

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO

# Remote Work

*Lessons from a team of over 200 remote workers*

By Wade Foster and the Zapier Team



# The Ultimate Guide to Remote Work

How to Grow, Manage, and Work with Remote Teams

Zapier

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*Working remotely and running a remote team seems like black magic to many. Yet at Zapier, we've been working remotely since our founding in October of 2011. This book shares everything we've learned about running a remote team—our successes and our failures.*

*Beginning as a series of posts on the Zapier blog, this book is an ongoing work about our experiences as a remote team, with much of the book written by Zapier CEO Wade Foster along with chapters from our team members and other remote employees. We'll update it periodically so you can learn how our thinking and processes change as we've grown from three to 200+ people and beyond, and we'll keep the older versions of each chapter archived so you can learn with us over time.*

## ***Who Is This Guide For?***

*Whether you currently work in or run a remote team, or you hope to work in or run a remote team in the future, this book will have nuggets of wisdom that you can apply to your current situation.*

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*Written by Wade Foster, with content from Danny Schreiber, Matthew Guay, Melanie Pinola, Bethany Hills, Alison Groves, Jeremy DuVall, and Belle Cooper. Edited by Danny Schreiber, Matthew Guay, and Melanie Pinola. Last updated on March 30, 2019.*

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# Chapter 1: How to Run a Remote Team



*Since October 2011, Zapier has grown to over 200 employees. You can read previous versions of this chapter written when [our team size was 20](#) and [our team size was just 6 people](#), to get a feel for how our remote team has scaled.*

Many companies, such as Automattic, Buffer, and GitLab, are successful as [100% remote teams](#). Yet it's still not a common company structure and, unfortunately, information about how to set up remote work so that you and your team can be successful is still scarce. We want to share what we've learned so far.

Zapier has always run as a remote team. We've grown from three founders to over 200 people working remotely in 20 countries. We've gotten a lot of questions about how we make it work, so this chapter will explain that.

Now, if you want to debate what's best—remote work or co-located work—this

chapter isn't for you. But, if you want some ideas on how one team has set up their team to be successful at remote work then stick around. *This chapter is for you.*

## Our Journey

From day one, Zapier has always been a distributed team. Even though I and my co-founders Bryan and Mike lived in the same city, we had different schedules and were bootstrapping Zapier on the side of our day jobs and school. We worked on Zapier in every spare moment we each had, but those moments didn't magically line up at the same time where we could work in the same room, so by necessity we became a remote team.

In June of 2012, we were accepted into Y Combinator and moved into a shared apartment in Mountain View, California. The next three months were the only period in our company's history where everyone has been in the same city at the same time.

In August of 2012, Mike moved back to Missouri while his girlfriend (now wife) was graduating law school, and in October of 2012, we started hiring. And since we were already a distributed team, it made sense to keep moving that way since we could hire people we knew were awesome, but just didn't live in the places we lived.

Our first hire was [Micah Bennett](#), Zapier's head of support who lives in Chicago. Between October 2012 and July 2014, we added eight more people to the team, with members living in Missouri, Nebraska, Pennsylvania, Florida, and Tennessee. And then we had our first international hires in August 2014, with writer [Matthew Guay](#) based in Bangkok, Thailand and full-stack engineer [Rob Golding](#) in Nottingham, UK.

Over the years, we've learned a few things about building and managing a remote team. There are others with more experience at this than us and with larger teams (Automattic, for example, has over 850 employees in over 60 countries). Our story and companies like these have proven that it's possible to scale even when you're fully remote. Whether you're a small team or a large one, if you want to dip your toes into remote work, consider this your crash course.

## 3 Ingredients of a Successful Remote Work Setup

It's highly unlikely you could pluck any random set of people, at any random moment in history, dispersed around the globe, put them together, and expect them to build something amazing.

We've found there are three important ingredients to making remote work, well, work: **Team**, **Tools**, and **Process**.

### Team

By far, the most important ingredient is the team. Not everyone can work well in a remote environment. Not everyone can manage a remote team (though I suspect with a bit of time and learning, a lot of managers could figure out how to make it work). Therefore, it's important to assemble a team that's capable of executing in a remote environment. Here's what has made the best remote workers for us:

#### 1. Hire Doers

Doers will get stuff done even if they are working from a secluded island. You don't have to give doers tasks to know that something will get done. You'll still have to provide direction and guidance around the most important things to be executed, but in the absence of that, a doer will make something happen. One of Zapier's [core values](#) is "default to action"—teammates who embody that value get work done.

#### 2. Hire people you can trust

Remote work stops working when you can't trust the person on the other end of the line. If you continually find yourself worrying what someone is doing, then you are spending brain cycles focusing on something other than the product or customers. Trust is key.

#### 3. Trust the people you hire

The flip side of this is you also need to exhibit trust with the people you hire. As a manager, you need to learn to manage by expectations rather than by "butts in seat," so make sure you can show trust in those you hire.

#### **4. Hire people who can write**

In a co-located office, a lot of information is shared in person. In a remote situation, almost everything is shared via written communication. Communication is one of the most important parts of remote team. Therefore, good writers are critical to a team's success.

#### **5. Hire people who are ok without a social workplace**

It'll be important to try to create some social aspects with a remote team. But the truth is that remote workplaces are usually less social than co-located ones. People on remote teams need to be ok with that and have their own social support system. And the best remote workers will thrive in this type of environment. That said, as you grow you might find multiple people in cities and some social environment will emerge. For example, we currently have several people in Austin and Portland who routinely meet in person for co-working and other social events.

## **Software/Tools**

In a co-located facility, you can always round up the team for an all-hands meeting to steer everyone on track. In a remote team, you'll need the right tools to make sure everyone stays on the same page and can continue to execute without a physical person standing next to them.

Here are some tools we've found handy as a rapidly growing team. While the exact tools aren't super important, you likely will need a tool in certain categories like group chat and video conferencing to make remote successful. These tools have changed quite a bit over the years. (Check out previous versions of this post to see what's changed.)

### **1. Slack**

The screenshot shows a Slack interface. At the top left is the channel name '#marketing'. To the right is a search bar and other navigation icons. The main area displays messages from two users, jess and jstych. jess sent a message at 3:10 PM saying 'w00t!'. jstych responded at 3:16 PM with 'nice work team!', followed by a Giphy link for a 'high five'. A thumbnail image from the Giphy shows a man and a woman giving each other a high-five in an office setting. The timestamp for this message is 3:36 PM.

jstych 3:36 PM

### Chilling in Slack

Slack is our virtual office. If you're in Slack then you're at work. A group chat room like Slack is also great at creating camaraderie.

Depending on your team size, you'll want to make use of channels in Slack as well. At a certain size, it can start to get noisy, so it makes sense to section off rooms into things like "water cooler", "engineering", "marketing", etc. I would hold off on this as long as possible, though, when you're a small team.

At around 10 people, we started creating multiple channels. We now have over 100 channels. Active ones include functional channels like #marketing, #support, and #hacking, along with project-specific channels like #team-growth, and social channels like #fun-cooking. Prepending Slack channels with words like "fun-" or "feed-" help organize and communicate to new teammates what can quickly become an unruly list of channels in Slack.

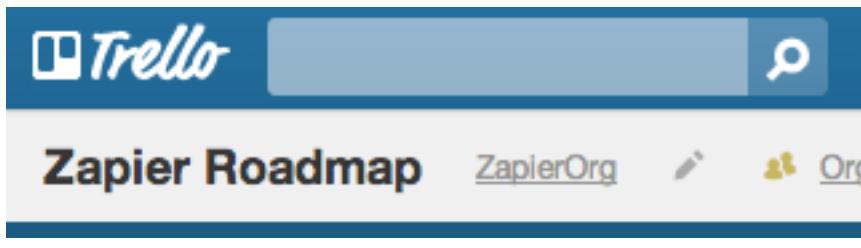
## 2. Async

The screenshot shows a feed from Zapier's internal communication tool. At the top, there's a pinned post by Wade about 'The Zapier Guide to Acing Async'. Below it is another pinned post by Wade about 'Refreshing the Zapier Company Values'. There's also a section for 'Friday Updates' with 5 items. Further down, there's a post for 'Wednesday' featuring a support meeting minutes from September 19, 2017.

### Zapier Using Async

Async is an internal tool we built. It's sort of like a blog meets reddit. This is the place where we surface important conversations that might get lost in the fast-paced Slack. It replaces internal email and acts as a great archive for anyone on the team to reference old discussions and keep up with company updates. Slack is where we talk about work, while Async is where we share work with the rest of the team.

### 3. Trello



### Zapier Roadmap

Trello acts as our default roadmap. Anytime we have something we'd like to do, we add it to a to-do list in Trello. In most situations, you'll find yourself creating way too many cards trying to do too many things. The trick we use to avoid getting card overload in Trello is each card needs to have a detailed description of what the feature is, why it's important, and what the results of a successful implementation of this feature should look like.

We also use Trello boards for keeping track of our marketing campaigns, support documentation, and really any project that needs to get done.

This works great for remote teams, because if anyone in the company is looking for something to do, they can just go pick a card off the Trello board and know that it's going to be a positive feature for the product/company.

We love Trello, but there are also other [great project management apps](#) that you might use too. And as we've grown, certain teams have found they prefer certain tools to Trello for managing projects or processes. We haven't felt the need to standardize, so give teams the opportunity to use the tools they feel most productive with.

#### **4. GitHub**

We use Issues and pull requests for specific purposes at Zapier. Much like how [GitHub uses GitHub to build GitHub](#), we use GitHub to build Zapier. GitHub houses all code related project management. Pull Requests are how we ship feature, while issues are reserved for bugs only. Feature requests and planning happen in Trello, a planning doc, or another tool like Airtable.

#### **5. 1Password**

Since we have logins to hundreds of services—those we use as a company or integrate with as part of our service, it's helpful for anyone who walks into the company to be able to access any of them without having to fire off an instant message or wait for an email reply. With 1Password, any teammate can log in to any of the services we use or integrate with without having to know the login credentials.

#### **6. Google Docs & Quip**

For almost any other documentation, Google Docs is great. We share spreadsheets for ad hoc analysis of key metrics. We share spreadsheets with team info and other vital info that might be used later. We share documents for contracts and records. Anything that might get used multiple times should be documented, and Google Docs is an easy, shared environment to make that happen. All you need is a Google account (or, in a company setting, a Google Apps account.)

Google Docs is not ideal for organization and collaboration, though. We've found Quip great for our internal knowledgebase. Any documentation that needs to teach someone how to do something—such as how to do QA testing

or format a post for the blog—gets added to a Quip doc and folder so others can quickly access the collective brain of Zapier.

## 7. Zoom

We've tried a bunch of video conferencing tools over the years, from Google Hangouts and Skype to GoToMeeting. As we've grown, we've found Zoom to be the most reliable and clear for large group video calls. We have a weekly all-hands meeting in Zoom that's essential for putting faces behind the names of our many teammates and gives us all a chance to just hang out for a bit as a company, virtually.

## 8. HelloSign

Every now and then, you and your employees might need to sign something. Spare yourself the hassle of printing out the document, signing it, scanning it back onto your machine, and sharing the document with the next person that signs and instead just use HelloSign. It'll make your head hurt a lot less.

## 9. Help Scout

Everyone at Zapier has a weekly customer support shift, because we believe this “all hands support” enhances our customers’ experience and our own product understanding—we experience Zapier the product as our customers do. Help Scout is the tool we use to support our customers day in and day out. Its reporting features help us find ways we can be more efficient in our ticket responses, tags help us categorize conversations, and integrations (of course) with other apps make sure we can keep on top of support requests in our favorite communication tools.

# Processes

The third ingredient in a powerful remote team is process. I know most people don't like to think about process, and process might feel boring and rigid. But if you think of process as “how we work,” it starts to feel more powerful.

Good processes let you get work done in the absence of all else. It provides structure and direction for getting things done.

That doesn't mean processes should be rigid, unchanging, or pointless, though. Process, at a small company, is more about providing a feedback loop so

that you can measure progress for both the company and the people in the company.

Here are a few of the processes we use to run Zapier. Or as I like to call them: *How We Work*.

## 1. Everyone does support

The customer is our lifeblood. We strive everyday to solve our customers' problems and help make their job just a little bit easier. When everyone on the team does support, everyone gets to hear the voice of the customer.

Also, the people who build the product also end up supporting the product. If a customer is angry about a bug, then the person who introduced said bug is going to hear about it and fix it right away.

*[Read more about how we do support here.](#)*

## 2. A culture of shipping

As we've grown, maintaining a culture of shipping has been crucial. The best way we've found to do this is to keep product teams small. To keep the focus on shipping, we divide up into small teams—usually 3 to 8 people with differing skill sets. The base roles are a PM, an engineer, and a designer.

These teams have a singular mission, for example, improve onboarding. They then have full autonomy to set their own roadmap to make this happen. With that autonomy, they also hold responsibility for the success of their initiatives. This works well, since small teams can move and ship fast and also appreciate the autonomy and responsibility for their own projects.

## 3. Weekly Hangouts

Every Thursday morning or afternoon (rotating every week to accomodate people in different time zones), we get together for lightning talks, demos, and/or interviews. With over 200 people in seven major departments and even more smaller teams, it's hard to see everyone on a weekly basis. These hangouts are a chance to say "hi!" to folks you may not normally see.

These hangouts are also a good chance to learn something new. Each week, someone inside the team does a lightning talk or demo on something interesting. We've had folks share their latest project, new teammates share fun facts about themselves and their backgrounds, and leadership members conduct well-being workshops through these hangouts.

Many teams do these weekly meetings as All-Hands Meetings. In a remote team that's across many timezones, this becomes an exclusionary event. As a result, this meeting becomes more about camaraderie and showing off the work of the company. We record these so folks who can't attend are able to catch up. But we're careful to avoid core strategic topics which typically are discussed in Slack, Async, or a Zoom call that can make sure to incorporate all the relevant teammates for that decision.

#### **4. Pair Buddies**

As we've grown, it can be harder to know all your teammates. One easy way to mitigate that is to have folks on the team get paired up with one other teammate or two at random each week for a short pair call. We use [Donut](#) in Slack for this to chat about life, work, or whatever random thing seems interesting. Sometimes cool new product features come out of these, other times it's just good fun. Regardless, it helps everyone better know their teammates.

#### **5. Weekly One-on-Ones**

In every job I ever had (even co-located ones), there wasn't enough feedback between me and my supervisor. So at Zapier, we set up a recurring weekly event with each team member I manage where we both jump on Zoom to chat about how work is going. These one-on-ones follow roughly the format outlined by the [Manager Tool's](#) podcast.

We use a feedback tool called [Small Improvements](#) to run our 1:1 sessions.

In the past, I did one-on-ones with everyone. However, around 15 people, this got to be too hard to keep up with everyone on a meaningful level. At 15, I split my focus on the support and marketing team while Bryan and Mike focus on the engineering and product teams respectively. As we've scaled, we've built a more traditional management structure. So I have people in roles that report to me, including: CTO, CPO, CFO, CMO, Chief Growth Officer, Platform Lead, VP of Support, and VP of Engineering. These people all have teams that report to them as well. This more formal hierarchy has helped keep everyone on the team feel more engaged with the company because they have a manager that can help make sure to align their own career interests with the strategic goals of the company.

#### **6. A culture of accountability**

People often ask “how do you know if employees are actually working?” Any easy way we know is with Friday updates. Each Friday, every person on the team posts an update to Async about what they shipped that week and what they are working on for the next week.

This makes it easy to keep in the loop on projects and also holds everyone at Zapier accountable to everyone else to do their part.

## 7. Building culture in person



The Zapier team in New Orleans

In person interaction is valuable for any team. There is definitely something unique that happens when teammates can work on something in person—tap someone on the shoulder and point to your screen to go over something, or share downtime with [fun games](#) and casual banter. So we strive to bring the team together two times a year somewhere cool.

We've visited Florida, Washington, Colorado, Alabama, Utah, Texas, Vancouver, Toronto, and New Orleans on company retreats.

In addition to the all-company get togethers, departments hold their own retreats and small groups of us might get together on an ad hoc basis throughout the year to coordinate the start of a major project or feature. Usually this is just one person jumping on a flight to visit another person or, if more than a couple of staff members live in close proximity (we have many teammates in Austin and Portland, for example), they'll have impromptu co-working sessions.

If this seems expensive, that's because it is. But the great part is that you'll likely have the money to cover this plus more since you don't have to pay for a central office that everyone is working in.

## 8. Automate anything that can be automated

The core of Zapier is automation. There are a couple reasons why we automate things. One, it allows us to keep the team size small since we don't need people on staff to perform repetitious, mundane, and boring tasks. Two, it lets teammates focus on high impact work nearly all of the time rather than figuring out less impactful things, like the proper deploy commands. Our philosophy is: If you're going to do something two or more times, automate it so you can eliminate busywork and do more meaningful work. We believe these so strongly that one of the [Zapier core values](#) is "Don't be a robot, build the robot."

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Hopefully, this chapter's insights into how one team manages a remote team inspires you. Don't take this as universal truth, though. One of the beauties of a remote team is that because remote work feels like an experiment, everything else feels like it can be more experimental too. So go ahead and experiment! The biggest wins aren't usually found in a post on the internet, but in what you discover on your own. And if you have tips, tricks, or best practices of your own, we'd love to hear them, too—we're [@zapier](#) on Twitter.

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*Written by Wade Foster*

# Chapter 2: How to Hire a Remote Team



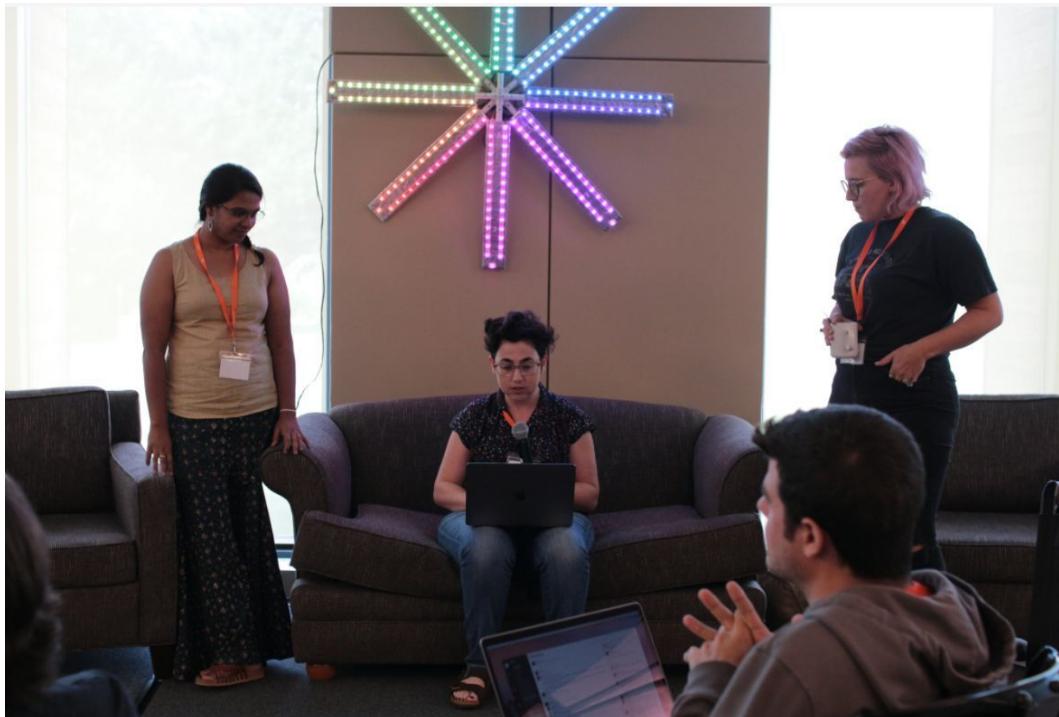
Since our beginning in October 2011, Zapier has grown from three founders cramped in a small apartment to a team of over 200 around the world. Along the way, we've picked up a few tricks (and things to avoid) to make building a remote team easier.

This chapter covers:

- Defining Characteristics of a Top-Notch Remote Worker
- How to Write an Attractive Remote Job Post
- How to Find Remote Candidates
- How to Hire a Remote Employee

*The photos in this chapter are from our [team retreats](#), which we hold every 6 months for in-person interaction.*

## Defining Characteristics of a Top-Notch Remote Worker



Some of our teammates working together

Not everyone is cut out for remote work, so before you begin hiring people for a remote position you'll need to consider the skills it takes to be successful in this type of environment.

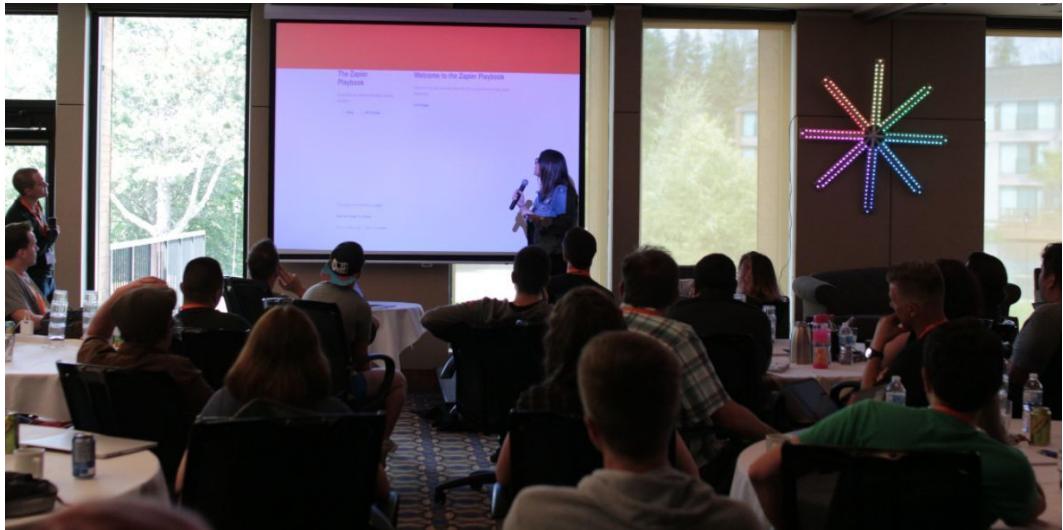
Great remote workers have a few traits that make them successful:

- **Propensity towards action:** This is the type of person that devoid of a task list given to them, they'll find something meaningful to do.
- **Ability to prioritize:** Often times, important tasks can be unclear when working remotely (especially at a startup). An individual who can focus on the right tasks and knows to ignore less impactful ones will do well.

- **Proficient writing:** Most communication in a remote team happens via text—email, team chat, or one-on-one private messages. If someone struggles to write clearly and concisely, they'll struggle in a remote team. Equally as important is being able to show tact in written communication too. It's all too easy to come off as curt via text. Liberal use of emoticons can go a long way.
- **Trustworthy:** If you can't trust the person, then not being able to see them every day is going to cause you to lose sleep. Make sure you trust who you hire.
- **Local support system:** If the only support system someone has is their work one, then being in a remote environment will likely make them go crazy. You need people who have outside support systems so they have people they can interact with on a daily/weekly basis.

Joel Gascoigne and the team at [Buffer](#) have found that people with these traits often come from freelance, contracting, or startup backgrounds. We've certainly found that to be true, too. 10 of our first 13 hires at Zapier had startup or freelance work in their background—and several staff members started out freelancing for Zapier before joining us full-time.

## How to Write an Attractive Remote Job Post



Team retreat presentation

Before you start sourcing candidates, you want to make sure to do a good job at defining the position. Oftentimes, companies throw up a generic job opening for a marketer or developer, which doesn't really help the candidate decide if they want to work for your company or not. Since remote companies don't have a local reputation, it's up to you to sell your company just as much as the role.

When it comes to defining the position, the best way to do this is to first fill the position yourself, even if it's only for a week. The work you do will help you understand what's involved in this role at a much deeper level.

This is a trick that [Basecamp](#) (formerly 37signals) uses when hiring for a new role. [Jason Fried](#), the company's co-founder, [explained this practice](#) in a Reddit AMA.

When it comes to an all-new position at the company, we like to try to do it first with the people we have so we really understand the work. If you don't understand the work, it's really hard to evaluate someone's abilities. Before we hired our first customer service person, I did just about all the customer service for two years. Before we hired an office

manager, David and I mostly split the duties. That really helped us know who would be good when we started talking to people about the job.

By doing the role you are hiring for, you'll also be able to write a more compelling job description and be better able to define how the role relates to the company and its success.

As a result, your job posting will be a detailed listing that explains the ins-and-outs of what you do as a company. This might turn some people away, but those people wouldn't have been a good fit anyway. Instead, you'll get applicants that are much more invested in being a part of your company.

Also, in the job posting, ask them to apply in a unique way—don't just ask for resumes. (In fact, at Zapier, [we don't ask for resumes at all](#). Instead, try to make the application process prove their abilities for the job.

For instance, when hiring for our business development position we had candidates that tested the basics of the role's partner duties, with questions like:

- Why are you applying for this role? What makes you excited about Zapier?
- How would you prioritize these upcoming integrations and why? Office 365, Flickr, Marketo, Wunderlist, Pocket, Ontraport, Hootsuite, and Joomla
- How would you get in touch with the following people (don't actually contact them): Editor at Lifehacker, Andrew Warner, CEO of Slack?

And rather than asking for a cover letter upfront, we asked them to write a sample pitch email to a partner.

People excited about your company are willing to complete these extra tasks, often with enjoyment. Those who aren't a good fit just skip your post or forget to do it, turning the unique application process into a filter.

For all our job postings, we also want to convey our company culture. So we also post [our commitment to applicants](#), which includes our promise to respond to every candidate, [our culture and values](#), [how we have been working on hiring for diversity and inclusivity](#), and the [Zapier code of conduct](#), which boils down to everyone treating each other professionally and with respect. Putting these out in the open has helped candidates feel more comfortable taking that leap of faith when applying for a job.

## How to Find Remote Candidates



It's impossible to hire if you don't have candidates for the role, of course, so the first thing to consider is how people will find out about your open position. Here's where we've had the best luck.

- **Our Networks:** People you've worked with in the past are great candidates to join up with you. This is especially true if you enjoyed working with them and want to work with them again. Also, ask customers, partners, investors, family, friends, and anyone you think might be helpful if they know of any good candidates. Often times, people aren't actively looking for jobs, but they will confide in a friend that they are unhappy in their current role.
- **Local meetup groups:** It's a bit odd to recommend local recruiting for a remote team, but this has worked out well for us. We're well connected with Missouri dev meetup groups since the founding team has strong ties

to the region. Many of the people in the area are excited about Zapier and stay in touch with what we do.

