

How to manage online remote teams, meetings, and 121's – Top tips

7 Tips for Successfully Managing Remote Teams

These tips will help you and your team be productive regardless of where they work.

Right now, remote working--or, working from home--has become more than a trend. It's now a necessity for companies all across the globe. As a result, there are thousands of team leaders and managers who find themselves suddenly managing a completely remote team. Honestly, that can be scary, especially if it's the first time you've ever had to do so and didn't have a lot of time to prepare.

If that's you, this list of tips will help you set up yourself and your team for success:

1. Have a Daily Check-In

Whenever possible, this should be one-on-one, and face-to-face via video. Phone conversations, email, and Slack go only so far. Your team needs to see you, and you need to see them. The good news is that services like Zoom or Google's Team Hangouts make this relatively easy. At first, this should be every day. The purpose is simple--set the agenda and provide the feedback and resources your team members need.

2. Communicate a Lot

It probably goes without saying that you should be in regular communication with your team. One of the hardest things about working from home, especially if you're used to an office environment, is the sense of loneliness and isolation that can set in. That's especially true considering that many people are practicing social distancing.

3. Take Advantage of Technology

As a manager, your job is to keep your team connected. Communication tools are a simple way to keep everyone engaged. While email and text messages might be a short-term solution, tools like Slack or Microsoft Teams are far better suited for collaboration and communication. Some of those collaboration tools are even available for free right now.

4. Manage Expectations

Help your team figure out what they should do, and create realistic expectations for their work. By the way, "managing expectations" applies to you as a manager as well. Set yourself and your team up for success by clearly stating both the tasks and the reasons behind them, and help your team understand exactly how you will measure success.

That means defining the scope, deadlines, and deliverables for each task or project your team is working on. Otherwise, don't be surprised if a few weeks from now you find yourself wondering what everyone was doing. Which brings us to ...

5. Focus on Outcomes, Not Activity

It's not possible to manage every aspect of the work done by a remote team. For what it's worth, you shouldn't be trying to manage every aspect of any team's work, but especially when your team is distributed across different locations. Instead of focusing on activity or hours worked, focus on the outcomes and measure your team accordingly.

6. Resource Your Team

Make sure your team has the technology it needs to get the work done. If you suddenly have a team of remote workers, that means there's a good chance they need tools like laptops, software, mobile devices, or even a high-speed internet connection. It's not reasonable to assume that everyone has all of those things, and it's your responsibility as a manager to make sure they do.

7. Be Flexible

Understand that, especially in the current environment, your team has a lot going on. That's not an excuse for not getting things done, but it is a reason to reconsider what productivity really means. Punching a clock for eight hours is out. Regular work hours are also probably out for many people. Instead, trust your team and give them the freedom and flexibility to get work done on the schedule that helps them be the most productive. That's good for your team in the long run anyway.

Discussion Points before the meeting:

1. Choose a remote meeting software.

There are a variety of remote meeting software options to choose from, both free and paid. Remote meeting software providers like Zoom, make it easy to set up your meeting so remote attendees can participate. Research and compare your options to see which ones will work best for you and your remote team members.

2. Know your tools and have a plan B

You may know how to turn on the video camera and send a code for participants to enter as they join. However, knowing your software and hardware well can help you use your tools more effectively, and resolve problems quicker.

Make it a habit to dial or go online at least 5 minutes early, so you can set up the facility in advance or fall back to plan B. Video recording rehearsals should also be conducted in advance, because it can overload the computer's operation memory.

3. Prepare a shared space

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What is the biggest benefit of an actual meeting? It is face-to-face interaction, which is a result of sharing a certain space. But a shared space is not equal to a meeting room. Also, it includes shared flip charts, chats, shared screens, or shared online whiteboard. A combination of different shared spaces positively influence remote employees presence in a meeting.

4. Plan the agenda carefully and share it in advance

Gathering together for a remote meeting takes effort, so do not waste time during the meeting. Have a plan with specific items to cover and stick to that plan. It is better to share the agenda ahead of time to those who will participate, so that everyone can prepare.

5. Develop “the rules of the road”

Whether it is a brainstorming, a project update, approval session or any kind of recurring meeting, set up the rules and circulate it to participants before the meeting, or set it up for a longer time period.

Uncontrollable meetings neither help your team be productive, nor boost creativity. Usually, they lead to chaos, where everybody is speaking at the same time, or someone is starting to dominate in the conversation. Nancy Halpern, Principal at KNH Associates suggests to develop “the rules of the road” that limit each person’s speaking time to prevent anyone from dominating.

