# Table of Contents

Glossary ............................................................................................................................... 3

Remote Work Myths ............................................................................................................... 4

**Practices of Successful Remote Teams** ........................................................................ 5  
  - Commitment to Intentionality ....................................................................................... 5  
  - Commitment to Documentation ................................................................................... 7  
  - Fostering Autonomy .................................................................................................... 12  
  - Building Trust ............................................................................................................... 14

**Communication** ........................................................................................................... 15  
  - Mindful Communication ............................................................................................... 15  
  - Communication Architecture ....................................................................................... 16  
  - Staying Aligned ........................................................................................................... 17  
  - Remote Team Agreements & Protocols ......................................................................... 18  
  - Availability Protocols .................................................................................................. 19

**Goal Setting and Feedback** .......................................................................................... 20  
  - Giving Feedback: Rewards and Recognition ............................................................... 20  
  - Giving Feedback: Corrective Feedback ........................................................................ 21

Morale .................................................................................................................................. 22

Contact Us .......................................................................................................................... 23
Glossary

**Synchronous communication:**

happens when messages can only be exchanged in real time. It requires that the transmitter and receiver are present in the same time and/or space. Examples of synchronous communication are phone calls or video meetings.

**Asynchronous communication:**

happens when information can be exchanged independent of time. It doesn’t require the recipient’s immediate attention, allowing them to respond to the message at their convenience. Examples of asynchronous communication are emails, online forums, and collaborative documents.
Remote Work Myths

Myth: Companies Won’t Know What Remote Employees Are Doing

Being in the same location doesn’t guarantee productivity, and it doesn’t mean employees have clarity about what they should be working on. As we discuss in Key Channels and Tools for Remote Communication, the practices of clearly setting team goals and establishing more asynchronous channels of communication allow remote teams to thrive without constant managerial oversight. Companies can implement effective remote check-ins.

Myth: Teams Won’t Be Able to Collaborate Effectively

The nature (and, sometimes, timeframe) of collaboration shifts when people move outside an office. But it’s not necessarily ineffective. Remote collaboration requires rethinking how remote teams work together, and also designing practices to support more asynchronous progress while still helping team members trust and learn from each other.

Myth: Our Company Won’t Be Able to Maintain Our Culture

As we cover in Remote Company Culture, shared values—and the specific practices of communicating and promoting those values—largely shape a group’s culture whether group members are co-located or not. Values can and should be written down, shared liberally and regularly, and revisited as a company grows and changes. Like many other written, asynchronous practices, values—and the culture built from them—can survive, and even thrive, in remote settings.

Myth: There Will Be Fewer Distractions

Despite favoring remote work over an office environment for reducing distractions, many people who work remotely end up managing a whole set of surprising new distractions. Barking dogs, construction next door, family or friends wanting to visit, door-to-door salespeople—they can be just as frustrating or disruptive as colleagues tapping you on the shoulder, especially when you’re on a video call with a group of people.
Practices of Successful Remote Teams

Commitment to Intentionality

The need to communicate well is not unique to remote work, but it’s one of the key areas that can make or break remote work for an organization. Distributed teams must decide on and document how they will communicate; otherwise chaos and confusion will follow. An effective communication system requires:

Building an architecture.

In order to streamline communication, whether between ten early-stage employees or across dozens of global teams, companies need to set up guidelines in a communication architecture. These guidelines will help your team communicate requests on a sliding scale of urgency, lowering the risk of burnout and helping individuals to prioritize tasks.

- Communication Architecture (page 16)
- Company Handbook
- Remote Team Agreement (page 18)
- Code of Conduct

Aiming for asynchronous.

An important part of your communication architecture is setting expectations regarding synchronous and asynchronous communication—that is, knowing what needs to be discussed live, right now, and what doesn’t need immediate response. It’s a good idea for every company and team to develop communication policies to identify when, where, and how to engage in each type of communication, including guidelines for asynchronous or synchronous behavior, and use of related tools.
Actively tracking and managing time.

