

How to Manage Remote Employees

A LEADERSHIP GUIDE TO SUPPORTING YOUR DISTRIBUTED TEAM





CHAPTER ONE

The Working World Is Going Increasingly Remote

The increase in remote work is startling. In 2018, 68% of global, full-time employees reported working from home at least once per month.

This is up from 43% working from home at least part of the time in 2016 and 39% in 2012. With millennials making up the largest percentage of the workforce, digital natives are propelling the remote work movement at an exponential rate.



Remote work research shows benefits for both employee and employer, including hiring, retention, and employee engagement.

In fact, employees who work remotely at least once a month are **24% happier** than their desk-bound colleagues.

Millennials have even come to expect the ability to work from home – **the number one reason millennials left their jobs in 2018** was lack of flexible schedule.

Technology like video conferencing, instant messaging systems like Slack, and WiFi/personal hotspots have allowed for the rise in a **hybrid workforce** – teams where some employees work from an office and others work remotely. In 2018, **16% of companies were fully remote** or distributed, meaning they don't have a headquarters or office. **40% of companies were hybrid**, meaning they offer both in-person and remote options.

Employees who take advantage of telecommuting and remote work are happier, **more productive**, and **save companies** money, all while contributing to **helping the environment**.

What does this mean for managers?

It means that the workforce is expecting flexibility, and companies who want to stay competitive as employers need to adapt. Remote and flexible jobs allow businesses to expand their talent pool and retain employees at a higher rate. Employees are happier and feel an increase in job satisfaction when allowed to choose when, where, and how they work best.

Remote Work Statistics

- ✓ Remote work provides **better opportunities for quality employment** for 30% of full-time employees worldwide.
- ✓ In 2018, the **number one reason employees chose to work remotely** was productivity and focus.
- ✓ Remote work decreases employee turnover. **Companies who support remote work have 25% lower employee turnover** than companies that don't.
- ✓ **Working remotely doesn't negatively impact** employee's investment in their work.
- ✓ **Fully-remote companies take 25% less time** to hire than other companies.

There you have it – the number of people who work remotely is steadily increasing, remote work is providing better job opportunities around the world, and supporting remote work benefits both employees and employers. Let's dig a little deeper into those benefits.





CHAPTER TWO

Why Build Remote Teams?

While it's easy to see why employees would enjoy or even prefer working remotely, managers need to be thoughtful about how to move forward. For example, could allowing remote work put the organization at risk? Could it decrease team productivity or disrupt company culture? As a manager, will I be able to lead effectively with a team that's partially on-site and partially remote? This guide will help you address these concerns and more. First, let's explore the organizational benefits of making a shift to allowing a flexible work culture.

Lower stress drives employee happiness.

Less stressed employees equal more productive employees. For example, an employee who sits in traffic for 45 minutes a day, or perhaps is struggling to balance personal and professional life, isn't going to be as happy with their job. If a person isn't happy with their job, they won't be able to work at their full potential.

Shorter (or nonexistent) commutes and flexible work hours leads to a decrease in stress, less time wasted, more productive work hours, and increased happiness among employees. A study by economists at the [University of Warwick](#) found that happy employees showed a 12% increase in productivity.

“The driving force seems to be that happier workers use the time they have more effectively, increasing the pace at which they can work without sacrificing quality.”

[Dr. Sgroi](#), Researcher



Flexible work arrangements allow for a better work-life balance and lower turnover rates.

With the advent of modern technology, the workplace is no longer confined to an office building. Employees can use VPN, cloud storage, and speedy home WiFi to accomplish the same tasks from their homes, coworking spaces, or on-the-go. Flexible schedules have created a generation for whom **a top reason to work remotely is to have a better work-life balance**. Working parents are able to save on childcare, avoid a lengthy commute, and spend more time with loved ones by altering their schedule from a traditional 9-to-5.

With improved work-life balance, employees are happier and staying at companies for longer than ever. The millennial generation is known for jumping from job to job, with **21% reporting that they have switched roles in the past year**, a rate that's three times higher than previous generations.