- **Your own userbase:** If you're fortunate enough to have a large userbase that matches the credentials you need, then it can be a great place to recruit from. We do this by adding a "hey, we're hiring!" link in emails that go out to customers and blog readers as well as on our website. This drives dozens of daily applications when we have open positions. Additionally, your users are likely a strong culture fit since they are already more familiar with your company and how you operate.
- **Your blog:** We don't publish positions on our blog but still see our increased content efforts pay off in the hiring process. To our surprise, almost every candidate mentions the blog as a reason they want to work at Zapier. In fact, an informal internal survey found that 1 in 10 current team members were led to apply to Zapier through something they read on our blog or in eBooks like this one. Many of our posts are about efficiency, productivity, and working better with the help of apps and automation—and people who are excited about those topics tend to make great remote workers.
- **Blog posts about your company:** Similar to the above, we sometimes write about how we work (like what you're reading right now). The people who connect with how we work get excited enough to search for how they can work alongside us.
- **Ask teammates to help with sourcing:** Some companies take a really aggressive stance and [mine every employees' social networks](#) for potential job candidates. I haven't found this to be necessary. Instead, simply ask teammates to help spread the word and with the goal of getting an awesome new teammate. Oftentimes, people are excited about working with and helping pick out their new teammate, so including them in the process is a net benefit to all.
- **Job boards:** As a last resort, job boards can be a source of candidates. Often these have bottom of the barrel candidates who are constantly job hunting and mostly looking for any job—particularly if it lets them work from home, not your job in particular. But you can occasionally strike gold here.
- **Share, share, share:** Use Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook, AngelList, and any channel you have access to to let people know that you're hiring. The more spread you can get, the more likely your job post will stumble across the right person's desk.

Sourcing candidates is often a harder task for remote teams than you'd think. Since you don't have global connections, you're a small brand, and local ties can be hard to come by, too, it can be hard to get the word out about your company and your positions. Take advantage of every channel you can find to get the word out and keep track of where the good candidates come from. Then make sure to utilize those in the future.

## How to Hire a Remote Employee

If you've done everything up to this point, then you should start to see applicants roll in. This is where the real challenge starts—it's time to make the hire. First, you'll need to sort through dozens, hundreds, and maybe thousands of applicants to find the person you want. (Fun fact: at Zapier, we average over 1,000 applicants a week for our open roles. We've been lucky to have a great talent pool to choose from.)

Hiring is time-consuming, but it might be the most important thing you do to make sure your team succeeds.

### 1. Sort Through Applicants in a Project Management Tool

We've borrowed heavily from how [DoSomething runs hiring with Trello](#). I suggest managing the hiring pipeline in a project management tool—Launchpad LA, for example, [uses Asana](#)—so that everyone on the hiring team can see the candidates, comment on their application and feel involved in the process. As a remote team, you don't get those in-person, team conversations about candidates, so finding one spot to have those chats puts everyone on the same page.

We use [Greenhouse](#) to manage the hiring process, but previously we used Trello boards for each open role with a Zapier integration that [automatically creates a Trello card](#) for candidates in the "Applied" column.

Next, we nominate someone to run point for hiring for that position. They are in charge of all the initial screening and, together with our Recruiting team, making sure the ball never gets dropped in the hiring process. This role is

*important.* Without someone filling this role, it's highly likely that candidates will get slow response times and the ball will be dropped. I know we had this happen before having people dedicated to this role.

That said, just because someone is running point for the position doesn't mean you don't want other teammates involved in the hiring process. In fact, the exact opposite—you want to get other teammates involved to independently evaluate candidates to help reduce bias.

## 2. Invite Top Candidates to a Video Call Interview

The recruiter and the hiring manager and other teammates reviewing applications select candidates for the next steps, a recruiter interview. If the candidates pass that, we ask them to the job fit interview. We use a rubric to do that. For example, when hiring for a Customer Champion, we evaluate candidates using a 1-3 scale for: persistence, knowledge, empathy, attention to detail, and Zapier usage.

In the job fit interview, we get to know the candidate a bit better and ask questions to see if they would succeed in a remote environment. These are best done synchronously, so make the most of your time and schedule these back-to-back. Doing so helps you more easily compare candidates, as well.

Pay special attention to how well the applicant communicates during this part of the process. Effective communication is so key in a remote position that the little things are a sign of a person who might or might not be a great fit. Potential warning signs are individuals who are poor at following up via email, forget when the interview was scheduled, or aren't flexible with an interview time.

[Matthew Guay](#), for example, is a U.S. expat based in Bangkok, which means his work hours are completely opposite of ours in the States. But during the interview process, he was more than happy to stay up late in order to meet our whole team on a conference call. His quickness to schedule and flexibility played a role in his hiring.

### **3. Put Top Candidates to the Test with a Project**

After these video call interviews, a few candidates have likely emerged as the strongest applicants. At this point we like to put them to the test. Depending on the role, we'll devise a task that is of moderate difficulty and indicative of the types of activities they'll do on a day-to-day basis.

For engineers, that might be using the [Zapier Developer Platform](#) to add a new service. For marketing, that may be writing a blog post in collaboration with someone on the team.

If it's obvious that this isn't necessary, we might skip this step, though it's often a good way to get a feel for working together even for great candidates.

More often than not, the task requires the candidate to interact with folks on the team—maybe even more than a couple of times. That way, you'll get a sense of how they communicate and collaborate.

The test should take only a few hours. We want to be cognizant of everyone's time.

### **4. Check References and Make an Offer**

Before making an offer, we send out an anonymous survey for a reference check using [SkillSurvey](#). That helps get honest feedback on candidates from their references.

Throughout this process, which takes on average 29 days to hire or 3.5 days to reject an application, we update applicants on the status of their application before making the final hiring call and closing out the job opening.

## 5. Bonus: Have New Teammates Meet the Whole Team



Previously, we had candidates meet the team with a short lightning talk on a topic of their choice. Unfortunately, with our now-rapid hiring pace and such a large team, this weekly intro isn't feasible. New teammates, however, do introduce themselves in their first weekly hangout with the team, sharing where they're from, a bit about their background, and anything fun they want to mention.

## More Remote Hiring Resources

One thing you'll note is that we never meet the individual in person during the hiring process. For our first five hires, we did meet candidates in person. We found this was helpful but ultimately wasn't critical. What it did add was cost, coordination headache, and time. If you wanted to interview three people face-to-face, that could take up to two weeks to manage. The first person in the interview process would then be waiting two or three weeks before knowing if they got the job or not. So now we do everything via Zoom and email. This works swimmingly.

If you're interested in how others hire in remote teams, here are how companies I admire do this:

- **Leo Widrich** on [how Buffer hires](#)
  - **Gregory Ciotti** of Help Scout on [how to make hiring less of a headache](#)
  - **Tommy Morgan** on [how Treehouse hires developers](#)
  - **Alex Turnbull** on [how Groove hires top talent](#)
- 

*Written by Wade Foster*

# Chapter 3: How to Build Culture in a Remote Team



When it comes to remote teams, culture is a huge topic. Common knowledge suggests that co-located teams have an easier time building culture compared to remote teams.

In fact, I've even had co-located teams tell me their culture problems were solved by simply buying a foosball table. Though I challenge the truthiness of that statement, I don't think there's a quick path to building company culture, and remote teams certainly aren't an exception.

**With co-located teams, it's easy to ignore culture building with the expectation that it will naturally happen.** In 99% of situations (made up number), this is simply not true, but by the time a co-located team realizes it, it might be too late to repair their culture.

**With a distributed team you know going in that culture will be hard to build.** As a remote team, you don't delude yourself thinking that culture will magically happen. You go in eyes wide open. If a strong culture doesn't develop

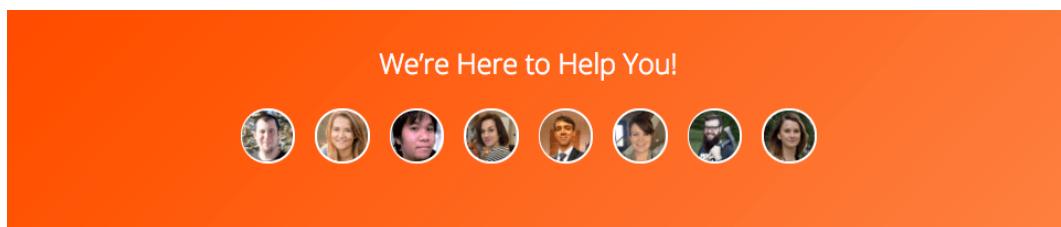
it's not because you didn't try, it's usually due to another reason.

With that in mind, how can you go about building culture when there are thousands of miles between teammates? Here are seven principles that work for us at Zapier.

## 1. Culture Is About More Than Ping Pong Tables

The first thing to realize is that your culture has to be built around more than ping pong tables. Games and other group activities that lend themselves to being in person are simply not a possibility on a day-to-day basis for remote teams. Therefore, your culture has to be built around something more than playing table tennis to unite the team.

## 2. Culture Is About How You Work



Hi! How can we help? (required)

Send Email

Links open in a new window.

### POPULAR RESOURCES

- [Support Documentation](#)
- [Zapier Status](#)
- [Zapier-Supported Apps](#)

Everyone that works on Zapier has bought into the belief that you come to work for the work, not for the ping pong. Most of your time at work is going to be work, so the work has to be rewarding by itself. Here are examples:

- How we talk to customers (is speed more important than quality?)
- How we communicate with each other (is this a phone call conversation or an email conversation or a chat conversation?)
- How much work do you do (do we work 40 hours or 80 hours?)

Those decisions and values create culture in remote companies more than a ping pong table would because our work is our lifeblood.

### **3. Tools Allow for Collaboration and Fun**

A co-located office develops its own personality through inside jokes, shared experiences, and a collaborative environment, such as a meeting room with whiteboards. A remote team needs to develop something similar. The easiest way to do this is with your day-to-day toolset. Here are some tools we love that have helped build our culture.

## Slack



jsherer 2:05 PM

Let's make sure there's a proper section on multi-emoji usage:



and of course



melanie 2:08 PM

I'm seriously going to write this post



thomas 2:11 PM

Being able to express yourself in emoji is one of my deepest beliefs.

I've been adding to the Zapier Slack emoji extensively for this reason



jsherer 2:12 PM

:dancingpizza: is amazing.



## Slack

Slack is our virtual office. It's the online version of the water cooler—where random work discussions happen, but also where we banter back and forth about the news, jokes, and pop culture. The best part of Slack is that our water cooler discussions are always accessible. Nothing gets lost. And there's no "behind-your-back politics" that happens in many co-located offices.

We make [heavy use of emoji in Slack](#) as well.

## GIFs and Memes



Cats ping pong

Most online communities have a go-to set of GIFs and memes they love. Zapier is no different. Being able to drop a relevant GIF or meme seconds after a timely Slack comment is one of the more spectacularly amusing things that happen in our little digital office place. Slack, in particular, has a great Giphy integration where you start a message with /giphy followed by your search term and you can insert a relevant (or often times a not so relevant) GIF.

And if you're so inclined, you can also automate your GIF game with [the Giphy integrations on Zapier](#).

## Async

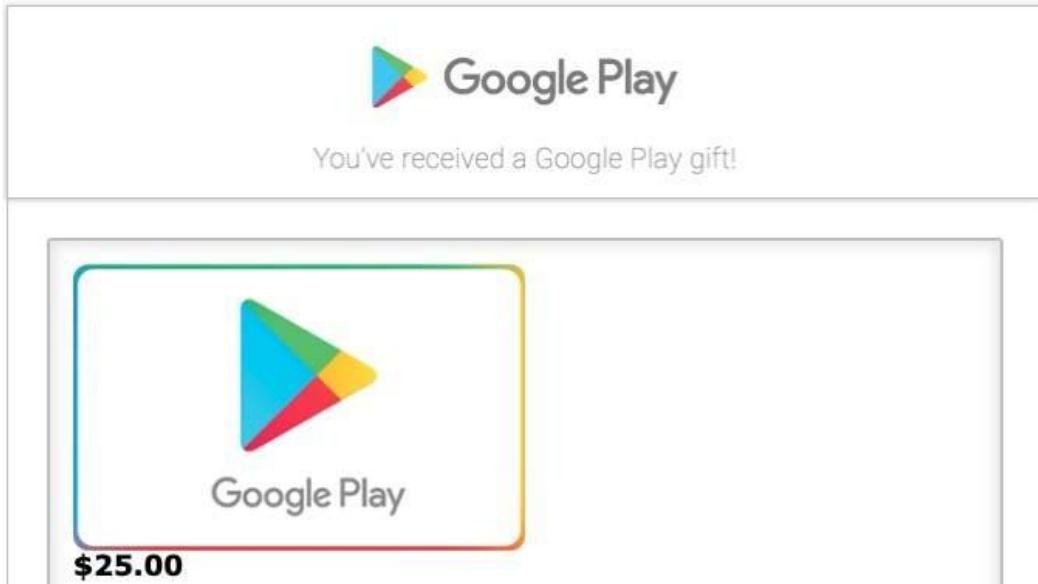
Our internal blog tool, called Async, was inspired by [P2](#), a WordPress theme [Automattic uses](#). Async makes it really easy to post updates. We use it to replace all our team emails. The asynchronous nature and threaded comments make it a lot easier to share things—from posts welcoming new teammates to discussing architectural scaling issues—Async helps keep everyone on the same page. It's almost like our own mini version of Reddit.

## Hangouts, Pair Buddies and Zoom

Chat is awesome, but being able to talk in real time and visually see someone is still pretty important for some issues. Slack calls for quick, ad-hoc one-on-one meetings or Zoom for bigger team meetings make it easy to work in real time. During these chats, it's always fun to have a five-minute personal checkup just to see what the other person/people are up to.

Pair Buddies are a weekly random pairing with 2-3 people on the team that allows you to catch up on work, life, or anything else. We use [Donut](#), a Slack app, for the random pairings. Pair buddy chats help keep some semblance of the office social life as part of work and encourage people who work in different departments to get to know each other better.

## Music and Books Perks with Tango Card



**Tango Card GooglePlay Gift Card**

One of our favorite services is [Tango Card](#) (also called Rewards Genius). The service makes it really easy to give perks to your employees. We've given everyone premium Spotify, iTunes, or Google Play credits, which is great since many remote employees love to listen to music during the day. Having music handy also makes it fun to share what everyone is listening to and hear what sort of eclectic tastes everyone has.

And because just about everyone on the team is an avid reader, staff can also choose to use their credits at Amazon, iTunes, or Google Play which they can use for eBooks. Well-read teams are happy and productive teams.

## 4. In-Person Meetups Are Still Important



Zapier retreat

We get the whole gang together twice a year for a company retreat. During the retreat, we do things that help foster our culture. Things like [playing board games together](#) and hiking as a group have helped us learn more about each other and our families—it's knowledge we wouldn't have gained in a normal week.

## 5. Local Community Sponsorship Shows Presence



**Startup Weekend Sponsorship**

We haven't done this a ton, but when we have it's worked. We've sponsored [dev/como](#), which [James Carr](#) runs, a handful of times and we've also made sure to [go back and sponsor Startup Weekend Columbia](#) every year. We've also donated an afternoon of our time to a non-profit during our retreats to give back.

Any time someone on the team wants to do something like this in their city, we're happy to sponsor. I imagine as the team grows even more we'll be fortunate to help foster many local communities around the globe.

By doing this, team members feel more like there is a local presence in their hometown.

## 6. Trust Is the Foundation

Remote teams have to trust their teammates. There is simply no way around it. The beauty of trusting your teammates is that oftentimes your teammates reward you. Most people genuinely want to do a good job. In a remote team, there aren't any silly rules about having your butts in a seat during certain hours of the day. This means at the end of the week you either have something to show for your week or not. This means you trust that your teammates are getting something done. But also your teammates trust you. To earn that trust you want to make sure you have something to show for your work each week.

Along with that: Being public and transparent about your [company's values and culture](#) goes a long way towards establishing trust in a distributed team and also for hiring people who will thrive at your company.

## 7. Getting Things Done

Friday - 3/22

New Tab



### Shawn's Friday Update - March 22

By Shawn Cook in Friday Updates on 3/22/2019

Starting to create designs and work on project related tasks



### SXP Weekly Update - 3/22/2019

By Noah Manger in Friday Updates on 3/22/2019

Ready to add the guide for users in the new editor | Purchased our community tech | Planning the help center redesign



### Stephanie's Friday Update: March 22nd, 2019

By Stephanie Briones in Friday Updates on 3/22/2019

Design Systems decisions and processes & interviews with Sr. Product Designers



### Brandi's Friday Update 3/22/19

By Brandi Shuttera in Friday Updates on 3/22/2019

Some in-person co-working and OKR work

### Friday update

Getting things done tends to be a by-product of trust. Because there is an implicit trust in your teammates and because there is no other way to measure results in a remote team, the team inherently evaluates each other on what was completed that week. We do this by sharing weekly updates on our internal blog (Async) every Friday—I bet you can imagine how it would feel to be the only one with nothing to show. That feeling creates a desire to finish something important each week.

As remote teams get more popular, I expect we'll hear more about the cultures in remote teams and how they develop differently from co-located teams.

*Written by Wade Foster.*

*Ping pong photo by [Wonderlane via Flickr](#).*

# Chapter 4: How Successful Remote Teams Evaluate Employees

*A look inside Automattic, GitHub, and Help Scout*



*This chapter was contributed by Automattic Happiness Engineer Jeremy DuVall*

During my first full day of work at [Automattic](#), the only thing running through my mind was “Am I going to get fired?”

That’s an unusual feeling, especially when you’re hours into a new job. To clarify, this had nothing to do with Automattic or any of my coworkers. They were all friendly and welcoming, encouraging me to take my time getting adjusted to my first remote position.

Still, I had this lingering fear in the back of my mind: I was used to seeing my coworkers and supervisors on a daily basis, and using in-person skills to feel

out how I was doing. Now, I was missing those seemingly crucial cues, and that made me fear the worst.

I was suffering through [Imposter Syndrome](#)—the feeling that I was a fraud, that I wasn't worthy of my position, and that sooner or later, someone was going to find out.

I had a sneaking suspicion that I couldn't be the only one who felt this way. After interviewing leaders at established remote teams, my suspicions were confirmed: This feeling is largely normal. "The struggle is real. Those first few days working remote seem so awkward, and you'll spend at least 10% of your time wondering if you're doing the right thing," confirms [Greg Ciotti](#), Content Marketing Lead [Shopify](#) and former marketer at [Help Scout](#).

So I started thinking: Is there any way to prevent Imposter Syndrome in remote teams? And what's it like for managers who need to evaluate these conflicted remote employees? Here are some best tricks of the trade from companies like [Help Scout](#), [GitHub](#), and [Automattic](#).

## Make New Teammates Feel Welcome from the Start

Remote environments can be intimidating for new employees, particularly if they're coming from a traditional, co-location office setting. One practice that helped me early on at Automattic was having a veteran employee as a "buddy" to help me navigate the uncharted waters.

I'm not alone in my desire for camaraderie in remote workplace. Ciotti recommends the buddy approach to help new employees feel welcome. There's even science indicating that [employees who have friends at work](#) "get sick less often, suffer fewer accidents, and change jobs less frequently."

Ciotti offers five tangible takeaways for buddies paired up with new employees:

1. Shoot the new employee a quick email before they start to welcome them to the team. Don't use email? [Slack](#) or any other communication tool will work.

2. Offer to be available for any random questions—even the ones that seem silly. (Speaking from experience, new people tend to hesitate on asking genuinely important questions.)
3. Check in with them on your team's chat app every couple of days in their first week to see how it's going. (My buddy and I checked in with each other once every two weeks, always on a Friday.)
4. Tell them about your team retreats or what it's like to hang out with the team in-person. (In my case, my buddy and I chatted about "Grand Meetups," the annual all-person gathering at Automattic.)
5. Share some "unwritten rules" like the difference between the #general and #offtopic communication channels in Slack. (Similarly, my buddy enlightened me on Automattic's #BurritoFriday tradition.)

Above all, buddies should make new employees feel comfortable and act as a go-to for questions employees might otherwise feel embarrassed to ask.

## Measure Output, Not Input

Matt Mullenweg, CEO of Automattic, has some strong doubts about the normal 9-to-5 grind. "If someone shows up in the morning dressed appropriately and isn't drunk or asleep at his desk, we assume he's working. If he's making spreadsheets and to-do lists, we assume he's working really hard. Unfortunately, none of this gets at what an employee actually creates during the day," Mullenweg says in a [Harvard Business Review post](#).

One potential solution to this conundrum? Have managers hover over employees either by roaming up and down the aisles in a traditional sense or obsessively checking to see when someone logs in or out. According to Ciotti, that's the shortcut to burnout:

Fires only burn when they have room to breathe, and you'll end up suffocating enthusiasm, motivation, and camaraderie by looming over people all day, every day.

Instead, productivity at Automattic is measured by output, not input.

"At Automattic we focus on what you create, not whether you live up to some ideal of the 'good employee,'" explains Mullenweg. For developers, that might mean looking at how many commits they've had over a given time period. For the support staff, that could be total number of tickets answered. The underlying message is to find a metric outside of *hours spent* to evaluate productivity.

## Look to the Team for Feedback

When gathering employee feedback, it's crucial to remember that the relationship isn't just between supervisor and employee. Each employee has a string of relationships with their fellow co-workers. [Phil Haack](#), software coach and author, said he heavily relied on this team atmosphere to evaluate performance when he was an engineering manager at [GitHub](#). He explains that when you create a strong team, it's easy to see who isn't pulling their weight.

For performance reviews, Haack asks each employee to send him a list of three to five co-workers they would like peer feedback from. He then asks those co-workers to provide feedback for the individual in three categories: Start, Stop, and Continue. Each box should focus on behaviors that match the title (behaviors someone might want to stop, for example). Haack adds the boxes aren't mandatory. "If you have three categories, the temptation is to put something in each. You might not feel very strongly that someone needs to stop doing something." In that case, employees can just leave a box blank.

Haack takes those bits of feedback and distills them down into major take-aways, combining duplicates and making sure feedback is worded in a useful manner. The end result is a collection of behavior-based feedback from individuals you work with daily.

Two elements are crucial. First, the format (Start, Stop, and Continue) provides a framework that makes a difficult task (giving peer feedback) easier. The main purpose is to help employees organize their thoughts. Second, the feedback should be focused on behaviors, not personalities. The former is something an employee can improve; the latter isn't.

## Ask for Self-Evaluations

When performing a review, Haack considers three points of view:

1. His own opinions.
2. Thoughts from co-workers.
3. A self-evaluation from the actual employee.

Self-evaluations often get a bad rap. As professional relationship author [Keith Ferrazzi](#) explains in an article on [Harvard Business Review](#), employees tend to fall in one of two traps (potentially both). First, they become a victim of the Overconfidence Effect, which causes them to overestimate their competence in a given area. Second, they're likely to make a [Fundamental Attribution Error](#), pinning their successes on talent and wisdom while failing to acknowledge environmental factors.

To combat this, Haack uses all three points of view. The goal of the self-assessment isn't just to see how great everyone perceives they are, but rather to see if the three points of view match up. "The point of that was to help me understand how people saw themselves, how others saw them, and how I saw them and see if there's a big disconnect there," he explains.

Self-evaluations have their flaws when used as the sole assessment method. However, in conjunction with team reviews and the opinions of the team leader, they help to complete the 360-degree view. They also reassure employees that their voice is being heard.

## Provide Feedback Often

"I spent a lot of the six months hoping I didn't get fired." That's not something you want to hear from one of your employees, but it's a real conversation Haack had with someone during their first official feedback session.

If employees are more familiar working in an office environment where they receive feedback daily, the silence in a remote position can be the perfect

breeding ground for Imposter Syndrome. It's easy to assume the worst about your work when you don't hear otherwise.

Everyone I spoke with for this chapter emphasized the benefits of giving regular feedback outside of formal reviews. Why? Because regular feedback lets employees know where they stand, gets everyone on the same page, and reduces the chance of a surprise during a more formal review.

When Haack was at GitHub, he had regular one-on-one meetings with his distributed team (they live all over the world) using a video conferencing software called [Blue Jeans](#). At Help Scout, team leads have scheduled weekly reviews with everyone in their department. They chat about what has gone well since the last check-in and what's looming on the horizon.

Regardless of whether you check-in with employees daily through a chat app, schedule weekly video sessions, or meet in-person monthly, the key is to provide continuous feedback rather than combining it all into one surprising review at the end of the year. Ciotti does offer one important caveat, "We hold the opinion that you should share praise and own blame." Hold performance-oriented discussions in private, not in public.

## Trust

One common thread that runs deep across every method of managing a remote team: trust. Employees need to trust that their managers are looking out for their best interest. Managers need to trust that their employees are engaged and motivated at work. Part of this trust is built during the hiring process—selecting candidates who are self-motivated—and the rest is built over time with each positive interaction.

Just like in-person office cultures, remote office cultures can differ wildly.

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*Written by Automattic Happiness Engineer [Jeremy DuVall](#)*

*Header photo by [Kevin Morris via Flickr](#).*

# Chapter 5: How to Build Strong Relationships in a Remote Team

*This chapter was contributed by Automattic Happiness Engineer Jeremy DuVall*



If you work in a remote team, one of the aspects you quickly notice is the importance of communication. Finding the best ways to communicate with your team is imperative when you're not working face-to-face, because you're missing most—if not all—of the context of each person's situation.

If you're in an office with your teammates, for instance, you'll notice if someone is especially quiet and withdrawn. And if that's a common behavior pattern, you'll know that it's a tip-off that they didn't sleep well last night and need some

space or that they're especially stressed and could use a chat to share their concerns.

You'll also notice details like noise levels in the office or distracting roadworks noise outside. You'll be able to tell when someone's really focused on their work versus when they're open to interruptions.

As humans, we're great at picking up on these signals. We practice this every day in our interactions and use people's body language and tone of voice to inform the way we communicate with them.

But in a remote team, you lose a lot of that context, so you need to find ways to make up for it. Let's take a look at some ways to build strong connections with your teammates when they're far away.

## Building Rapport Remotely

When you start a new job in a remote team, it can feel very strange. Although it might be less confronting than working in a new office full of people you don't know, it can also be more isolating, as you don't have an easy way to get to know everyone quickly—especially those you don't work with directly.

Eventually, you'll make the rounds and have some interaction with everyone, and perhaps even meet them in person at a [company retreat](#) like Zapier holds every few months. But how do you go about building a rapport with people you've never really met?

Let's start with some standard methods for building rapport, and look at how we can apply them to a remote working situation.

Robin Dreeke is the founder of People Formula, former Head of the FBI's Behavioral Analysis Program, and author of [\*It's Not All About Me: Ten Techniques for Building Quick Rapport With Anyone\*](#). In his book, Dreeke explains some of the [most basic ways to build rapport with others](#), including smiling, tilting your chin lower so you're not looking down on them, matching their handshake strength, and slowing down your speech so you come across as being more credible.

All good tips, but not very useful in a remote setting. So what *can* we apply to a remote situation to help us build strong relationships with our teammates? Well, Dreeke suggests a few things that we can use.

