



A RESOURCE FOR EMPLOYERS

Ultimate Guide to Working from Home



INTRODUCTION



What happens when you ask the whole world to work from home?

The unprecedented and unpredictable spread of COVID-19 has required many HR professionals to compose a memo they never expected they'd have to send:

"Good morning everyone. In an effort to safeguard the health and well-being of our employees and our communities while still fulfilling our mission... We're all working from home, starting next week!"

For some employees, the transition to remote work is a dream come true. For others, it's a nightmare. But regardless of how individual team members feel about it, businesses around the world have either closed down or switched to a remote workforce, and we must all adjust to this new reality.

In this guide, you'll find practical suggestions for how to adapt and thrive in this new way of working, from setting new expectations to adjusting the way you stay connected. And, as a result, you'll empower your team to achieve the highest possible levels of productivity.

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Building Trust as a Remote Team



If you're new to managing remotely, don't expect it to feel natural at first.

Consider all that you had to learn when you became a manager for the first time. While there are a lot of overlapping skills when managing a remote team, there's also a lot you need to learn as you shift your supervisory responsibilities from an onsite office to a remote one.

The way you get to work is different — it's on a computer in your home. And the way you observe your team is different now, too — it's also on a computer in your home, and not in-person.

These new ways of engaging with your team means that you need to establish new expectations and habits for how you manage your team, with an emphasis on the most important factor: **building trust**.

Let's be frank: worrying about what an employee is doing all day is not going to help you achieve your goals as a company. And the way to overcome this situation is by creating trust.

Here are five ways you can start building trust with your employees when you're suddenly remote:

1 Clearly communicate your expectations

When it comes to communicating remotely, take nothing for granted. What do you need to achieve, by when, what changes do you have to make to your original quarterly plan and goals? Type it up clearly as a “single source of truth” so that everyone is on the same page, literally, as you discuss it.

Action Tip

Share the document with stakeholders and other teams you collaborate with.

What should the document cover?

- ✓ **Goals you need to achieve.** Make sure the what, why, and when are spelled out, such as in this example from [Perdoo.com](https://perdoo.com).
- ✓ **Who is responsible for what?** Use the [RACI model](#) to define levels of responsibility and accountability.
- ✓ **How do we communicate?** Get aligned on which technology you will use for each message type, expected response time, and dark time (when you won't be checking messages).
- ✓ **When do we communicate?** How often is an update expected and in what form (written, zoom, recording, stand-up)?
- ✓ **What do we do when we can't get it done?** What are our [escalation norms](#) for when work cannot be completed?

Sample escalation norms guide:

Email:

For non-urgent requests; response time within 24 hours.

Text:

For urgent requests; response time within 1 hour; use only in emergencies.

Slack:

For checking in, fun, learning, and connection; response time optional; all channels are open and optional.

2 Create new opportunities to connect

Having a shared mission helps teams feel connected and engaged. And when they can see that work is getting done, it creates a culture of accountability. With that in mind, think about what types of updates might be best for your teams to help stay connected and informed.

For example, Zaipier, a 100% remote company, has embraced a team ritual called “Friday updates.” Each Friday, every person on the team posts an update about what they accomplished that week and what they are working on for the next week. One team member reported, “Friday Updates makes it easy to keep in the loop on projects and also holds everyone accountable to everyone else to do their part.”

Connect through 1-1s

One-on-one meetings are a time to make sure you and each member of your team is working towards the same objective(s), that the work that is being completed is the right work, and most importantly to check on the well-being and engagement of your team.

Regular check-ins stop larger issues from festering, allow for immediate and regular feedback, and promote open communication. Dedicated one on one time with your team members becomes even more critical and important when managing a team virtually. We recommend allocating between **30 minutes to one hour with each of your direct reports for a 1-1 each week**, especially while the work from home mandate is in effect.

Getting the most out of 1-1s

There's no one way to organize a 1-1. In fact, many factors dictate the best way to structure your meetings for success, including the emotional needs of those you manage, your relationship, and the team member's experience level.

The most important element in a successful 1-1 is creating a space where individuals feel comfortable to discuss the issues and concerns on their mind. These meetings are primarily for the employee and their participation is vital.



Action Tip

Pre-populate a shared agenda. It will help you provide context prior to the meeting and also allows both parties to take ownership of the meeting.

Customizing 1-1s for COVID-19

Checking on the well-being of your employees is your responsibility as a manager. With the constant evolving media coverage of COVID-19 and this new way of working remotely for some, it is possible your team may be feeling overwhelmed or anxious. One of the responsibilities of a manager is to use emotional intelligence to show empathy, coach and ensure your team feels supported and informed at all times.

Start your 1-1 with an open-ended question. This allows the most important and top of mind topics to surface. Here are some questions you might try:

- How are you feeling?
- What are you most excited about?
- What feedback do you have for me?
- What is on your mind?
- What are you most worried about?