Turnover is expensive for companies. **Losing a mid-level employee costs an average of \$8,000** plus training, onboarding, lost engagement/productivity, and more. Companies that allow employees to work remotely and have a flexible schedule see **25% less turnover** than companies who don't. Making the switch to a remote workforce will save your company serious money with millennials and other generations alike.

Employees who work remotely are more productive.

The [top reason people chose to work remotely in 2018](#) was productivity and focus. Turns out employees know what they're talking about. A [two-year Stanford study showed](#) that

“Employees who telecommuted were twice as productive as those who worked in a traditional office environment.”

Additionally, the study found that employee attrition decreased by 50% for those who worked remotely.

The [2 year Stanford telecommuting study](#) also found:



Remote employees took shorter breaks and less sick days



Remote employees saved the company \$2,000 each on rent



Employees reported that it was “less distracting and easier to focus” at home

Connect Solutions ran a survey that found that 77% of remote or flexible workers feel more productive when they work outside of their company's office. Why not let employees work where they feel most productive? You, your employee, and your company will all benefit - it's a win-win-win.

Supporting remote work expands your candidate pool and improves diversity and inclusivity.

Removing geographical limitations instantly expands your hiring pool. For every great candidate in a manager's local city, there are hundreds more around the world that could do the job just as well – if not better and more efficiently. There are more choices to choose from, more unique skillsets, and more opportunity for growth.

Teams that have diversity in background, location, culture, age, and other factors are more productive than homogenous teams.

Expand your hiring radius and think creatively about leveraging the globe as your hiring pool. If your company offers 24/7 support, you won't need employees to work off-hours or nights if you utilize remote employees in other timezones.

Remote work strengthens trust between manager and employee.

How might we be able to correlate remote work and employee retention? Turns out supporting flexible work can improve trust within the employee-manager relationship.

A [study done at MIT](#) created an experiment to pilot a flexible work program. The goal of the pilot was to transform remote work from a rare privilege for select people to a common opportunity for every employee.

90%

of the team said that their family and personal life improved

85%

of participants agreed that their stress was reduced

80%

said that morale and engagement improved

93%

believed that collaboration was better than before

The most unexpected result was that

62% of employees reported feeling more trusted and respected when given the option to work remotely.

This was attributed to a fundamental change by managers during the pilot in order to effectively support their remote employees, specifically in regards to evaluating their employees' effectiveness.

For example, a manager could previously monitor whether an employee was working effectively using visual cues – is the person at her desk, is she typing away at her computer, etc. A manager can't rely on these visual cues when she's not in the office.

In these situations, what do you do? Managers should step away from needing this kind of visual confirmation and instead – simply trust them. Set clear goals and expectations and trust the person to do the work from wherever he or she is.

Your employees will rise to the occasion. Trust is a strong motivator that drives employee engagement and retention.



Remote work improves company documentation and process-building.

The nature of remote work lends itself to improved communication and record-keeping. When an employee is tuning in to a meeting from home, [meeting agendas](#) and a meeting facilitator are essential to making sure everyone is heard. Additionally, post-meeting conversations can be directed to messaging apps rather than in-person conversation. This creates a simple paper trail in addition to meeting notes that can be referenced later if the team forgot who was assigned to what or when a deliverable would be completed.

Creating an extensive internal website with completed projects, resources, and team hierarchy is also beneficial for hybrid teams. By creating digital documentation, you'll save time when onboarding new employees and save yourself time if employees can peruse an internal wiki rather than ask you every question they may have. This promotes autonomy and eliminates different people saying opposing things if one team uses different guidelines from another. Centralized documentation will help streamline your business and improve remote communication.



CHAPTER THREE

What to Think About When Hiring Remote Employees

Now that you've seen the data, hopefully, your initial concern has dissipated. Now, we can justify remote and flexible work due to its mutual benefits on the company and the employee.

Once you've made the choice to allow remote work, the next step is to understand how to support it. So how do you effectively recruit and lead a distributed team with on-site, flexible, and potentially full-time remote employees?