First, Dreeke points out that meeting someone new can be overwhelming when you have no time constraint on your conversation. Because we're [wired to look for threats](#) in any new situation, our first reaction to meeting someone is to be wary of them until we start building up some rapport. Establishing an artificial time constraint can help ease the pressure of a conversation with someone new, according to Dreeke.

If you're setting up phone or video calls to meet your new teammates, try setting a time limit of 15 minutes.

Another tip from Dreeke is to validate others by listening to them and suspending your ego. "True validation coupled with ego suspension means that you have no story to offer, that you are there simply to hear theirs," he writes.

We [love to talk about ourselves](#), especially to good listeners, but this means we're often ready to respond with our own related stories when our conversation partner finishes talking. According to Dreeke, ego suspension means putting aside our own desires to contribute to the conversation and instead asking [short, open questions](#) like *how, when, and why*.

[Studies have shown](#) that listening carefully and asking the person you're talking with to expand on what they're saying will make you more likable and more likely to be chosen for future conversations.

So, in summary:

- set a finish time before starting a conversation with someone new
- listen without interrupting or sharing your own stories
- ask short, open questions

## Relying on Text the Right Way

Your team might rely on tools like Skype or Zoom for video and voice chats, which will give you a chance to use those rapport-building strategies we just discussed. Voice and video calls can help you feel more in touch with your team and avoid the issues of asynchronous communication like time lags or misunderstandings.

But you'll likely spend a lot of your day communicating with text. Whether it's in [Slack](#), [Basecamp](#) shared documents, emails, or GitHub issues, text tends to be the most convenient way to keep in touch with your teammates without interrupting them.

Need a team chat app? Find one in Zapier's roundup of [The Best Team Chat Apps for Your Company](#).

Effective written communication is such an important part of remote working that it's often part of what remote companies look for when hiring. For instance, [Automattic](<https://automattic.com>) Happiness Engineer Andrew Spittle shares:

Text is our predominant communication mode and we look for strong writing skills in applicants. On the support side that's key since text is not just how we communicate with customers but also with each other. Our interview process is all done through text chats, too, as a way to evaluate that ability.

In a remote setting, you need to be able to get your point across clearly and simply, show empathy and understanding, and be efficient to avoid wasted time, since you may be waiting across timezones for your team to reply anyway.

Here are three suggestions for connecting with remote team members through text:

## 1. Stay Up to Date

When your teammates are working on the other side of the world, you get used to waking up or coming back from lunch to a full inbox and messages flowing in from your team chat, shared documents, and various other places. This can be overwhelming, so finding ways to keep on top of what's going on is imperative for communicating efficiently with each other.

The distributed [Stripe](#) team [shares most internal emails](#), which means everyone has a very full inbox to work through daily. With over 400 email lists in the company, there's a lot to organize at Stripe.

One of the approaches Stripe takes [for scaling transparent emails](#) for scaling transparent email is to create archive lists where otherwise irrelevant emails are CC'd to. This means if you're setting up a meeting with someone you don't have to flood everyone's inboxes with your back-and-forth emails, but later on, everyone has access to that information if they need it. Here's how Greg Brockman, Chairman and CTO of OpenAI and former Stripe CTO [explains it](#):

The goal isn't to share things that would otherwise be secret: it's to unlock the wealth of information that would otherwise be accidentally locked up in a few people's inboxes. In general, if you are debating including an archive list, you should include it.

(Buffer also uses a transparent email process. You can read about how it works [on the Buffer Open blog](#).)

## 2. Remember Hanlon's Razor

A razor is a concept used in philosophy to help us strip away possible explanations (hence the name) for a phenomenon. [Hanlon's razor](#) refers to the idea that we should always assume ignorance before malice. That is, if someone does something wrong, don't assume they purposely meant to hurt you. It's just as likely (perhaps more so) that they simply made a mistake.

This is especially important in situations where you're missing context. If you're communicating via text with co-workers who are multiple time zones away, try to always assume ignorance before malice if you have a misunderstanding.

In my own experience, this has happened several times. When I worked remotely for Buffer, I would often jump on a call with Leo to discuss something we'd disagreed about, only to realize we weren't on the same page at all, and it had all been a misunderstanding.

## Asserting Yourself When Needed

Perhaps the hardest, yet most obvious, way to compensate for the lack of context in remote communication is to be more forward and open than you

normally would. As I mentioned in my example earlier, working with someone in an office makes it easier to pick up on their mood and know when they need some time alone. When you work remotely, you're going to bug people by chatting to them when they're not in the mood—it's unavoidable. Being respectful of others is just harder when you have less information to inform your decisions.

To cut down on that problem, we need to find ways to share that context explicitly with each other. A good way to go about this is to set up rules ahead of time.

Here's an example from my own experience: my co-founder [Josh Sharp](#) and I use [Viber](#) to communicate throughout the day. Sometimes it's a quick message here and there about grabbing some lunch or heading out for a meeting. Other times, we have real-time chats for hours about our work. Because Viber is our "always on" channel for communicating, we have to explicitly remove ourselves from being available if we need uninterrupted work time. To avoid anyone getting offended by a frustrated request that they shut up for a while, we came up with a code word.

"Tree time" is what we call our uninterrupted work time. I don't remember where the name came from now, but I think it had something to do with a hypothetical scenario where one of us runs up a tree to get away from the other... Regardless, this is now our code word. If one of us asks the other for some "tree time", it means "don't get offended, but I'm finding it hard to concentrate and I really need some uninterrupted time to focus on what I'm doing."



### Tree Time chat

Because we set up this rule ahead of time, we both know it's an option. Anytime we feel the need for some peace and quiet while we work, we know we can fall back on *tree time* without having to explain ourselves or worry about offending the other person because we don't want to chat right now.

Being open about what you need can be really hard. Most of us aren't used to being so upfront with our teammates. But keep in mind all the information *you* have about how you feel and your current needs that your teammates don't have.

It's up to you to fill in that gap so they can communicate with you in the best way.

Another good example of setting this up in advance is what [the Basecamp team](#) did when it introduced phone support. At first, the support team was wary of

adding the extra pressures of phone support to their workload. How do you do phone support when you work remotely from cafés?

Basecamp didn't want the support team to lose the benefits that come with remote working, so they set up some guidelines ahead of time. One is that team members can take breaks to work outside, in cafés, or just away from the phones, and the rest of the team will cover for them. Making this rule in advance means team members know it's an option and can ask for it when they need some space.

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We've covered a lot of ground in this chapter. Through all the examples I've included you can see that each company handles remote working in different ways. The most important thing I've learned from working remotely myself is that each team, and each member within that team, needs to find the way that works best for them.

Experiment with different options to find what works best, but remember the most important lesson: Find a way to share the context of your situation with your teammates. They need all the information you can give them to work with you in the best way they can.

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*Written by Hello Code cofounder Belle Beth Cooper*

*Microphone photo via [Ryan McGuire](#)*

# Chapter 6: How to Run a Company Retreat for a Remote Team



One of the downsides of being a remote team is that physical interaction doesn't happen unless you make a dedicated effort to get the team together.

While we firmly believe that day-to-day work does not need to happen in person, we do believe that some things happen easier when in person. Because of that, we get the whole team together for a company retreat twice a year.

We've now run 10 company retreats for team sizes of 7, 10, 14, 19, 27, 34, 45, 68, 95, and 185. Here's everything we've learned to pull them off.

## 1. Why Should You Run a Company Retreat?

Big, full-company retreats are tough to coordinate and expensive, so why even bother?

Ultimately: because some things are just better done in person. For instance, it's hard to have an impromptu, deep conversation with a teammate over Google Hangout about their kids, some random idea you've had improving a secondary process in the company, or company values. All those things tend to naturally happen in person, while they don't happen in a remote team unless you force it.

Also, retreats are a ton of fun. Since you don't see everyone on a daily basis, it's exciting to have everyone around for a week-long excursion where you can talk shop and learn more about each other as people in an everyday setting.

## 2. Where Should You Hold Your Company Retreat?



**Mt. Rainier Company Retreat**

Wherever you want!

So far, we've had company retreats in California, Washington, Florida, Colorado, Alabama, Utah, Texas, Vancouver, Toronto, and Louisiana—and departmental retreats in other locations.

When choosing a place for your company retreat, there are a few things to consider:

1. Make it somewhere easy for folks to get to (that is, less than a two-hour drive from a major airport).
2. Go somewhere that can hold everyone. When we were a smaller team of under 30 people, we were able to do AirBnB and HomeAway houses (hotels can feel sterile, but houses feel inviting.) As we've grown, we've had to broaden our search for places that could accommodate larger groups in one spot while also still providing that sense of privacy and closeness. Our People Ops team has done a great job scouting locations based on these criteria and others, such as our need for a large conference room, fast and reliable Wi-Fi (at least 100mbps up and down), and breakout rooms to work on projects together.
3. Don't worry so much about being close to tons of activities. We used to think having a large city nearby would be important but then realized we rarely took advantage of the full city amenities.
4. That said, do have some activities very near the retreat location. Beachside houses, resorts near hiking trails, or places with big games rooms (pool, ping pong, etc.) are great because people can entertain themselves in downtime without driving places.

Ultimately, though, go with what suits your company. I know some companies travel overseas or some bring everyone into headquarters.

### 3. How Long Should Your Company Retreat Last?



Brainstorming workshop at one of our recent retreats

It depends. You need to be respectful of people's time. After some iteration, we've found four full days plus one optional "fun" free day, bookended by two travel days to be a good fit. People with family and kids aren't too inconvenienced, and it's long enough to do something meaningful. We have biannual retreats, one in the winter and one in the summer. Every year, the retreat weeks alternate to avoid these days always falling on someone's birthday or other family celebration.

As you grow, another thing to consider is staggering travel days. We have the founding team plus international travelers come in a day early. This means customer support for Zapier isn't abysmal for one day while everyone is traveling, and we can prepare the location with food since we're there a bit early.

## 4. What Should You Do During Your Retreat?



**Zapier hackathon presentation**

It can be easy to default to doing the things you always do on a day-to-day basis at work. But that would be a waste of an opportunity.

We decided early on that we should do things during the week that we can't do together—even if it was at the expense of making progress on Zapier itself. After all, we work on the product every other day of the year. For one week it makes sense to take some time off and work on the team which is just as important as the product itself.

Some of the best activities we do are mostly unrelated to work.

We [play party games](#), such as [Mafia](#), have karaoke nights, and have hiked Mt. Rainier, skied, swam in the ocean, and visited the USS Alabama together. Doing something physical is a great way to learn more about each other, but we've also done food tours and even visited an old Texas ranch that's used as a movie set.

We also spend time doing work-related things or discussing issues important to us.

Previously, we paired a mini-conference with a hackathon. Here's how we did it:

1. Before the retreat, all team members suggest projects for the hackathon that anyone at the company can work on. This project should be something that can be significantly developed, if not shipped, in three days.
2. After the project suggestions are in, each department (e.g., support, marketing, product, engineering) votes on the top hackathon project the company should work on.
3. From that list, each person in the company selects the top project they would like to work on (plus 2 alternatives) at the retreat. Hackathon teams are assigned based on this.
4. During the retreat, each hackathon group works on their project over the course of 3 working days or afternoons.
5. At the end of the week, each group presents what they built.

Some examples of hackathon projects that have come out of our retreats are new features like [Formatter by Zapier](#), a [guide to using Zapier](#), and accessibility enhancements in our product.

Most recently, we experimented with replacing the hackathon with an “unconference.” While the hackathons encouraged collaboration with people from different teams and let us experiment with things that might not have otherwise gotten attention, they’ve been difficult to plan as we’ve grown. So for our last retreat, we decided to try unconferences instead. As Meghan Gezo, HR/People Ops Specialist, explains:

An unconference is a participant-driven meeting that lets attendees decide what gets discussed. Rather than locking everyone into a set schedule and set topics, the unconference lets everyone decide what topics are important to talk about. It also lets everyone participate in the discussion instead of just one person or a panel of people. Even if a topic ends up with only a few interested people, it can still be really useful to everyone involved!

Here's how it works:

- Each unconference lasts 40 minutes, with one lead/facilitator and one note taker.
- Before the retreat, everyone is free to suggest topics (via a spreadsheet) and nominate the lead person, which could be themselves
- At the unconference, participants are encouraged to share ideas in the conversation.

Some of the topics covered at the last retreat include:

- Productivity and Energy Management
- How to Make Data Friendlier
- How Zapier Experts Use the Product
- Managing Diverse Time Zones
- How to Win The Price Is Right

After doing a couple of retreats, we've found that the best retreats combine something everyone on the team can work on in person along with multiple activities that help the team get to know each other better. Like our Game of Thrones viewing party:



GoT

## 5. What About the Cost of the Retreats?

Obviously, cost is a big consideration for doing a trip like this. Keep in mind, though, that a typical remote team saves tons of money each month by not having to pay for an office (or paying for a much smaller one than you'd normally have to have if you're a partially remote team). We decide to invest money we save on office-related expenses into company and department retreats because of the invaluable team-building these experiences provide. At the same time, we try to keep spending on retreats reasonable; keeping everyone happily employed is more important than sending everyone to luxury resorts overseas.

Retreats aren't cheap, but what's even more expensive is having a remote team that doesn't work well together. Ultimately, the cost of the trip is well worth it in my mind, but you have to make that choice based on the constraints of your own business.

## Getting Feedback on the Trip



**Unconference team photo**

If you're planning to keep doing retreats as you grow, then you'll want to make sure the retreats keep getting better. The way to do this is to ask for feedback.

For example, the feedback we got from our first company retreat was that since we paired the trip with a conference, everyone spent a ton of time doing their own thing at the conference and by the time we all were able to regroup at the place in the evening everyone was really tired. So we decided not to do retreats alongside conferences again.

Here are some questions that are useful to ask the team after a retreat:

1. What was awesome about the trip? Be as detailed as you'd like.
2. What should we do differently the next time around? Be as detailed as you'd like.

3. In retrospect, did you like the unconference structure? What was good?  
What could be improved?
4. We had a handful of roundtables this retreat. What was good about these?  
What could be improved?
5. How did your team day go?
6. Any other comments?

Based on feedback from our previous retreats, we've learned that teammates most enjoyed meeting and hanging out with everyone, having an entire venue to ourselves, lots of food options, and a range of roundtable topics.

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Doing a company-wide retreat is a big event, and our People Ops team spends a lot of time planning it—about a year in advance. But it's a lot of fun. If you run a remote team, I would highly encourage you to consider planning one for the next year. I think you'll find it well worth it, and your teammates will love your company even more for it.

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*Written by Wade Foster*

# Chapter 7: This is What a Remote Office Looks Like



One of the benefits we talk less about when it comes to working in a remote team is that you have *complete* control over your workspace. But it's one of the most important benefits. In a traditional office space, you're forced to work in a one-size-fits-all environment, which isn't ideal for everyone.

At Zapier, everyone creates their own workspace, and today we thought it would be fun to share. Here's a peek at the home offices or workspaces of some of the Zapier teammates. (Note: These aren't in any particular order. And some of us admit to cleaning off our desks before taking the photos.)

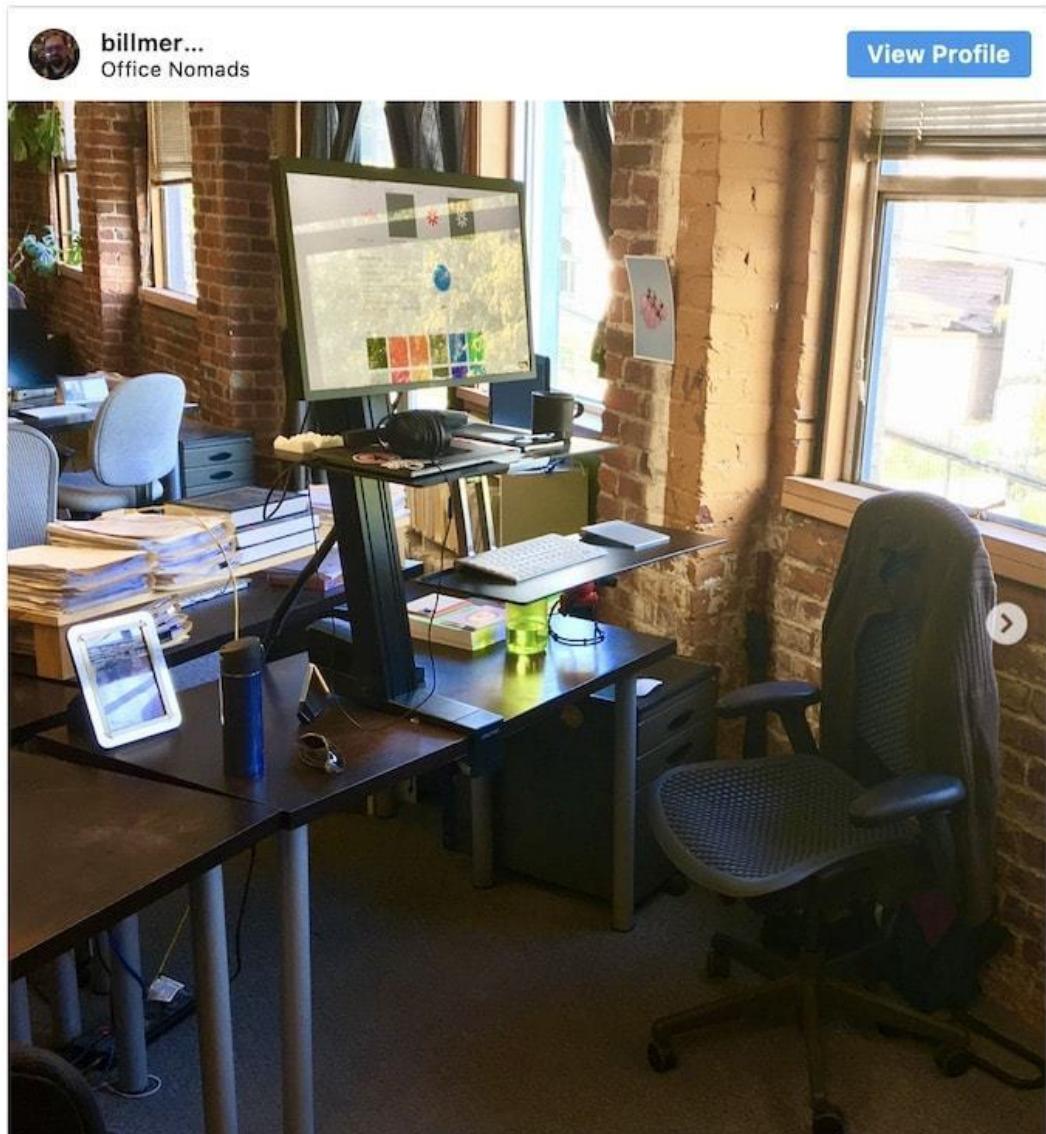


## Hoon Park, Customer Champion (Austin, TX)





## Bill Merrill, Product Engineer (Seattle, WA)



[View More on Instagram](#)



13 likes

billmerrill

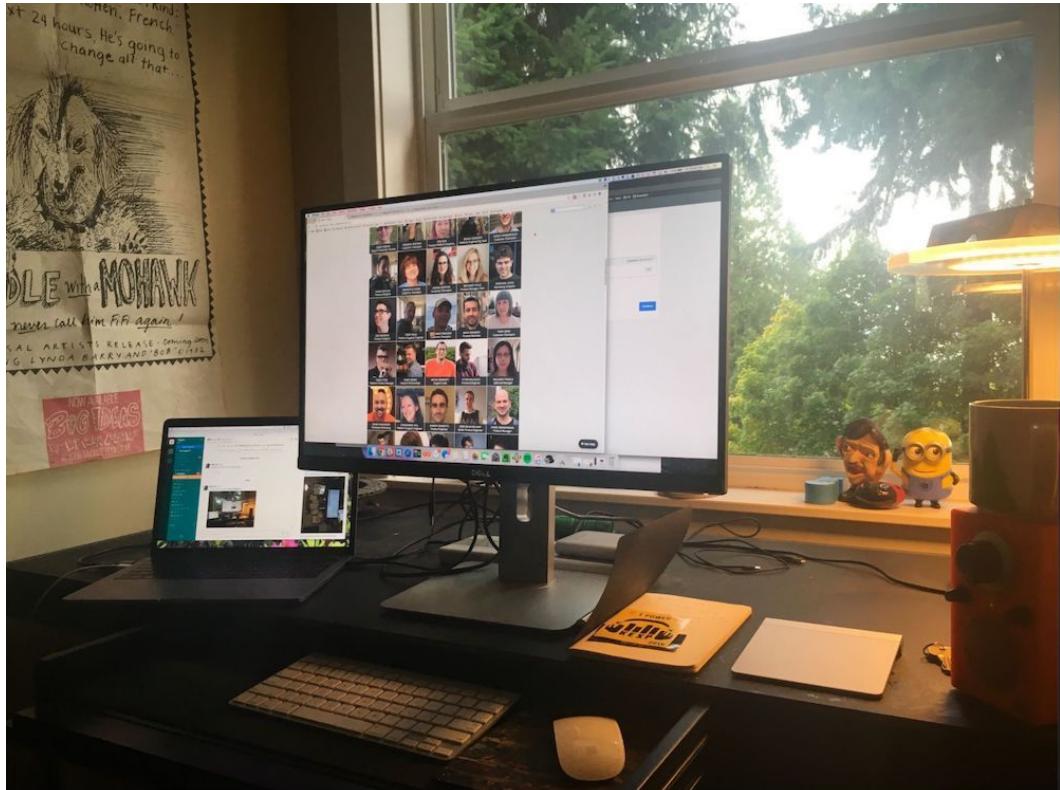


@zapier coworkers asked about my work space at @officenomads. #zapierlife

## **Rob Golding, Senior Product Engineer (Nottingham, UK)**



## Kirk Godtfredsen, Customer Champion (Seattle, WA)



## **Kim Kadiyala, Marketing Specialist (Fort Lauderdale, FL)**



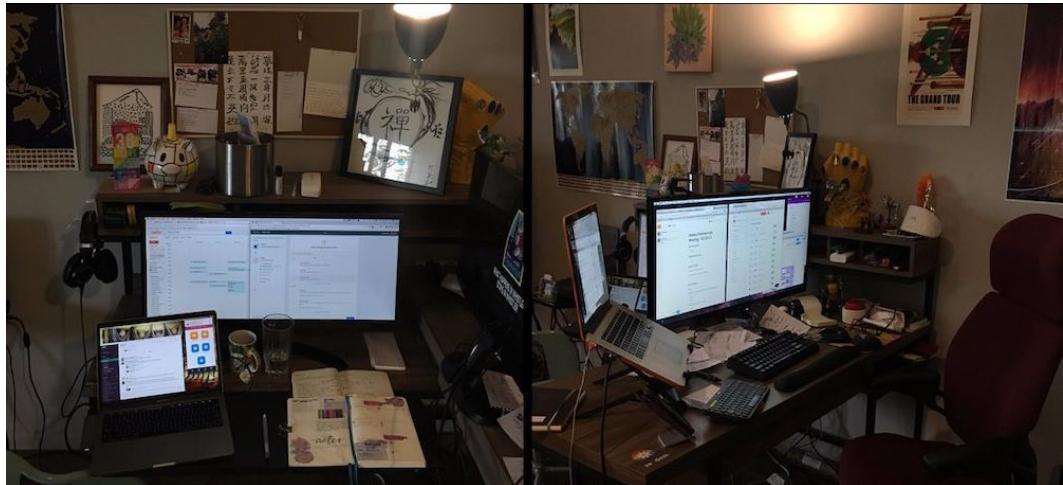
## Erin Chock, Customer Champion (Portland, OR)



## Vicky Cassidy, Platform Lead (Madison, WI)



## Zen Ren, Platform Support Lead, and Zé João Proença, Partner Success Specialist (Austin, TX)



Two workspaces in one!

## Additional Thoughts

It's fascinating to me that all of us work great together. But if forced to be in an office with one another for 250 days a year, we might not like working with each other quite as much.

Working distributed thus helps everyone optimize their environment in a way that suites them best while not distracting others on the team.

See [more team photos at #zapierlife on Instagram](#).

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*Written by Wade Foster*

# Chapter 8: How to Work Faster in a Remote Team



"OK, I'm done."

I vividly remember reading that short, punchy sentence again and again in my first few weeks at Zapier, each time pursing my lips, scrunching my forehead and thinking, "How did Wade finish that task so fast? Geesh, I'm slow."

Zapier is my first job on a remote team. Prior to my time here, I spent two years in a co-located corporate cube farm and four years in a regional media company. Never, though, had I been a part of an organization in which each team member is on their own, dictating their own hours, office setup, and work environment.

For my boss—Zapier co-founder [Wade Foster](#)—and the half-dozen other individuals on the team when I joined, this freedom gave rise to a higher level of productivity, too. Or so they felt.

"Non-remote work defaults to the highest distraction communication first, which is in-person. Remote work defaults to the lowest, which is no commu-

nication,” said Zapier co-founder [Mike Knoop](#) when I asked him if he felt he worked faster in a remote team.

“Fewer distractions lead to faster work,” Mike added. “You have to purposely decide to enter into more distracting conversations.”

For Wade, it’s been a similar experience.

“Fewer distractions,” he said when asked the same question. “I don’t get sucked into side conversations. No one plays crappy music really loud. I don’t get hit in the head with a Nerf ball.”

“Things are more to the point,” he added.

Of course, those are Zapier co-founders speaking; they are, without a doubt, biased on this topic. So what about my teammates at Zapier or members of other remote organizations: Do they find the distributed team structure increases productivity? And if so, why? I went searching for input.

## Are You More Productive?

*Have you found working on a remote team has resulted in you working faster, more productively? If yes, how? If no, why do you think not?*

That’s the question I sent out to a dozen colleagues in the remote working world. Tabulating the nine replies that came back, six individuals said “yes,” two said “yes and no,” and one replied he “wouldn’t say that working with a remote team has really affected the pace of my work.” And though these nine answers vary, there is a constant theme: a remote working environment *allows* for a faster pace of work. Whether or not that’s the intention of the remote employer, it’s the common outcome.

[Belle Cooper](#)—co-founder of Hello Code based in Melbourne—summed it up best in her response.

“Working remotely has definitely led me to find ways to work faster,” Cooper says. “It didn’t happen naturally as a result of remote work, but the freedom of remote work means I can experiment with different work spaces, different work times and approaches, and find what works best for me as well as what helps me work fastest.”

"It didn't happen naturally as a result of remote work, but the freedom of remote work means I can experiment ... and find what works best." - Belle Beth Cooper

Complementing Cooper's take is [Zach Leatherman](#), an Omaha-based web developer part of the remote [Filament Group](#) team, who points out that it's a two-sided equation.

"In my opinion, remote work can only succeed in environments that have little red tape and low barrier to decision making," he says. "If employees don't have freedom and independence to make decisions, remote work will be less effective."