Time tracking provides remote teams with essential structure, visibility and transparency. It helps managers coordinate resources and it helps remote workers master their own performance. Knowing that the time they spend working productively is being tracked means that remote employees are more accountable to their output each day. Thus, they are far more likely to be motivated and produce greater results on a regular basis.

Here are three great tools to help you track and manage your time:

- **Clockify**: Free & Paid Plans
  - Features: Easily clock time, Create clients, teams, projects and tasks

- **Toggl**: Free & Paid Plans
  - Features: Easily clock time, Create clients, teams, projects and tasks

- **Harvest**: Free & Paid Plans
  - Features: Create clients, teams, projects and tasks, Exceptional reporting

Once you have found the right tool, it is crucial that you create a culture of time tracking and monitoring in your organization. Openly sharing timesheets can help increase your team’s motivation. It can also help individual team members benchmark their performance, efficiency, and productivity against all other members of a company. This can lead to your whole team actively improving their daily work habits.
Commitment to Documentation

In a remote environment, it’s essential to provide documentation of what it’s like to work at the company, including policies, processes, protocols, tools, values, and culture. In a traditional office environment, it’s easier to get context on something when you can just stop someone in the hall and ask, or watch others model the expected behavior. Remote offices have no choice. Important These processes need to be codified such that people can work asynchronously and autonomously and still track toward the same goals and foster the same values. Documentation about company and team processes should be:

Company handbook.

You might also hear this referred to as a “central source of truth,” “central repository” or “document cache,” and it’s the one place where anyone can go to get answers about how your company operates. Written communication can be augmented with other mediums but it’s important to establish written communication as the prioritized approach because it is persistent and asynchronous, and thus enables team members to learn and operate at their own pace.
Digital water cooler.

Some companies have developed digital versions of their own water cooler which allows everyone to get a sense of what else is happening across the company. Many companies use slack or some form of Q&A forum for this purpose.

Example Channels:

“Newbie Channel”

This establishes a clear place for questions that may be assumed as obvious knowledge. New and tenured employees alike can feel comfortable asking questions they may not have asked otherwise, for fear of embarrassment.

A “Today I learned (TIL)” Channel

#TIL, or Today I Learned, is a popular lingo for describing anything you just learned. It aggregates handy tech tips, trivia-ready facts, and pop-culture references, so we can all keep up with the times.

rob 8:42 AM

TIL git has an autocorrect you can switch on by `git config --global help.autocorrect`
https://nathanhoad.net/git-autocorrect-for-simple-typos

nathanhoad.net

Git: Autocorrect for simple typos - Nathan Hoad
If you find yourself making a lot of little mistakes when typing in Git commands then you might want to enable ‘autocorrect*’. (134kB)
Public org chart.

Another key element of ensuring transparency across teams is creating a public organization chart. The org chart can take many forms, but effective ones at the very least outline each person’s role, manager, and team, culminating in a visual representation of how they ladder up. By setting up a thoughtful naming system and a public org chart, people will be able to easily access and participate in conversations that they may not otherwise be directly privy to.

All-hands meetings.

Whether you’re a six-person startup or larger company in the hundreds or thousands of employees, regular, synchronous meetings of the entire organization are critical for large-scale goal alignment and important updates. The value of these meetings is in the conversation and connections that can happen between different team members. Questions, clarifications, and discussions enrich the experience. Your all-hands meeting is also another opportunity to allow for personal connection and help build social connections among distributed teams.

Tools like zoom, Skype, or Google Hangouts are great for conducting All-hands meetings.
Stand-ups.

Many teams have daily or weekly stand-ups where each person shares what they accomplished yesterday, what they’re doing today, and/or what they’re working toward for tomorrow. Stand-ups do not have to happen in live meetings.

Having a team stand-up channel in slack or a shared document where employees can add notes on what they’re working on today is a helpful form of visibility that encourages trust without the pressure to micromanage.