The secret? Your goal as a leader is to ensure there is absolutely no division between your remote and in-office teammates. Let's dive in.

What to look for when hiring remote employees vs. co-located employees

If you are hiring a team of superstar employees for a hybrid team, co-located team, or fully-remote team, different qualities can help to balance a group in a way that benefits everyone. When considering what to look for in remote employees, picture someone who is self-motivated, organized, responsive, and a problem solver. For co-located employees, look for those who are team players, creative, adaptable, and active listeners. Many traits will overlap and transfer to both, particularly if you have a flexible work environment where employees can choose their own schedule and location. Above all, look for candidates who are transparent. Communication is key to setting your new hire up for success, and it's essential for both parties to be transparent and honest about their needs.

Traits to look for in remote employees:

- Organized and detail-oriented
- Results-driven
- Self-motivated
- Responsive and reliable
- Able to prioritize
- Problem solver, curious
- Reporting-savvy
- Time management skills
- Transparent

Traits to look for in co-located employees:

- Team player
- Creative, enjoys brainstorming
- Enjoys a fast-paced environment
- Succeeds under pressure
- Adaptable
- Honest
- Excellent communicator
- Active listener
- Transparent



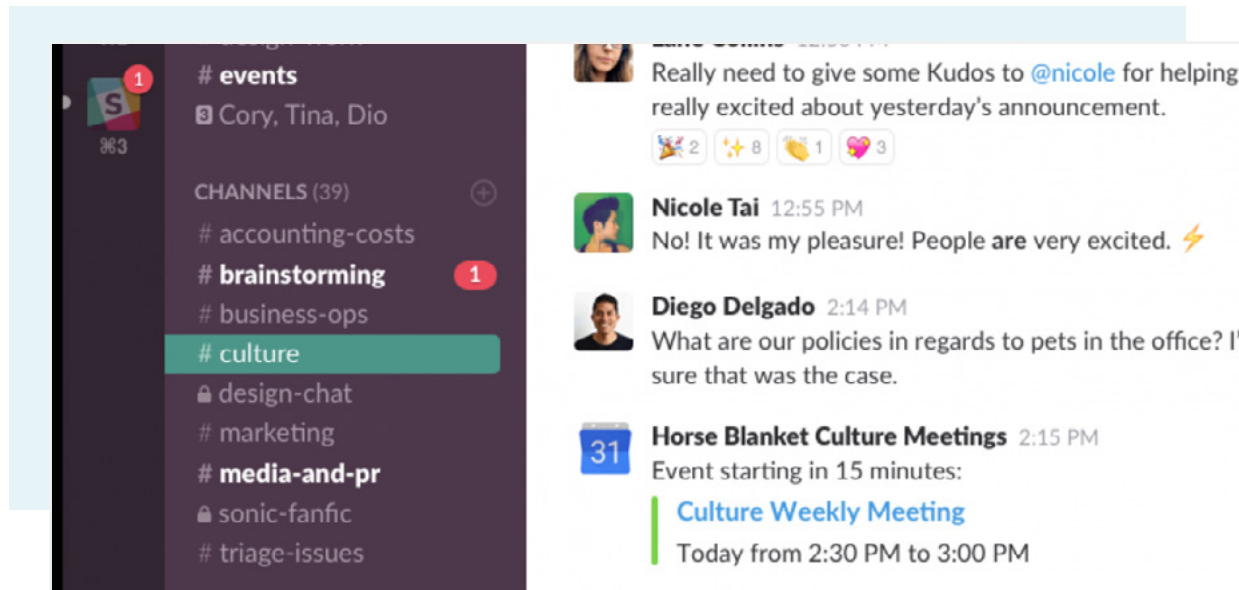
Leadership styles affect remote employee satisfaction.

As more and more managers join the remote workforce, it's important to consider how leadership styles translate when leading a team and managing employees remotely. For example, managers and individual contributors are the **most likely to be visual learners**. Consider incorporating video communication into your team meeting habits. Make sure to create a plan with your direct reports on how, how often, and preferred forms of communication, as well as a plan for progress check-ins and career growth conversations. Use **asynchronous communication** and make yourself available to your remote employees for at least some of their working hours. Finally, leverage **personality evaluations** to take a closer look at team dynamics and how best to pair up managers with new remote hires.



