Redefining Remote Work:
How to Manage a Happy, Healthy and Successful Team at Home
A decade ago a fully remote staff was a far-fetched concept, but today remote work is the new normal.

There are now more than five-million people working remotely in the U.S. alone; regular work at home has grown 173% since 2005, or 11% faster than the rest of the workforce and nearly 50 times more than the self-employed population. By 2028, it is expected that one third of full-time employees will be working remotely.

While some companies remain hesitant to make the transition, the data shows this adversely impacts employee morale, productivity and creativity, company culture, turnover rate, and even profitability.

More than three quarters of workers say they’d be “more loyal” to their employers if they offered flexible work options, and 25% fewer employees terminate their contracts with companies that allow remote employment. In fact, more than a third of remote employees say they’d be willing to take a pay cut of up to 10% to continue working from home.
Remote Work Today

Throughout the United States and globally, across industries and sectors, companies large and small have converted from the traditional work environment — with corporate headquarters and satellite offices — to full or partial ‘telecommuting.’

Among the companies now fully remote are leaders in financial services, such as American Express and Wells Fargo; tech, including Amazon, Cisco, Dell and Twitter; hospitality, led by Hilton; entertainment, like Netflix; consumer goods, including Williams-Sonoma; health, including Aetna, Johnson & Johnson and UnitedHealth Group; and even aerospace and defense, such as General Dynamics.

Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg said amid the COVID-19 pandemic in Spring 2020 that as much as 50% of his company’s workforce could be working remotely in the next five to 10 years, adding:

“A lot of people felt, ‘Hey, if I do not have to come in... then I’m going to be more efficient if I don’t have to commute into the office that day.’"
Meanwhile, even before the Coronavirus outbreak, small companies were twice as likely to hire remote workers.

The global pandemic has demonstrated that, in addition to all the other benefits documented by the likes of Owl Labs and Buffer, a remote workforce can help halt the spread of illness, protecting public health and preventing lost productivity and profit.

Talent professionals have taken notice, with nearly 75% reporting that work flexibility, including remote employment, is “very important” to the future of human resources and recruiting.

In this guide, we’ll show you why remote work works, offer inspiration from companies doing remote right, and provide you with the top tips and tricks for ensuring your business thrives with happy, healthy employees working from home.
Part I Why Remote Work Can Work

Today, 16% of all companies worldwide are fully remote, and every year more and more make the transition (in the five-year period between 2013 and 2018, annual growth increased nearly 47%).

While companies that do remote work wrong experience difficulties with communication and accountability, remote work works for those with a strong company culture, clearly defined roles and responsibilities, open communication channels and effective management.

**And when remote work works, it works well.**
Greater Productivity and Proficiency

Intuition and data tell us that happy and healthy employees are better employees. So, what makes an employee happy and healthy? For many, working from home.

• A 2020 survey of 3,000 workers, ages 18 to 65+, across industries on six continents, showed that people who work remotely report being happy in their jobs 29% more often than employees who work on site.

• A 2017 study of 25,000 workers found that nearly three in four say remote work helps them maintain a proper work/life balance.

So does the research on remote workers confirm our initial hypothesis? Simply, yes.

Remote workers work more than the standard 40-hour workweek 43% more often than onsite workers — because they enjoy what they do — while the onsite workers who do work ‘overtime’ do so because it’s required of them.

Furthermore, companies with remote staff experience 41% lower day-to-day absenteeism and a significant decrease in executed vacation time.

• More than 50% of remote workers in 2015 told CoSo Cloud, a private-cloud solutions provider for Adobe Connect, that they’re less likely to take time off than they would be if they worked on site.

• Buffer found four years later that results bear this out, with 43% of remote employees taking three or fewer weeks of paid vacation per year.
According to one study featured in *Harvard Business Review*, all of this amounts to nearly an entire extra day's worth of work every week for remote employees; in fact, the article is entitled “To Raise Productivity, Let More Employees Work from Home.”

Perhaps most importantly, though, the work itself also improves — by up to 40%, as *Forbes* noted in February 2020.