So when both parties are present—the freedom-giving remote employer and the productivity-seeking remote employee—work happens at a faster pace. Could it be that simple? The trait "propensity towards action" is, after all, one that we look for in candidates when [we're hiring](#).

We could boil it down to that, but it would leave out some of the unique characteristics that define remote work. Knoop's comment, for example, is that remote work inherently cuts down on distracting conversations because a majority of the communication is written rather than verbal. So whether or not the individual has an aim to increase their productivity, when they're in the remote environment Knoop describes, they'll be more productive.

Putting that to the test, I asked my teammates and a group of nine colleagues for examples of how being part of a remote team has helped them work faster. Here are eight of the ways they offered, followed by a few ways in which they work slower, too.

# 1. Pull Internal Communication Out of Your Inbox

- 
-  Team APAC Monthly hangout  
By Tony Rule in Uncategorized on 4/27/2017  
Reporting from Chennai, Sydney, Melbourne & Wellington today
-  RFC: Sponsoring MacStories' new AppStories Podcast  
By Matthew Guay in Marketing on 4/27/2017  
Have any short domain ideas?
-  Changelog: In App Notifications Shipped and We Removed Suggested Steps  
By Bethany Hills in Changelog on 4/27/2017  
tl;dr We're testing if the notification bell is a effective tool for user communication
-  Weekly Comarketing Update 4/27/15  
By Carlin Sack in Marketing on 4/27/2017  
Covering co-marketing activities from Wed 4/19 to Tues 4/25
-  Changelog: Rover app pages, new stats tab!  
By Chris Peters in Changelog on 4/27/2017  
New tab on Rover app pages called "Beta Stats" check it out!
-  How to Drink From the Slack Firehose And Stay Productive  
By Wade Foster in General on 4/27/2017  
Read this and be better at Slack
-  Vicky's Friday Update - April 27  
By Vicky Volovoski in Friday Updates on 4/27/2017  
Lots of Platform planning, prepping for onboarding a new PM, and Loki notifications are now much improved!
- 

*Each Friday, Zapier team members recap their week with a post on the company's internal blog.*

Think about the number of words you speak each day—3 minutes of conversation with your favorite barista, 15 minutes on a conference call with a new client, 30 minutes unpacking your day with a friend or your spouse over dinner. Now imagine typing all of those conversations out in email form. That's the majority of remote communication.

By default, these conversations and others like it fall into your inbox and pile up, waiting for you to read and reply. And that's exactly what you do—a [survey conducted by McKinsey Global Institute in 2012](#), for example, found that 28% of a professional's work week is dedicated to reading and answering email. That's the highest time allotment outside role-specific tasks, which clocks in at 39%.

One of the best things we did early on to thwart this imminent mess of email as the Zapier team grew, was take an inventory of which conversations belonged in our inboxes and which ones belonged elsewhere for the sake of context and convenience. The result: Only two types of internal emails remained. (The emails: team feedback following an applicant's group interview and announcements of new hires.)

Company and department updates, project specs, design mock-ups, and individual "Friday Update" reports moved from email to our [private internal blog](#), and the aggravating "Reply All" emails that accompanied them became easy-to-read threaded comments. Team and department feedback, along with questions and discussions, moved to team collaboration and chat app [Slack](#), which replaced one-on-one email threads with its private messaging feature, too. And Slack even became the place we find out about new public and private blog posts with a Zapier integration.

It's tough to put a total "time saved" figure on the email changes inside our team, but that's ok because it's not the only—or even the best—result. What's best is the order it brings—assurance that when there's a new email, it's meaningful, and when there are five replies to a department update on our internal blog, they're quick to read (and "like," too).

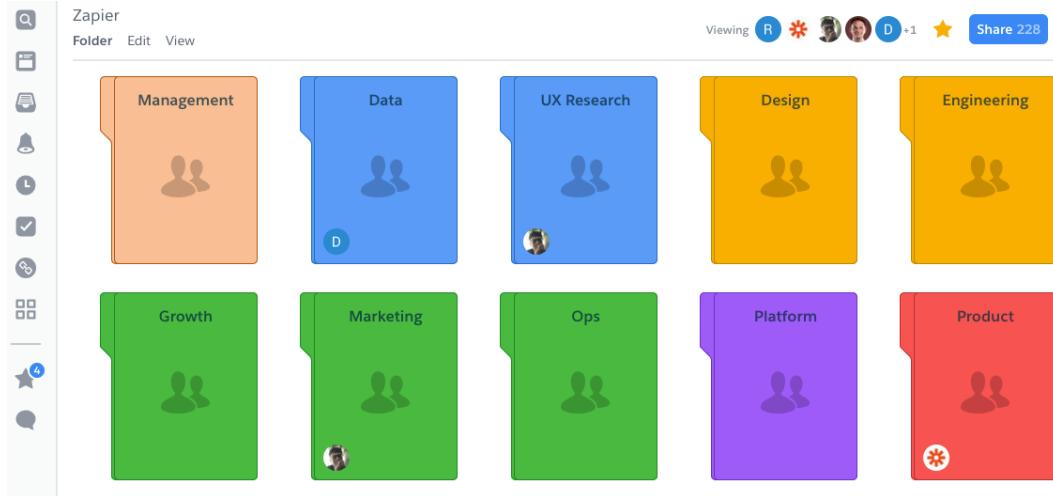
Or as [Andreas Klinger](#), Head of Remote at [AngelList](#), puts it: "Communication feels cheap to do but often adds up to a lot of time costs and very often only results in more communication (unless framed in processes)." Streamlining communications and cutting down on the back-and-forth emails is the true benefit of pulling communications out of your inbox.

"Communication feels cheap to do but often adds up to a lot of time costs." - Andreas Klinger, Product Hunt

That said, your team might not need to pull internal communication out of your inbox to find benefits. The team behind payments remote-friendly company Stripe kept their email intact but [added structure](#) such as [advanced Gmail filters](#).

Slack works for our team—it keeps us out of the inbox and frees up our time to work on more important projects. But what matters is finding an efficient communication model for you and your team.

## 2. Rely on the Right Tools



*The Zapier team turns to Quip anytime it needs to document a process.*

We love apps at Zapier. We're constantly playing around with them, [integrating them into our own platform](#), and trying them out in our workflows.

So as we moved email threads out of our inboxes, we needed to find an app for each convo. Slack absorbed most of the load, but not all. Progress updates around our editorial calendar moved into [Trello](#), a highly customizable project management tool. Step-by-step guides teaching fellow co-workers, for example, how to instigate a [drip campaign](#) moved into [Hackpad](#), a collaborative documentation tool, and then into [Quip](#) when Hackpad shut down. And before we relied on our private internal blog for weekly updates, we used [iDoneThis](#), an app that makes it easy to record the tasks you accomplished.

When your remote team lands on the right tools, you can really get in the groove. That was an experience shared by [Matthew Makai](#), a remote employee on Twilio's team, another company that's split between co-located and distributed employees.

"My colleague Ricky Robinett and I wrote [this blog post](#) on our new TaskRouter API together while he was in NYC and I was in D.C.," Makai says, noting several other colleagues gave their input on the piece, too.

"I felt like we were more efficient than if we were in-person because we had a mastery over our communication tools, including Google Docs, Trello, Flowdock, and video chat. If we were in the same room, I don't believe it would've worked as well because the writing-review-revision feedback loop is inherently asynchronous, so we all worked on our own schedules."

"We were more efficient than if we were in-person because we had a mastery over our communication tools." - Matthew Makai, Twilio

Scott Hanselman, a Microsoft employee who works remotely from Portland, best sums up the remote worker's approach to [trying and using tools](#) when you need something outside your essential toolkit.

"We use Lync at work, but I also use Skype, GChat, Join.me, straight VNC, Windows Remote Assistance, CoPilot and a dozen others," he says. "If one doesn't work for some reason, don't waste time, just move to the next one."

Once again, the time savings of being remote might come directly from being remote, but perhaps also because you're forced to try new tools that work great remotely *and* can also speed you up.

**See Tools of Remote Teams:** Google "[remote team tools](#)" and you'll discover what's working best for the teams at [Ghost](#), [Buffer](#), [Hanno](#), [Groove](#), and others.

### 3. Use Differing Schedules to Your Advantage

Makai, in the quote above, found that the flexible schedule that comes with a remote team speeds up his writing and editing process. And he's not the only one: Among the individuals polled for this piece, the most popular answer for how remote work enables individuals to work faster is the ability to decide one's hours.

IDoneThis founder [Walter Chen](#) uses his adjustable schedule to get over his "2 p.m. post-lunch lull."

"When I was a lawyer, I had to close the door of my office and put my head down on the desk for a quick nap. Still, you can imagine that the head-down

on the desk nap isn't as refreshing as it could be," he says. "Now that I work remotely, I'm able to lie down for a nap or go to the gym for a quick workout, which gives me a huge energy boost."

[Joe Stych](#), a Minneapolis, Minnesota-based team member at Zapier, has a different take on the schedule offered by remote companies, one that means maximizing his allotted time.

"At my old job, productivity was zero after 4 p.m.—I was counting down the minutes until I got in my car or just refreshing my email to make sure my boss didn't send me something," Stych says. At Zapier, he's nestled in his home office, working until he signs off Slack.

For some teams though, making the most of the schedule doesn't mean working when most productive, but always staying productive because you can work around the clock.

"We're spread over a number of different time zones all over the world, so our development is 24/7," says Groove founder and CEO [Alex Turnbull](#). "Even when those of us in the U.S. are sleeping, our developers in Europe and South Africa are hustling. Customers can get help at any hour, and production never stops."

Inside Zapier, we take advantage of this benefit, too. My marketing teammate [Matthew Guay](#), for example, is based in Thailand, so our clocks are opposite—when it's 8 a.m. in Omaha, it's 8 p.m. in Bangkok. At the end of the workday, I'll often hand off a piece to Matthew for editing. When I wake up the next morning, it's all marked up. Never in my many years on an editorial team have I had the quick workflow offered by this unique situation.

## 4. Skip the Commute

"We save, collectively, dozens of hours each week on commuting," says Groove's Turnbull. "Those hours go into getting things done, and over time, that amounts to massive, massive wins."

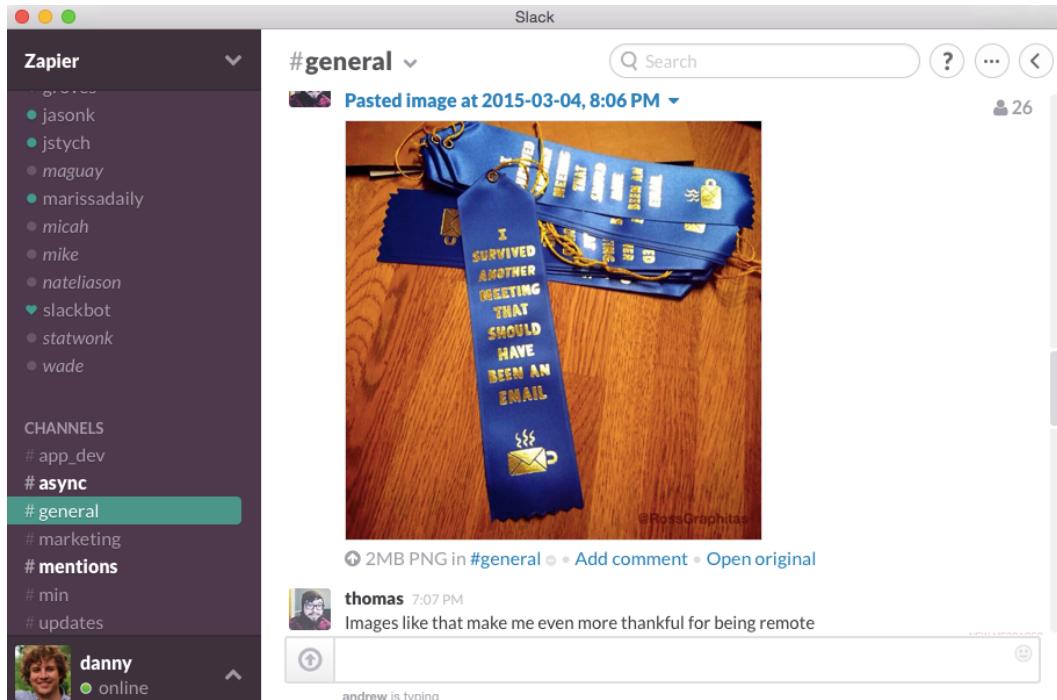
Zapier co-founder and CEO Wade Foster has a similar take. "I jump right into work when I'm ready. And leave when I'm done. There's zero friction between working and not."

"We save, collectively, dozens of hours each week on commuting." -  
Alex Turnbull, Groove

While this is perhaps the most-heralded aspect of remote working, it might be one that's underutilized, as well. In essence, the commute, be it 15 minutes or 50 minutes, is found as an excess when you're remote working. Why spend time in the car when you can get right down to it at your home office?

Applying that same principle to other activities yields a productivity boost, as well. Instead of leaving your office to grab lunch, for example, prepare it that morning, as if you were commuting. Rather than go for coffee in the afternoon, rely on a thermos or switch to tea, which makes preparation easy. Look to cut excess from your team's processes, too. Instead of holding that weekly stats recap meeting, for example, spin up an internal blog post that details the numbers.

## 5. Cancel Meetings



"Hey, can you hear me?" ... "How about now?"

You'd never say that when you've stepped aside for an impromptu meeting, but it's a common occurrence when starting up a video conference call. This annoyance is surprisingly helpful though: You purposely try to avoid putting yourself in that scenario. Yes, as if [meetings weren't bad enough](#), now you have to put up with fussy software that multiplies meeting pain.

So the best thing to do is ask yourself: Do we really need that meeting?

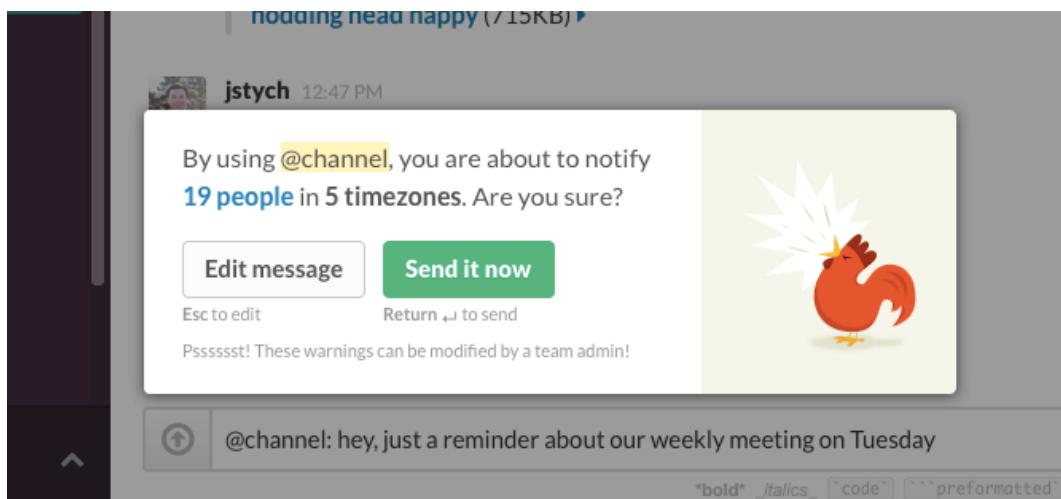
Start asking yourself that question and you'll start earning back dozens of hours monthly. (That's a potential [7,000 hours back](#) for the unnamed organization in a report by [Bain & Company](#)).

The team at iDoneThis reconfigured their weekly meeting after giving it a second thought. They knew they wanted to hold a regular meeting for some

important face-to-face contact, but the content of their meetings was ineffective.

"Since we didn't set forth a specific enough protocol or purpose, the Hangouts were unfocused, devolved into rambling discussions about product, and ended up wasting our time," writes former iDoneThis team member Janet Choi. After consideration, they changed up the format to a more effective weekly show-and-tell session.

## 6. Think Before You Send



With a majority of communication on a remote team being in written form, you start to notice something about how you talk with your teammates: You put more thought into it. It's hard to just spout something out; you first must type it out, read what you've written, and then hit "send" or "publish." Those extra little steps add a helpful filter to your conversations. You end up thinking before you speak, yielding clearer and more concise communication. It's probably no surprise then that "proficient written communicator" is among the skills we look for when hiring at Zapier.

This is a tactic that can work for in-person teams, too. Amazon's Jeff Bezos, for example, bans Powerpoint presentations in meetings. Instead, he requires

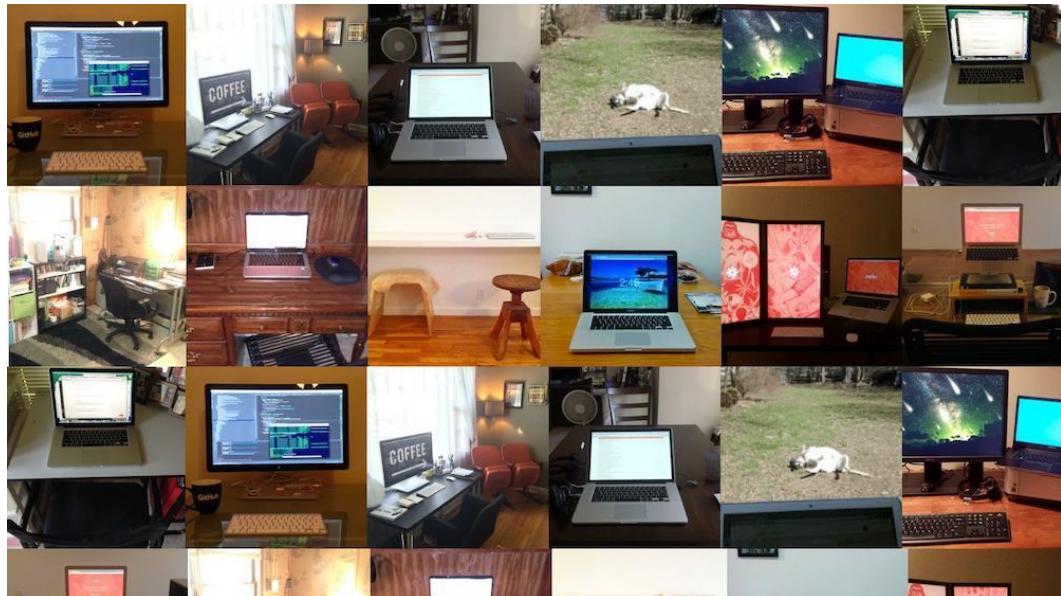
each attendee to come prepared with a memo, which is then read by the others before the meeting starts.

"Full sentences are harder to write," Bezos [says in a Fortune article](#). "They have verbs. The paragraphs have topic sentences. There is no way to write a six-page, narratively structured memo and not have clear thinking."

If your company relies on a [team chat application](#) like Slack, you'll see this benefit, too.

"Things are more to the point," says Zapier's Foster. "In-person meetings tend to have lots of chit-chat, *how's the weather* talk. In chat, you skip over most of that and get right to the point."

## **7. Set Up Your Best Environment**



*The home offices of the Zapier team vary dramatically.*

"If you ask people the question, 'Where do you really need to go when you need to get something done?' you typically get three different kinds of answers,"

says [Jason Fried](#), the founder of Basecamp and co-author of bestselling book *Remote: No Office Required*. One answer is a place, location or room, such as the porch or the coffee shop; another is a moving object, such as a plane or train; and another is a time, really early in the morning or on the weekends.

"You almost never hear someone say 'the office,' but businesses are spending all this money on this place called the office and they're making people go to it all the time. Yet people don't do work in the office."

"It's like the front door of the office is like a Cuisinart and you walk in and your day is shredded to bits." - Jason Fried, Basecamp

Fried, who [delivered these words on stage](#) at TEDxMidwest 2010, says he's been asking people this productivity question for about 10 years.

The office, he says, is where "work moments" happen, not work days. "It's like the front door of the office is like a Cuisinart and you walk in and your day is shredded to bits because you have 15 minutes here, and 30 minutes there and then something else happens and you're pulled off your work ... and then it's lunch."

Take those distractions away, and you can be a lot more productive. "People need to be able to be away from the distractions of the workplace to actually work and get things done," says Zapier Managing Editor Melanie Pinola, who pointed me to Fried's talk. "When I first started telecommuting, I found myself finishing my tasks much earlier than I had previously and ended up taking on more responsibilities...from home, because I just worked better in this environment."

Aside from the ability to dictate their schedule, the ability to control their environment is also a main factor for many remote workers' productivity.

"Having a quiet day at home to write means I get work done way faster," says [Jimmy Daly](#), a Tucson, Ariz.-based content marketer.

Working from home allows you to quickly change your surroundings, too.

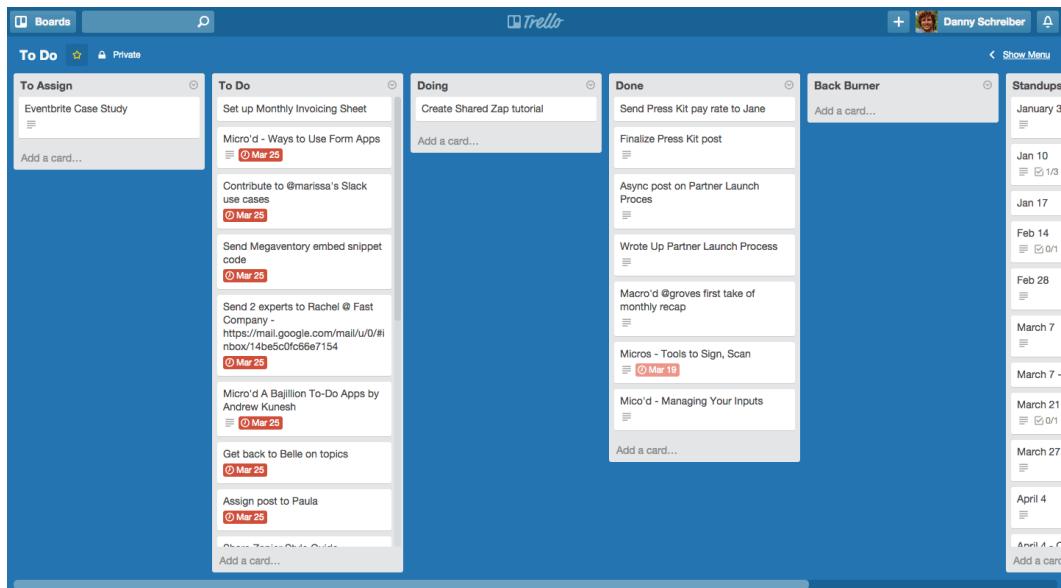
That's an upside Zapier's Guay has found. "Stand while you work or sit. Kneel at a table if that feels right for a bit. Sit back on the couch to edit or walk around the house with a draft to read over. Use speakers for music if you want...or have perfect silence."

Remote work also doesn't need to be restricted to your own abode—go wherever makes you productive.

"Often just being at home can drive you nuts," writes Microsoft's Hanselman. "I try to get out a few times a week. I've worked from the mall, from Starbucks, from McDonald's (free wi-fi, sue me) and from a park bench. I find that just having people walking around makes me feel more productive."

**Related:** Learn the best way to organize your desk and home office for maximum productivity and ergonomics.

## 8. Own Up to Your Productivity



Whether it's working in your own home or a nearby coffee shop, there's another aspect that pushes remote employees to work faster: You're responsible for your productivity. Gone are the regular meetings and brainstorming sessions in "Conference Room 3B," and no more can you pull up a spreadsheet and stare at your screen to appear engulfed in busy work. You now must own up to what you did and didn't accomplish.

That's what motivated Cooper cut down the time it took her to write a blog post [from two days to four hours](#). She saw Buffer co-founder [Leo Widrich](#) churning out posts at a much faster pace than her, so she examined what could be holding her up. Between cutting out excess research and distractions like email, Cooper eventually narrowed in on how to author a quality blog post in the least amount of time necessary—just one morning.

"Now that I've proven to myself over and over that I can write a post in a morning without dropping my quality, they're a lot less formidable in my mind," writes Cooper. "I think that makes a huge difference to how I work."

Personally, I've recently found keeping a tally of my to-dos on a Trello board helps me stay focused on what's most important that day. It also saves time at week's end, too, since I use a Zapier integration to copy all the cards in the "done" Trello column to a Google Doc, which I pull out each week. The average time it takes me to write my weekly recap for our internal blog instantly went from around 40 to 20 minutes.

It's a stretch to say all remote workers are inclined to be more productive, but the topic itself has become a theme on blogs of remote teams—including [Trello's](#), [RescueTime's](#), and, yes, [Zapier's](#) blogs.

## Not So Fast... What Doesn't Work About Remote Work

As a remote worker myself, I'll admit to being biased in this piece and giving the most attention to the upside of the working arrangement. But there are downsides, too.

"There are times, of course, where working together would be faster," says Daly. "For example, when we redesigned our site, the process was slowed down by waiting for responses from people who were fast asleep in another timezone."

"It's harder to communicate via typical in-person channels such as whiteboards." - Matthew Makai, Twilio

Twilio's Makai finds difficulty in being the lone remote team member when an in-person meeting is happening at the headquarters.

"The downside is when I'm working with a group of folks at HQ in San Francisco and I'm in D.C., it's harder to communicate via typical in-person channels such as whiteboards," he says, noting he circumvents this issue by visiting the office at least quarterly for in-person meetings.

I'll add one more to the list: shoddy internet. My home Wi-Fi has given me more trouble than I ever remember experiencing when I worked in an office building. And when the internet's out, well, productivity takes a hit (and your mobile hotspot comes to the rescue).

## The Right Reason to Go Remote?

Whether you're a founder considering going remote or a professional contemplating joining a remote team, a major benefit to consider is the opportunity to amp your productivity. Between my own experience and conversations with over a dozen individuals for this post, it's clear that a remote workplace allows you to do just that. Whether or not you succeed at it is entirely up to you.

That said, to achieve this productivity boost, you might not need to go remote at all.

Thanks to the rise of [instant messaging apps](#) like Slack, [collaborative editing tools](#) like Google Docs, and file sharing tools like Dropbox, there's a shift in the way we all communicate at work.

"Pay attention to how much time you actually spend each day in the same room talking in real time to other people—it's far less today than ever in history (I don't have data for this, but I've rarely heard counterarguments)," [writes Scott Berkun](#), author of *The Year Without Pants*, a book about remote work.

"Even in companies that do not allow 'remote work,' remote work is encouraged implicitly by the equipment used and the daily working habits we've adopted across our culture."

## Unplug

"OK, I'm done," I message Wade this time.

About six months into the job, I finally catch up to my new team's fast-paced environment. But it didn't come without pulling myself away from the team. My trick for writing faster, I found, is to completely unplug from the communication tools we use. Do this, and then put 100% focus on writing in a distraction-free environment. It works and I'm now working faster than ever before.