Build and extend company culture outside the walls of your office.

Company culture doesn't exist within the walls of your headquarters alone. You may not even have a headquarters! Culture exists among the people of your company and can be cultivated online, in-person, and anywhere in-between. Remember how we mentioned documenting everything to benefit your remote employees? Create a database of company lore, old photos, and the internal company growth story. Incorporate remote employees via video conferencing camera during informal get-togethers or celebrations. Even better, pay for them to fly in for the occasion. Having remote employees involved in as much of what goes on as possible will build camaraderie for your entire team.



We are in the digital age, aren't we? Use it! Create Slack channels for #GoT (Game of Thrones) fans, dog lovers, parents, and gamers. By opening up the space for employees to bond and connect, you'll facilitate a better team dynamic and better relationships between the members of your team. Set up weekly coffee video dates between employees using a random name generator, or a pairing tool like [Donut](#). [Try these Slack team building ideas for hybrid teams.](#)

[Positive work relationships have been proven](#) to lead to less sick days, better learning and memory retention, better job performance, and less depression. Foster a positive work environment, and you'll see less turnover and more motivated employees.

Make an effort to host in-office visits and company retreats.

If your budget allows, bring remote employees in for in-office events like yearly kickoffs, planning weeks, town halls, or company parties. If you're not there yet with your budget, make sure to have live video streaming for important meetings and events to allow remote folks to tune in and ask questions. When scheduling major events, don't forget to consider time zones, local holidays, and travel time. If you have an employee coming from halfway around the world, give them at least a day to settle in and shake off the jet lag.

Plan a yearly retreat. A retreat is the perfect opportunity for all team members to be in the same place at the same time and finally meet face-to-face. Use the time to review the past year and strategize about the upcoming year. Make sure to schedule in group social time — employees will get to know each other better, which will drive stronger group performance long term.

The takeaway? **Include remote teammates** in holidays, celebrations, and kickoff events. Those opportunities for bonding and team-building are just as important to productivity as your weekly standups and 1:1s.

Don't forget benefits and perks for your remote employees.

If you have a fancy espresso machine, Taco Tuesdays, or standing desks for your in-office employees, why shouldn't your remote folks have the same? Consider allocating a meal delivery (GrubHub, Postmates, or Uber Eats) budget for remote employees to use when the office has meals. The same theory applies for paying for remote employees to have a **home office setup** with a standing desk or their desk of choice, as well as a coffee maker. Whatever you spend in perks, you'll save in the reduced costs of turnover.





CHAPTER FOUR

Best Practices for Leading Successful Teams

For remote to work well, businesses need to consider the overarching company culture and organizational design. Companies that err on the side of being more transparent, that are deliberate about designing the organization, and put deliberate effort into including remote folks are going to see more success in leading remote teams.

How are you communicating your corporate strategy, mission, and vision to remote employees? How are you making sure they're tapped into your culture? By thinking through your remote experience before bringing on remote employees, you increase your likelihood of running a successful remote team.

Hire strategically.

Depending on your organization, it may or may not make sense to hire remotely. While we're advocates for remote work, not every business strategy makes sense for remote hires — and not every role makes sense to hire remotely, either. For some, hiring a remote customer service representative is a no-brainer — it saves on location cost and allows reps to work from anywhere, anytime. Alternatively, other organizations may find that it's easier to manage a team of customer service reps in one location, where they can streamline training and communication.

Start by considering who you're willing to hire as a remote employee. Are there roles in your organization that could function well outside of an office? Will this employee be able to work cross-functionally with other teammates who may work on-site or in other time zones?

You may also consider whether you need a candidate who has prior remote experience. If you're just starting to bring on remote employees, hiring someone with no remote work experience probably won't work out for either of you. Candidates with proven remote experience will not only fare better but also be able to support your organization in creating a thriving remote workforce.