Discussion Points during the meeting:

1. Introduce everyone

The video camera doesn’t show every speaker throughout the meeting. Some software shows an icon or picture of who is involved in the meeting, but it is good practice to introduce everyone attending. Managers at OnPoint Consulting post pictures of attendees on the wall when the video is not used, because people are more willing to participate and are more open when they know who’s on the call.

2. Have small talk before to start

Don’t miss a chance to connect with remote colleagues and help them make their presence felt in the room. Having small talk helps to feel people connected.

Patty Azzarello CEO at Azzarello Group shared a story of a guy who worked remotely and took a picture of himself every day, and whenever he was on a conference call with the group at headquarters, he would email the picture of himself with a note that said something like, “thought you would want to see what shirt I was wearing today”. It may sound silly, but he was exerting his presence — he was well known and respected.

3. Remind of the meeting goal

Remind participants of the meeting goal once starting a meeting. If you use an online collaboration whiteboard, you can easily put a sticker with a meeting goal and what needs to be achieved at the end, so that all the participants are clear with it at all times during the meeting.

4. Give people things to do

Split the roles between attendees: facilitator, timekeeper and scribe to write down action points and decisions made. This helps involve participants in the meeting. For a recurring meeting, change the roles between participants from meeting to meeting by running a kind of lottery, so nobody knows who will be lucky to be the timekeeper or scribe, writing down the meeting minutes. Any kind of game before the meeting usually works well for participants engagement.

5. Have people identify themselves and make sure everyone recognises each other

This is especially important if some participants aren't visible to everyone else. A quick, "Hey, Elsie here," before Elsie speaks, for example, lets others identify the voice (and the face if on video) of each speaker. Keep note of who has spoken, as well to ask nonparticipants to join in.

However, if Elsie is a remote employee, it can be difficult to identify her voice and personality via a phone call. Patty Azzarello CEO at Azzarello Group suggests that these remote employees take a casual Skype call with key office colleagues at any convenient time in order to connect with them "in person", because it makes a huge difference.

6. Ask participants to contribute

Asking directly for input really helps team members feel engaged. And remember, listeners can only hear one person at a time clearly, so take turns sharing with each other. Michael Sueoka, Head of User Experience at The Mobile Majority considers that it is vital to make every person feel like they have the ability to contribute to the project. Reaching out to everyone in the meeting individually or asking specifically for their contributions is a good way to get people involved. So here are few examples of such engaging hooks.

_____ Are you happy with it?

_____ What interests you the most and why?

_____ What is your favorite/least favorite part?

_____ If you could change anything, what would it be? Why?

_____ What's one thing that could increase your satisfaction with this project, and why?

7. Include introverts during remote meetings

It's important to keep everyone engaged during remote meetings, including the team members who might not be the most vocal or outspoken.

If you notice that someone on the team is trying to contribute but getting overshadowed by more extroverted team members, carve out time for them to speak (and make sure the rest of the team is listening). Some team members may still be reticent to pipe up during a virtual meeting. Take the time to schedule a one-on-one to get that person's insights on how you can make remote meetings a more inclusive space for them. Even better, create a communal space or document online where people can add their thoughts, insights, and suggestions following the meeting.

To Do after the meeting:

1. Send a follow up

Remind those who participated the main points of the meeting and the direction post meeting. This both increases the effectiveness of the meeting and reinforces the importance of remote meetings to your team members.

However, it's only effective when it's read, so make the letter or chat message as engaging as possible — fill it with gifs, videos, funny pics from the meeting, etc. Make it a habit, so the meeting participants will be waiting for your email each time after the meeting.

- Deliverables and next steps
- Who's responsible for following up on each item or task
- When those deliverables are due
- When the next meeting or check-in will be

2. Check out action items are in progress

It's vital in remote working relationships that you get very clear and outcome-oriented with performance objectives and expectations for individuals and teams. Discuss them as a result of the meeting, send via follow-up email, and don't forget to control them when the meeting is done. Otherwise what was the point?

For every virtual meeting, it's important to create a clear meeting agenda that includes:

- Key talking points
- Meeting structure (for example, when and for how long you plan to discuss each talking point)
- Team members/teams that will be in attendance
- What each team member/team is responsible for bringing to the meeting
- Any relevant documents, files, or research

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The best jobs to keep remote workers engaged during meetings are:

- Interactive. The job should require each person to contribute in real time and interact with the meeting and other team members.
- Straightforward. If the job is too complex, your team may spend more time trying to figure out what to do than actually participating in the meeting.
- Frequent. Ideally, each team member's job is something they need to do over the duration of the meeting so that they're engaged from start to finish, rather than being assigned a "one and done" task.