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*Written by [Danny Schreiber](#).*

*Racing photo by [Andy Walker via Flickr](#).*

# Chapter 9: How to Find Your Optimal Work Environment and Boost Productivity



There's no shortage of productivity articles to read or techniques to try, but I've realized lately that optimal productivity comes in different states for everyone. Not only are some of us morning larks and others night owls, some of us need to move around a lot, others find a standing desk works best, and some of us work to music while others need silence.

The most important thing I've recently come to understand about productivity is that embracing what works for me (once I know what that is) is the best way to get more done. If you're struggling to improve your own workflows, here are three areas to start experimenting with.

## Time of Day



**Time of Day**

As more of us are working remotely, joining co-working spaces or working from home these days, we have more flexibility to work at the times when we're most productive. We can finally pay attention to what helps us do more, better work.

To start with, we all have a **built-in body clock** called a **circadian rhythm** that runs a little differently to everyone else's. This is what determines whether we're night owls or morning larks. Depending on how your internal body clock runs, you could be more suited to a particular part of the day. Generally speaking, we all start out being most suited to early mornings, and our body clocks slip later during adolescence, when we prefer to **sleep in and stay up late**. As we become adults, some of us hang on to these night owl tendencies, others become extreme morning larks, and most of us slide into a comfortable middle ground.

You probably already know what times of day suit you best, but if not, it's worth exploring since [being tired will hurt your performance](#). I had always liked being up early but I wasn't sure my body was naturally inclined that way until I tested starting my day later (which definitely isn't for me).

Although we all have different circadian rhythms, most of us have a [natural dip in energy](#) in the afternoon. So if you notice yourself moving slowly or feeling unmotivated after lunch, take heart in the fact that it's not just you.

Once you have a good idea of how your internal body clock works and how your energy naturally rises and falls throughout the day, you can use this information to plan a more productive workday. For instance, if you find working late at night suits you, plan your biggest tasks or your most intense projects for that period. If mornings work for you, you may need to get up earlier for some interruption-free focus time.

I often need a nap in the afternoon, so I've found that planning to work on major tasks before lunch and working from home where I can duck off for a half hour nap suits me best.

## Surroundings



**Surroundings**

Adjusting your surroundings to make you more productive is easy to underestimate, but can actually make a huge difference. For example, if your workspace is too cold, you're actually going to be *wasting energy trying to keep warm*. Of course being too warm is no good for your productivity either. You really need to find your "sweet spot" as far as temperature goes, and try to get your workplace as close to that as possible. The team at Zapier has [this figured out](#); everyone knows just what **temperature** they work best at, and takes control of keeping their workspace from getting too hot or cold.

If you're sharing a workspace you might need to bring in a portable fan or heater, or move your desk to be closer to the heating and cooling system (or further away).

**Noise levels** (and types) are another environmental factor that can affect

productivity and are very personal. I always thought it was strange to like having TV reruns on in the background while I work until I learned entrepreneur [Nate Kontny](#) does this, too. Nate built the first version of [Draft](#) while [watching The West Wing](#), because he found that worked well for him.

"I know this isn't real common, but I've always been pretty good about working while watching television. It can't be some really cerebral show that I've never seen before, but things like re-runs of Felicity or West Wing are perfect. The core of Draft was built while watching the entire season of West Wing over again at 1AM." - [Nate Kontny on the Brightpod blog](#)

Aside from TV, others like [working with music on](#), though some need complete silence to concentrate. The type of work you're doing can change what sounds make you most productive, too. [One study published by the Journal of Consumer Research](#) found that creative work is easier amongst ambient noise, which encourages us to think outside the box. If that's you, check out an app called [Coffitivity](#), which offers soundtracks such as "Morning Murmur" and "Lunchtime Lounge". Silence is more suited to work that requires [deep focus](#) rather than creative thinking. And if you like working to music, your own preferences will obviously play a part in what you choose to listen to.

Lastly, pay attention to how much **light** your workspace has, and how it affects your productivity. I tend to need more natural light when I'm working than others, so I look for spaces to work near windows. On the other hand, a study published by the Journal of Consumer Research found that our creative thinking is [enhanced by dim lighting](#), which helps us to feel less inhibited. So test out your own preferences if you're not sure about them, but keep in mind the type of work you're doing when you adjust your workspace, as well.

## Managing Your Workload



**workload**

Once your workspace is set up and you've worked out the time of day when you're most productive, you can start experimenting with how you approach work itself. Here are a few suggestions, but you'll definitely want to experiment to see what works for you.

### Chunk Your Tasks

If you have different types of work to get through, [grouping similar tasks together](#) into time "chunks" can make you more productive than switching between different types of work all day. For instance, small, simple tasks can be saved for the periods of your day when you're low in energy, or in-between meetings when you don't have time to get stuck into bigger projects.

A similar method is to [front-load your day](#) (or your week). This means you work on the big, intense projects first, and work on smaller tasks that don't have deadlines as you go through the day. Knocking off your most important tasks first make it surprisingly more fun to finish other work in the afternoon, since the stress of today's deadlines is already dealt with.

## Just Get Started

Something I often struggle with is [just getting started](#) on a big task or project, so I take this into account when planning out my day. Breaking down a task into smaller sub-tasks or action steps can be helpful in getting over the hurdle of just starting.

Another way I've overcome this in the past is to just commit to working on something for just five minutes—not long enough for it to be a huge effort, but just long enough for me to feel like I might as well keep going, once the five minutes is up.

## Set Yourself a Challenge

When you're working from home or a remote workspace, it can sometimes be hard to keep up with your workload or meet all your deadlines. I've found a good way to manage this is to challenge myself. Sometimes I challenge myself to [get all my work done by noon](#). A short deadline can do wonders for your focus!

If you're a fan of the [Pomodoro Technique](#), you can use that as a challenge, too. Try challenging yourself to get something finished before your Pomodoro timer goes off—you might not get it done, but you'll probably find you focus a lot better when you're working against the clock in a short burst like that. If timers aren't your thing and you work from home, you can try "[real life Pomodoros](#)" instead: naturally occurring intervals that you can use as timers for short bursts of work, like waiting for your dishwasher to run through, or waiting for someone to arrive for a meeting.

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In my own experience, testing one part of your workday at a time is the best way to know what makes a difference to your productivity (good and bad). Once you've got one thing in place, like what time of day you work best, you can experiment with another part, like how you chunk your tasks together or breaking down big projects to make them more manageable.

This probably all sounds like a lot of effort, but the pay off for knowing what makes *you* productive is huge. It's definitely a lot more rewarding than trying to use other people's methods and getting frustrated when they don't work.

Learn more about how to set up your desk for productivity and ergonomics in our article on [The Best Way to Organize Your Desk](#).

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*Written by Hello Code cofounder Belle Beth Cooper*

*Header photo via [Ville Miettinen](#). Time of day photo via [Delgoff](#). Surroundings photo via [Eric Murray](#). Managing your workload photo via [Brad](#).*

# Chapter 10: How to Work in Different Timezones



"It's a small world after all." The Disney song rings true when you run into someone at random in a city of millions or when you cross the globe in a day. But somehow, nothing shrinks the globe like building a company with a team that's distributed across multiple continents.

Twice a year, the Zapier team gets together [at a company retreat](#). We plan what we'll do next and catch up on what's happened with our teammates over the last six months. The rest of the year, we manage to work together across seven time zones, using Slack, Zoom, and some sheer effort to stay connected.

The best job for you might not be in your hometown, and you might work better when you aren't shackled to a 9-to-5 workday. And that's ok with a remote position, as long as you can manage the time shift. Your team will likely get more done, and you'll be able to provide better support for your customers—but you'll also need to figure out how to make the world feel a bit smaller.

After years of working remotely—for companies in India, Canada, Australia,

and the U.S.—I've learned how to make the most of the pros and overcome the cons that crop up when the world is your office. Here are five tips that you can use to take advantage of a time shift and six ways to tackle the most common problems that a remote teams faces.

## 5 Pros of Remote Work, and How to Take Advantage

### 1. Hire Around the Globe to Snag the Best Employees

"Letting people work remotely is about getting access to the best people wherever they are," write [Basecamp](#) co-founders Jason Fried and David Heinemeier Hansson in their book *Remote: Office Not Required*. Remote job board [We Work Remotely](#) says hiring a distributed team can help you "find the most qualified people in the most unexpected places."

That's music to the ears of metropolitan-based startups, like those in Silicon Valley and London fighting to hire great employees in a crowded market, as well as companies not based near urban centers. As Automattic founder [Matt Mullenweg](#) wrote, "If 95% of great programmers aren't in the U.S., and an even higher percentage not in the Bay Area, set up your company to take advantage of that fact as a strength, not a weakness." But hiring from anywhere only works with one crucial element: a time shift.

It's possible to hire people around the globe and still have your whole team working 9-to-5 at your office's time zone—after all, plenty of people work night shifts—but it's not optimal.

"The problems with remote work are more apparent if the team expects remote team members to be available at the company's time zone rather than theirs," says [Mutahhir Ali Hayat](#), a Pakistan-based developer who has worked on a number of remote teams. "It can quickly lead to burnout."

## 2. Offer Freedom of Time and Place to Boost Productivity

"It's only sensible and wise to live in an area where you can do your best work." - Neil Patel, entrepreneur

The freedom to work from anywhere you desire is an attractive benefit—but it's only true freedom when you can also work *whenever* you'd like.

"The key to remote work is living where you work best," says [Neil Patel](#) in [Entrepreneur Magazine](#) "Your environment does impact how you work. Thus, it's only sensible and wise to live in an area where you can do your best work."

Fried and Hansson offer another upside to remote work in their book on the topic. "The big transition with a distributed workforce is going from synchronous to asynchronous collaboration," they write. "Not only do we not have to be in the same spot to work together, we also don't have to work at the same time to work together."

9-to-5 isn't for everyone. Neither is Silicon Valley or the city where your company is based. Some of us [do our best work late at night](#), while others prefer to get up early and spend the late afternoons away from the desk. And while some metropolitan areas offer some lifestyle perks, other big-city issues—like high costs-of-living—will drive potential employees away.

### 3. Spread Across Time Zones to Work Around the Clock



The sun never sets on the British empire—even today—and it doesn't need to set on your company, either. Aside from the few weeks every year when we're all together at our [company retreats](#), there's always someone at Zapier awake and working. Time zone coverage is just something that's automatically possible with remote teams.

The Zapier marketing team, for example, works from Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur, Minneapolis, Omaha, Austin, Raleigh, New York, Toronto, San Francisco, Portland, and other cities. That makes scheduling meetings difficult, but we can hand off work to keep the wheels turning 24/7. I can write an article during the day in Bangkok, and my teammate Melanie in New York can edit it while I sleep. By the time I wake up, I've got corrections to work on. At the same time, Danny in Omaha can begin working with a new partner during the day, and I can pick up the remaining tasks as soon as he quits work at 5 p.m. his time.

[Jon Russell](#), a Bangkok-based reporter for TechCrunch, says remote work is

what enables their site to run a 24-hour newsroom. "When it comes to online publishing, being in different places isn't so strange," says Russell.

Marketing and reporting aren't the only jobs that benefit from a time shift. A global support team, for instance, can provide 24/7 support to your customers without forcing anyone to pull a night shift. Or, if you have system administrators around the globe, no one needs to have their sleep disrupted for emergency server issues.

"It was like having a friend in the future." - Scott Berkun

Microsoft's Internet Explorer team found success planning work around time shifts. [Scott Berkun](#), in his book *The Year Without Pants*, relates that Microsoft's U.S. and India teams worked in a system called "Follow the Sun."

"They worked the night shift while my team in Redmond worked days," Berkun says. "If I planned well, we'd find magic in going to bed frustrated by a missing puzzle piece, and waking to find it in our inbox. It was like having a friend in the future."

As [Couchsurfing](#) designer [Ben Hanna writes](#), "Good timing can make a project literally zip around the globe with work being completed 24 hours a day."

## 4. Work Solo to Destroy Distractions



Keeping projects rolling 24/7 may boost your team's output, but there's something else about working at different times that might make you even more productive: silence.

"I always say I love the fact that my mornings are quiet," says Zapier developer Rob Golding, who works in the UK, a few hours ahead of the rest of the Zapier development team. Zapier support team member Lindsay Brand echoed that sentiment: "One of the benefits is the quiet time to concentrate without getting distracted by chatting to your colleagues."

Working remotely *already* frees you from the standard workplace distractions of parties and water cooler talk, but GIF wars in Slack and random questions can quickly distract you just as much no matter where you're working. And that's nice—we all need human interaction, and it's great that you can still get that without being in the same room.

Too much of a good thing, though, can mean getting nothing done. A time

difference gives you the freedom to code or write without distraction. Then, when the rest of the team is online, you'll be more focused at what you *need* to discuss with them before it's time to get offline.

## 5. Stay Accountable to Focus on the Important Things



Teams in traditional office settings measure productivity by how long each team member spends at his or her desk (I'm only half kidding). But remote teams can fall into the "I'm online, so I'm being productive" trap, too.

A time shift, though, forces you to show what you've actually accomplished, since few others were there to see if you were logged in all day.

"A remote work environment should encourage performance—not presence," says entrepreneur Neil Patel. Then, you won't have to worry about time off and how many hours people are working. "You are simply looking for high-performers who can get stuff done."

The ability to hand off work is a productivity benefit, but it's also motivator since you know you *must* accomplish tasks so you can hand them off to co-workers at day's end. "It puts a little pressure on you to get your work done," says TechCrunch's Russell.

## 6 Cons of Remote Work, and How to Overcome Them



Even if you've never stepped foot in a "traditional" workplace, TV shows like "The Office" paint a grim picture: Endless meetings, random interruptions, and droning water cooler chats. Those may be exaggerated stereotypes—and traditional offices *do* have some redeeming qualities—but they're universal, nonetheless.

Remote teams need their own conventions and tools, too, to make everything flow smoothly together. Whiteboards and corkboards are obsolete in a remote environment, and even paper calendars and analogue clocks feel archaic. As [Virtuali](#) CEO Sean Graber wrote in the [Harvard Business Review](#), "It's important to create formal processes that simulate the informal ways we touch base when we are physically collocated."

You'll need new ways to make your work, well, *work*, so here are a few challenges the distributed teams at Zapier and other remote companies have faced while working remotely with a time shift, and how they overcome them.

## 1. There's no Constant Collaboration, so Own Your Own Projects

"Hire managers of one." - Basecamp

Teamwork is great. But, if you're working with a time shift, you'll need to pull your own weight on the team and lead your own way. If you're always waiting for someone to tell you what to do next, and that someone's asleep while you're working, you'll never get anything done.

That's why the most crucial part of building a remote team is hiring self-directed workers—"managers of one," as the Basecamp team calls them in their book *Rework*.

"You want someone who's capable of building something from scratch and seeing it through. Finding these people frees the rest of your team to work more and manage less," the book explains.

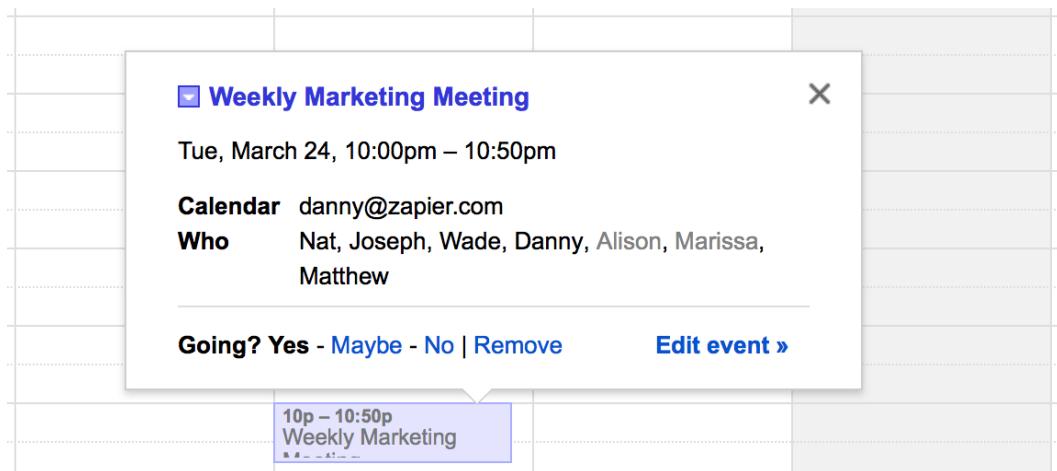
Zapier's CEO Wade Foster agrees, saying that the most important tenet in running a remote team is being able to "trust people to do stuff." To make that possible, he says, "have a project you own so there's always something to jump into." That way, you'll never be waiting on the next big thing you need to do.

It might not be possible—or even desirable—for each team member to take ownership of part of your company's work, but you can break projects up in a way that everyone has their own specific area to focus on. This strategy makes your projects asynchronous, which remote developer Mutahhir Ali Hayat suggests is the best way to make remote development work out.

"Manage projects in a way that they're asynchronous," Hayat says. "That means that the remote person has a lot of autonomy and any problems that arise can be solved by either leaving messages on Slack/email or syncing up for a couple of hours one day."

That, perhaps, is the greatest reason that it's tough to add remote work—and especially a time shift—to teams with years of experience working together in an office. It's absolutely possible to do great work with a dispersed team, but you must plan work accordingly. Break things up into chunks that can be worked on individually, find time to sync back up on what's been done, and make sure each person on the team can self-direct their work. Then, you'll find that the time gap doesn't really matter.

## 2. Meetings Might be Late (or Early), so Be Flexible



Remote workers are not islands—you'll need time to get together as a team. Whether it's just a check-in to see how everyone's doing or a set time to work collaboratively, there's almost no way to *always* work on your own.

That's good—after all, you'll still want some team interaction. But it also means you'll need to be flexible about times.

"Any remote worker knows you have to be flexible, so I feel time zone differences don't impact your remote work life too much," says Zapier's Brand, who works in Barcelona. "I'd quite happily sacrifice staying a little later or getting up a little earlier to avoid the stresses of a morning commute in rush hour traffic."

Staying up a bit late or getting up an hour earlier isn't a bad tradeoff for a job you love, but how about 2 a.m.? That's what *The Year Without Pants* author Berkun encountered when he worked at Automattic. "My team had hit the natural limits of space and time on planet earth," Berkun says. "For us to speak at the same time, someone would have to be miserable."

At Zapier, we encountered a similar issue with our weekly team meetings—for the marketing team, they typically occur in the mornings for U.S.-based team members and at 10 p.m. for me in Bangkok. When daylight saving time went into effect, though, suddenly I was looking at an 11 p.m.-midnight meeting.

6:30 a.m. Bangkok time—and late afternoon/early evening U.S. time—turned

out to be our winter solution. Both times have worked out for us, but they've forced each of us to be a bit flexible.

"I'd quite happily stay a little later or get up a little earlier to avoid the stresses of a morning commute" - Lindsay Brand

It doesn't need to be terrible: just try to limit long meetings so you're not straining someone's schedule. And if you're joining a team from far away, be prepared to be the most flexible one.

It might even work out great for you, if you like to work nontraditional hours anyway. Software engineer [Kevin Furbish](#) found this to be true about his remote team at Intuit. "Many of us tend to work crazy hours, which mitigates being in different time zones."

But even still, if you want to make a distributed team work, you need to accept a time shift. "I'll take phone calls late in the evening from folks that don't realize I'm on the east coast and consider that part of the job for someone working remotely in a different time zone," Furbish says.

### 3. It's Tough to Stay In Sync, so Check in With Your Team

@craiglabenz ●

Search



 **Matthew Guay** 9:43 PM

Just remembered we need to pair call ... ping me anytime tomorrow when you're free and we'll work it out :)

 **Craig Labenz** 10:02 PM

It's 10pm in Thailand now?

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March 6th, 2015

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 **Matthew Guay** 8:45 AM

Yeah, it was when you'd messaged 😊

Just ping me when you're online for the day, and we'll jump on a call.

 **Craig Labenz** 9:42 AM

I could do later tonight

Planning meetings across time zones might sound so painful that you'd rather just never have meetings—but don't do that either.

Belle Beth Cooper, writing about [working remotely on the Buffer team](#) says that “it’s important to check in before you start your workday and make sure you’re on the same page as everyone else.” You might be a “manager of one,” but if you’re going to hand off projects across time zones, you’ll need to stay in touch.

At Zapier, we stay connected with our team in a number of ways. We post thoughts and updates about team projects on Slack, regardless of who’s online. Plus, each department has a weekly video call to map out that week’s work, and every Thursday we’ll have an all-hands-on-deck call in order to get everyone together.

Every employee is also assigned a random “[pair partner](#)” each week—that means we’ll jump on a call with one of our colleagues just see how things are going, and perhaps work together on a cross-team project.

“Check in before you start your workday and make sure you’re on the same page as everyone else.” - Belle Beth Cooper

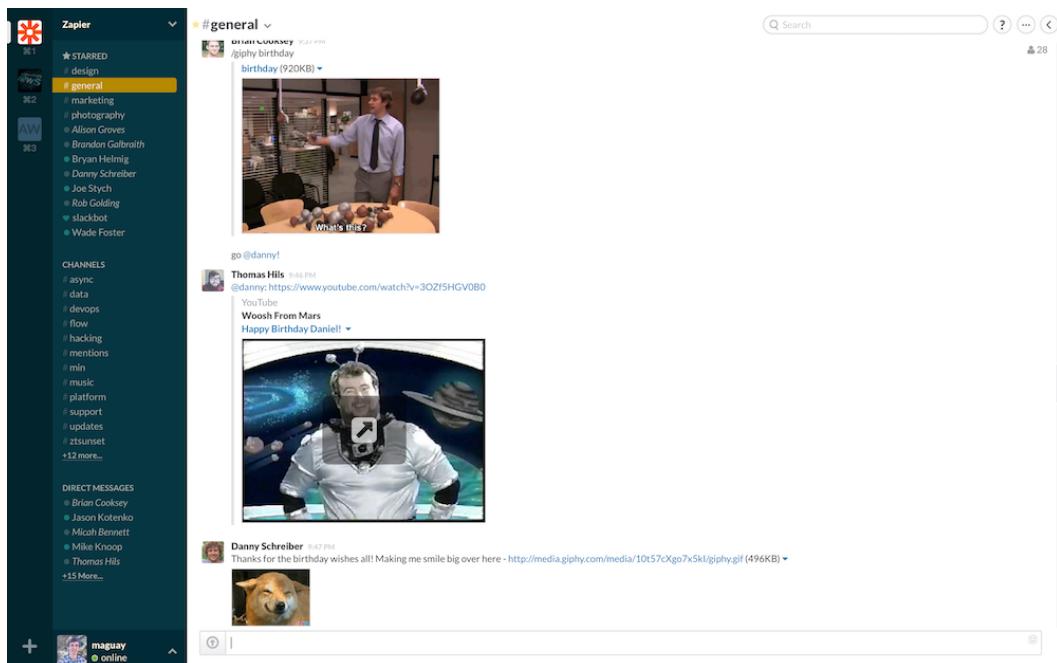
The [Couchsurfing](#) team has a similar schedule to make sure everyone's connected. "We have a bi-monthly full company meeting to make sure we all know we still exist," writes designer [Ben Hanna](#). "You may not need to do this, but for us it is good to hear voices we may not interact with on a daily basis." The Couchsurfing team also has "one-on-one meetings, conversations and project management meetings to keep everyone on task," just as our team does.

If you have a large distributed team, you might not need to try so hard to stay connected. Berkun found this out while working at Automattic. "Since there are people working from nearly every time zone in the world, there was always someone online to help with a problem or joke around with when you're working," he wrote in his book.

Even still, odds are you'll be working with *someone* who's not online at the same time as you. For that, be sure to try a bit harder to stay in touch. It's worth it.

FaceTime and Skype are great for quick one-to-one calls, [Google Hangouts](#) are great for team meetings and broadcasted meetings, and Zoom is the best tool we've found for getting a huge team on a call together. You might even want to [get a Twilio number](#) so your teammates can call you without racking up international charges. Whatever works best for your team, just put the effort into staying connected.

## 4. You Still Need to Socialize, So Have a Virtual Water Cooler



Staying in touch with everyone is easy nowadays. You can work at opposite times from the rest of your team, and *still* join in on all the office banter. The trick is a team chat app—for us, that's [Slack](#).

"One of the sad parts of working at a different time to the majority of your team is missing out on all the work chatter, but with tools like Slack, it's easy to catch up on that and get involved a little later," explained Zapier's Brand.

It's impossible to overstate how crucial Slack—a team chat app that makes it easy to search through all of your team's messages—is to remote teams. It's the one app that comes up in nearly *every* discussion of how to make remote teams work. Even reporters from *The New York Times* have found that Slack helps them stay connected to their newsroom while away on assignments.

"One danger of my job, as a columnist who works in California, is a feeling of disconnection from the mother ship in New York," writes technology columnist [Farhad Manjoo](#). "Using Slack, I can peer into discussions that would never have been accessible to me. I can see how the producers and editors who

are handling my column are discussing how to present it, and how the team overseeing the home page is thinking about my work."

"I have a feeling of intimacy with co-workers on the other side of the country that is almost fun. That's a big deal, for a job." - Farhad Manjoo, New York Times reporter

The ability to see what others are saying not only gives you insight to how others are working—something you might glean by working together—but it also enables the more fun aspects of working in a team. "What's more, I have a feeling of intimacy with co-workers on the other side of the country that is almost fun," Manjoo says. "That's a big deal, for a job."

No matter how independently you can work, and how hard you try to stay connected, you won't be in the flow of what everyone's doing unless you have a team chat tool. "At TechCrunch and The Next Web, having a central point of contact is critical," says Russell. "Tools like Slack, Convo and HipChat make that possible in a way that it never really was a few years ago."

It doesn't have to be Slack—it could be any of the other [great team chat apps](#) out there. Just be sure it fits this description:

- Easy to use, with mobile apps to stay in touch on the go
- Separates discussions into groups that everyone can join
- Archives all conversations so you can search through everything
- Includes private chats
- Integrates with the apps you use
- Has fun extras like Slack's Giphy integration that lets you lighten up the mood with GIFs

## 5. Your Work Can Be Overlooked, So Work in Public

The screenshot shows a feed of public posts from the Zapier team. Posts are listed by day:

- Wednesday Mar 25:** "How to Market New Zapier Apps: From Activation to Launch" by user 3. Tags: marketing.
- Tuesday Mar 24:** "Marketing Minutes - 03-24-15" by user 2. Tags: marketing.
- Monday Mar 23:** "Good News Everyone (also Cooksey OOO)" by user 17. Tags: schedule.  
"Support Minutes - 3-24-15" by user 5. Tags: support.
- Sunday Mar 22:** "Andrew Out Monday 3/23" by user 0. Tags: schedule.  
"Pair Buddies 3/23/15" by user 4. Tags: schedule.
- Saturday Mar 21:** "Nat's Friday Update" by user 5. Tags: friday updates. A small note at the bottom right says "try esc j k ⌘".

It's not enough to use Slack as your virtual watercooler. To work effectively with a time shift, you'll also need to work in public. In other words, communicate, and make sure everyone knows what you're working on.

