



The Science of Managing Remote Employees

Keep mobile and telework employees engaged and productive by focusing on **Connection** (building the right bonds with remote employees), **Alignment** (ensuring remote employees are moving in the same direction), **Accountability** (making sure the work gets done) and **Communication** (battling message degradation and other challenges with frequent and focused communications). (Take the [quiz](#) to see if you're suited to remote work.)

Extroverts are best for remote work (not introverts as most people believe). Natural connectors, extroverts easily build relationships. People prone to passive aggressive behavior and/or rumination don't tend to make good remote employees. [Learn why you're 87% more likely to love your job if you work from home.](#) Remote employees who love their jobs think in tasks or gigs (and not hours logged), prefer tough feedback that goes right to the point, and prefer not to be constrained by a rigid set of rules.

The most successful remote leaders share 6 key characteristics. Develop these in yourself (learn more [here](#)):

1. **Indefatigable:** You are tireless and embrace a schedule that may span time zones.
1. **Company Evangelist:** Your positive company message is contagious and transmits across the distance.
2. **Encouraging:** You keep remote employees solutions-focused with your clear and positive messaging.
3. **Approachable:** Remote employees feel safe coming to you with problems and critical information.
4. **Constructive:** Your solutions-focused feedback eliminates blame.
5. **Leadership 2.0:** You encourage frequent, two-way exchanges of authentic communication that makes remote interaction more like face-to-face.

CONNECTION: Make conversations purposeful. Stop asking: "How's it going today?" (**phatic communication**) Deepen communication with direct questions that encourage two-way flow of information: "What's getting in your way", "What roadblocks are you facing right now?" "What's stopping you?" "What's holding you back?" and "What's frustrating you?" Hold **frequent** and **authentic** conversation via face-to-face contact (using virtual technology) at least once a week. Identify your preferred communication style with this [quiz](#).

Alleviate **fears of "out of sight, out of mind"** ([learn more about remote employee fears here](#)) and ID potential roadblocks with monthly **four-part conversations** (best done via video conferencing like Skype) that ask remote employees: **What would you like to get better at this month?** (helps identify and set goals), **What's something that you're better at now than you were last month?** (helps employees realize personal achievements that might otherwise get missed), **What was your professional highpoint this month?** (highpoints reinforce the positive) and **What was your professional low point this month?** (low points identify weaknesses and help with early detection of problems).

Teach with positive reinforcement (it's different from feel-good praise). Be specific about performance you want to see more of: "Hey, Bob, the way you got that report done ahead of schedule means a lot to me and the customer and the extra data analyses were really creative," instead of "Great job on that report," gives Bob two specific, repeatable behaviors that tell him how to achieve similar high performance again. **Celebrate employee successes:** Recognizing employee success promotes productivity and teaches performance expectations. Be

creative. Include remote employees when sharing employee stories, have your boss send congratulatory email (reinforces you are advocating for remote employee's visibility), post employee successes on the team website, host teleconference celebrations (visual makes a difference), etc.

ALIGNMENT: Attenuation kills alignment. Keep messages short and focused. **Keep conference calls focused and purposeful** (no more than 3 to 4 objectives per meeting). **Statement of Achievement:** "As a result of this meeting, we will have accomplished ____." If you can't fill in the blank, don't meet. (Statement of Achievement can **cut up to 17 minutes** from your meeting, learn more [here](#).) **Minimize** the decline of employee attention (**zoning out**) by **keeping calls participatory** and by **asking questions** like: "How would you answer someone who asked about the other ideas we considered but didn't choose?" or "If you could create a solution from scratch, would this be it?" and "Are there any circumstances under which our current decision won't work?" **Increase accountability** by concluding every meeting with a quick **roundtable response** to: "What are you personally going to achieve and by when?" Follow up in writing with a **Decision Grid** that documents accountability.

Have everyone go remote for a **blended meeting** (co-located and remote employees) to reinforce the meeting challenges remote folks face. **No Homework Teams** (once a month, learn more [here](#)) allow employees to work collaboratively and build team connection. [Google Docs](#) is just one free way to get everyone working on the same page at the same time. **Daily Huddles** help keep remote teams aligned, focused and emotionally connected. Everyone gets one minute to review top priorities (hold roadblock solving conversations in a different meeting). Use virtual forums to maintain transparency and to keep team members connected.

ACCOUNTABILITY: Establish autonomy to increase accountability with the 5 Levels of Freedom:

1. Assess the situation; report all facts; I'll decide.
2. Assess the situation; give me a proposal; don't take action until I authorize.
3. Assess the situation; give me a proposal; do it unless I say "No."
4. Take action; let me know what you did.
5. Take action; no further communication is necessary.

Hyper-Discrete Projects: Give remote employees the feeling of autonomy and control they want by breaking big projects into smaller pieces that each requires closure (instead of big projects with lots of checkpoints).

Give detailed work assignments that explain the "Why?" of work: Include factors like: end point date, quantity, quality, color, boundaries, budget, behaviors, etc. and ask: "Are there any obstacles that would prevent you from accomplishing this?" Follow up in writing.

COMMUNICATION: Know your communication strengths & combat remote communication limitations. Face-to-face communication allows for tone of voice, two-way interaction, body language and the opportunity to quickly "undo" mistakes or misunderstandings. Video conferencing and phone only deliver tone and two-way interaction. Voice mail offers tone of voice and IM two-way interaction. Email is the least desirable form of communication and presents the greatest risk of message misinterpretation (make subject lines crystal clear). Avoid emotional language (can't, not, impossible) that may incite the wrong reaction from remote employees.

Summary: Establish bonds that create connection with remote employees. With this foundation set, alignment, accountability and communication can be established. You don't have to do it all at once. It only takes 20 minutes to establish and share some basic communication rules so everyone is on the same page. Pick one technique from today's program and just get started. Make emails easily searchable by subject line.

Tip: [Harvest](#), Paymo and [Timecamp](#) are good tools for tracking remote employees' work. If you don't know how to manage and/or track a remote employee, just ask: "Can you help me figure out the best way to evaluate your performance?" Come up with solutions together.

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