If you're willing to consider candidates for remote openings who haven't worked remotely before, make a clear list of qualities and competencies you want to test for during the interview process so you can evaluate how they'd perform in the role without a proven track record.



Set clear metrics for success.

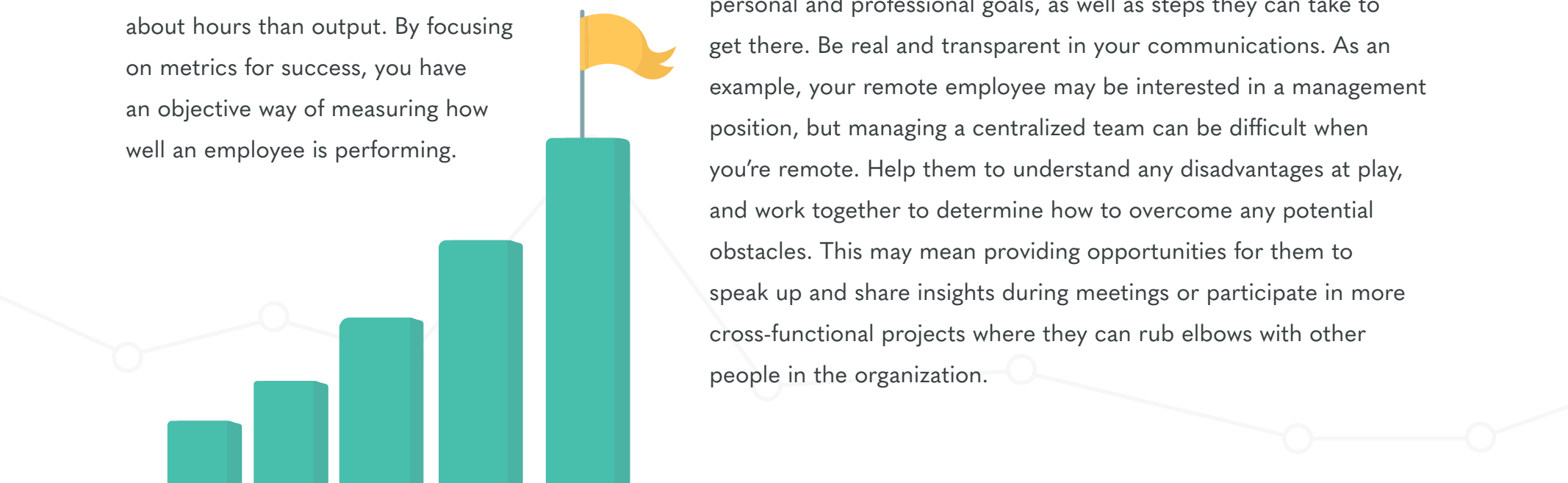
A common concern for employers looking to lead remote teams is: How will I make sure they're meeting their goals? The answer is simple: The same as you would as when people are in-person. Whether your team is remote or local, clear expectations and metrics for success should be set up front. When a new hire starts, part of their onboarding should include metrics they will be measured against and frequency of measurement. For many remote employers, the concern is less about hours than output. By focusing on metrics for success, you have an objective way of measuring how well an employee is performing.

Build career paths for your remote team members.

Career pathing plays a key role in employee engagement. When employees see an opportunity for growth within your organization, they'll naturally put in more discretionary effort.

For remote employees, career growth can be more difficult than it is for their in-office peers, due to decreased visibility and fewer opportunities to network. These conversations have to start with trust. Make sure you're building a personal relationship with your direct reports and that there's an open line of communication so they feel heard and supported.

Schedule regular personal and professional development conversations with your employees. Use this time to discuss their personal and professional goals, as well as steps they can take to get there. Be real and transparent in your communications. As an example, your remote employee may be interested in a management position, but managing a centralized team can be difficult when you're remote. Help them to understand any disadvantages at play, and work together to determine how to overcome any potential obstacles. This may mean providing opportunities for them to speak up and share insights during meetings or participate in more cross-functional projects where they can rub elbows with other people in the organization.



