers is vital to your ability to be productive. If you're not connected, you're out of the loop. Period. So wherever you're officing—home, hotel, or field location—make certain you have:

- + **A reliable Internet connection.** This is your lifeline. If you don't have hard-wired Ethernet, be sure you have functional WiFi or access to a hotspot, and that none of it is configured to restrict your access to important people, networks or information.
- + **Reliable communication devices, tools & apps.** For starters, you need a smartphone for all the great stuff it can do besides make calls: You can use it as a personal hotspot when you don't have WiFi; you can use it to access documents and data on the go; and you can use it for video calls when you're out and about. Speaking of video, you'll definitely need a webcam and a way to do seamless screen sharing. This could involve installing video software like [Highfive](#) on your laptop to enable easy web-based video calls with your office team. You'll also want real-time communication tools—like [HipChat](#) and [Slack](#)—to keep conversations consistently moving all day through a central communication hub.
- + **Access to critical information.** Whether you use an online project management tool like [Asana](#) or [Trello](#), or you use repositories like [Dropbox](#) or Google Docs, you absolutely must have access to the files and applications that help you get your work done. Preferably, you'll have the same access to data that the rest of your team uses, so there's no separate workflow required to keep you up to date.

3 Your productivity needs to be visible

Remember, as a remote worker, you're still working. You still have deliverables and due dates. You might know what projects you're tackling at any given time—but if you can't demonstrate your accomplishments to your manager, team, or clients, they'll have no clue how you spend your days. You want them to trust you, but you have to earn that trust.

- + **Track your time.** Yes, it can be a chore, but it can also be a good way to keep people apprised of what you're working on. Luckily, there are plenty of cool tools online that make it easy to ditch the spreadsheets. Check out [Toggl](#), [Freckle](#), and [Harvest](#)—just to name a few. Harvest integrates directly with team tools like Asana and Trello, so time-tracking by project is even easier.
- + **Be reachable.** If you're not on your colleagues' visible radar, it's easier for them to forget about you or leave you out of impromptu—but important—discussions. During work hours, never be more than a text or a chat message away. And always respond to questions as soon as you can.
- + **Document your accomplishments.** Online project management tools like Asana and Trello let you easily check off completed tasks or show your progress toward a goal. Web app integration company Zapier has a large remote team, and they use [P2](#), a real-time WordPress blog that lets them check in on what's been accomplished throughout the day. Whatever option you choose, just do like your math teacher asked and show your work.
- + **Show your face, too.** Of course, the best way to demonstrate visible productivity is to be actually visible. In addition to using video to host team meetings and one-on-ones, some companies create virtual portals into each other's worlds by placing two-way video devices in typical “water cooler” spaces—like game rooms or kitchens. These might seem like small steps to take, but your visual connection to your team or your clients shows people that you're doing work, engaging with others, and getting things done—all of which are necessary to establishing trust.

“Remote teams have to trust their teammates. ... In a remote team there aren't any silly rules about having your butts in a seat during certain hours of the day. This means at the end of the week you either have something to show for your week or not. This means you trust that your teammates are getting something done. But also your teammates trust you. To earn that trust you want to make sure you have something to show for your work each week.”

4

Establish boundaries

When you're working away from an office, you face a lot of temptations. You might be tempted to play hooky one day so you can get some much-needed yard work finished—and you might be tempted to sit at your desk till 3 a.m. to get that last project completed. No matter how you look at it, successful remote work requires you to put boundaries in place that protect both your work and your life from becoming inextricably linked.

- + **Create a schedule.** Know when you will start and stop work each day, when you will break for meals, and when you have other obligations that might interfere. Then do your darnedest to stick to your schedule.
- + **Value results over hours.** For some people, setting time-based boundaries isn't an option or just isn't feasible. That's okay. What matters is that you deliver on your projects. Be willing and able to put in the hours required to get things done on time, and most people won't care when those hours are. Draw boundaries that make sense to you and that enable you to fulfill your obligations.
- + **Know when to disconnect.** Just because you have mobile technology that goes wherever you go (including your kitchen or bedroom) doesn't mean you have to stay tied to your office 24x7. Make sure you still give yourself the ability to "leave" your remote work every day. If you don't, the quality of your work and your overall productivity can suffer.

Watch out for these pitfalls

- **Switching gears frequently.** Whether you're working from the office, your home or a coffee shop, you're bound to get distracted by something. And while we think we're masters at multitasking (thank you, technology), shifting focus too often can actually harm productivity. Early in our smartphone days, one [Stanford research study](#) found that being assaulted by too many streams of electronic information at once made people lose focus and perform substantially worse than those completing one task at a time.
- **Feeling isolated.** If you work remotely and you're alone most of the day, it's easy to forget how it feels to be immersed in team camaraderie. Video conferencing helps, and you don't have to discuss work at all. Think of a quick video chat with a colleague like the normal in-office bantering that would occur in the break room or in between meetings.
- **Overloading.** Here's the blunt truth: You can't expect others to care about your boundaries unless you care about them first. When work is over for the day, or when you conquer that big project, allow it to be over. Leave your email alone. Turn off the devices. Honor your own schedule.