For remotely coaching someone:

Focus, focus, focus.

Effective coaching in any setting requires focused attention on the other person. That can be tough when we're coaching virtually, because of the pervasiveness of multitasking. A virtual coaching conversation is a special kind of interaction — very different from a typical conference call or online meeting, where we can often just partly tune in and still get the gist. When we're coaching, the most important details are easy to miss. If we allow ourselves to become distracted, we'll be less likely to notice things like a subtle change in someone's facial expression or tone of voice, or an unusual turn of phrase that may signify something more. We may also fail to monitor our own emotional responses and instincts, which are vital sources of data. Even worse, others can sense when our attention wanders, leaving them reluctant to discuss truly important issues.

Manage the time.

In most meetings, including phone calls and video conferences, the discussion goes right up until the end of the allotted time, at which point we rapidly conclude and move on to the next meeting. This is another way in which coaching conversations are different: It's part of your job, as the coach, to track time during the conversation — I usually set a timer to minimize distractions — and stop at a point you've agreed on in advance.

Treat Remote As Local

Treat your remote people like they are local and treat your local people like they are remote. Give remote people as much access to you as possible. Remember, your local people see you in the halls, eat with you at lunch, stop by your office, etc. The remote people don't have that access and can feel distant. Respond to them as quickly as possible. Make your local people set appointments.

Avoid Multitasking

Figure out how to avoid multi-tasking. Video conferences instead of phone conferences work well. Encourage people to stay in working mode and off email back-and-forth as much as is reasonable. Email trails with extensive "reply all" can be stifling on productivity. This tends to peak on Fridays as people are trying to move work off their plate. Send a note to whoever needs it, but send it early in the day!

Some Hints

Keeping people engaged is paramount. I spend a lot of time crafting my questions - more than I would normally. Even if you can't get much conversation going keep asking great questions and have some prepared and on the screen. Keep people thinking how it relates to them / their team etc. Allow and encourage interaction via the chat box.

Have technical support. I've run webinars and on-line facilitated meetings where someone is monitoring chat, someone else is in managing who shares the screen, break out groups etc and a WhatsApp group to communicate with each other. I'm the tech jockey tonight, next week I'm the key facilitator and my colleague is the tech jockey. We'll have a WhatsApp group set up to manage comms between us and our host.

Fit for purpose process design is paramount. In my experience designing for virtual facilitation takes even longer than F2F. There's less opportunity for "think on your feet and change the process" - somewhat frustrating for me as that's possibly what I do best ___

Keep checking in with participants regularly.

Don't forget the basics, like meeting guidelines / groundrules. And remind people to mute, turn video on and off etc.

Send out an agenda as you would a normal facilitated event that includes purpose, aims etc.

Experiment - I'd be happy to host a couple of on-line meetings for people without much experience in this so you become more comfortable. No cost. I'm stuck at home at the moment with all work cancelled due to the Corona Monster, so some virtual interaction could be welcome. EMAIL ME IF INTERESTED. I can show how Stormz works and other things I've used.

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8 Tips for Remote Teaming



BUILD TRUST EARLY AND OFTEN!
Make time for frequent, short activities that subtly increase the level of trust on your team.



Create ways for the team to connect outside of meetings
Use social and professional channels to keep people in touch with one another as they work.



DESIGN GROUP MEETINGS WITH CARE
Think about what things really call for a team meeting, and design those meetings so people can participate actively.



Plan the right amount of time for meeting tasks
Don't try to cram too much into one remote meeting. Take your time, chunk it up, and remember everything takes a little longer to do well when it's remote.



Make time to hear opposition
Plan for a rich discussion with opposing views rather than trying to rush the group into agreement because of time constraints.



LEVEL THE PLAYING FIELD
Set it up so that if some people are remote, everyone is.



Let go of the belief that virtual is never as good as face-to-face
In truth, remote teams can be cohesive, thriving powerhouses, and virtual meetings can be productive and engaging.



NEVER ASK, "DOES EVERYONE AGREE?"
Instead, use effective tools and methods for exploring options and making decisions that everyone can commit to.

Learn how to do all this and more in the 2-day online workshop **Virtual Team Facilitation!**



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What **YOU** can do to ensure you're a productive remote worker

- 01** Get dressed 
- 02** Exercise – get outside if you can 
- 03** Take a coffee break or just stand up regularly 
- 04** Sit at a desk – put your monitor at eye level – don't work slumped on the couch 
- 05** Write a to do and DONE list and share it with a colleague/team 
- 06** Split your day up into 'productivity chunks' of 45/90 mins – what works for you? 