Use these prompts to generate stand-up structure:

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

The purpose of stand-ups isn’t necessarily to have a space for individuals to share their status, but rather to build a shared understanding of the state of the team. By exposing everyone to the same information, every team member has the opportunity to highlight risks they may anticipate to the success of any project, and to open the space for others to provide support or additional information.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wednesday, August 15th</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Slackbot</strong> 9:45 AM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reminder: Hey @editorial-team What’s on today?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lima Al-Azzeh</strong> 9:58 AM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Brainstorming new content based on keyword research / updated blog categories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Case study follow up with APAC team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Meeting to align on Q3 case study needs and process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Trina Robinson</strong> 11:08 AM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Art briefs for Alice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Check-in with Workplace team about employee magazine delivery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Calendar updates and Asana all afternoon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Koka Sexton</strong> 1:32 PM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• OKR for H2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Case study discussions with Lima and Biz Marketing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Discussing upcoming launches with Partner team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Demand Gen conversations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Team agreements.

We recommend that teams develop their own agreements that designate how they work together. Team agreements can describe procedures such as decision-making processes, how to get support, and the tools and communication methods that the team uses.

For team agreements to work, they require buy-in from everyone on the team, and as such should be written collectively, not mandated by management or leadership. Team agreements are also iterative—they are living documents that should be adjusted as the team learns how to work better together.

Ideally, team agreements codify the way the team works as specifically as possible. For example, if the team chooses to share status updates over email, then not only is this written down—clearly documenting the detail and frequency of updates—but a template for the email is also included in the agreement to make it easier for everyone to use the process.

Team agreements lead to better collaboration because they require an open discussion about how individuals want to work together. This discussion allows members to share their perspectives on good behaviors that should be encouraged, bad behaviors that shouldn’t, and personal working-style preferences that could easily become assumptions—which are breeding grounds for miscommunication and frustration if not discussed.

More on Remote Team Agreements on page 18
Fostering Autonomy

Successful remote teams enable individuals to be self-directed and have a certain amount of autonomy or control over what they do and how they accomplish their assigned or chosen tasks. In order to foster autonomy, teams need to be structured so that each person can work independently, while still contributing to the collective goal. Autonomy is not just a psychological structure, but should best penetrate into logistics, including employees having agency to build their own schedules—the ability to swap calendar tetris for some deep work. Companies and managers can do a number of things to help these employees thrive:

Establish your values.

When values are documented in the company handbook and permeate the communication architecture, employees are empowered to make decisions on a daily basis that are aligned with these values, and can be trusted without constant managerial oversight.

Set goals and KPIs.

It’s helpful to make clear what is expected of each team and employee. Goals and KPIs might be identified each period (monthly, quarterly, yearly) and layer up through the organization. Team goals can also be documented and made accessible by everyone, including other teams.

Clarify roles and responsibilities.

In a company that fosters healthy autonomy, each individual on the team should be able to articulate the “why” behind what they do, with a clear understanding of how their actions drive impact and integrate with the rest of the company. If roles and responsibilities are made transparent on a public org chart, employees are further empowered to reach out laterally for help or answers. Once individuals have the information needed to succeed, they’ll be able to effectively operate without rigid rules.
Provide context.

Employees need as much context as possible to make decisions on their own. This is maximized when people know exactly what you expect of them (deadlines, goals, et cetera); there is no need for anyone to be making assumptions. In addition to the company creating a robust documentation system, everyone can be directed to make sure they are asking questions, as well as both receiving and providing enough information when communicating asynchronously.

Reward impact.

