



REMOTE & ASYNC WORK — 15 MIN

Managing remote teams: best practices and expert insights

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January 8, 2024



Managing remote teams can be a unique challenge — especially if you're used to office-based environments. You need to embrace new approaches to communication and documentation, and find new ways to build effective teams.

In this guide, we'll help you navigate the transition, and understand how to manage a remote team more efficiently. We've included key insights from Remote's founders, Marcelo and Job, who have first-hand experience of building a global, remote-first company from the ground up. And we'll also share some tips from some of the world's top communication and team-building experts.

So let's get started.

What are remote teams, and why are they becoming more prevalent?

Remote teams are groups of people, often from different parts of the world, who work together in the same way a traditional, in-office team would. Accelerated by advances in technology and the COVID-19 pandemic, it has become an increasingly popular approach to working.

A remote-first approach frees your company up to recruit the best talent, regardless of location, and allows it to:

- Tap into new cultural perspectives
- Obtain local expertise
- Enter new markets
- Cover different time zones

What are the main challenges of managing a remote team?

As mentioned, there are several key differences between managing remote and in-person teams — some of which are more obvious than others.

To fully realize the benefits of flexible work and get the best out of your people, you need to understand what these main blockers are.

Communication issues

When employees work from the same location, a lot of interactions happen organically — so-called "water cooler" moments. In a remote team, this obviously isn't the case.

You and your remote team members are also likely to miss out on non-verbal cues, such as body language. This is a crucial part of communication, and misinterpreting someone's approach can introduce tension and even affect productivity.

Without clearly defined meeting and communication requirements, you and your team members might struggle to decide what warrants a virtual meeting

or even a direct message. After all, if you're not in the same workspace, the chances of drawing someone away from deep work are much higher.

Creating a sense of clarity

With remote teams, clarity is a multidimensional challenge. To make sure your teams are the happiest and most productive they can be, you must establish clarity around:

- Purpose (i.e., what their exact responsibilities, work output, and goals are)
- Process (all the procedures and code of conduct for the work they perform)
- Quality (i.e., the indicators of a job well done, and the criteria they're expected to follow)
- Company culture and values

Day to day, this can manifest in several ways. For example, a meeting may have been created with an unclear agenda, with uncertainty around whose participation is required and which topics are going to be covered. There may be no single source of truth (SSOT) for team members to refer to for a particular subject, resulting in doubt and inconsistency.

Building a connection

One of the hardest factors to overcome — or even quantify — is whether your remote employees feel like part of a team or not. Even with an employee satisfaction survey, you may not be getting the full picture and, in the long run, a sense of disconnection can result in turnover and below-average performance.

In in-person teams, this is usually mitigated through dedicated team bonding sessions for which there are budgets. And in many cases, team members bond naturally through eating lunch together or socializing after work.

This is incredibly difficult to replicate in a remote team. It can be a big challenge just to have everyone online for meetings at the same time, let alone team bonding events like online lunch (which, for some, might be a very early breakfast or a late dinner).

One common solution is to organize annual (or even quarterly) offsites but, depending on the size of your company and the location of your employees,

this can require some significant budgeting and logistical gymnastics.

Instilling trust

This is perhaps the biggest challenge in managing remote teams. And there are two separate tiers to consider here: the trust among peers, and the trust among direct reports.

In the case of the former, this challenge can be amplified if you offer a hybrid work arrangement. Your hybrid employees may — subconsciously or otherwise — favor those colleagues who they interact with in real life, resulting in silos. This is something that you must take into account and, ideally, prevent.

Building trust as a remote team manager also comes with its own set of challenges. It's worth noting that this works both ways; your employees need to trust you, but you also need to be able to strike a balance between control and delegation. This can be tricky when you're still learning how to manage a remote team and you want to [avoid micromanaging](#).

What do you need to manage a remote team?

To effectively manage a remote team, you need to consider the following components:

A selective hiring process

Effective hiring is important in any part of business, but especially so in remote-first organizations. If you get the right people in with an open attitude to working remotely, this can make everything else so much easier.

Make sure that, during the hiring process, you assess your candidates' suitability for remote work and their ability to be flexible and adaptable. Remote working can require different skills and isn't necessarily for everyone, so give yourself the best possible chance by hiring the right people from the start.