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What you can do as a **TEAM** to be productive, motivated and connected

Webcam. Show your team your surroundings. Take it in turn to drive meetings. Meet online to set AM and PM goals

Don't email – if people live alone they may not talk to anyone all day

Skype or Teams chat about some non-work things, share a funny news story



Like music? Share your Spotify lists. See what others are listening too throughout the day

High fives are virtual, but needed! Call out people who've helped you today

Schedule a time for everyone to take a break.

I use my Apple watch to remind me to stand and take breaks regularly otherwise I'd sit for 10 straight hours!

Our team have set ourselves a step challenge to make sure we get at least 6000 steps in a day.

My Wi-Fi is not great so I work offline a lot of the time. People text or call me if they need something and I keep my manager up to date with what I'm working on.

My kids are home and my husband's sick. My team are really understanding and know I'll get things done later in the day

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What you can do as a **PEOPLE LEADER** to keep your team productive, and well



Be very clear with your team how and when you expect them to communicate and check in.



Be mindful of challenges people may have. As an employer you're still responsible for their mental and physical well-being when they are at home.



Some people end up putting in MORE hours and working harder when they're at home. Monitor this. Don't let people burn out.



Let your team know they're doing a good job. Tell them you appreciate their adaptability and hard work.



Check in PERSONALLY with your direct reports and ensure they cascade this to their teams too. Not just about work – check in on their personal situation too.

Can any good come from this? Perhaps. Think about opportunities



MANAGE THE CHANGE

This might not be YOUR change, but help manage the change. Pause and apply ADKAR thinking regularly.

MANAGE RESISTENCE

Assist team leaders to manage resistance. Fear, uncertainty, negativity, CM's this is your day job

CONTACT DETAILS

Make sure everyone has each others contact details. Personal and work tel nos. Add the emergency no's and government websites to this sheet too.

What Change Managers can do to facilitate transition to BCP.



SHARE

Share a daily productivity tip/challenge or action for you team to do and get them to share their results.

EDUCATE

Find a few great TED talks about remote working. Share the links and summarise the key points.

TECHNOLOGY SUPPORT

Support team members who are not confident with technology. Offer to help them with Skype privately so they get confident.

7 TIPS FOR MANAGING A REMOTE TEAM

Take your team's productivity and efficiency to new heights with these useful insights.

#1 WORKFORCE

Hire the right people.

Not everyone is up to the task of working alone, as remote workplaces are usually less social than co-located ones. People on remote teams need to be ok with that. For best results, it's imperative to hire people who are up for this challenge and capable of working independently, but yet in a small team.



#2 TOOLS

Use the right remote work tools.

Tools are important in a remote workplace because they enable you to better organize the team and keep everyone on the same page. A truly effective remote work team will have all of the vital remote work tools: email, a file sharing capacity, an instant messaging platform, screen sharing software, project management software, and any tools or resources specific to your industry.



#3 PROCESS

Organize a work plan.

One of the most important ingredients in a powerful remote team is process, or how you work. In a virtual team, each person may develop their own processes and procedures that don't mesh with the way other team members are working. It's best to use a project management system to keep everyone in touch.



#4 GOALS

Articulate project goals and objectives clearly.

Help remote workers understand what they are working towards by setting the correct priorities and goals. In a virtual work setting, the importance of having clear project goals and objectives cannot be overstated.



These goals should be clearly communicated during meetings, regular check-ins, and performance reviews, too.

#5 COMMUNICATION

Keep communication lines open.

Communication is key when you have a completely remote workforce. You have to get really good at deliberate, structured communication, making sure the team is checking in daily. Set aside time for your one-on-ones with your remote employees. Also, encouraging team members to keep in touch with each other can be invaluable for additional points of communication.

Effective communication will help you build a team that is innovative, efficient, and results-driven.



#6 TRUST

Trust is key.

Recruiting remote workers you can trust can be a time-consuming process when you're trying to run a business.

And since not everyone can work in a remote environment, it's important to find people you can trust to complete their tasks, and stay productive when working under their own steam. Hire those people you know they will get stuff done.



#7 TEAM BUILDING

Develop a happy and engaged team.

Compensate for the fact that you are not bumping into each other by trying to create some social aspects with a remote team. Creating stronger bonds within your company can be as simple as using videos as a way to inspire your team, meeting in person periodically, having and maintaining non-work related communication, or anything that creates a feeling that teamworkers are not working separately but are truly part of a team.



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