Working in an office can train you to operate in ways that are hard to shake. One of those is the tendency to tie your impact to the hours that you spend in the office, regardless of your net output throughout the day. Successful remote teams recognize that this approach is not optimal, and reward outcomes and associated impact instead. Rewards within an organization (bonuses, promotions, public recognition) can be aligned with the behavior that the company is trying to shape. Reward a publications team, for example, for the amount of additional traffic they’re driving instead of the sheer number of articles they’re producing.
Building Trust

Trust is the cornerstone of any healthy relationship. It’s also one of the most important aspects of successful, high-performing teams. In a Harvard study of trust on professional teams, they found that high-trust teams report:

- **106%** more energy at work 🔥
- **50%** higher productivity 👷
- **76%** more engagement 🗣
- **29%** more satisfaction with their lives 😌

Building trust in a remote environment can be more difficult, because trust typically arises gradually over time through our direct interactions with other people. Without traditional in-office touchpoints, it’s tempting for managers to want to opt for more visibility into their team’s productivity, whether that takes shape as a time-tracking app, website monitoring, ad-hoc requests for status updates, or other forms of micromanaging. But this makes it harder for colleagues to form trustworthy bonds with each other; as a corollary, it’s easier for trust to break down in remote teams.

Just as it’s best to intentionally design and continually supported communication in a remote environment, it’s also important to do the same with trust-building activities. This includes:

- Establishing “On Track” as the default status for everyone on the team.
- Publicly recognizing and rewarding people’s efforts and successes
- Supporting the psychological safety of remote workers
- Getting everyone together every once in a while

A high-trust remote culture will not build itself. Investment in building relationships across wifi connections requires each individual to learn how to communicate effectively digitally, but also needs time allocated to non-transactional activities, like co-working sessions or yearly retreats. Additionally, it’s important to make sure you’re rewarding people for embracing company values, and to ruthlessly hire or fire those that compromise that, regardless of how “good” their work is.
Mindful Communication

Consider the following versions of feedback on a proposal:

This is a terrible idea.

This is a terrible idea!

This is a terrible idea 😊

You can try to infer meaning from them, but ultimately, they’re all ambiguous statements. If one of those statements came from your boss, you may even stop sharing ideas with them because their feedback wasn’t actionable and was even potentially hurtful. And, unless you’re in an environment of high trust, you may take that criticism as a threat to your psychological safety.

Now, evaluate this response instead:

Have you considered any alternatives?

This statement communicates that you’re not sold on the proposal, while avoiding passing judgement on whether the idea is bad or not. This aligns with the goal of helping your team make the right decision. The idea may indeed be a bad one, but saying so in a blunt way can be hurtful, out of line, or cause defensiveness. When it comes to communication, sometimes you have to choose between being effective or being right.

The underlying principle of mindful communication is empathy. By thinking about and understanding what others are thinking and feeling, you’re better able to assess how your words will be received and formulate communication that is positive, helpful, and constructive (even if it contains disagreement or criticism).
Communication Architecture

A communication architecture is a company’s documented set of practices, tools, and associated processes for how and when people communicate. It describes all the types of communication—such as email, meetings, phone calls, online chat—and the tools and protocols for using each one. The architecture guides each employee’s decision-making process as they communicate with other people at the company.

The concept of a communication architecture might sound imposing, but it’s largely the documented outcome of thinking through how your team wants to communicate, plus plenty of trial and error to learn what works and what doesn’t. It can be as simple as a set of guidelines written down in your handbook.
**Staying Aligned**

When co-workers or managers aren’t readily available, it may take more time to get help from others. To mitigate this, remote teams and workers need to develop practices that bridge information pockets.

*Important* An information pocket occurs when individual members of the same team have access to differing levels of information. Individuals could have access to more or less information depending on social relationships with peers or managers, their time zone overlap, their ability to ask for help, or whether they come to an office or not. Access to the outcome of decisions, or how to do administrative tasks like getting expenses approved, are examples of information that could form in pockets if it’s not broadcasted adequately. Confidential information, or other information that should be shared on a need-to-know basis, doesn’t count as information pockets.