A top-down view of a desk with a laptop on the left, a spiral notebook in the center, and a cup of coffee on the right. The notebook is open to a page with sections for 'MONDAY', 'TUESDAY', and 'WEDNESDAY', each with 'APPOINTMENTS' and 'TO DO' columns. The text 'Managing remote workers? It's time to make a plan...' is overlaid in white on the notebook page.

Managing remote workers?
It's time to make a plan...

We have a tendency to overcompensate and approach remote workers and virtual teams as these mythical beasts. But you shouldn't think about them in a fundamentally different way. They are still people working in an organization to get stuff done. Treat them as such.



Mark Mortensen, associate professor of Organizational Behavior at INSEAD

Source: <https://hbr.org/2015/02/how-to-manage-remote-direct-reports>

1 Keep communication open

Whether you're managing one remote worker, a team of remote workers, or people who frequently travel to various field offices, your job can become exponentially more challenging if you don't know how to keep your whole crew aligned. The number one thing you can do as a manager is ensure open lines of communication, through all the channels that in-office workers would typically use (and then some).

- + **Think constant collaboration.** The great thing about chat tools like Slack and HipChat is that they enable more of a constant flow of conversation, the way dialogue would occur if you were all working in the same office at the same time. The temptation when you have remote workers is to check in with them only when the full team meets (maybe once a week?), when in reality a co-located team is interacting throughout the day, every day. Use tools that help the team stay connected consistently, regardless of location.
- + **Still, remember that remote workers don't always operate the same way—or at the same time—as everyone else.** To begin with, remote workers typically front the expenses on a lot of their technology or services for connectivity—so they might not run the same machines or even operating systems that the rest of the team uses in the office. And remember that you might be working in different time zones, whether domestic or international, so pay attention to the hours you request meetings. (Here's a [handy time zone converter](#) if you don't want to do the math.)
- + **Make those in-office vs. remote comparisons.** Try not to let your interactions with remote workers occur after the fact or through a different medium than what seems natural. If—rather than send email or make a phone call—you would pop by someone's office or cubicle to provide input or solicit insight, provide the same courtesy to remote workers by using video to converse.

2 Make your team culture inclusive

The worst thing you can do as a manager of remote workers is isolate them—or even inadvertently punish them—for working outside the office. It's your job as a leader to keep them involved and happy. Not only is team culture critical to your ability to retain employees, but your remote workers are often your least expensive and most productive team members, which makes them very good for business.

- + **Get people together creatively.** If some team members are in an office, and others are at home or regularly on the road, think of engaging ways you can keep everyone in the loop such as a two-way video stream in the office kitchen area or daily greeting sessions via video. These are the moments when impromptu chats can lead to innovative ideas, and you want to foster that as much as possible.
- + **Meme away.** Everyone enjoys a good meme, and as the folks at Zapier know, they can go a long way in helping remote teams bond. Why? Because when people are scattered in different locations, they miss out on the in-office bantering and “inside jokes.” Try to generate that type of shared humor and culture online as a way to bring remote and in-office workers together.
- + **Encourage empathy.** When most of your team is in the office and only a handful work from remote locations, it can be difficult for in-office employees to understand what it's like working away from everyone else. On occasion, ask office workers to go home or work remotely so they get a sense of the challenges that remote team members face. You'll likely develop new ideas about how to connect and collaborate more effectively using online tools and cloud technologies.

“Most online communities have a go-to set of GIFs and memes they love. Zapier is no different. Being able to drop a relevant GIF or meme seconds after a timely Slack comment is one of the more spectacularly amusing things that happens in our little digital office place.”

3 Manage everyone fairly

Remote workers aren't different from those who work in the main office—at least not in the fundamental ways. Yet managers often create an inadvertent divide between remote and in-office team members through their language, their expectations, or even the company's default processes. Fortunately, you can change these things to eliminate that “us vs. them” mentality.

- + **Make data accessible to everyone in the same way.** If you're managing remote workers, they need to get a hold of the same files and applications that the rest of the team uses in the office. Make sure they have what they need installed on their machines or reachable via the cloud. Dropbox is a great central repository for storing files that don't change too often, while Google Docs is a good alternative for keeping living documents updated in real time.
- + **Expect the entire team to use the same tools.** Regardless of where your team members work, have everyone use the same tools and applications to communicate and manage projects. Online project management tools are extremely easy and intuitive to use, and they keep everyone on the same page no matter where they are. Likewise, if the team uses a chat tool, have that be the primary way you chat and ask questions among the group.
- + **Standardize processes and metrics.** Mark Mortensen, an associate professor of Organizational Behavior at INSEAD, advises managers of direct reports to apply business processes and metrics in the same way for every employee, regardless of where they office.³ You want to eradicate any feelings of inequity among team members, so you need to set clear expectations about everyone's objectives and how they will be measured.
- + **Added bonus: You're essentially mobilizing your team.** By keeping things equitable among team members and having everyone use remote-friendly tools and processes, you're prepping the whole group to be successful as remote workers—so if someone's situation changes down the road, they can continue to work for you without major hiccups.

