

CHAPTER 3:

# How We Work

## Remotely

37signals is a fully distributed company. Our team works from all over the world, across 5 continents. We don't care where employees choose to live and work, just that they're here to do great work on exceptional products, alongside a world-class team. We've been remote since we started, and our founders literally wrote the book on the subject.

You can work from anywhere, but please be sure to inform your People Ops team when you move – especially across state or country borders. It may affect your or the company's tax situation.



## Cycles

We work in 6-week cycles at 37signals. This fixed cadence serves to give us an internal sense of urgency, to keep projects from ballooning, and to provide us with a regular interval to make decisions about what we're working on.

Our cycle structure is particularly important for the product teams, since they approach feature and product development with scope and budget in mind up front. For more on this, all employees are encouraged to read Shape Up.

All teams operate on the same 6-week cadence.

## Cooldown

In between each cycle, we spend two weeks cooling down. That's when product teams deal with bugs, when everyone writes up what they've worked on, and when teams decide what to tackle next. Sometimes big batch projects extend into cool down, but we try to avoid that.

## Communication

Since we work asynchronously and remotely, it's important to radiate information about what we're working on. We have 4 chief mechanisms for doing that.

- *What did you work on today?* You'll be asked this question every afternoon, and you're required to answer at least twice a week. You should describe what you're working on and give some context about why you're working on it or why it's important.
- *What will you be working on this week?* You'll be asked this question every Monday morning, and you're required to answer every week.

Daily and weekly check-ins are subdivided by department so you're only subscribed to your team's answers. You're of course free to subscribe to other team check-ins, but you're not obligated to do so if you find it too noisy.

- Every team submits a *Kickoff* for the upcoming cycle, and they're due the second Friday of the cooldown period. Teams use their kickoff to summarize the work they have scheduled for the upcoming cycle.
- *Heartbeats* are required of every team, and they're due on the first Friday of the cooldown period. Teams use their heartbeat to summarize and celebrate the work they completed during the previous cycle, and the work described in the cycle heartbeat should line up (more or less) with the work you scheduled in the cycle kickoff.

These 4 mechanisms work together to free individuals and teams to run their days and cycles with confidence and independence. We have six opportunities per year to make big decisions about what to work on, and the rest of the time should chiefly be spent carrying out those short-term plans. By having clear expectations for communication, it's easier for everyone to build trust in where we're going and why.

Heartbeats and Kickoffs are assigned to team leads well in advance of every cycle. Heartbeats, kickoffs, and automatic check-in answers can all be found in the What Works project for the current year.

## Asynchronously

Most of the work you do at 37signals shouldn't require you to be in constant communication throughout the entire day with someone.

You should collaborate as though most things you ask of others will get an answer eventually, but not necessarily right this second. Your first choice of action should be to post a message, a todo, or a document about what you need to explain or need to know. Then others can read it on their schedule, when the natural lulls of the day allow it, rather than being interrupted right in their peak flow time.

Of course there will be times when you do need to tightly collaborate with someone in real time, but those cases should be infrequent. We have pings, video calls, screen-sharing, or even in-person collaboration for when async isn't efficient.

## With managers of one

We rely on everyone at 37signals to do a lot of self-management. People who do this well are managers of one, and we expect everyone to embody this principle.

That means setting your own direction when one isn't given; and determining what needs to be done, and doing it, without waiting for someone to tell you to. A manager of one will spend their time well when left to their own devices. There's always more work to be done, always more initiatives to kick off, and always more improvement to be had.

## Balanced

We limit ourselves to a 40-hour (32-hour in the summer) work week. Keeping our hours at work limited forces us to prioritize the work that really matters. A healthy amount of sleep and a rich and rewarding life outside of work should not be squandered for a few more hours at work.

There are occasions when teams or individuals need to work off-hours for on-call, maintenance, or emergencies. This time should not be in addition to your normal working hours. Use your discretion to take time off to make up for the additional hours you put in during the week.