Action Tip

Most importantly, listen to what's being said. An important aspect of being a manager is to make sure your employees feel heard, safe and empowered. Once you've fully heard them, help be a facilitator of solutions. Uncover what they're excited about, how you can mentor them to be successful, and unblock them to do their best work.

4 Focus on feedback

If employees are more familiar working in an office environment where they receive feedback daily, the silence in a remote position can be the perfect breeding ground for feelings of uncertainty and confusion. Our brain is wired to scan for danger, and it's easy to assume the worst about your work when you don't hear otherwise.

Regular feedback that happens in the moment and outside “review/bonus time” is one of the most important vehicles to keep employees engaged, especially when working remotely. It lets employees know where they stand, gets everyone on the same page, and reduces the chance of a surprise and disagreements during a more formal review.



5 Default to transparency

When working remotely, especially at the beginning, more communication is better than less. Keep employees informed by sharing information broadly to all team members in a timely manner whenever appropriate. Choose the right medium or a combination depending on the message and its implications, as some messages will require an email followed by a team meeting. Depending on your communication style, sometimes it will work best to replace a long email with a video with technology like Loom or schedule a Zoom call to share your news.

Creating Opportunities for Communication and Engagement

When you're in an office with your teammates, you have a hundred tiny opportunities every day to check in and interact with each other. These regular check-ins allow you to see if a person is stressed and needs a chat, or is super focused and doesn't want to be bothered.

When you're working remotely, you don't have these opportunities. Unless you go out of your way to replace these informal interactions and community-building moments, you won't be able to maintain good levels of communication and engagement among team members.

Fortunately, many high-performing companies have operated remote only for years, revealing five ways you can build strong connections with your teammates even when they're not sitting next to you:

1 Host daily or weekly phone stand-ups

A stand-up meeting is a brief daily or weekly meeting in which each team member comes prepared to answer these questions:

- *What did I work on yesterday?*
- *What am I working on today?*
- *What issues are blocking me?*

Ideally, the meeting is so short that everyone stays standing, hence the “stand up” part of the meeting. But the daily reinforcement of sharing individual successes and plans keeps everyone excited about the team's overall contribution to the organization.



2 Turn Slack into your “town square”

Without daily interactions, remote team members can end up feeling like they aren't a part of the team. Left unaddressed, this can lead to feelings of isolation and loneliness that turn into low morale and engagement.

Many companies find success by turning to communication apps like [Microsoft Teams](#) or [Slack](#) into the “Town Square.” This creates a place where employees can stay connected on projects while also sharing personal details about kids, pets, and outside-of-work activities.

3 Proactively head off miscommunication

Communicating at a distance can lead to miscommunication and misunderstandings because you lose the non-verbal communication that comes with face-to-face interactions. And when in doubt, people tend to perceive neutral written messages as negative.

If employees start to have too much back and forth on a given topic, or feel any frustration about a conversation, it's critical that you advise employees to move to voice or video chat so they can re-capture some of that important emotional context.

4 Watch out for burn-out

Without boundaries, the fusion of the workspace and homespace can lead to a feeling of always being on the clock. This is why it's incredibly important to align with your team on expectations around work output and availability. If you find some employees are still overworking, advise them to create start and stop rituals for their daily work so they have a clear beginning and ending to their days.



Action Tip

For managers, align on dark time and response time norms. Check in during 1-1s about work/life balance. Model taking breaks and recharging for your employees by scheduling shared breaks and learning experiences.

5 Invest in team spirit

Not being able to spend time together can really damage morale for employees who enjoy working in an office. If at all possible, invest in team spirit by creating opportunities for informal interactions, sending care packages to employees' homes, or sponsoring team building activities like the [Donut Slack app](#), which pairs employees for informal conversations.



Action Tip

Create a "Lunch Room" Zoom for your teams and co-workers. Set up a Zoom link, send it out to team members and co-workers and chat and eat lunch together.

Here are a few examples of virtual team building that can encourage employees to learn more about each other in a digital format:

- '10 things about you' lists
- Coffee and learn session
- 30-minute chatroulette
- Gaming sessions
- Informal weekly bonfires or fireside chats

Optimizing Productivity on a Remote Team

Managers and employees working from home for the first time might be surprised at how difficult it is to avoid distractions and interruptions. There's an infinite stream of entertainment that can distract you from the task at hand, not to mention tasks and responsibilities at home that can pull even the most focused employee from their task.

Here are three suggestions you can bring to your team in order to avoid a permanent drop in productivity:

1 Set and follow a schedule

If you don't do anything intentionally to avoid it, work life and home life can blur together naturally when working remotely. Create definition in your team's day by setting expectations for working hours and sticking to them, even if that means scheduling any emails after 5PM to send the next morning when the day begins.

Meetings, check-ins, and "quiet hours" can be another great way to create a group rhythm. For example, set the expectations that unless there's an exception, 8-12PM is reserved for deep work or writing and 1-5PM is when the team will schedule meetings. Adjust accordingly for the way your team works and the typical demands of your day.