Write what you've done that day, share where you're hung up on a project, and ping others with ideas. Developers, perhaps, have it the easiest with code comments and pull requests, but everyone should share what's happening in their own "manager of one" domain.

David Fullerton had to overcome the communication hurdle when he was growing the Stack Exchange team. "When there were 4 people, everyone knew everything. When there are 75 people, that no longer scales," he says. "So you have to work out your channels of communication, and that's doubly true with remote workers because you can't rely on overheard conversations or gossip to spread the word. You have to force yourself to be explicit in communication."

At Zapier, we've formalized communications about what we're working on with two things: a *Minutes* document from each of our team meetings that outlines our goals for each week, and a *Friday Update* post that covers which of those

goals we actually accomplished. Each of those live in *Async*—an in-house tool that gives everyone a set place to write anything they need to share with the entire team and forces us to “work in public.”

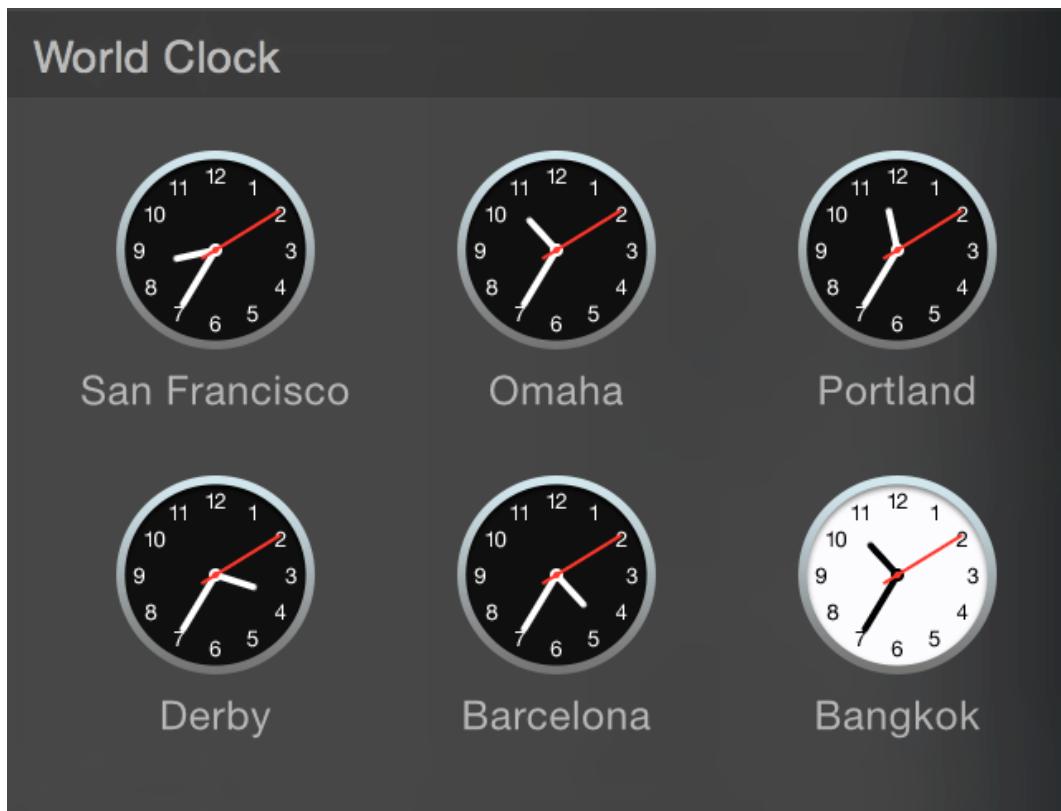
“You have to force yourself to be explicit in communication.” - David Fullerton

Sometimes you need someone to hold you accountable or just to work alongside you. Jeff Atwood found that when he [started Stack Overflow](#) programming on his own turned into a lonely job.

“I was coding alone,” he says. “Really alone. One guy working all by yourself alone. This didn’t work at all for me. I was unmoored, directionless, suffering from analysis paralysis, and barely able to get motivated enough to write even a few lines of code.”

His solution was to have a coding partner, someone he’d bounce ideas off of and check in with about project progress. Work together, even if there is a time gap, and you’ll find that the old adage “two are better than one” is still true.

## 6. Time Zones Are Merciless, So Keep Your Clocks Synced



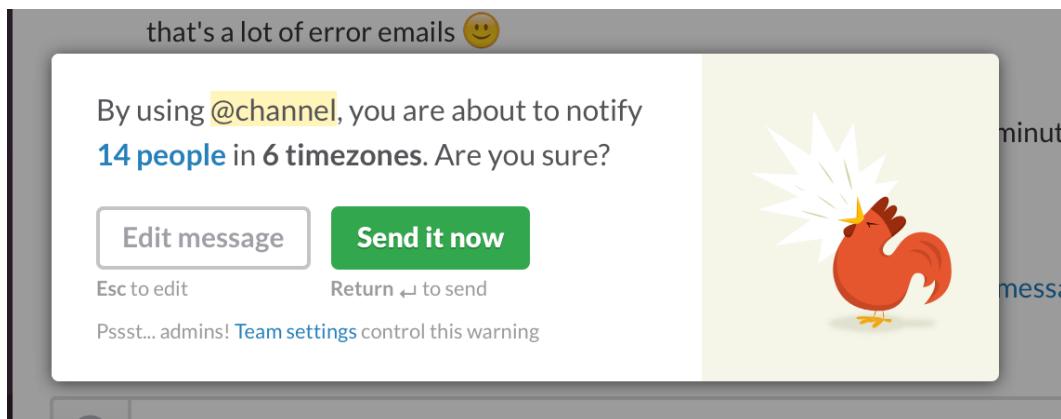
GMT—otherwise known as UTC—is a beautiful thing. It's the “mean solar time at the Royal Observatory in Greenwich, London” according to Wikipedia, and it's what every time zone is based on. If it's midnight in London (GMT), then it's 7 a.m. in Bangkok (GMT+7) and 8 p.m. the previous day in New York (GMT-4).

If you travel the world frequently, knowing which a time zone you're in relative to GMT is crucial—and it's also important if you're working with a distributed team. Knowing the difference between Eastern, Central, Mountain and Pacific time alone isn't enough anymore. You'll need to know the new year starts in Japan, which times of the day your colleague in London will be awake, and the times you're most likely to get support tickets from your Australian customers.

It's not actually that hard, as long as you think about it relative to GMT/UTC.

Know how many hours you are from GMT, and then it's simple to know what time it is in any other time zone. And keep your brain thinking in the time zone where most of your team is located, or the time zone you use to schedule content and plan releases. Don't just assume that since you're "in the future" compared to the rest of your team that you have more time—I've fallen into that fallacy far too often.

Beyond those mental tricks, you'll want to rely on your apps to prevent mishaps. Sometimes, they can be so clever, you'll never have to worry about anything.



Slack, for instance, lists each team member's time zone, how many hours that is from your local time, and that person's current local time whenever you click their name. That's an easy way to double-check before expecting an immediate reply. Or, if you attempt to message everyone in a group, Slack lets you know it's late for some people before you hit "send."

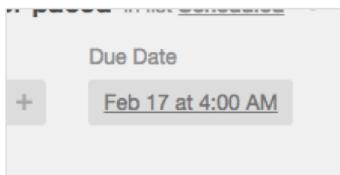
Tip: If you're working on distributed team—or just have friends around the world—turn on your phone's "Do Not Disturb" mode so it won't ding with notifications all night. Here's how to do that on [iOS](#) and [Android](#).



**Danny Schreiber** 11:35 AM

@channel heads up -- publish dates in Trello are now set to 4 a.m. -- this makes it globally the same day for us all 😊

<http://i.imgur.com/wt11vUS.png> (12KB) ▾



now no more confusion for our Bangkok office, hehe



**Matthew Guay** 11:37 AM

😊 Nice stuff, thanks for getting that figured out @danny!

time zones are more annoying than exchange rates

Other apps *don't* make it so easy, though. Trello, for instance, stores deadlines in UTC and then displays their due date and time based on your current time zone. That made articles on our schedule look like they were due a day later for me in Bangkok. To overcome this limitation, we worked to find a time to schedule tasks where the due day would be the same for all.

You might find that you need to tweak some things—say, using the same time zone settings in everyone's apps—to make it all look correct, but it's worth the time. After all, a broken schedule can make your remote team's work fall apart entirely .

Beyond that, if you're still having trouble tracking time and scheduling meetings with your whole team, here are some tools that have come in handy for us:

## Google

A screenshot of a Google search results page. The search query is "6AM Bangkok in San Francisco time". The results show a snippet: "6:00 AM Thursday, in Bangkok is 4:00 PM Wednesday, in San Francisco, CA, USA". Below this, there's a note about the search taking 0.72 seconds.

Google really does know everything. If you search for the current time in most major cities around the world, you'll get the answer right at the top of your results. More recently, Google added a time calculator to search so you can look up what time it *will* be in a certain place.

That might not be enough to schedule meetings across a number of time zones, but it's a quick way to figure out if you're ok to call your boss at 6 p.m.

## Google Calendar

The Google Calendar settings interface. It includes fields for Language (English (US)), Country (United States), Your current time zone (selected as Bangkok), Date format (1:00pm), and Time format (1:00pm). A dropdown menu for Date format lists various time zones: (GMT+07:00) Bangkok, (GMT-10:00) Hawaii Time, (GMT-09:00) Alaska Time, (GMT-08:00) Pacific Time, (GMT-07:00) Mountain Time, (GMT-07:00) Mountain Time - Arizona, (GMT-06:00) Central Time, and (GMT-05:00) Eastern Time.

Google Calendar looks basic at first glance, but it's [packed with features](#) that make it great for remote teams—or really any team. You can set your own time zone, and save the time zones you work with most to have an easy way to switch between them.

Then, if you want another easy way to know what time it is everywhere your team's located, you can turn on the World clock in the Calendar Labs settings.

It's a simple, text-based world clock provides an at-a-glance update.

Find more great ways to optimize Google Calendar in our roundup of [30 Google Calendar hacks and tricks](#).

## Every Time Zone



For an even simpler way to see what time it is around the world, check out [Every Time Zone](#) from the [Freckle](#) team. It shows the current time in your own city, along with others in popular time zones around the world.

Drag the second indicator to the time you want to have a meeting, and you'll see what time that'll be in cities around the globe. It's not a perfect way to schedule, but is a good way to get a feel for international time differences.

## World Clock Meeting Planner

UTC-time	Bangkok	Omaha	Portland	San Francisco	Nashville
Thursday, 16 April 2015, 17:00:00	Fri 00:00	Thu 12:00 *	Thu 13:00 *	Thu 10:00 *	Thu 12:00 *
Thursday, 16 April 2015, 18:00:00	Fri 01:00	Thu 13:00 *	Thu 14:00 *	Thu 11:00 *	Thu 13:00 *
Thursday, 16 April 2015, 19:00:00	Fri 02:00	Thu 14:00 *	Thu 15:00 *	Thu 12:00 *	Thu 14:00 *
Thursday, 16 April 2015, 20:00:00	Fri 03:00	Thu 15:00 *	Thu 16:00 *	Thu 13:00 *	Thu 15:00 *
Thursday, 16 April 2015, 21:00:00	Fri 04:00	Thu 16:00 *	Thu 17:00 *	Thu 14:00 *	Thu 16:00 *
Thursday, 16 April 2015, 22:00:00	Fri 05:00	Thu 17:00 *	Thu 18:00 *	Thu 15:00 *	Thu 17:00 *
Thursday, 16 April 2015, 23:00:00	Fri 06:00	Thu 18:00 *	Thu 19:00 *	Thu 16:00 *	Thu 18:00 *
Friday, 17 April 2015, 00:00:00	Fri 07:00	Thu 19:00 *	Thu 20:00 *	Thu 17:00 *	Thu 19:00 *
Friday, 17 April 2015, 01:00:00	Fri 08:00	Thu 20:00 *	Thu 21:00 *	Thu 18:00 *	Thu 20:00 *
Friday, 17 April 2015, 02:00:00	Fri 09:00	Thu 21:00 *	Thu 22:00 *	Thu 19:00 *	Thu 21:00 *
Friday, 17 April 2015, 03:00:00	Fri 10:00	Thu 22:00 *	Thu 23:00 *	Thu 20:00 *	Thu 22:00 *
Friday, 17 April 2015, 04:00:00	Fri 11:00	Thu 23:00 *	Fri 00:00 *	Thu 21:00 *	Thu 23:00 *

TimeandDate.com's [World Clock Meeting Planner](#) won't win any design awards, but it makes time shift scheduling straightforward. You pick the cities where everyone lives, and the date for your meeting, and it'll show in green, yellow, and red the times that are best, not *too* bad, and terrible for everyone.

You might find that there's no perfect time for your team, but at least you'll find options that aren't excruciating. Plus, you can add the correct time to your calendar in just a click, if you'd like.

There are more time zone tools at [TimeandDate.com](#), too, so be sure to check it out if you want to find local times around the world for your event, convert times for any location, and more.

**Tip:** Need a tool that's more accessible and works well with screen readers? Try out [International Meeting Planner](#) for a similar tool with a slightly simpler interface.

## World Meeting Time



Prefer something more eye-catching? Then [World Meeting Time](#) might be more your style. Just drag placeholders to the spots on the map where your team lives, enter when you want to hold the meeting, and see what time that'll be locally for everyone before sending invites.

It's not as simple to pick the perfect time here, but it's easy to spot where everyone lives and send group meeting invites. And with the new [World Meeting Time Pro](#), you can save your guests and regular meetings to re-schedule meetings with your team easily, and sync everything with Google Calendar.

## Build Your Own Small World

Remote working isn't automatically a freer way to work—it can be just as stressful as any 9-to-5 job. Teach your remote team to be flexible about time, though, and everyone's lives will be easier. Plus, you'll be able to hire the best people from anywhere around the globe.

That might mean you can move to a city where it's easier to start a family, or extend your "vacation" to a few months on the beach each year. You might even find time to visit some of the incredible cities on [Nomad List](#) while still contributing all to your team.

*Written by [Matthew Guay](#).*

*World clocks photo by Leoplus on Flickr. Always open photo by [Jeremy Brooks](#). Quiet photo by [José María Pérez Nuñez](#). Time zone clocks photo by [Alexei & Verne Stakhanov](#). Clock photo by [Matthew Guay](#).*

# Chapter 11: How to Avoid Burnout in a Remote Team



Working remotely is a wonderful thing. It allows you to work in your best environment, giving your teammates and company the chance to have your best work. It also lets you call your own shots, leaving you more creative, happier, and healthier (hello no germs spreading around an office!).

But there is a tendency to work *more* while working remotely. When your home is your office, it's hard to put separation between your work life and personal life. Though total control is great, not being able to pull yourself away from work can more easily lead to burnout.

When you're part of a distributed team, what's the best way to cope and balance

the great aspects about remote working with the sometimes-not-so-great parts? We posed that question to 22 members of remote teams around the world. Here are their responses, with actionable ways to help you avoid getting burned out while working remotely. And even if you work in a traditional, on-site team, you'll likely find tips here to help you keep balance in today's mobile-first, always connected world.

## 1. Establish and Maintain a Routine

### Courtney Seiter, Content Crafter at [Buffer](#)

The best thing I did for myself in adapting to remote work has been to create morning and evening routines. In the morning, I have a routine of a quick workout, stretching and meditation, and in the afternoon/evening I take the dogs on a walk and then work on my Spanish. The routines change a bit based on the season (in the summer, there's a lot more gardening), but it actually doesn't matter so much what they include.

The main thing for me was that putting these routines in place has the effect of sort of approximating a commute time (although much nicer!) and signaling to my brain when work time is starting in the morning and ending in the evening. It can be tough as a remote worker to distinguish between work and non-work time, and these routines help me a lot.

### Jesse Parker, Customer Champion at [Zapier](#)

It's definitely important to have a hard stop. There is always work to be done and you'll have to accept that it's not possible to finish all of it. If you try, you will burnout. I've done that to myself in a previous job and it's not fun and you grow easily exhausted.

## **Mercer Smith-Looper, Customer Service Integrations Specialist at [Campaign Monitor](#)**

I keep a hyper-set schedule. To give you a little insight into this, I was the 5-year old that would get mad at my parents when they told me that there was no schedule for the day while we were on vacation. That has kind of—er—persisted through my life, much to the chagrin of my husband and friends. It sounds counterintuitive, but having a set schedule means that I *stick to it* rather than having the propensity of most other remote workers to not maintain balance between home life and work life. So, I wake up at 8:30, make coffee and breakfast for my husband, walk my dog, and then work. At 12ish everyday, I either nap with my dog or take a walk and eat depending if I'm hungry. I finish at about 5:30 everyday, unless I have a late call or something, and then do the same thing most nights. I always make sure to shut off my computer and not turn it back on until going back to work the next day.

I've heard statistics somewhere that when you work remotely because there are so few distractions for you (if you're of a certain personality type, that is, which I would argue you need to be if you're going to work remotely), you get a ton more work done than you would if you were in an office. I use this as a kind of justification in my crazy brain to keep to this set schedule. My home is my safe place, and I need to respect and honor it just as I try to do my own sanity by keeping a schedule, and making sure that I don't get into the habit of burning that midnight oil.

## **Rachel Muircroft, Software Engineer at [Bentley Systems](#)**

I've worked remotely from my house now for 7 years and the one thing that I try to do consistently—and sometimes it's really hard—is keep office hours (between 8 and 6). It has kept me disciplined and over time my colleagues have been able to learn what my hours are, too. This is important for me because I like to try and get involved in collaboration projects as much as possible. It pushes the communication both ways more—and it's also more noticeable when teammates start heading home at the end of the day.

There are times though, when working on projects alone can't be avoided and when I'm in that situation, I make sure I get outside at lunchtime, see people,

plan my tasks to keep to the hours and check in with the office often. I even have my monitor dim slightly using the software [f.lux](#) to let me know it's getting late in the day and to think about finishing up.

I've recently moved further down the east coast of Scotland, too, so I try and take regular 5 minute breaks just to stand up and look out the window at the sort-of sea view.

"My home is my safe place, and I need to respect and honor it just as I try to do my own sanity by keeping a schedule." - Mercer Smith-Looper, Campaign Monitor

### **Alison Groves, Customer Champion at [Help Scout](#)**

For myself, keeping my mind and spirits in tip top shape has everything to do with establishing a routine. I'm an early riser, so I get up at 5:30am every day, work 90 minutes, take an hour to run for a few miles and eat breakfast, then tackle the day. I also find it extremely important to have a natural end to my day, which for me is preparing dinner. I use meal delivery service [Blue Apron](#) to bring me ingredients to cook for myself or friends, and know that I have to end my day and take care of myself in a healthful manner by cooking.

I do my absolute best to hold steadfast to this routine whether I'm at home or on the road. Tasks get done under those constraints, and I'm putting a large importance on my own well being.

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## **2. Set and Stick to Priorities**

### **Kate Stull, Co-Founder of [Popforms](#)**

In the early days of Popforms, I used to work all the time. In the morning, I would grab my laptop and pull it into bed with me, and dive into email almost as soon as I woke up. I'd work all day, sometimes forgetting to change out of

pajamas, and then I'd be curled up with the computer, writing blog posts, back in bed at night. It was bad.

Not surprisingly, I got pretty burnt out doing that. I was working every day of the week, unhappy, never feeling done, and focusing more on quantity than quality. But I figured if I was working all day, I must be pretty important and doing pretty important things, right?

Then one day I realized the work was never going to stop. There is always more to do, and when you work remotely, there is no one to tell you to go home or that the office is closing, so it has to be YOU who decides when to stop. You have to decide that the rest of your life is worth making space for, and not let work take over that time.

When I decided to cut back my working hours (I don't check email after 6 p.m., I don't work weekends, I don't bring my computer to bed), it made me focus on quality over quantity. I had to make sure I was maximizing my 7-8 working hours, instead of just aimlessly moving from task to task over 12-14 hours a day, or being overly reactive to small fires and delaying more important work.

I worked with my cofounder to define the most important priorities for my role, so that when 5 p.m. rolls around I can ask myself, 'Have I done the most important work I could do today?' And when I can say yes to that, then I can log off, recharge, and invest in the other areas of my life. That is what makes it possible for me to keep working without getting burnt out.

## **Josh Pigford, Founder of Baremetrics**

I think things like 'motivation,' 'procrastination' and 'burnout' are all kind of intertwined and burnout, to me, is essentially the sum of choosing to work on the wrong things for too long. We're naturally motivated by successful feedback loops, and you get burned out when that feedback loops gets broken over and over again for too long.

Show up, work on things that move the needle and you'll be fine.

"Like your grocery list, most things can wait until tomorrow. Set aside time for work and rest." - Chris Gallo, Highrise

## Chris Gallo, Support at Highrise

The feeling creeps up and the next thing you know you're answering your first email at 6:45 am and replying to another one at 9:15 pm.

Burnout is real. Don't fight it. You can't win.

A great analogy that I've found useful is to think of work as grocery shopping. You don't drop everything and go out to the store the instant you're running low on cookies. If you did, you would waste a lot of time and energy.

You make a list, find time to go to the store, and stock up all at once. But with work, we're constantly plugged in, always checking email, and dropping everything when we don't have to.

Like your grocery list, most things can wait until tomorrow. Set aside time for work and rest. Do nothing. And don't feel guilty about it. Your mind will reward you later.

## Kyle Gray, Content Marketing Manager at WP Curve

I am most vulnerable to burnout when I lose track of what's important in my work. It's hard to say no to tasks or opportunities and stay focused on what is really valuable in my work. I start to take on little extra tasks and projects that I think are important, but are just distractions. Before I know it I am spinning a bunch of plates and the quality of my work and my life start to suffer. Days where I jump between different tasks, projects and emails leave me feeling exhausted and stressed.

There's a couple of things I do to refocus:

- Identify what is essential and what's not - For me that is creating content, anything that is not creating new content needs to get cut out. Setting clear goals helps keep you on track. My goals are very simple: I need at least 10 posts published on the WP Curve blog each month.
- Get organized - I plan out my next week and book time for the important things. When the time is blocked out in advance, it's easier to say 'no' to distractions. It also means less creative energy is wasted making decisions in my day.

Getting refocused always seems to reduce my stress and burnout. I feel fulfilled and energized on days when I singularly focus on a single task.



### **Gavin Zuchlinski, founder of [Acuity Scheduling](#)**

Before working on Acuity full time, I worked for a government agency in a classified environment. One nice side effect was that it was almost impossible to bring work home with you (absolutely no quick checking e-mails on your

phone!). Burnout definitely happened there, but it was more obvious because you would be physically at work too much.

During that time I worked on Acuity part time, so I'd squeeze in work on it whenever I had a free moment. That definitely formed some bad habits I'm still trying to break. Now that I'm full time on Acuity there's no need to squeeze in work when I can, but it's still a habit to check e-mails when I can, or whenever I have an idea to test it out.

When I was working on Acuity part time, limited time was a forcing factor. I had plenty of ideas and when I was finally able to implement them, they were full formed in my mind and my execution was efficient. Now with more time there's less of a need of efficiency, so it's easy to run with a less mature idea, only to find time wasted, or spend time ruminating on and researching things which really don't benefit the core of my business.

My feeling is that having fewer constraints on my time is leading to more overwork, and more burnout.

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### 3. Create and Keep Boundaries

**Janet Choi, Marketer at [Customer.io](#)**

The remote worker's greatest challenge might be herself/himself. While one of the [best benefits of working remotely is flexibility](#), that can turn into too much pliancy over where work ends and life begins.

When I first started working remotely, I reverted to a college night-owl schedule, where I was getting up and going to sleep later than the rest of humanity—and failing to spend all that time in between in a disciplined way. So I felt like I was never getting enough done AND failing to deal with my well-being and everyday life. That puts you in a continuous dangerous downward-spiral that leads not just to one-time but habitual burnout.

“The remote worker’s greatest challenge might be herself/himself.” -  
Janet Choi, Customer.io

When you're the decider over how you spend your hours, you also have to be more proactive about sticking to priorities and setting boundaries—that's part of your job. I find myself returning to something Marissa Mayer says about burnout (no matter the Yahoo policy for remote work) how important it is to [find your rhythm](#) and protect it to avoid burnout. For me, that rhythm means taking time to reflect and celebrate progress when planning, and setting boundaries like working outside of my apartment at a co-working space or scheduling deliberate non-work time into my week.

### **Jess Scott, Founder of [jessINK](#)**

Set boundaries. While it's important to get work done in a timely manner, remote work doesn't mean that you absolutely need to be online or available 24/7. Also, schedule some time for relaxing/socializing and/or close, supportive relationships. Remote work offers flexibility, and I appreciate the work-life balance that comes with that.

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## **4. Take Short and Long Breaks**

### **Chase Clemons, Support at [Basecamp](#)**

Take a three-day weekend every now and then. Make sure to get away from everything for a week or two each year. With our team, we recognize that sometimes you just need to get away and recharge. So every three years, we give each person a thirty-day sabbatical. Regular breaks and vacations go a long way towards [preventing burnout](#).

### **Tom Moor, Co-Founder of [Sqwiggle](#)**

Split your days in two. This is pretty easy to do as a remote worker, as you can work from different locations in the morning and afternoon. Having a nice walk

or cycle somewhere around lunch gives your mind time to work and your body some movement, which it probably needs if you've been sitting all morning ;)

### **Debra Carpenter, PR Manager at [Logo Garden](#)**

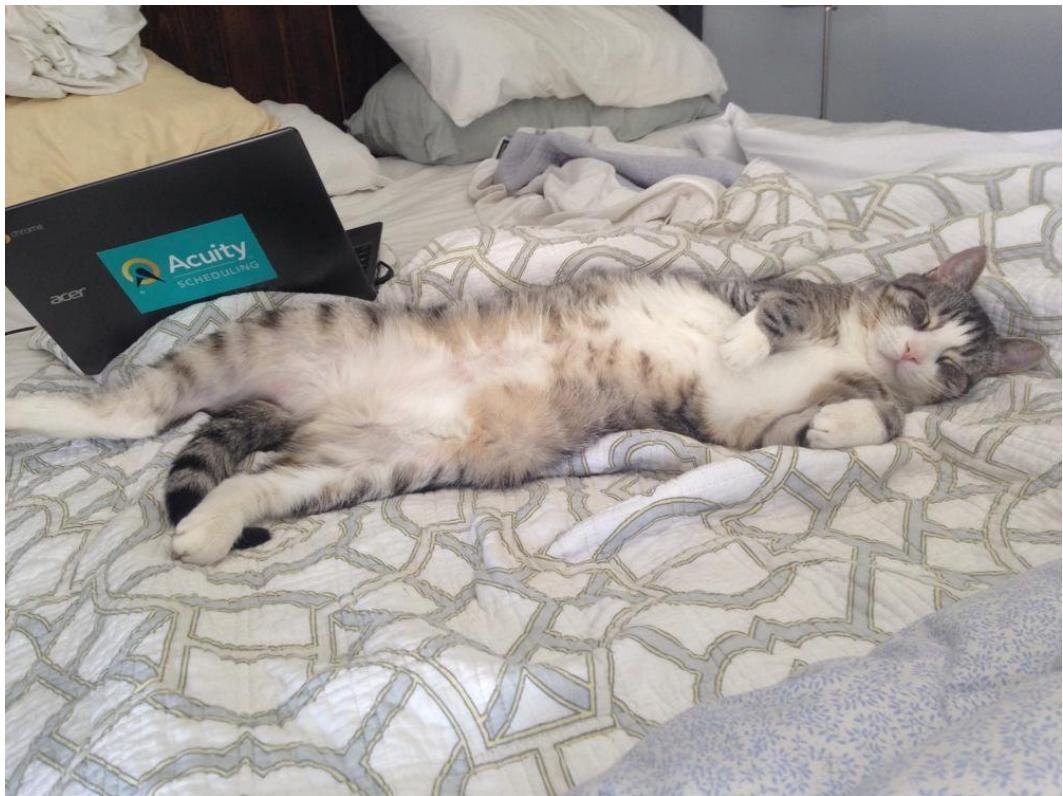
Use the little moments of free time throughout the day to your advantage—do some jumping jacks, walk outside, meditate. It helps break my days into smaller, more manageable bits and makes me feel more productive.