With the increased freedom and flexibility of working from home, remote employees:

- Don't spend time or energy commuting to and from work
- Schedule work when they can be most focused and productive
- Take less vacation time, and often work when traveling
- Feel empowered by the implicit trust of their managers and company leadership
- Aren't distracted by their coworkers
- Take breaks when they need to
- Take fewer sick days
Stronger Talent Pool

When your business is able to recruit from anywhere in the U.S., or even the world, instead of the restricted geographical area within a commute-centric radius around your office(s), your opportunity for attracting the best talent and most suitable team members is vastly improved. By recruiting talent from outside your area or immediate networks, you can attract younger workers who are typically:

- More experienced with remote teamwork and project management processes
- More adept at newer, increasingly advanced technologies
- More inspired and energized
- At lower pay grades
- From more diverse backgrounds
- Earlier in their careers

Millennials and members of Gen Z are nearly twice as likely as Baby Boomers to have significantly invested in developing a flexible talent strategy and incorporating technologies designed to support a remote workforce — and, by 2028, they will comprise 58% of the workforce.

Remote work options also allow companies to expand their cultural diversity by attracting individuals with disabilities, who may be restricted by a traditional office setting, working parents, who limit their search to work-from-home opportunities so they can raise their children, as well as workers from different ethnic and racial groups; companies in the top quartile for ethnic and racial diversity in management, for instance, are 35% more likely to produce financial returns above their industry averages.
Improved Employee Retention

Since 97% of employees are looking to be a “flexible worker” in the long term and nearly seven out of every 10 members of the fastest growing segments of the workforce are willing to trade other work benefits for flexible workspace options, it should come as no surprise that an ever-increasing number of businesses are restructuring to accommodate them — and it’s working.

Companies that allow employees to work from home experience 25% less turnover. Less turnover means a more consistent, stronger company culture, and less time and financial investment in unemployment benefits, severance payments and new talent acquisition.
Reduced Costs

Businesses without an office don’t have to pay for rent or mortgage, utilities, property insurance, property taxes, office supplies, or emergency preparedness. Even if every employee works from home one day a week, you can save on electricity, water, paper towels, toilet paper and all the resources required to run the office that day.

Since remote employees are healthier due to a better work/life balance, they miss work and see their physician less, reducing the cost of your company’s employer-sponsored health insurance.

And, with 36% of workers prioritizing the ability to work from home over a pay increase, you can save on salaries simply by instituting a remote work policy.

**Based on conservative estimates, employers save an average of $11,000 per year on each half-time remote employee.**

You can even calculate your own savings using the:

Global Workplace Analytics
Telework Savings Calculator
[globalworkplaceanalytics.com/roi](http://globalworkplaceanalytics.com/roi)
Part II What We Can Learn from Companies Doing Remote Work Right

In 2020, Glassdoor.com, a digital platform for job searches and applications, salary comparisons and anonymous reviews, compiled employee feedback on some of the most successful 100%-remote businesses.

Two years earlier, Proven, a fully remote company with an online hiring tool and other resources for small businesses, asked employers representing dozens of the top remote companies for their top tips.

The purpose of each of these efforts was to identify what makes remote work work (or not); their findings can help inform and inspire companies considering a transition to a fully or partially remote workforce.
All of the “virtual” or “distributed” companies on Glassdoor’s list have no physical offices, allow employees to work wherever they want and invest in team retreats and conference budgets to build culture and community. Of course, each has its own structures, processes, procedures, and methods of inspiring and empowering their employees.

A sales development lead at Toptal, a network of on-demand engineering, design and finance talent, spoke of “a culture of high standards, autonomy, and empowerment” that prioritizes accountability while facilitating risk taking.

A senior software engineer at Invision App, a digital product design platform, emphasized high-quality tools and processes, as well as management’s support of a “strong work/life balance” and family leave.

A graphic designer at Modern Tribe, a software and design company, mentioned schedule flexibility, work/life balance and team support, and added “opportunity for growth and career development.”