Create clear processes for communication and collaboration.

We often take for granted how easy it is to simply drop by a co-worker's desk to ask a quick question or get a status update on a project. When employees are distributed, communication and collaboration require more intentional structure and process.

SCHEDULING

Consider if employees will have flexible or fixed schedules. How will each member of the team know who's on vacation, who's at a conference, etc.? Leveraging technology, such as Google Calendar, Turbine, or Lync, can help your team keep track of who's where and when.

COLLABORATION

Consider using a project management tool, such as Basecamp, Trello, or Asana. These tools provide an easy and efficient way to keep track of projects, tasks, and deadlines, as well as share notes and files.

COMMUNICATION

Leverage real-time collaboration tools, such as Slack or Jabber, for quick questions and conversations. Use email to send files, memos, and other important documentation that might be referenced later.

Keep in mind that overcommunication is necessary for remote or distributed teams. Where a memo might be courteous following an in-person meeting, it's vital communication for employees who work off-site.

MEETINGS

While many lament the practice that is meetings, they play an important role in communication amongst a remote or distributed workforce. Implement regular meeting cadences to ensure consistent communication of important initiatives, strategic developments, or organizational changes.

At The Predictive Index®, we have the following meeting cadence for our distributed teams:

- Daily standups
- Weekly team meetings
- Monthly metrics review
- Quarterly meeting

When facilitating meetings where some team members are remote, make a concerted effort to favor the remote person. This includes offering them the opportunity to share their thoughts on a subject before the topic “goes to the floor.” Whether your team is distributed or completely remote, follow up meetings with written recaps. This ensures that those who were not present are in the loop and offers a reference point for anything that was communicated or decided that you might want to reference back to.

Connect remote employees with in-office peers.

Be intentional about connecting your remote workers with their in-office peers. This may include quarterly or annual retreats that include group activities. You may also leverage technology, such as Slack’s Donut app, to encourage employees to schedule time to connect virtually. While allocating time for personal conversations may not seem appropriate to some during work hours, it plays a vital role in ensuring remote employees are building personal relationships with their colleagues, which ultimately leads to better teamwork and collaboration.

Be intentional about checking in.

The saying “out of sight, out of mind” can often apply when it comes to managing remote employees. For this reason, it’s critical to be diligent about regularly checking in to see how your employees are doing, how they’re feeling, if there’s anything they need from you, and if there are any blockers to executing their deliverables. There are many tools you can use to facilitate these check-ins—from Zeal’s Ava-bot on Slack to a good news/bad news report every Friday to scheduled reminders to reach out and touch base. Regardless of which tool you use, make a point to regularly check in and see what’s up with your remote reports.



CHAPTER FIVE

Remote & Hybrid Team Communication Best Practices:

When and How to Use Each
Channel in a Manner That's
Considerate and Inclusive

Working on a hybrid team brings new challenges when it comes to communication. Just as the office environment has adapted to the new normal of employees working in open-office environments, using headphones, and working flexible hours, communication strategies have adapted as well. Now, there are more considerations for teams of employees who work from an office, on-the-go, or from home. Remember that teammates may be in different time zones and have different working hours from each other.

Let's look at some communication tools and how to best utilize them when managing a remote or hybrid team.



Instant Messaging

Using a messaging app, such as [Slack](#), mimics those drive-by conversations people enjoy in the office. Team members can stay in communication throughout the day for quick and efficient collaboration, as well as chat simply to keep in touch. When your team is dispersed, you can't rely on chance to have these kinds of hangouts. Proactively reach out to your remote employees to ask them how they're doing. Tell your team to do the same, and it will help build stronger relationships across your team. Make sure to encourage remote employees to keep their status, time zone, and away messages updated, as well as take advantage of "Do Not Disturb" mode so they aren't getting interrupted frequently during non-working hours.



Email

Be considerate of remote employees' working hours. Encourage remote teammates to keep an up-to-date public calendar showing their working hours for each week. Then, take a quick look before you send an email to see if they are working. While you may specify a project's due date in the email, it can still be a source of unnecessary stress and mental burden for your employee. A [study from Virginia Tech](#) showed that seeing an email from work during non-working hours caused just as much stress and strain on significant others as having actual work to complete.