A positive onboarding experience

This translates to the onboarding process, too. You need to provide your new hires with all the necessary information to get them started, and make

sure they feel supported, welcome, and good about their decision — all without meeting in person.

You also need to get them up to speed quickly with your processes. For example, if a hire has never worked asynchronously before, this might take some getting used to. Here's what you can do to ensure a [positive remote onboarding](#) experience:

- Create a self-serve process for new hires to reduce manual work
- Don't overload them with details
- Assign them a "buddy" who can help them find their feet and answer common questions
- Cultivate a culture of ownership and trust early in the process

Clearly-defined communication channels

As mentioned, communication is key in remote teams. As a rule, it's better to over-communicate than under-communicate, but it's still advisable to implement clear [communication guidelines](#). As a starting point, consider the following:

- Try not to use communication tools like Slack excessively to avoid codependency
- Turn off phone, email, and Slack notifications to allow time for deep work
- Document your meetings
- Standardize information storage to make sure information is easy to find

Less meetings

Meetings can be a great tool for reinforcing your team's goals, boosting their performance, and helping remove any bottlenecks in their way. However, they can also sometimes be a hindrance.

To help you manage meetings more effectively, here are some recommendations from Remote's CEO, Job van der Voort:

- **Don't organize a meeting if its only purpose is to share information.** Instead, choose an asynchronous communication medium, such as email, chat, or ideally, a public board such as Notion. If you feel that your message requires more of a human touch (such as a specific tone

of voice or facial expression), you can always record an audio message through a tool like Yac, or a video through Loom.

- **Replace meetings with experiments.** Try alternative ways to communicate, and see what works for you and your team. You could switch a call for a recording, replace weekly syncs with emails, or do a text-based Slack standup. In the best-case scenario, you'll be able to limit the time spent on synchronous communication. And, in the worst, you can always go back to meetings!
- **Create an agenda for every meeting and set time limits.** Try to keep meetings to a maximum of 25 minutes. To track the time, work with an itinerary that specifies all the key events (including a short Q&A session, if applicable).
- **Plan recurring meetings wisely.** While rituals are important, make sure to organize recurring events only if you see the need for each meeting week after week. Reevaluate your need for meetings regularly, and don't shy away from reducing meeting frequency.

To learn more about making your meetings more efficient and valuable, check out Job's detailed guide on [running remote meetings](#).

A strong support structure

This should be a key pillar of any working arrangement (remote or not), but ensure you prioritize your employees' mental and physical well-being. Establish this mindset as early as the recruitment stage, as you want candidates to see that you're a supportive organization, and that you understand the unique challenges encountered by remote and hybrid teams.

Acknowledge stress as an unavoidable part of work, and encourage your team members to show vulnerability. For instance, let them know it's OK to admit that they're incapable of completing a task, or finding common ground with others on the team. This way, you can find a solution and ensure that the employee isn't feeling alone in their struggles.

[Self-care](#) applies to you, too. You're not just a team manager; you're a valued person and team member. So be sure that you do not take on more responsibility that you can genuinely maintain without putting yourself at risk of emotional, physical, and mental overload.

How to manage a remote team

In terms of how you manage people remotely day to day, there are numerous best practices and approaches you can adopt.

Here are some of the key ones:

Embrace async

Asynchronous work isn't just about knowing how to use Slack or Notion properly; it's an entire work culture around which everything else should be built on.

Async communication doesn't just make it easier to navigate time zone differences. It removes the need for all your team members to be online at the same time, which includes traditional working hours, too. This can have a massively positive impact on your team members' work-life balance, allowing them to work at the times where they are most productive.

It also minimizes unnecessary distractions. Instead of asking colleagues, people can find answers to their questions through the relevant space. This removes a lot of pressure, as no one is expecting to get an instant response.

Of course, for asynchronous communication to work effectively, it needs education and buy-in from everyone in your team. Normalize that it's OK not to be constantly available, and ensure everyone is aware of when and how to create high-quality, consistent documentation using tools like Notion, Slack, and Google Drive. Follow these basic guidelines, too:

- Use the most appropriate message format (i.e., written, verbal, or video)
- When in doubt, over-document
- Provide context for your message
- Be clear about what you're trying to communicate
- Use a suitable tone of voice
- Provide the relevant resources (if any)
- Agree on the next steps to move things forward
- Document the communication (or include tags) to ensure all relevant stakeholders have access

To learn more about working asynchronously, check out our [detailed guide](#).