Information pockets can lead to misalignment or slower progress when it comes to getting remote work done. To prevent these from developing, teams can invest in documentation and knowledge caches that keep individuals informed, and appropriate mechanisms for keeping each other updated asynchronously. Individual employees also have increased responsibility on their part to stay autonomously aligned, informed, and unblocked.

Organizations that embrace distributed work can help mitigate information pockets by using the following techniques:

1. **Build a handbook**
2. **Provide regular and predictable updates**
3. **Facilitate asynchronous Q&A**
4. **Individual responsibilities for alignment**
Remote Team Agreements & Protocols

Team agreements can include positive behavior the team wants to encourage, and also outline negative behaviors. They must also explicitly establish how the team will handle violations and hold each other accountable.

Some additional questions that can help you add detail to your team agreements are:

- How often do we plan or revise our plan? Where do we document it, and who is responsible for maintaining it? Who is responsible for planning?
- What is our meeting etiquette? When is it necessary to meet? Can I leave a meeting if I don’t find it valuable? Where are notes kept? Do we record meetings?
- Where do we communicate? How should we use the different tools that we have at our disposal? How should we not use tools?
- How do we keep each other informed on status? How do we inform others? Are we “on track” by default, or do we check in daily? How do we communicate if we’re off track? What is the threshold to communicate the risk that a task or project can’t be completed in time?
- How available do we need to be on chat? How do we communicate when we’re doing focused work and shouldn’t be interrupted?
- Do we have core hours? Do we overlap? If we don’t have time overlap, how do we inform others about progress and issues, and potentially “hand off” work?
- How do we communicate vacation, sick days, or personal emergencies?
- How do we report team or company emergencies? How can we be contacted in case of emergencies? Is there someone on call?
- How do we provide feedback to each other? How should we signal to each other that we’re breaking an agreement? What do we do if someone is consistently breaching our agreements?

It’s important that your first team agreement be achievable, and refined over time as the team learns what works well and what doesn’t. This requires regularly revisiting and updating team agreements, and being sure to get feedback on them as new members are added to the team.
**Availability Protocols**

Availability protocols are a part of a team agreement that clarify how people communicate what times they are present and available to respond in communication tools like email, chat, and calendaring apps.

If a team is skilled at working asynchronously, presence becomes secondary to getting work done. When everyone defaults to “on track” and has thorough documentation available about best practices, they shouldn’t need to interrupt anyone to get things done. But sometimes, someone on the team will be stuck without the information they need, or something may be truly urgent. In those cases, it helps to know who is available when, the best ways to contact them, and what to do in the case of emergency.

**Interruptions or Support Availability**

Remote teams need to be more explicit about conveying availability, because everyone can’t just look over a wall or into a room to see if someone is in deep focus mode or a meeting.

Examples:

- **Google Calendar** allows people to define working hours and set predetermined appointment blocks.

- Chats allow people to set “away” or “available” statuses, but these methods can lead to leaning on presence too much by setting the expectation that when you’re “available” you’re de facto interruptible. Tying your availability to chat reduces your ability to do asynchronous work because the presence indicator means you’re “at work” and people may send chat messages your way instead of more asynchronous methods like email or a message in the project management tool that someone can respond to when they have time.

- Some teams combat presumed availability in chat apps like **Slack** by having an agreed-upon protocol, such as using a specific emoji paired with the term “Focus mode” when they are technically “available” but do not want to be interrupted.

**Status:** **Focus Mode 🧘‍♂️**
Goal Setting and Feedback

In a remote team, you cannot use presence as a proxy for contributions—this is a good thing. Not having a physical office to go to in order to prove you are “at work” means that a remote workplace skews itself to being outcomes-based: is someone regularly producing high quality work in reasonable time constraints? Here, you’ll benefit from having clear job descriptions and levels or an outline for what’s expected at each level of performance.