While it may seem benign to send an email when it's convenient for you, likely thinking to yourself, They don't have to do anything about it right now. I just need to send so I don't forget. Next time, use a tool like [Gmail's scheduling tool](#) to send it during their working hours.



Video Conferencing

Use meeting time as a chance to connect “in-person.” How? Use video. In fact, if you only use audio today, you’re putting your remote employees at an extreme disadvantage during group meeting time. Why?

Because the people on the call are getting only half of the message. [Research by Albert Mehrabian](#) showed just how much of human communication is more than words.

Take a look at his [study’s breakdown](#) of the components of communication:

55% comes from facial expressions and body language

38% comes from vocal inflection and tone of voice

7% comes from words themselves

55% of communication comes from facial expressions and body language.

The bottom line? Make sure you’re using video technology that prominently shows the faces, emotions and body language of the people in the room. Tools like the [Meeting Owl](#) video conferencing camera show a 360-degree panorama of the full room and can automatically focus on whoever is speaking at any time. That type of remote experience is key for effective communication.





Phone

Create a plan with each individual employee on their communication preferences. Maybe you have a remote employee who cares for their child during the day and can't take phone calls out loud during nap time. Make sure they have a way to let you know when they won't be available for phone calls and how others can reach them (Slack, email, etc.) during that time. Suggest they keep a detailed public calendar with their preferred method of communication during given times, or that they keep their instant messaging app like Slack up-to-date with an away message specifying how to reach them.

If you'll be requiring remote employees to have a smartphone for work, provide them one or a budget for a phone and plan. Additionally, consider if remote employees who use the phone to interact with customers and prospects should have a home phone line with a dedicated number, use a virtual phone software, and whether or not they may need accessories like a headset or noise-canceling headphones.





CHAPTER SIX

Remote Team Management Resources

Now that you're on board with managing your remote or hybrid team, you're ready to arm yourself with the resources you'll need to succeed. Here's a list of websites, communities, team-building ideas, and tools to help you manage a team with remote employees.

RESOURCES FOR REMOTE TEAM MANAGERS

[How to Create a Remote Work Policy](#)

[Everything You Need to Know About Using Zoom](#)

[Slack Communities for Remote Workers](#)

[The 10 Best Subreddits for Remote Workers and Managers](#)

[Remote Jobs and Remote Workers LinkedIn Group](#)

[Meeting Agenda Templates](#) (including performance reviews & one-on-ones)

[Scheduling Meetings Across Timezones](#)

[Remote Management Best Practices](#)

[Technologies Transforming Remote Work](#)

[Tech Gadgets to Support Remote Employees](#)

TOP PODCASTS FOR REMOTE LEADERS

[The Accidental Creative](#)

[How I Built This](#)

[The Investor Mindset](#)

[StartUp Podcast](#)

[This Week in Startups with Jason Calacanis](#)

[TED Talks Daily](#)

[Bulletproof Radio](#)

[The Mindvalley Podcast](#)

REMOTE WORK THOUGHT LEADERS

[Shane Metcalf](#)

[Spencer Jentzch](#)

[Alexis Ohanian](#)

[David Heinemeier Hansson](#)

[Brian Peters](#)

[Claire Lew](#)

[Jacqueline Jensen](#)

[Hiten Shah](#)

[Tracy Halvorson](#)

[Brie Weiler Reynolds](#)

EVENTS FOR REMOTE TEAM LEADERS

[Nomad Summit 2019](#)

[Travelcon 2019](#)