An employee of MoveOn, the largest independent, progressive organizing group in the U.S., pointed to a culture of transparency, mutual support and positivity, as well as a “relatively flat organization” that allows employees to “have a voice” and contribute beyond the job description.

A senior software engineer at Collage.com, a website for creating and purchasing custom photo collages, identified a decision-making process dependent on data, such as A/B testing and ROI estimates, “which greatly reduces the risk of politics,” as well as a lack of micro-management and “lightweight” processes. This employee also noted that having a fully remote staff allows this company to avoid issues that arise in companies that are only partially remote.
After transitioning to a fully remote company, Proven identified “many” advantages, including fewer employee distractions, a comfortable work atmosphere and low operating costs. However, as in any work environment, a remote team also faces “some unique challenges,” such as how to communicate effectively, ensure proficiency and cultivate a culture of connectivity.

What Proven found after interviewing leaders at 38 of the most successful remote companies is that they all overcommunicate, leverage collaborative tools such as Slack and Zoom, expect and require accountability and self-motivation, and work to instill trust among employees and supervisors.
“Managing and incentivizing your employees, making them feel part of a team and important to the success of the company.” – Jody Grunden, Partner & Virtual CFO, Summit CPA Group

“Make it a point to participate in any social opportunities your company offers; Fire Engine RED has a virtual book club and a virtual walking group.” – Chuck Vadun, Communications Director, Fire Engine RED

“Make sure you understand the goals of your company, on a yearly, quarterly, monthly, weekly, and even daily basis. Then you will be able to refine your work to help achieve those goals.” – Ryan O’Connor, Lead UX Designer, GobySavvy

“Time tracking apps will help you gain a better understanding of exactly how you spend your time and can help you identify which websites and apps are taking up most of your time.” – Dave Nevogt, Co-Founder, Hubstaff

“We do not micromanage and we trust our team to do their job to the best of their ability. Trust allows us to give team members freedom to explore new ideas and innovate on existing products. As a result, our team continues to deliver.” – Kerry Boyte, Co-Founder & COO, Wordfence

“Use Slack to keep in touch throughout the day for work and personal stories (a #random channel acts as a remote team water cooler and a place for people to bond over stories and funny gifs).” – Kate Harvey, Content & Search Marketing Manager, Chargify

“Taking advantage of video chats, collaborating often using your project management software (we use Basecamp), sharing lessons learned and new information in your team portal (we use Slack), and setting up recurring meetings with management to discuss your projects.” – Brian Patterson, Partner & Co-Founder, Go Fish Digital
Part III How to Help Your Employees Thrive from Home: Your Master Guide to Managing a Remote Team

Your Leadership Team

- Work with your leadership team to create an ongoing cadence for identifying, evaluating and addressing employee successes, emerging issues, potential risks and new opportunities
- Schedule and hold brief daily ‘stand up’ meetings to discuss employee successes, emerging issues, potential risks and new opportunities
- Schedule and hold monthly leadership meetings
- Schedule and hold quarterly leadership meetings

Your Middle Management Team

- Create a Manager Handbook with the following information:
  - How to set clear expectations, roles and responsibilities
  - How to foster accountability and celebrate successes
  - How to ensure consistent communication
- Train managers in support of the handbook guidelines
- Enroll managers in an online course for managing remote teams, such as Managing Remote Teams from Udacity.com
- Schedule and hold an annual or bi-annual manager-only retreat
- Schedule and hold monthly meetings with managers, led by the core leadership team
The Employee Handbook

Create a handbook for your employees, answering the following questions:

✓ What are the company’s values?
✓ What are the company’s priorities?
✓ What are the company’s business goals?
✓ What are the work hours?
✓ What is the vacation policy?
✓ What is the sick day policy?
✓ What are the employee benefits?
✓ How is company data protected?
✓ How is consumer data protected?
✓ What is the online onboarding process?
✓ What is the communication process?
✓ How are projects managed?
✓ How are goals and objectives established and measured?
✓ How are achievements recognized?
✓ How are employees empowered to grow?
✓ How is community fostered?
Leveraging Technology