Giving Feedback: Rewards and Recognition

A second benefit of recognition being given publicly is that it makes clear what types of behavior your company rewards. This helps to build the type of culture that you want. It’s more effective to show people exactly what success looks like, than to criticize what they do wrong. Public recognition is also an excellent tool for improving the performance of those who aren’t high achievers yet. In a remote team, there are many fewer opportunities to directly observe co-workers’ work, and so drawing specific attention to excellent work gives everyone a chance to learn and improve.

👋 High Five!

As a remote manager, you have a number of options for recognizing remote employees:

- Company email threads to appreciate good work
- Sharing messages in public chat rooms. One specific idea is a “High Five” channel in Slack, where anyone can give someone else a remote high five—an emoji, GIF, or written comment—for something great or noteworthy that they did.
- Having a dedicated written space for recognition or gratitude.
- Use software services similar to performance review software for ongoing, positive praise.
- Create regular time for celebrating ‘wins’ in team or all-hands meetings.
Giving Feedback: Corrective Feedback

Corrective feedback should be given privately. There’s nothing to be gained from public humiliation—it will only cause the manager to lose the trust of the team, and can create intense feelings of discomfort and isolation in everyone present.

Important The exception here is correcting harmful public behavior, like a racist slur or other violation of a code of conduct. This is not performance feedback; this is maintaining an inclusive culture. If the harm occurred in a public space (for example, a team meeting or company chat), the priority is to show the rest of the team that such actions are not acceptable and won’t go unchallenged. This means immediately and publicly correcting the harm, saying, “We don’t use that kind of language here,” then following up privately to go deeper and make sure the offending party understands what was wrong with their language or action.

In serious cases of performance feedback, where there may be an overall mismatch between role contributions and expectations, it becomes important to document this both for the company and with your direct report to make sure they understand the seriousness of the situation. Important Here, sending follow-up ‘recap’ emails after feedback discussions can be helpful, so that the feedback, the discussion, and agreed upon plans to improve, are in writing and shared between the employee and manager. It also gives the employee a chance to respond if they feel differently about the situation, if they feel the conversation mischaracterized them, or if they felt their comments were taken out of context.

This can be done over email or chat message, as long as it’s in writing in a more official place where both people can see it. Important Doing this creates documentation that could be needed if the situation continues to worsen; and also creates a clear, explicit message for the employee. In addition to emails or similar, it’s best to keep meeting notes, summaries of plans, and other relevant feedback in a folder online where it can be accessed by HR or another manager if needed. Wrongful dismissal is always a concern, so keeping a paper trail is particularly important.
Morale

Building community and ensuring that remote workers have the context to make decisions about their own work as much as possible are vital to reducing the risk of burnout and keeping morale high.

What you can do:

1. Ensure that workers are able to unplug and set boundaries. You can recommend that people turn off at the end of their day (local time), and not check messages during dinner because a colleague just came online.

2. Setting clear, achievable goals. Ensure that they are realistic and, to the extent possible, make processes predictable, so that employees can commit to sustaining a meaningful life outside of work.

3. Taking vacation days. A minimum vacation policy is especially helpful here, to encourage workers to fully recharge and reconnect with the joys that make life meaningful. Model this as a leader by taking vacation yourself, and not checking in while you are away.

4. Having a documented team agreement. This helps ensure people don’t feel required to respond to messages at all hours of the day and night and that they have a predictable cadence of communication they can rely on.

5. Practicing gratitude. Talking about things you are thankful for actively fights burnout. Gratitude helps teams pause and recognize how important small acts of kindness are – even when they are not physically in the same building.
Contact Us

Due to COVID-19 and the announcement of Order No. 2020-02 – STAY AT HOME/WORK FROM HOME ORDER, we are helping companies:

1. Setup a Communication Architecture
2. Setup Remote Work Tools
3. Setup Communication Protocols
4. Create Company Handbooks
5. Create Remote Team Agreements
6. Create a Remote Work Code of Conduct

Please contact us at:

Blue Logic Labs

hello@bluelogiclabs.com
(808) 829-0183

1050 Queen St., Ste. #100
Honolulu, HI 96816