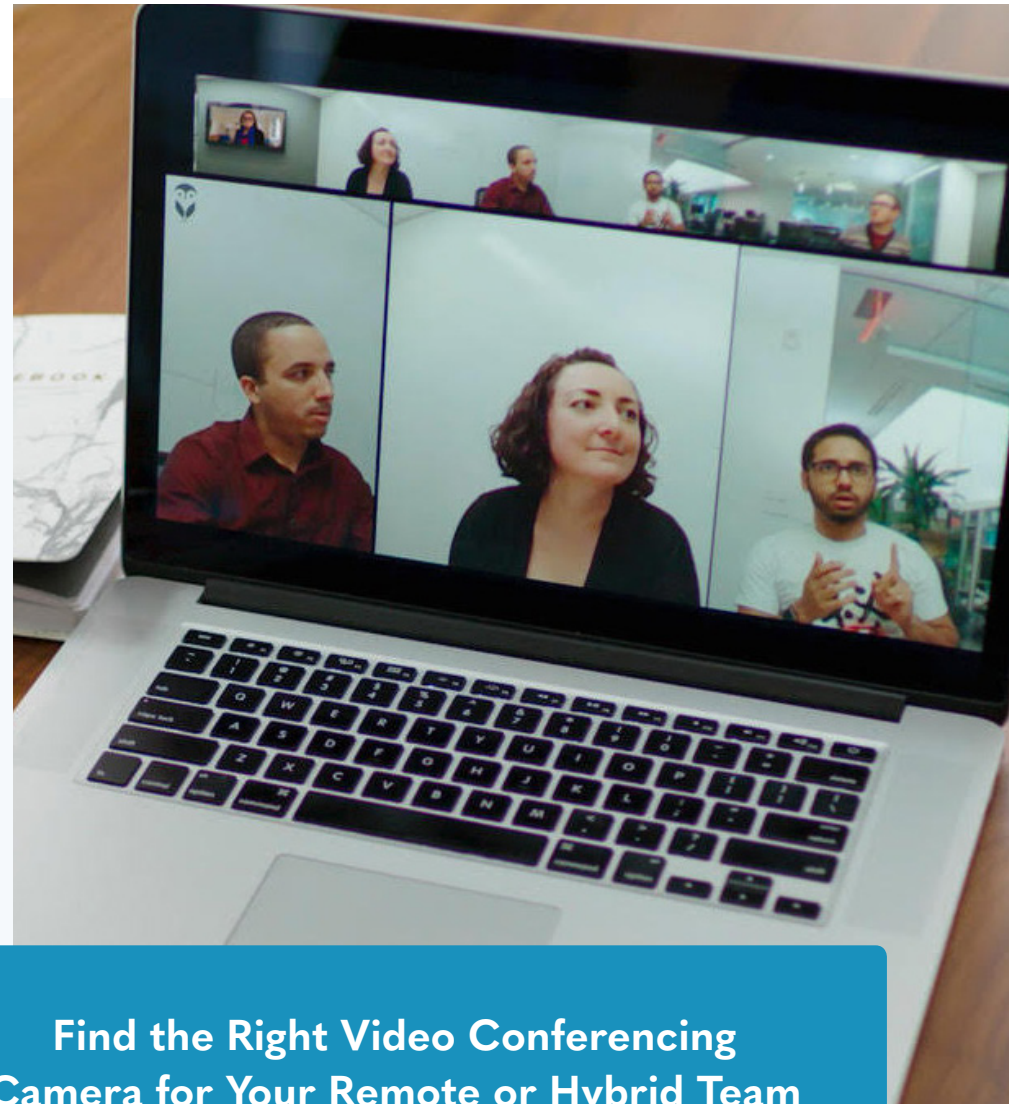
[No Desk Project Retreat](#)

[Harvard Extension Program 2-Day Intensive Seminar: Leading More Effective Teams](#)

Conclusion

The bottom line is, there shouldn't be a division between remote and co-located employees. To run the most effective remote or distributed teams, there is a need for managers to embrace new techniques and adapt their style to create new, more efficient systems. Supporting and enabling employees produces happy teammates, and as we know, happy teammates = productive employees.

The benefits of working remotely are undeniable for employees, managers, and companies. Let's contribute to a future workplace that makes location irrelevant for remote workers and their managers.



**Find the Right Video Conferencing
Camera for Your Remote or Hybrid Team**

[Find Yours Now](#)