Set clear expectations

Despite the large volume of research confirming the positive impact of remote work on employee productivity, many managers still question the effectiveness of remote work. To avoid any misunderstandings — or even conflict — it's a good idea to set clear expectations regarding your employees' performance and work schedule. As a starting point, consider the following:

- Discuss and confirm what you expect from each employee
- Inform employees of any deadlines to deliver goals
- Set realistic and achievable milestones to prevent discouragement
- Establish core working hours where possible (taking time zones into account)

Track performance, not time

In many offices, where employees are given clock-in sheets and cards, employees are judged on their input rather than their output. With a remote team, you should instead focus on results — not hours worked.

Constantly monitoring your employees — especially with invasive software — is the easiest way to show you don't trust them, and it *will* result in your best people looking elsewhere. People are productive at different times so, as long as the results are good, let them work whenever they feel most productive.

Respect preferred working hours

This echoes the point about setting clear expectations — but from both sides. Employees (including yourself) should have clear boundaries, or run the risk of burnout. Ask your team to share their preferred working hours and respect them, even if they are not necessarily the most convenient for you. For example, some people may favor working early in the morning, while others will prefer to work in the evening. Either way, you should take notice and not disturb people during their rest hours.

If you want to learn more about creating a shared language of trust in your workplace, check out [Remote Connect's session with Charles Feltman](#). Charles shares some great tips on how to build trust and respect, and mediate conflict in remote teams.

Set the example as a leader

According to behavioral change expert Adam Grant, leaders are “culture carriers,” which means it's crucial for you to lead by example. This is especially true in remote work, where studies suggest that managers are less enthusiastic about the arrangement than lower and mid-level employees.

If you're asking people to follow certain processes, but you're not following them yourself, this will be reflected in how your team members operate. Embrace the benefits of remote work, navigate the challenges, and ensure that you always set — and follow — the standard.

Give team members responsibility and accountability

At Remote, trust starts on day one. Which means you shouldn't shy away from assigning accountability, even at the start.

Of course, you should be realistic; nobody is going to be an expert in three weeks. But it's a good idea to create 30, 60, and 90-day plans where you establish milestones (formal or informal) for your people.

Existing employees should also be encouraged to take ownership in their field of expertise. With nobody standing over your team members' shoulders, it can be easy to lose direction and focus. Ensure that they are encouraged to be proactive and take the initiative, without the fear of being punished for making mistakes.

Focus on cross-team communication

Transparency shouldn't end with your own team; it should extend to any interactions you or your team members have with other departments in your company.

To understand how far transparency goes in cross-team communication, imagine the various areas where the work of a design and software development team can overlap.

While the former creates visual and functional outlines for a website, the latter will be responsible for bringing it live. If you can ensure that these two

teams communicate freely and openly, you'll make sure that there aren't any hidden biases or that these teams function in siloed environments.

That being said, not everyone will have the time or role to participate in these cross-team interactions. This is why you should document and report on progress. Your team can then refer to the relevant resource to understand the current state of play, including guidelines or any planned changes.

With all of this in mind, you might be asking the question: how do you ensure that you're building a genuinely remote-first work environment, rather than one that is remote-forced in nature? To explore this common dilemma in more detail, check out our Remote Connect session with Keah Nguyen, who explains [how to be intentional versus reactionary](#) when managing a remote team.

Lean on video and audio

As mentioned, async communication isn't just confined to Slack and Notion. If you'd prefer to communicate something to the team "in person," record a video announcement. If your team has questions, encourage them to ask them on the relevant group channel, or in the comment section of the video.

A video is still a valid piece of documentation, with everyone able to watch it at their own schedule or return to it, if needed. It also reinforces to employees that not every topic requires real-time communication.

You can even integrate your video recording tool with AI software to create transcripts and identify the key points of the video.