Within these rhythms, you can also direct your team to productivity techniques like the Pomodoro Technique or 50-20-50 work sessions, in which you spend time focused on a particular task for 50 minutes, take a 20 minute break, then another 50 minute session.

2 Create space for work

Without a dedicated office space, employees are likely opening their laptop at the kitchen table and pushing through a long work day next to breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Obviously this isn't conducive to productivity or focus, so if you can, offer to provide a stipend for employees to invest in some home office equipment like a desk, chair, or privacy screen.

Even if you can't offer to pay for it, you can give employees guidance about creating space for work, and how doing so will make it easier to get into a work mindset at the start and end of the day — and make it more clear to family and roommates when you are and are not working.



Create a plan for self-care

No matter how much an employee might have anticipated it, the reality of working remotely is often a very different experience than what is expected. Especially under today's circumstances, the novelty can quickly wear off, leaving managers and employees alike feeling stressed and disconnected from fellow co-workers.

It's important to share with your team that self-care is an important part of being productive. The brain needs "off hours" to decompress and re-focus, and those moments and triggers simply aren't built into the workday when you work from home — so you have to build them in yourself.

For mental health and well-being, this might look like more meetings with a supervisor to feel reassured about your productivity and progress. For stress this might look like scheduling 15 minutes of every lunch break for a mini-meditation session or a brisk walk. Whatever you need to maintain physical and mental well-being should be a part of planning your work week.



Maintaining and Growing Productivity as a Remote Team

As your team gets more practice working remotely, you'll slowly come to realize that you can be just as productive — if not more productive — when you aren't in an office space. After all, many successful companies have been doing it for years already!

But even if you end up moving 100% back into the office space when this crisis is over, it will be a good reminder that it's not how your people work that matters. It's who's working for you and what they're working on. And that's something you'll always have control over when you hire the right people for the right job.

We hope this guide has given you some confidence in navigating the transition to remote work, and that you're able to use these tips to improve communication, engagement, and productivity on your team!

Using the Glassdoor Blog as a Partner Resource

Glassdoor has been researching remote work and interviewing top remote performers for years, and we're proud to act as a partner resource as you navigate this challenging time:

Working From Home Tips

- [8 Tips for Working From Home or Remotely](#)
- [How to Manage Teams When Working Remotely](#)
- [10 Tips to Help Remote Workers Avoid Burnout](#)
- [Best Practices for Successful Remote Workers](#)
- [How To Successfully Manage A Remote Manager](#)
- [Work from Home Guilt: What It Is and 3 Ways to Overcome It](#)
- [7 Ways to Improve Your Time Management Skills](#)
- [How to Build Up Your Work-Life Balance Muscle](#)

Productivity Tips

- [The Best Morning Routine Hacks Proven to Boost Productivity](#)
- [3 Psychological Factors Negatively Impacting Your Productivity](#)
- [What To Do When Productivity Tools Aren't Productive](#)
- [6 Amazing To-Do Lists To Help You Maximize Productivity](#)
- [11 Employees Share Their Best Work Productivity Hacks](#)

Collaboration + Communication

- [Best Communication Skills for Workplace Success](#)
- [QUIZ: What's Your Communication Style?](#)
- [How to Talk to Your Manager About Your Work-Life Balance](#)

Management Advice

- [How to Manage Teams When Working Remotely](#)
- [How All-Remote Work Can Lead to Success](#)
- [How to Handle the Coronavirus in the Workplace](#)

Wellness + Mental Health

- [9 Ways to Create a Mental Health-Friendly Workplace](#)
- [How to Put Your Mental Health Above Your Career — and How to Walk Away When You Can't](#)
- [7 Ways to Stay Healthy When Work Gets Crazy](#)
- [3 Ways Managers Can Empower Team Members With Mental Health Struggles](#)
- [How to Take A Mental Health Day Off — And How to Cope If You Can't](#)
- [Mental Health at Work: 4 Steps to Take When Your Job Gets You Down](#)
- [How to Ask For Help at Work When You Need It Most](#)

Coronavirus

- [What Employees & Employers Need to Know About the Coronavirus](#)
- [Could I Lose My Job Because of Coronavirus Fears?](#)
- [Coronavirus Outbreak: How Employers & Employees Are Responding](#)



About Glassdoor

Glassdoor is the second largest job site in the U.S. today.¹ Set apart by the tens of millions of reviews and insights provided by employees and candidates, Glassdoor combines all the jobs with this valuable data to make it easy for people to find a job that is uniquely right for them. As a result, Glassdoor helps employers hire truly informed candidates at scale through effective recruiting solutions like [job advertising](#) and [employer branding](#) products. Launched in 2008, Glassdoor now has reviews and insights for over 1M employers in more than 190 countries.² To stay up to date on employer-related news, industry trends and hiring tips, visit the [Glassdoor for Employers Blog](#).

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1. Source: comScore Media Metrix, March 2019; 2. Source: Glassdoor Internal Data, September 2018