³ <https://hbr.org/2015/02/how-to-manage-remote-direct-reports>

“Clear team-level work processes, output requirements, and group norms reduce the complexity of virtual team coordination from coordinating efforts across multiple sites to aligning one’s efforts with a single, consistent set of expectations.”

3 Plan some face time, too (online & offline):

While you can (and should) interact with your team often using online collaboration and chat tools, you should also prioritize face-to-face time.

- + **Schedule in-person meetings on a predictable schedule.** Research shows that face time is most effective for remote or virtual teams when meetings are held predictably.⁴ When remote workers know they will meet with a manager in-person every six months, they can plan ahead for any “big” topics that are best suited for in-person discussion. And don’t always expect employees in satellite offices to travel back to the headquarters to see you. Make the effort to travel, and you’ll show that you’re committed to your team members as a leader.
- + **Go face-to-face using video, too.** Of course, you shouldn’t limit your face time with remote workers to those in-person visits. Video technology like Highfive makes one-on-ones more personal, convenient, and affordable. Nonverbal communication is essential to building strong relationships, understanding each other’s messages accurately, and getting our points across effectively. Facial expressions, eye contact, and even posture can all point to a person’s mood, willingness to cooperate, energy level, and so on.⁵ When you use video conferencing regularly with remote workers, you allow everyone to share those nonverbal cues and the advantages they provide.
- + **Get the whole team together.** Your one-on-one time is important, but getting an entire team together in one location is also critical to team culture, employee retention, and open communication. Plan yearly team retreats or team-building sessions, where everyone comes together in person to re-connect.

⁴ <http://orgsci.journal.informs.org/content/11/5/473.abstract>

⁵ <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/fulfillment-any-age/201206/the-ultimate-guide-body-language>

Watch out for these pitfalls

- **Hiring workers for the wrong reasons.** In today's competitive hiring landscape, you might be tempted to bring someone on board as a remote worker because the ability to provide that arrangement shows off your company's flexibility—which is a key attraction for many candidates. But as FlexJobs CEO Sara Fulton Fell cautions, "Hire them for the job. Don't focus on the flexibility at all."⁶ In other words, make sure people can be productive first and foremost.
- **Not understanding what a remote worker does.** As a manager, you should have a realistic picture of what each of your employees is responsible for every day. This is especially important for remote workers because you need to be able to tell if they are meeting expectations. If you don't know what they're supposed to be doing, you'll have a hard time connecting with them and ensuring they're on track.
- **Forgetting about them.** Always remember to keep remote workers involved in your conversations, even if they're just little off-the-cuff chats. It only takes a second to send someone a quick message or to pull them into a video conference, and good remote workers will be ready for these spontaneous requests.

⁶ <http://quickbase.intuit.com/blog/2014/04/14/7-mistakes-managers-make-when-managing-remote-workers/>

Are you ready to make remote work work for everyone?

+ REMOTE WORKERS

Is your workspace comfortable, clear, and connectable?

- ✓ Got your smartphone?
- ✓ How about a webcam?
- ✓ Good Internet connection?

Do you have what you need to work productively?

- ✓ Got your accounts set up for the collaboration tools your team uses?
- ✓ Can you access docs and share them easily?
- ✓ Is your laptop set with the applications you need?

Can you show your team that you're working?

- ✓ Are you ready to chat or do video conferences within minutes of a request?
- ✓ Can you track your time or check off tasks as you go?
- ✓ Do you have regular check-ins planned with your team?

Are you establishing boundaries?

- ✓ Have you made a work schedule that you can stick with?
- ✓ Do you know how to keep your focus without getting overloaded?

+ MANAGERS

Is your team able to communicate effectively?

- ✓ Have you selected your preferred team tools?
- ✓ Have you picked a video technology solution?
- ✓ Is everyone down with the time zone differences? What about OS differences?

Are you working on your team culture?

- ✓ Do you have a plan for regular team chats and conversations?
- ✓ Are you encouraging inclusion and humor?
- ✓ Have you asked office workers to try remote work now and then?

Are you being fair as a manager?

- ✓ Is everyone on the same page when it comes to accessing and sharing data?
- ✓ Got everyone on the same team tools?
- ✓ What about processes and metrics? Are you treating in-office and remote workers the same?

Have you planned face time?

- ✓ Do you have a set schedule for in-person visits with remote workers?
- ✓ Are you making an effort to use video and encourage face-to-face contact?
- ✓ Have you scheduled a team gathering for this year?

You're on your way. Highfive!

Thanks for reading our latest guide. We hope we've provided a clear picture of the issues surrounding remote work from both an employee's and a manager's perspective. And we hope we've helped you understand how to build and sustain the kind of culture where remote workers can thrive—especially since the number of people working outside the office is only going to increase. In fact, some experts predict that half of the global workforce will work remotely at least 50% of the time by the year 2020.⁷

Being ready to embrace remote work means having the right tools in place. Highfive can help. We build video conferencing solutions for every room and every person. Want to see it in action? Just sign up for a free trial. To talk to a member of our sales team about what you need, [click here](#), or call 844-464-4445.

⁷ <http://www.fastcompany.com/3034286/the-future-of-work/will-half-of-people-be-working-remotely-by-2020>