Don't sacrifice 1:1 meetings

We've already talked about reducing your number of meetings. However, 1:1 meetings with your team should rarely be canceled (unless there is a valid reason, such as an emergency). These meetings show your team members that you care about them and their concerns, and if you regularly call them off, problems and frustrations might accumulate.

They don't always have to be live calls, of course; sometimes, you can conduct the meeting async, or through Slack. But, in general, regular 1:1s will lead to a better relationship over time.

Give all meetings a clear purpose

For the meetings that **are** required, adopt the following best practices:

- **Provide a list of required attendees for in-person meetings.** Make it clear who needs to be present (or re-watch if they're unable to participate), and whose presence is optional.
- **Share an agenda and meeting notes.** Meeting titles won't always give away what you want to cover. To help team members decide whether the topic concerns them, add a few sentences to the calendar event and/or your team chat about what you'll be focusing on. Make sure someone takes notes throughout the meeting (or use an AI reader) so that you can share and keep an archive of all the key takeaways.
- **Don't expect everyone to be present.** The more distributed your team, the harder it will be to find a time and day that fits everyone. Try and find as wide a common ground as possible, but don't tie yourself in knots trying to secure a 100% attendance rate. Instead, allow your staff members to catch up either by reading meeting notes, or by re-watching the recording
- **Rotate calls to cover all timezones.** To make sure no one feels left out from the opportunity to join a live meeting, you can also consider rotating call times. This way, all of your team members will have the option to join meetings during their regular working hours.
- **Allow people to leave a meeting if they feel that they can't add value.** Make sure that employees who decide to exit a meeting to return to deep focus work don't feel ostracized or impolite. While in person this may be considered rude, respect that your team members may feel they can be more productive elsewhere.

Protect your people

Some leaders are so focused on delivering results that they forget about those who actually deliver them. And when you're not in the same physical space as someone, it's difficult to notice the signs of stress and burnout.

Check in with your team regularly, both privately and in shared spaces. And most importantly, always remember that the best cure is prevention. If you repeatedly set unrealistic expectations and overwork people, they **will** burn out.

Make sure people are protecting themselves, too; after all, it's everyone's responsibility to look after their own health. If you see that certain people are

working long hours, frequently checking in during vacations, and constantly replying to messages during their downtime, you may need to step in.

To learn more about wellbeing and mental health in remote teams, check out [our in-depth, expert-led guide](#).

Encourage life-work balance

Unlike many in-person workplaces, strict operating hours are not realistic in remote teams. If your employees feel like they're on stand-by mode around the clock, this can eventually result in mental, emotional, and physical overload. To compound matters, some team members might be hesitant to say anything, under fear they'll be accused of a lack of commitment.

It's also a common concern of remote employees that the lines between home life and work life can become blurred. This is why it's so important to reinforce an asynchronous culture, and encourage employees to turn off notifications during their rest hours.

Remember: one of the biggest benefits of remote work is that it enables a *better* work-life balance, not a worse one, so make sure your team embraces it.

Set up bonding activities

Employees who are office-based get a lot of time to talk about non-work-related topics during lunch or coffee breaks, which helps people build stronger relationships.

In a remote workplace, the majority of conversations revolve around work only, but it doesn't have to be this way. Remote teams should get the same opportunity to connect and catch up on topics related to their personal lives as office-based teams.

Set up optional, open-invite coffee chats or online games every week, encourage your team members to have coffee chats with each other, and allow people to create Slack channels or groups dedicated to non-work-related subjects, such as parenting, photography, or science fiction.

Managing remote teams with Remote

The subject of managing remote teams is a fluid one, with new research, best practices, and thought leadership emerging all the time. And as more and more companies go remote, more knowledge will be generated.

Managing people is only one part of the puzzle, though. To ensure that your remote team members are receiving the best benefits, having the best onboarding experience, getting paid accurately and on time, and able to self-serve their day-to-day HR needs, you need a proven, reliable global HR partner.

Our employer of record (EOR) service enables you to hire, onboard, pay, and manage people almost anywhere in the world, with taxes, compliance, and paperwork taken care of. Meaning all *you* need to do is focus on the topics we've discussed in this article.

To learn more about how Remote can help you manage your remote team more effectively, check out our [detailed hiring guide for global employees](#).