Fast Company predicts that applications designed for remote work will soon become the preferred form of communication, and Business News Daily says that “with the right tech” transitioning to a remote workforce “can be a seamless process.” The following software will help you optimize all aspects of managing your remote business:

**Human Resources**

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<th>BambooHR</th>
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<td>• HR system of record</td>
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<td>• Hiring and onboarding</td>
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<td>• Attendance, benefits and compensation management</td>
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<td>• People data and analytics</td>
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<th>Engagedly</th>
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<td>• Performance management</td>
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<td>• 1-to-1 employee feedback</td>
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<td>• Cascading goals</td>
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<td>• Employee surveys</td>
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**Company Communication**

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<th>Slack</th>
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<td>• Daily morning ‘stand ups’</td>
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<td>• Team channels</td>
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<td>• Working groups</td>
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<td>• Company-wide announcements</td>
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<td>• Water cooler</td>
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<tr>
<th>Zoom (integrated with Slack)</th>
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<td>• Company video calls</td>
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<td>• Management video calls</td>
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<td>• Team video calls</td>
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<td>• One-on-one video calls</td>
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<td>• Ad hoc video calls</td>
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**Project Management**

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<th>The project management software you choose must align with the way you do business, and there are a number of highly rated apps worth researching, including but not limited to:</th>
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<td>• Atlassian JIRA</td>
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<td>• Trello</td>
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<td>• Basecamp</td>
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<td>• Asana</td>
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<td>• Notion</td>
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Training

Every new hire should be trained as part of the onboarding process on all of the team processes, procedures and guidelines, as well as the software used to conduct business. Since nearly 40% of remote workers and 15% of remote managers receive no training on how to work remotely, you'll demonstrate early on that your organization, more than many, takes remote work seriously and wants everyone to succeed.

One of the most productive ways to share knowledge and best practices is through video demonstrations. The Loom app allows you to record yourself and/or your screen as you accomplish tasks, and then share a link to your video with your coworkers. This can be highly effective, for instance, when introducing new technologies or seeking to improve an employee's work quality.

Continuing Education

One of the most effective methods for motivating the members of your team is facilitating their growth. There are a number of online learning tools available, many offering formal Continuing Education credits, including but not limited to Udemy and LinkedIn Learning.

Work Tools

Depending on your industry and the products or services you provide, you'll need a suite of applications that allow you to conduct business. Popular tools across industries include the Adobe CS Suite for design, Microsoft Office and Google Docs for word processing, presentation building and data tracking, analysis and visualization, and Dropbox and Google Drive for storage.

Security

Data security is essential to protect your company from data breaches, as well as any unintended non-compliance with security-based regulations. Technology companies large and small have developed effective methods for implementing, monitoring and reporting on data security; we recommend conducting comprehensive research to determine which software will best suit your needs. To protect your passwords, specifically, you can use LastPass or 1Password to generate strong passwords, store them in a protected vault, and share access only with approved team members.
Creating Community

It is critical to develop a company culture and connected community, especially in a remote environment, with employees primarily communicating through video and messaging apps. The following methods have proven successful in achieving these goals:

• Weekly or bi-weekly CEO-led virtual company gatherings to share:
  - Company milestones
  - Company priorities
  - Employee of the week
• Monthly company ‘work not work’ meetings, during which one employee presents a skill, hobby or interest not directly related to work
• Weekly team meetings
• Bi-annual or annual in-person retreats
• Virtual happy hours with cocktail-making demonstrations
• Virtual aerobic, meditation or yoga classes
• Recruitment bonuses
Employee Empowerment and Accountability

In addition to maintaining consistent communication, the most important responsibilities of your management team are ensuring that your employees are empowered to succeed and accountable to their coworkers, their teams and the company as a whole. The following tactics facilitate empowerment and accountability:

Agile Project Management

Agile is a project management methodology through which projects are divided into multiple smaller tasks and then shorter, incremental phases of work known as sprints. The main intentions of this approach are frequent and early delivery, ongoing reassessment and adaptive planning, continual improvement, and flexibility.