### **Mike Knoop, Co-Founder of [Zapier](#)**

To me, burnout is when I have particularly low energy. It's happened a few times. The best way I've found isn't to fight it or force yourself to work on something productive. Rather, switch gears and do something active for a few hours. Go outside, walk, go do an errand. Seems to help a lot when you finally get back in front of a machine.

### **Nicole Geosits, Customer Support at [Acuity Scheduling](#)**

Get outside when it's nice. Do your laundry in between answering emails so you can wholly enjoy your weekends. Enjoy your flexibility that working remotely offers, and pet your cat when you're feeling stressed.



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## 5. Make Time for Human Interaction

**John O’Nolan, Founder of [Ghost](#)**

Burnout is always tough, and I think it affects everyone from time to time. One of the hardest things about working remotely is the lack of human contact to provide a moral boost during the difficult periods. Usually burnout is a clear sign for me that it’s time to get out of the house and go and spend time with real live people and unwind a little. I consider this an investment in my future productivity, rather than slacking off, which helps justify it (if only to myself).

"One of the hardest things about working remotely is the lack of human contact to provide a moral boost during the difficult periods."  
- John O'Nolan, Ghost

### **Laura Gluhanich, Co-Founder of [Signal Camp](#)**

Make sure to get socialization in—and have a crew you can reach out to for advice, support, celebratory high fives and face to face time.

### **Coby Chapple, Product Designer at [GitHub](#)**

Go talk to another human. Everyone always underestimates how much this helps. The most helpful person to speak to will be different depending on your situation, but here's some ideas to try: talk to your manager, your colleagues, your non-work friends, and your family. You really should try and cultivate friendships outside your job (and even outside your industry as a whole) if you don't already. One of the most [helpful things for burnout](#) is a change of context to distract you from your professional life's fatigue, and healthy social time with friends is unbeatable in terms of grounding you in the bigger picture.

### **Aray Montaivan-Till, Community Manager at [Cloud Peeps](#)**

Go out to lunch or coffee at least once a week with another freelancer [or remote worker] in the area. It's great to talk shop, vent and talk through problems and thoughts together.

### **Wade Foster, Co-Founder of [Zapier](#)**

One thing I think is really important especially for remote workers is to have a local social life. Have friends, colleagues or family that you can hangout with. Otherwise you'll get no social interaction ever and will quickly burn out from work even if the work is fun.



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## Don't Flame Out

Campaign Monitor's Mercer perfectly summed up the working from home life in her answer. "Hobbies are super helpful to distract you from the feeling that because you work from home that home always has to mean work," she says.

Home doesn't always have to mean work, and those other things we love to do in life outside of our work help keep work in one corner of our lives, and let our other interests and hobbies share that same space. If we establish a routine, manage and respect our time, spend time with people outside of work, and take breaks—such as dedicating time to hobbies (mine is beer making!)—remote working can be an extremely fulfilling way to live. Burnout is something we don't have to let happen if we're mindful and take care of ourselves.

**Related:** Read our [Remote Work Survival Guide](#)

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*Written by [Allison Groves](#)*

*Match photo by [Ana](#) via [Flickr](#). Remote photos courtesy respective individuals.*

# **Chapter 12: How to Thrive as an Extrovert on a Remote Team**



Hi! I'm Bethany, Product Manager and extrovert. Super nice to meet you!



People often confuse being extroverted with being an outgoing person. And a lot of times the two traits do go hand-in-hand.

But to me, being extroverted isn't about being outgoing. It describes the way an individual gains and loses energy. Nothing gives me more energy than socializing and collaborating with my friends and coworkers. When I walk out of a meeting, I feel inspired, energized, and ready to take on the world. Personal interactions are the way I recharge.

This posed a problem for me about a year ago when I joined Zapier, an all-remote team. The remote aspect of my job provides many benefits I enjoy, but the lack of in-person contact has been a real challenge for me.

With the help of my Zapier coworkers, I've developed a few practices that I find vital to my day-to-day well being. Here are our best practices for thriving as an extrovert on an all-remote team.

## Consider Social Activities as a Form of Self-Care

When I worked in an office environment, I could be passive about social interaction because it was an inherent part of my day. On a remote team, much

of our communication is written in tools like Slack. While I love communicating via emojis, it's not the same type of communication that feeds my extroverted soul.

In a remote world, you have to be intentional about in-person socialization. This can come in a variety of ways for extroverts on our Zapier team:

I'm a runner and my running group is the way I socialize and de-stress, so I make time for it. I also prioritize meetups, hackathons, and professional groups that relate to my development as a Product Manager.

Andra Roston, Customer Champion, also **prioritizes spending time with groups**: "One of the best things about working remotely is that it leaves me the social energy for the times I want. I crossfit and do theatre, both of which are social activities."

Cody Jones, Head of Partnerships, **relies on his home base and community ecosystem**: "I have 3 boys that love to rough-house, play, and get into all sorts of mischief. I see my parents and siblings each weekend as well. I'm also very involved in my local community—I'm a scout leader which means I spend about 4 hours each week with a bunch of boys and their parents."

Tim Anderson, Chief Growth Officer, is **intentional about making plans**: "I try hard to plan to meet up with friends. In remote work, you no longer have the easy, 'who wants to grab a beer after work?' thing going, so that requires a lot more planning."

Whether it's sports, a hobby, or hanging out with family and friends, recognize these activities are the primary way you'll recharge—and prioritize them appropriately.

**Prioritize your social activities, because they are a form of self-care.** It's easy to blow off social activities when you've been working in your pajamas all day and your Netflix queue is full. Which brings me to my next tip...

## Put Your Shoes On

Literally, put your shoes on in the morning. I'm twice as likely to leave the house if I stick to my morning routine and get dressed. Whether I plan to work from

a coffee shop, go for a run, go to happy hour, or attend a meetup I make sure I'm dressed to do so *with my shoes on* before I start work in the morning.

Mike Knoop, CPO, also uses this trick: "It's such a small thing but it works. When my shoes are on, I'm at work and I'm ready to tackle the day."

This tiny change in your morning routine can really make a difference. For me, the simple act of putting my shoes sets a positive and intentional tone that shows up in my work and social life.



**YOU LOOK FANTASTIC!**

## Leverage Technology

When I worked in an office, my go-to move was to grab some coworkers and head to a whiteboard. Working remotely changed that. I really missed the tactile nature of whiteboards and the ease of ad-hoc communication.

Luckily, there are tools that can help replicate in-person collaboration in a digital space. Some my team use daily include:

- [Mural.ly](#), a digital workspace that offers digital stickies, whiteboards, and a lot of other great features
- [Zoom](#), our video conferencing solution
- [Slack](#), where most of our day-to-day communication happens

Using these tools is a great way to recreate in-person collaboration. Chris Patrick, People Ops, finds **virtual coworking sessions a useful way to connect** with members of his team via technology. And Andy Wilkinson, Customer Champion, **pairs up with teammates** over Zoom or Slack calls when responding to customer emails.

These are great tools, but they're only effective if you use them. So grab a colleague and open up a digital whiteboard or hop on a call to brainstorm. Make the most of the technology you have available to you, and you'll feel a difference in your day-to-day productivity.

## Engage With Your Remote Team

Because we communicate mostly in writing, it can be easy to watch conversations roll by without engaging. And, for the same reason, it can be hard to build relationships with your team.

Be diligent about participating. At Zapier, we have a culture full of jokes, gifs, and emojis in Slack. I find when I fully participate in these conversations I feel connected to my coworkers and spend a lot of my day actually Lol-ing.

Andra Roston, Customer Champion, **dedicates time to relationships with remote teammates**: "I try to spend time in our #fun Slack channels. I also make the absolute most of Zapier retreats, and try to maintain the relationships I forge thereafter."

Danny Schreiber, Editorial Team Manager, **takes advantage of in-person time** when he does see his team (such as our company retreats) to build relationships: "When we're together in-person as a company I find myself

taking full advantage of it and soaking up the time—mixing up who I dine with, grabbing drinks/coffee between things, staying up too late in the game room, etc."

I'm fortunate to live in Austin, TX where a few other Zapiens also live. We organize monthly lunches and weekly coworking sessions at coffee shops. We even threw a holiday potluck! On the flip side, I also try to engage with my remote team. We have a weekly pair chat program and informal video hangouts that help facilitate these types of interactions.

When I focused my energy on engaging in the culture of our team and building relationships, it changed the way I perceived remote work. This type of focus builds a sense of community where we as extroverts thrive.

## **Finally, Ask for Help**

Social interaction comes passively in an office. In a remote environment, you have to be much more intentional. That can be a hard transition.

Be proactive about your self-care. About 3 months into my employment, I felt lonely and isolated. I loved my team and the work, but spending time by myself all day, every day was negatively impacted my well being.



I reached out to my manager for help, and we brainstormed some solutions, like testing out a coworking space, attending meetups, and prioritizing social events. I wish I had asked for help sooner because there were two positive outcomes of that meeting.

The first is that I had the support and encouragement from my manager while I worked through this challenge. I felt less isolated immediately after that conversation.

The second is that I started being intentional about self-care as an extrovert. And that led me to raise the subject with my team and define these best practices that I'm now sharing with you.

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*Written by [Bethany Hills](#)*

*Title photo by [Burst](#) via [Pexels](#).*

# Chapter 13: How to Find and Get Hired for a Remote Job



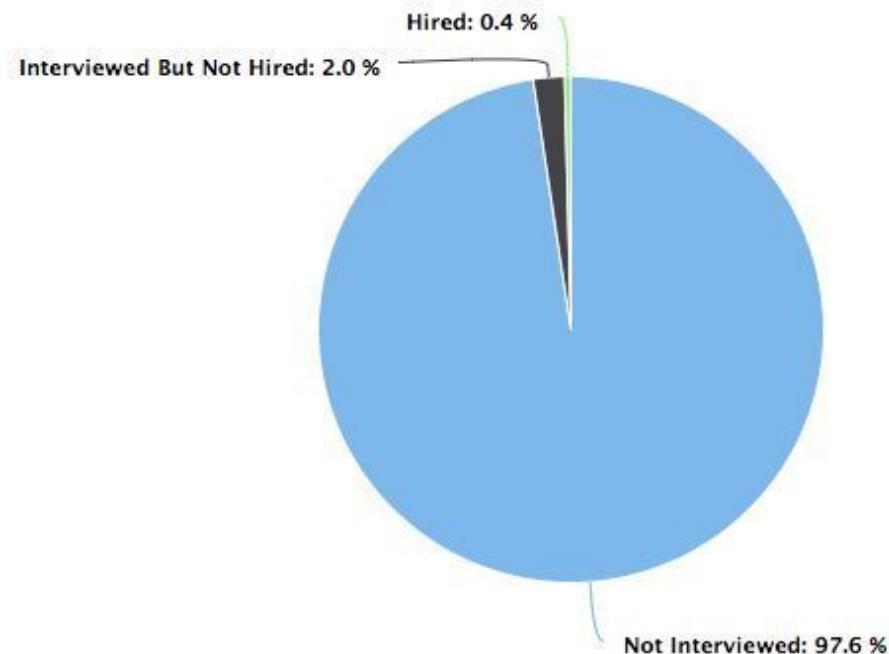
When it's raining, snowing, or sweltering hot outside, I am grateful for my 30-second "commute." When I see photos of open offices with people trying to work side by side at long tables, I'm grateful for the solitude of my home office. When I hear that some people spend two hours *each way* jumping from bus to train to yet another train to get to work, I'm grateful for the time I save by not commuting, because that's more time with my family and more time for myself.

**For many people, remote work is the ideal way to work.** You get the income stability and benefits of being an employee, plus the freedom to work wherever fits you best. You get to ditch the soul-crushing commute and, yes, work in your pajamas if you like. Before you throw out all your suits, though, you have to land the job.

Although remote work is becoming more popular—almost [40% of the US workforce works remotely](#), compared to only [9%](#) 20 years ago—it's still not the norm, and competition for these positions is fierce. According to a [Telework Inc. survey](#), the option to telecommute ranks as high as or even higher than health benefits on job applicants' wish lists. However, it takes *two years* on average to get a position that allows for remote work.

Here at Zapier, we're a 100% remote team and we get many applicants for [our job openings](#). In our Customer Champion roles, for example, only 2% of applicants get a job fit interview and only 0.4% are hired. We're as picky as Yale—and so are other employers.

### Zapier Customer Champion Hiring



So if you want to work remotely, you need a plan. A plan that will help you showcase to hiring managers that you're not only the best candidate for the job, you're also cut out for working productively on your own.

Here's that game plan.

## Understand What Employers Are Looking For



*The four attributes Buffer looks for in their remote work candidates*

First things first: It takes a certain kind of person to work successfully in a remote work environment. There's no one looking over your shoulder prompting you to get stuff done. You might feel isolated and unmotivated on your own. Day-to-day communication with your boss and teammates can be trickier without body language cues. And there's a very real danger of *overworking* when your office is open 24/7 and a few feet away.

So as beneficial as remote work can be, it's not without its challenges, and employers who hire remote workers are keen on making sure every person on their staff can thrive in this environment. Also, it's a good idea to make sure for yourself that you really want to work remotely. I've known a few people who started working from home and quickly developed cabin fever.

See if the following four essential traits fit you.

## 1. You're tech savvy

Because much of your time will be spent online, make sure that your computer system is up to par. Employers with remote staff rely heavily on the latest tools and software to get the job done, such as [video conferencing apps](#). Some companies will pay to get you set up with the gear you need, but others don't. And, in any case, be prepared to gain experience with new tools.

At [FlexProfessionals, LLC](#), co-founder Sheila Murphy explains on [Remote.com](#) that "for remote positions in our company, employees must have excellent communications skills and a comfort level with learning [...] and using technology. We look for and evaluate these traits throughout the interview process."

You don't have to be a tech wizard, but at least have some familiarity with tools and be open to ongoing learning.

## 2. You're an efficient communicator

Even when you're working remotely, you'll still need to actively communicate with your team. You'll likely communicate via direct messaging apps, email, and texts, so being able to get your points across clearly and quickly is essential. Coby Chapple, a product designer at [GitHub](#), says:

The importance of this cannot be overstated. When you're remote, a majority of the way you interface with the world will be through the written word, so it's critical that you can articulate complex concepts and subtleties. Giant walls of text aren't fun either, so it's important to keep things concise.

[Automattic](#) Happiness Engineer Andrew Spittle shares with us:

Text is our predominant communication mode and we look for strong writing skills in applicants. On the support side that's key since text is not just how we communicate with customers but also with

each other. Our interview process is all done through text chats, too, as a way to evaluate that ability.

As we explain in our [Guide to Remote Work](#), being able to show tact in your written communication is also important, because it's easy to come off as curt via text.

**Related:** Become a Better Writer: Our Favorite Writing Apps and Tips and [How to Use Emoji Like a Pro](#).

### 3. You're independent and trustworthy

As a remote worker, you'll probably have the least amount of supervision you've experienced in your career (unless you were a freelancer or ran your own company previously). You'll have to take ownership of your tasks and be proactive and self-motivated in getting them completed on time. *Default to action* is one of our core values at Zapier.

If you have previous experience freelancing or running your own business, you've got a leg up on the competition. Giacomo Guilizzoni, Founder and CEO at [Balsamiq](#), is an example of another employer who looks for previous remote work experience in applicants. He [says](#):

Previous work-at-home experience is a plus, especially if they've done it for a long time. Working at home is amazing for the first six months, great for the first two years, and can be tough after that unless you come up with your 'system' for separating work from your personal life.

**What if you don't have previous experience working solo or remotely?** Try picking up projects that you can take ownership of and be self-managed on. Even better: See if you can get a few days working remotely at your current job, so you'll have experience with it. In [The 4-Hour Workweek](#), Tim Ferriss offers a script and instructions for getting your boss to let you work from home. It involves:

- Getting your company to increase their investment in you, for example by paying for additional training
- Showcasing your productivity when working from home, such as when you need to be home for repairs or on a snow day
- Creating a short presentation of the benefits of remote work for the company and for your work as an employee
- Proposing a remote-work trial period

I started working remotely 17 years ago for my previous job when I was too sick to go into work but still well enough to get work done. That week proved to my boss—and myself—that I could be productive outside of the office—[even more productive](#), as many telecommuters besides myself have found. A few months later, when I needed to move out of state for my husband’s job, remote work became my mode of work. That trial run made all the difference.

So give remote work a try as soon as you can and document your productivity success along the way.

#### **4. You’ve mastered time management**

If you’re able to stay focused for long stretches of time, can prioritize tasks, and can follow-up promptly, remote work might be a fit for you. These are all important for any worker to have, but they’re critical when you’re on a remote team. Adda Birnir explains on [The Muse](#) that remote workers need organization, proactiveness, and motivation (among other skills):

When you work remotely, your boss won’t be looking over your shoulder—or even able to stop by your cubicle—to see if you’re staying on top of your tasks. You’ve got to keep yourself on track.

To prove that you always know what needs to be done and when, emphasize in your resume, application email, and interview the jobs or projects you’ve done that have required managing many moving pieces, and talk about how you kept everything coordinated. Also, because remote teams can be global, consider time zones. You’ll have to be mindful of others’ schedules and flexible when setting meetings. See [How to Work in Different Timezones](#) for more on this tricky issue.

To help with staying on top of things, adopt a process of making a plan to balance your work day. For example, project management tools such as Airtable and Trello will help you stay organized, as will a [daily schedule or routine](#). Got a bunch of recurring tasks you don't need to waste your time on doing manually? [Schedule and automate them instead](#).

## **Additionally, you are a great fit for that particular role and the company's values**

Buffer COO and co-founder [writes](#) that the most important element they look for in a candidate is alignment with [the company's 10 values](#).

The main way we try to gauge this in practice is by looking at the wording of each email and seeing how well it feels in line with our culture. Especially since we're a remote team, written communication gets a lot of weight, and gauging emotions from it is important for us.

Secondly, we heavily rely on a candidate's social media postings. We'll check out their Twitter accounts, how individuals Tweet and whether their postings feel in line with our culture. Is there a lot of positivity or a lot of complaining? Would their posts feel great to see on our team Twitter list?

These elements help us begin to understand what type of cultural contribution a candidate would bring.

And in addition to that great values fit, you should also have skill and experience in the role as well as an understanding and love of the product. Before you apply for a remote job, make sure you're familiar with the company (more on applying in a bit).

## Where to Find Remote Jobs

There are roughly 60 “work from home” job scams online for each real opportunity.

The first step in finding a remote job is knowing where *not* to look.

When I was younger and more foolish, I applied to a work-from-home job ad that promised easy pay for easy work. Yup, it was all about licking envelopes and trying to scam other suckers like myself with a pyramid marketing scheme.

When you’re desperate for flexibility and the desire to work from home is so great, it’s easy to fall into these kinds of traps. Bottom Line [reports](#) that there are roughly 60 “work from home” job scams online for each real opportunity.

### Make sure the job listing is legitimate

If you’re unsure of a job posting, there are a few ways you can proceed:

- Although not always the case, avoid general classified sites such as Craigslist. While legitimate jobs are posted there, you’ll have to research the company to be 100% sure. Job hunting is stressful and time-consuming enough as it is.
- Check out the company’s website. Check to see if there are any red flags that stand out to you. Does it lack professionalism or basic contact information? Do they promise big paychecks without much work?
- Look the company up on the Better Business Bureau and Google around for reviews.
- If you decide to proceed and you’re selected for an interview, a video chat is helpful because you’ll interact with people versus communicating through emails. If you meet more than one person during the interview process, that could be a bonus.

## Look to your own employer or companies that are known for remote work policies

The best thing you can do, though, is first to see if your current employer will let you work from home. If you have a good relationship with your company, that's the easiest path to remote work.

Beyond that, look for remote jobs at companies that are known for hiring remote workers. Here's a list on GitHub of [companies with "remote DNA"](#) (note that not all of them are 100% remote, however, for all jobs).

## Check out remote-work friendly job boards

While sites like Indeed and LinkedIn offer solid job listings, niche sites that cater specifically to remote work give you better options.

**Related:** [25+ Fully Remote Companies That Let You Work From Anywhere](#)

The following remote work job boards have a great track record and are a good place to start your search. When you find a job you're interested in, research the company before applying—just as you should when applying to any job. You want to be sure you understand their business and feel that you would be a good fit, rather than haphazardly sending off your resume to any company that might offer remote work jobs.

See the Muse's "[Ultimate Guide to Researching a Company Pre-Interview](#)" for learning more about your potential new employer.

### FlexJobs

The screenshot shows the FlexJobs homepage. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links for 'Jobs', 'How FlexJobs Works', 'Job Search Tips & Help', 'Research Companies', and a search bar. On the right, there are user profile icons for 'John Doe' and notifications. Below the navigation is a row of icons for 'My Dashboard', 'Advanced Job Search', 'Job Search Activity', 'Your Resume Profiles', 'View New Jobs of Interest', 'Find jobs By Location', 'Skills Tests', 'Job Search Checklist', and 'Special Partner Offers'. A sidebar on the right is titled 'Announcements' and features a message about part-time telecommute jobs. It also contains sections for 'Search for Jobs' (with a search bar and advanced options), 'Related Job Search Options' (with links to 'View All New Jobs', 'View All Job Categories', 'Find jobs By Location', 'Jobs with Featured Companies', '100 Surprising Flexible Jobs', 'Search jobs By Company A-Z', 'See Best Lists of Companies', and 'See Flexible Job Trends').

**FlexJobs** is a job board that showcases not just telecommuting openings, but also job postings for other types of flexible arrangements, such as freelance or part-time work. Using the site requires paying a fee (ranging from \$14.95/month to \$49.95/year), but currently the site lists over 32,000 jobs from 4,725 companies—so signing up can definitely pay off. The FlexJobs staff hand-screen each job posting so you can avoid work-from-home scams.

## Jobspresso

	JavaScript Engineer (Node.js Owner) Heroku Heroku provides services and tools to build, run, and scale web applications	 Anywhere in US	DEVELOPER
	Junior Community Outreach Specialist Student Loan Hero The smartest way to organize, manage, and repay student loans.	 Anywhere	MARKETING
	Program Manager Microsoft	 Anywhere in US	PROJECT MGMT
	Engineering Program Manager Microsoft	 Anywhere in US	PROJECT MGMT
	Marketing Writer GitHub How people build software	 Anywhere	MARKETING

**Jobspresso** allows you to search for jobs in specific categories, such as marketing, copywriting, project management, and support. All of the jobs listed are curated for remote workers. They also allow users to post their resumes to increase exposure to potential employers and get daily job updates.

## Remote.co

## REMOTE COMPANIES Q&A

110 leading remote companies and virtual teams answer your top questions.

<h3>35 Questions</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><a href="#"> Why Remote &gt;</a></li><li><a href="#"> Hiring Remotely &gt;</a></li><li><a href="#"> Managing Remotely &gt;</a></li><li><a href="#"> Working Remotely &gt;</a></li><li><a href="#"> Remote Worker Insights &gt;</a></li></ul>	<h3>110 Companies</h3> <table border="0"><tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr></table>																

[See All Questions & Companies >](#)

[Remote.co](#) is passionate about remote work and partners with startups that feel the same way. They post jobs in the following categories: customer service, design, marketing, human resources, sales, writing, and development. And they also offer Q&As for remote companies and the people who would like to work for them.

If you want to be the first to hear about new opportunities, sign up for their alerts to receive up to two notifications a week.

### We Work Remotely

PROGRAMMING JOBS		LATEST POST ABOUT 5 HOURS AGO	
<b>NEW</b>	<b>Spreaker</b> <a href="#">Web Engineer at Spreaker - Fullstack / PHP7 / ES6</a>	Jan 13	
<b>NEW</b>	<b>Recordsure</b> <a href="#">Javascript Web Developer</a>	Jan 12	
<b>NEW</b>	<b>Know Your Company</b> <a href="#">Rails Programmer</a>	Jan 12	
<b>NEW</b>	<b>Tempus Energy</b> <a href="#">Energy Markets Data Scientist</a>	Jan 12	
<b>NEW</b>	<b>Lullabot</b> <a href="#">Front-end Developer with React/Redux Experience</a>	Jan 12	
<b>NEW</b>	<b>Inside</b> <a href="#">Rails developer</a>	Jan 12	
	<b>Bytion</b> <a href="#">Senior WordPress Developer</a>	Jan 11	
	<b>Doximity</b> <a href="#">Senior DevOps Engineer</a>	Jan 10	
	<b>Barrel</b> <a href="#">Development Manager</a>	Jan 10	
	<b>DeepCrawl</b> <a href="#">Senior Ruby Developer (London office or Remote in UK)</a>	Jan 10	
	<b>Toptal LLC</b> <a href="#">React Developer</a>	Jan 10	

We Work Remotely is sponsored by Basecamp and their book *Remote*, which delves into all things related to working remotely. The job board is updated daily and you can subscribe to the site's RSS feed to get informed of new job postings. You can find jobs in programming, development & system admin, marketing, customer service, management, design, and copywriting here.

## Working Nomads

JOB CATEGORIES	
Development	58
Management	27
Marketing	14
Design	10
Sales	10
Finance	4
System Administration	4
Writing	4
Legal	2
Consulting	1
Customer Success	1
Health Care	1
Human Resources	1

### Remote Jobs

Search for a remote job

★ Full Stack Developer	Carbon Analytics
	19 hours ago
★ Business Development Executive	Brazil Business Reports
	1 day ago
★ Marketing manager	Betafresh Hong Kong ...
	3 days ago
★ Web and front-end developer	Vefstofan
	7 days ago
★ Mid to Senior Level WordPress Developer	LightSpeed
	7 days ago

Working Nomads provides a curated list of remote jobs for individuals who

want to travel while they work. You can browse numerous job categories such as development, education, or management. You can also sign up to receive job alerts delivered to your inbox daily or weekly.