For employees, agile project management provides clear tasks, enables incremental successes and automates accountability. While agile project management may be too sophisticated for some smaller businesses, years of successful implementation in the software development industry have led many organizations to implement the process for managing all business projects.

JIRA by Atlassian is the leader in agile project management/development software.

Accessibility

One of the most common ways managers hinder accountability, create confusion and weaken morale is by limiting communication. By not only remaining accessible but promoting overcommunication, you can prevent miscommunications, track and applaud progress, and check in on the health and happiness of your employees.

Two methods that help managers who may have difficulty managing their own time is to require that they establish virtual open office hours, when they can always be reached about anything, and implement a digital suggestion box, in which employees can ‘place’ questions or comments they may be afraid to otherwise share.
Goal Setting and Tracking

While agile and other forms of project management help to formally establish and monitor project goals, there are other, more personal ways to empower employees to meet them (and other goals for professional growth). For each team, managers should:

• Set quarterly and annual professional goals
• Schedule and host weekly, monthly and quarterly goals meetings to review progress, celebrate successes and address any pertinent issues

For each employee, managers should also schedule and host one-on-one check-ins to review individual progress against quarterly and annual goals.

Professional Growth

Companies that achieve success, especially in a remote environment, have a strong culture and community, as well as opportunities for individuals to grow personally and within the organization. The following tactics improve employee morale and retention:

• Incentive programs
• Conference budgets
• Continuing education
• Advancement opportunities

Personal Health

Healthy employees take fewer sick days and are more productive and communicative during work hours. In addition to hosting team-building virtual exercise classes, you can also offer your employees a variety of benefits they can utilize on their own, including:

• Monthly health stipend, for fitness center membership, massage appointments, etc.
• Mental health days, to be taken when an employee is not sick but emotionally worn
• Subscriptions to mental health apps, such as Calm or Headspace
• Weekly, or as needed, one-on-one wellness check-ins between managers and each of their employees, during which they can discuss anything except work
Other Perks

There are so many other ways to show you care, including but not limited to an annual home office stipend, a weekly coffee stipend, and virtual birthday celebrations with local gift certificates for the celebrating employee. In most cases, the benefit of these small perks far outweighs the cost. When employees feel like they are part of a caring community, or family, they are more personally invested in the success of your company.
Part IV Tear-Out Exercise: Create Your Remote Employee Handbook

Company Values


Company Priorities


Business Goals


Work Hours

Project Management System

Employee Benefits Package

Data Protection Policy and Methodologies

Communication Policy and Methodologies

Vacation Policy

Sick Day Policy
Employee Goal Setting and Tracking

Employee Achievement and Incentives

Employee Growth Opportunities

Team Building Practices

Need help with your employee handbook?

MBL Benefits provides its clients free access to company handbook software with real-time legislative and compliance updates.
Taking Your Team Remote

As recently as 2010, companies scouring the globe for employees who would telecommute full time were considered radical. Now we know: remote work offers benefits to businesses and workers that can’t be denied — and organizations unwilling to adjust are appearing increasingly archaic.

In less than a decade it is predicted that nearly a third of all full-timers will be working from home. Employers who shift, at least partially, to remote work will benefit from access to a larger talent pool, improved employee retention, greater productivity and proficiency, and significantly reduced costs.

For a long time you could compete with more traditional work structures and hiring packages, pushing work flexibility into the future. But the future is now, with seven out of 10 millennials reporting that they’d trade other benefits for the ability to work remotely.
The MBL Difference

If you’re considering the transition to a remote work environment and want guidance to streamline the process, there’s no better solution than MBL.

At MBL, we are a true partner. We think of our work as building relationships, not as a business transaction. It’s our mission to learn as much about your company and its needs as possible, so we can act as your guiding force. We will share our vast network of partners, carriers, technology and wellness providers, and more, so you can keep your employees happy, attract new talent, reduce your expenses and boost your bottom line.

Schedule a free consultation with one of our advisors today.

Get Started