One nice feature of Working Nomads is the use of tags, so you can search or browse for a job based on specific skillsets.

**Tip:** Many other job boards or websites also allow you to filter jobs by location. So, for example, on [MediaBistro](#), you can narrow down the search to “Working from home.”

## How to Apply and Interview for a Remote Work Job

All companies approach remote interviews differently. For instance, at GitHub, Chapple explains that they “usually start screening with things like written questions or exercises to get a feel for a candidate’s communication skills and the depth of their abilities in the area we’re looking to hire for.” Others, such as Automattic, conduct interviews via text chat, and at Zapier we use a combination of written, phone, and video interviews.

Keep in mind that employers use these video interviews to get a feel for your personality and interest in the job. If you’re positive, curious, and articulate in the video chat as well as other parts of the application process, hiring managers will be more confident about you.

### Prepare for the video interview

If you’re going to interview via video chat, here are a few key considerations:

**Try out the video app** before the interview. Whatever app your interviewer chooses to use, install it (if required), log on in advance, and check it out. Familiarizing yourself with the tool is especially important if you haven’t used it before. Nothing is more nerve-racking than starting an interview late because you didn’t know how to use the tool or you’re having problems with your computer’s audio or video. (Still, it happens.)

**Find a quiet space** where you can focus on your interview and won't be distracted. Although comfortable, coffee shops might not be a good option. Some coworking spaces, on the other hand, offer private rooms or phone booths where you can have your video chat. Wherever you set up for the interview, make sure the lighting is adequate and whatever's in the background of the video isn't unprofessional.

**Dress professionally and stay engaged during the interview.** Avoid distracting patterns or colors that might not look good on video. You want the focus to be on what you're saying and not on what you're wearing. At the same time, make sure you're comfortable in your clothes so you can focus on the interview.

Body language is still important when you're doing a video interview. The eye contact, smiling, and not fidgeting rules apply here just as much as in in-person meetings. Also make sure to turn off your phone's and computer's notifications, less those become a distraction for you and your interviewer.

## **Be prepared overall—and focused on the job, not just remote work**

Most importantly, for any part of the application process:

**Be prepared.** You'll want to know as much about the role and the company as possible.

Zapier Product Manager Chris Geoghegan advises:

Being able to clearly articulate why you want to work somewhere (besides the fact that the position is remote) is really important. In job fit interviews, you definitely see this where some candidates are clearly more interested in the remote aspect of Zapier, and I think that can be red flag.

Jason Kotenko, Zapier Platform Lead, adds:

*Explain why you want the exact position.* Just wanting to work at a remote company is usually not enough for specialized roles.

Be prepared with stories or examples that showcase your value to the potential employer and your ability to get that specific job done. Along with that is having examples of times you showed those “successful remote worker” traits or skills mentioned above. You might be asked about or want to mention things like:

- Successful solo projects you’ve started or team projects you’ve led.
- Your reasons for wanting to work remotely. What makes you fit for working on a remote team? (independence and trustworthiness)
- Previous writing experience and other communication skills. How do you choose the communication tool for different situations? (communication skills)
- Your daily routine and methods to stay focused. What are your optimal work hours? What’s your workspace like? How do you prioritize tasks? How do you balance work and personal life? (time management skills)

## **Ask questions to make sure this is a good fit**

**Remember that interviewing is a two-way street.** While the employer is evaluating how suitable you are for both the job and the company’s culture, you’re there, too, to see if they are a good fit for what you want. Don’t take any job just because it allows you work remotely. Take it because that’s the job and the company you want to work for.

Questions you should ask to make sure the company is really serious about remote work:

- How many people do you have working remotely full-time?
- Is occasional travel needed to meet with co-workers?
- How does the remote team usually communicate?
- What would my typical schedule and day look like?
- How often would I be in touch with my manager?

Also, if you’re applying for an employer in another country, before accepting a position it’s a good idea to find out:

- How will taxes be taken care of from my paycheck?

- Will I need to buy my own health plan?
- Would I need to get a work permit when visiting the employer?

Of course, you'll probably have a lot of questions of your own for the company as well.

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Finding the "right fit" for any job comes down to knowing your strengths and what makes you most productive—as well as finding the kind of company and role you want to work in. If you're independent and a high achiever, there are tons of remote work opportunities out there where you can gain freedom and control over where and how you work best.

Good luck!

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*Written by [Melanie Pinola](#)*

*Milveen Eke-Allen contributed to this post.*

*\*Title photo by [Tran Mau Tri Tam](#) via [Unsplash](#).\*\**

# Chapter 14: The Remote Workers' Toolkit

30+ Productivity Apps and Tools to Help You Work Smarter, Not Harder



"Give me six hours to chop down a tree, and I will spend four hours sharpening the axe." - Attributed to Abraham Lincoln, but most likely never said by him

Everyone could use a good productivity tool or two. If you're a carpenter, you need a hammer and nails. Painters couldn't get their job done without a paint brush. And if you're a remote worker or a freelancer, an internet connection and the software you need to stay productive are equally crucial. They can make the difference between wasting hours on a task versus getting it done as simply and as efficiently as possible—especially when there's no IT team to ask for help and you work largely unmanaged.

Every day, there are more web, mobile, and desktop apps, as well as gadgets, designed to help remote workers and the self-employed—and they're getting better all the time. Technology changes so fast, but some things remain the same. You'll always need fast internet, communication tools, and a handful of other apps to stay productive.

Here are the categories of apps and tools you'll likely need, with some recommendations based on popular tools I (as a tech reviewer and telecommuter for over 15 years) and my fellow remote workers use. For more options, you can check out our regularly updated app roundups for each category, as available, linked in each section.

Let's find your next productivity tool for your virtual office arsenal.

## Tools for Staying Connected and Plugged In



It's amazing how much the very nature of work has changed in only the last 15 years or so. We can instantly access the latest files from a shared Dropbox folder, join a Skype video call, simultaneously collaborate on a shared document or spreadsheet, use remote desktop to control a computer from afar, and chat in real time with instant messages wherever we are, on any device.

All that hinges on reliable internet access, which is why this starts with making sure you stay connected.

## Mobile Hotspots

Every online worker shudders at the thought of their internet going down for hours. If you work primarily from your home office, you probably already have the fastest internet you can reasonably afford (if not, that's project number one). It's also a good idea to have a mobile hotspot, not just for internet access on the go (such as getting your laptop connected while on the road) but also as a backup in case your power or internet goes out.

There are two kinds of mobile hotspots: hardware and software. Hardware devices such as the [Karma](#) are pocket-sized Wi-Fi access points you can wirelessly connect to with your laptop, tablet, portable game system, and so on. The devices cost between \$80 and \$150, with separate charges for the data. I like the Karma because there are no activation fees, and it's relatively inexpensive—you can pay as you go, with a \$3 monthly fee and data costing \$10 per GB (the data never expires). It works out cheaper, at least for the US market, than alternatives like the MiFi where you'll pay for a monthly plan.

You may not even need to purchase a mobile hotspot, though. The simplest option is to use your phone as a hotspot to share your standard mobile data plan over Wi-Fi. This feature—called *Personal Hotspot* on iOS and *Mobile Hotspot* on Android—is baked into most newer iOS and Android phones and tablets (look in the Wireless & networks settings on Android or the Network settings in iOS). However, using your phone as a wireless modem will drain its battery faster, and your wireless carrier may also require you to buy a hotspot (sometimes called “tethering”) plan, which typically costs about \$15 per month.

Every market's different, so be sure to check with your local carriers for the best options for mobile hotspots in your location.

## Remote Desktop Software

Remote desktop apps securely connect you to a computer at another location so you can work on it as if you're sitting in front of that computer's keyboard. It's a handy way for telecommuters to access computers at the office—or even in the same building, without having to physically be there. The opposite is true, too—remote access software also is useful if you have a desktop computer at home and want to access it when you travel or if you need to troubleshoot your grandparents' email problems from the comfort of your couch.

If you're connecting to the office computer as a telecommuter, your IT department should help you set up remote access on your home computer. Microsoft's [Remote Desktop client](#) is built into Windows, available as a Mac download, and simple to use (all you have to do is press connect to start working remotely on the computer). Apple offers their own version, called [Apple Remote Desktop](#), but it costs \$80, and users report critical connectivity issues with the latest update.

So, for everyone else, [TeamViewer](#) is a free ([for personal use](#)) remote access tool that you can use to not only remotely control a computer but also to share your screen with others for online meetings or presentations. This all-in-one tool works on Windows, Mac, and Linux, as well as Android and iOS. Another option is [Chrome Remote Desktop](#). It runs in the Chrome browser and requires only a few clicks to set up and use. TeamViewer has more features, but Chrome Remote Desktop is probably the simplest option for accessing files remotely or for quick troubleshooting.

## Real-time Communication Apps

If you want to have a video conference or collaborate on shared files, there are a multitude of options, ranging from simple mobile apps to enterprise-grade software with sophisticated management and security capabilities.

**Team Chat:** If you're working remotely, odds are you'll want to chat with your team to collaborate asynchronously instead of needing to set up a time for a call every time you have a question. [Slack](#) is one of the most popular tools for that. It's the free team chat tool that made chat popular again, with file sharing that works with Google Docs and Dropbox, image and video previews,

customizable notifications, and direct messages between team members. Oh, and tons of [emoji](#) (or [reactji](#)), too—very important for distributed teams.

**More options:** If you're looking for Slack alternatives, see [The 12 Best Team Chat Apps for Your Company](#)

**Screen Sharing:** Sometimes it's easier to show than tell. With screen sharing, you can show others your desktop and the files and apps you have open—and watch as you work on your computer. That means virtual team members can give you live feedback on that new logo you designed, and you can argue the merits of your font choice and change the colors before their eyes—all without anyone needing to be in the same room. As Basecamp's Jason Fried wrote, "You'd be amazed how much quality collective thought can be captured using two simple tools: a voice connection and a shared screen." Now that [Slack has built-in screen sharing](#), it's a no-brainer choice if you use Slack to chat. [Screenleap](#) is also a solid option, since the free tool shares your screen without requiring your viewers to sign up or download anything to view it.

**Video Chats:** Sometimes you'll still want to have a little face time. Video chats can make you feel like you're in the same room with your virtual teammates. Seeing others' expressions and gestures and hearing their voices goes a long way in having more effective conversations. [Google Hangouts](#) is one of the easiest and most capable video chat services around—if you have a Google account (who doesn't?) you have Google Hangouts. You can have a live video call with up to 10 other people, and Hangouts works with all computers as well as Android and iOS. At Zapier, we use [Zoom](#) because we find it's reliable for even 100 attendees on a video chat. Or, for quick calls, the built-in video chat in Slack is handy, too.

**More options:** Check out [The 12 Best Video Conferencing Apps for Teams](#)

## Remote Collaboration Software



Communication and collaboration don't always have to happen in real time. One of the biggest benefits of online collaboration tools is that they let everyone have a discussion around projects and files, regardless of time or place. Here are some you should find handy.

**Online Office Suites:** Office suites have been shifting away from installed software packages to connected, online apps over the past decade. In both [Microsoft Office Online](#) (the web-based versions of Word, Excel, PowerPoint, and OneNote) and the equivalent Google offering, [G Suite](#) (with Docs, Sheets, Slides, Forms, Drive, and more), you can easily share a document with others and have them add inline comments or make their own edits. And, you can work on the go with nearly full-featured mobile apps.

### [More options: The Best Online Writing Apps for Collaboration](#)

**Shared File Storage:** A central storage space you can access from any device—computer or phone—is critical for collaboration. And it doesn't have to be

complicated. Just save a file to the shared folder and you and your other coworkers will instantly have the latest changes.

[Dropbox](#) led the way. It's one of the most popular online storage and file syncing tools because it's so easy to use (just save a file to the Dropbox folder), was one of the first cloud storage services, and, in my experience, it syncs files more reliably and faster than competing services. Its integration with many other apps really makes it shine. A basic Dropbox account with 2GB of storage is free, but there are paid versions that add more storage, advanced management capabilities, and corporate security controls.

There are other options, though. Microsoft's [OneDrive](#) offers 1TB of storage with an Office 365 subscription (from \$6.99/month), which comes with the full Office suite and 60 minutes of international calls on Skype. And [G Suite](#)—the professional version of Gmail and Google Docs—includes 30GB of storage with its \$5/month plan.

**Virtual Workspaces:** Many online collaboration and project management tools offer a central place for dispersed team members to not only store shared files, but also leave messages in discussion forums, plan work in online calendars and task lists, and more. [Basecamp](#) (\$99/month for unlimited users) is one of the most popular and most highly recommended project management tools (check out [our review of Basecamp 3 here](#)). The closest free alternative is [Freedcamp](#), which supports unlimited projects and users; paid plans offers more features, such as Google Calendar syncing and cloud storage integration starting at \$4/month.

**Related:** See [the tools and methods our remote Design team uses](#).

## Project Management, Note Taking, and Time Management Apps



Ditch the commute and you have even more time to work with. The apps below will help you get organized and maximize your most precious resource.

### Project and Task Management Software

To-do apps and project management tools are a dime a dozen these days. The tough part is finding the ones that work best for you.

**To-do Lists:** If you don't have a place to track all your tasks, you might forget about them altogether or experience the constant anxiety of thinking there are things you need to do but can't remember them (dubbed the [Zeigarnik Effect](#)). That's why one of the tenets behind the [Getting Things Done® \(GTD®\)](#)

**productivity system** is to clear your head with a mind sweep, listing all your tasks or “next actions.”

Personally, I use a paper notebook with [the Bullet Journal note-taking system](#), because I like the speed and tactile nature of pen and paper. Other people prefer digital apps that will remind them of their upcoming tasks, including popular to-do list apps like [Todoist](#) and [Any.do](#). At the end of the day, the best to-do app is the one that you’ll actually use.

### **More options:** [The 40 Best To-Do List Apps for Task Management](#)

**Project Management:** Task lists can only capture so much. For projects with a vast number of tasks that need to be done in specific order or workflows with more complex time management needs, consider a full-fledged project management tool.

[Trello](#)’s user-friendly and colorful interface lets you drag list items (“cards”) around on a virtual [Kanban board](#). Reminders, comments, labels, and other features make it a great organization tool for yourself or your entire team. In fact, you can use Trello to [organize your entire life](#) or use it to manage everything in your company just as [the team behind Trello uses their own product](#) to collaborate and communicate as a team. (By the way, Trello has also just published a [guide to how great teams are embracing remote work](#)—worth a read!)

[Asana](#) is another great option. Built specifically for teams, Asana integrates project tasks with conversation threads and calendars. It’s a simpler approach to adding extra features to a to-do list for teamwork. [See how 22 teams use Asana as their central hub](#).

### **More options:** [The Best Project Management Software: 50 Tools for Team Tasks](#)

**Note-Taking Apps:** One of the biggest challenges of modern life is that there’s too much information to keep track of and remember for both our professional and personal lives. Note-taking and web-clipping apps help us keep all this information organized and shareable.

[Evernote](#) is the app of choice for many productivity geeks. With it, you can save web articles, make lists and quickly jot down ideas, and snap photos of

documents and images related to your projects. Shared Evernote notebooks provide a centralized place for team members to share their reference materials or notes.

Microsoft's [OneNote](#) is similar but designed around a more traditional notebook style. Where Evernote treats each note as a separate document and uses tags for extra organization, OneNote shows your notes as tabs and pages in a virtual notebook—more like the paper notebooks you used in school. While Evernote excels at easily saving information, OneNote's notebook-like interface and robust handwriting support make it perfect for project planning and mindmapping. As you might imagine, it also plays very well with other Microsoft Office apps.

**More options:** [Evernote, OneNote, and Beyond: The 14 Best Note-Taking Apps](#)

**Timers:** The Pomodoro Technique promises to help you have fun with time management by encouraging you to work in focused, timed 25-minute sprints with a 5-minute break in between. You can use an app like [TomatoTimer](#) or an actual kitchen timer for those sprints. Adjust your sprint timing as you see fit—maybe it's 25 minutes or maybe 90 minutes.

**More options:** [The 12 Best Pomodoro Timer Apps to Boost Your Productivity](#)

**Mind Maps:** Finally, you can use mind maps like [MindMeister](#) not just for collaborative brainstorming, but also to plan projects in a more visual manner. GTD guru David Allen himself uses mind maps to get a bird's eye view of everything going on in his life. And if you use [MeisterTask](#), you can turn your mind maps into project tasks in a few clicks.

**Learn more:** [How to Make Mind Maps: Visualize Your Ideas for Better Brainstorming](#)

## Distraction-Busting Apps

I once knew a professor who was incredibly prolific. Besides teaching, he had more than a dozen books under his belt. This is despite the fact that his home

office was the kitchen table, where family members were constantly bustling about. He had naturally razor-sharp focus in the midst of chaos, but most of us aren't like that. In addition to single-tasking and turning off notifications, a few key tools can help you focus better.

**Minimalist Writing Tools:** Writing apps like [OmmWriter](#) keep you focused on just the page and your words. It sports a Zen-like atmosphere, including mellow music, and keeps menus and other windows out of your view. Other options without the music and background photos include [iA Writer](#) and [Byword](#)—both of which are popular with the Zapier team.

If you need a more powerful tool for writing long-form content, [Scrivener](#) has a full-screen writing mode that removes distracting menus, toolbars, and file lists. You can pop back into the normal interface for organizing your content. Scrivener also makes it easy to break text up into smaller parts so you can concentrate on each section (instead of, for example, dealing with my usual time-wasting habit of going back to the beginning of a piece to endlessly rework). [See our guide to Scrivener](#) to get started.

**Program Blockers:** If you struggle with the temptation to constantly check your email or visit time-wasting sites, apps like [SelfControl](#) and [Cold Turkey](#) can temporarily block specific websites, games, and other programs so you stay on track. They're like a force field between your focus and common distractions. If you don't want to install a desktop application, a browser extension like [StayFocused](#) for Chrome will block time-wasting sites for specific time periods. I also like [Productivity Owl](#) for Chrome, which lets you save distracting pages for later and limits the amount of time you spend at specific sites (so you don't get sucked into the rabbit hole called Wikipedia, for example).

**More options:** [14 Tools to Help You Avoid Distractions and Stay Focused at Work](#)

## Tools for Staying Secure



Don't yawn. Information security isn't the most exciting topic, but it's as important as internet connectivity for remote workers—especially because we often store business information on our laptops and smartphones. Here's a quick review of the five security tools you should have in place:

**File and Disk Encryption:** Encryption software scrambles data so that even if it gets into the wrong hands, thieves won't be able to read your files without the encryption key or password.

You can encrypt your entire hard drive with tools like Windows' built-in BitLocker (only available for the Pro and Enterprise versions, though) or Mac OS X's FileVault (included with every Mac). Generally, however, while full disk encryption is more secure, you can more conveniently manually encrypt the folders and files on your computer that have sensitive information on them. These include files that contain personal information such as account numbers or social security numbers or sensitive company data including client names and proprietary information. No one wants to be that guy who loses a company laptop with unprotected files and exposes customers' personal information.

Open source [7Zip](#) makes it easy to compress a file or a set of files and encrypt the archive with a password. Mac OS X's Disk Utility can also create an encrypted disk image (basically a folder) with password protection.

**Online Backup:** Telling people to back up their files and make sure their

passwords are secure is probably the equivalent of your mom telling you to sit up straight and eat your broccoli (but Mom is always right!). Unlimited backup service [Backblaze](#) is set-and-forget online backup software, costing just \$5 per month per computer. It's [The Wirecutter's recommendation for online backups](#), and the best option for most people.

### **More options:** [How to Back Up Everything from All Your Apps and Devices](#)

**Password Manager:** Hardly a week goes by these days without news of yet another security breach involving stolen passwords, credit cards, and other sensitive data. Hackers are getting more advanced, we all have too many passwords to remember, and most of us would rather clean the toilet than change our passwords again. That's where a password manager comes in. It reduces one of the biggest security risks—using the same password on multiple sites—by storing all your (unique) passwords in an encrypted database secured by the only password you have to remember. Just make that master password as long and complex as possible ("12345" does not qualify).

I use [1Password](#) because the app doesn't require you to store the password database on someone else's server—though you can store the database in Dropbox and sync it across your devices. The Zapier team uses [LastPass](#) thanks to simple sharing controls. And [Dashlane](#) deserves some love for being the first password manager to add a change-all-your-passwords-with-one-click feature (handy!).

### **More options:** [The 12 Best Password Managers for Protecting Your Personal and Shared Accounts](#)

**Two-Factor Authentication (2FA):** Password leaks are going to continue to happen, but you can add an additional layer of security by turning on two-factor authentication for all the services that offer it. With two-factor authentication, even if someone has stolen your password, if they try to log into your account from an unknown device, the service will ask them to verify their identity with a unique, randomly generated code from an authentication device or app. Check the sites that use 2FA at [Twofactorauth.org](#). At the very least, turn on 2FA for your email and financial accounts.

### Learn more: Two-Factor Authentication: A Security System for Your Digital Life

**VPN:** Finally, any time you're using an insecure network—such as free public Wi-Fi at the airport or coffee shop—use a VPN. Virtual private networks create encrypted tunnels for sending and receiving data, so that sensitive file you're sending to the office (or the content of that Web page you're visiting) can't be sniffed out by others. It's [surprisingly easy to steal people's information from the air](#) if they're not using a VPN. I use [Private Internet Access](#) because it's inexpensive (\$3.33/month paid annually) and the company doesn't log your activity, but if you want other options, [there's a site for that](#).

## Automating and Outsourcing Tools



Finally, let's talk about supercharging your work with automation. Remote workers already have a leg up on productivity, because we have fewer office distractions and can avoid needless in-person meetings. Automation takes your productivity to the next level. Cut the repetitive tasks or delegate smaller tasks to others and you'll preserve your energy for the more important things only you can do best. Here are some tools to help manage outsourcing and automation:

**Virtual Assistants:** I use [Fancy Hands](#) to outsource tasks and make better use of my time. For about 40 cents per minute you can have your assistants do things you either don't want to do or don't have the time for, such as:

- Call your wireless carrier to negotiate your cell phone bill
- Perform research on a topic you're investigating or need for your next report, such as the top trending topics on Twitter
- Contact Dell about troubleshooting a new laptop that has lines going through the screen and find out what your service options are

You might not think you need a service like this, but you'd be amazed at the relief you'll feel when you have others doing the small tasks that are weighing on your mind. Fancy Hands pricing starts at \$30/month for 5 requests of up to 20 minutes each, and unused requests rollover each month.

**Text Expanders:** Stop typing the same words over and over again. Text expansion tools such as [PhraseExpress](#) (Windows, Mac, Android, and iPhone; free for personal use or starting at \$49.95 for a license) and [aText](#) (Mac; \$5) autocomplete phrases you type often, such as common email replies or snippets of code. They can also quickly insert data such as the current date and time and automatically correct misspellings, saving you hours of typing (and your wrists). Your phone's built-in text expansion (look in the keyboard settings) also relieve the frustration of tapping tiny keys to enter your email address, name, and other common words.

**More options:** See [our guide to text expansion](#) for more text expander app recommendations.

**App Automation:** I'd be remiss if I didn't mention [Zapier](#), the service that connects over 900 web apps to automate repetitive tasks. Not sure what to

automate? Check out these [popular ways](#) over a million users are saving time with Zapier.

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When you work remotely, you have the freedom and the flexibility to do your best work in the environment that best suits you. But you still need the right tools to overcome [the challenges that remote work presents](#). The apps and tools above are the ones I've relied on to stay productive when working largely on my own, but they can be helpful for office workers as well. Your turn: what are the must-have productivity tools you turn to regularly?

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*Written by [Melanie Pinola](#)*

*Title photo by [xsmo](#) via Pixabay. Wi-Fi image via [Freepik](#). Laptop image via [Freepik](#). Pomodoro timer via [David Svensson](#). Gear photo via [Sonny Abesamis](#).*

# Chapter 15: A Special Thanks To Those Who Share

The Best Blog Posts, Articles and Resources on Remote Work



We wouldn't have been as successful as we have been at remote working without other people and companies sharing what they've learned along the way. Here are the posts, books, and other resources about remote working that have inspired and challenged me to think differently.

We'd like to say *Thank you!* to all these people and companies for sharing their experiences and providing a map to help us navigate the challenges of remote working. I hope you'll find these resources helpful as well.

## Automattic

Automattic is most notably the team behind WordPress.com. With over 800 employees, all of which work remotely, they are one of the best modern examples of what a successful remote team looks like.

*Our favorite posts:*

- [A Year Without Pants](#)
- [Why Isn't Remote Work More Popular?](#)
- [10 Lessons from 4 Years Working Remotely](#)
- [Why Remote Work Thrives in Some Companies and Fails in Others](#)

## GitHub

Similar to Automattic, GitHub has helped write the book on what modern remote work looks like. GitHub's teammates work all over the world.

*Our favorite posts:*

- [How GitHub Works](#)
- [Collaborating at GitHub with a 60% Remote Workforce](#)

## Basecamp (formerly 37Signals)

Basecamp literally wrote the book on remote work. The best selling book *Remote* is one of the best resources to pick up if you are wanting to build a remote team. Their previous book *Rework* also includes a number of helpful tips about remote working and productivity in a distributed workplace, many of which were originally shared in part on their blog, [Signal v. Noise](#).

- [Remote](#)

## Treehouse

Treehouse teaches people how to code, and they are also a remote team. Not only are they remote, but they also do other things that people might think are strange like working a 4-day work week.

*Our favorite posts:*

- [How I Manage 40 People Remotely](#)
- [How to successfully run a remote team](#)
- [How We Hire Developers at Treehouse](#)

## Buffer

Buffer started about 1 year before us and has an amazing content marketing team.

*Our favorite posts:*

- [What Remote Working Means & The Tools We Use at Buffer](#)
- [The Joys and Benefits of Working as a Distributed Team](#)
- [How We Hire at Buffer](#)

## Help Scout

Help Scout is almost exactly the same age as us. As a result, we've often struggled with the same things at the same time. It's been great to bounce ideas off each other as we've grown.

*Our favorite posts:*

- [How to Make Hiring Less of a Headache](#)
- [What We've Learned Building a Remote Culture](#)

## Groove

The Groove blog is one of the best for startups. Groove founder Alex Turnbull is also one of the most thoughtful bloggers around, so it's no surprise that their writing on remote teams is helpful too.

*Our favorite posts:*

- [How Our Startup Hires Top Talent Without Bidding Against Google](#)
- [The Best Tips And Tools For Managing A Remote Customer Service Team](#)
- [The Pros & Cons of Being a Remote Team \(& How We Do It\)](#)

## Fogcreek

Fog Creek is famous for having great private offices for developers in NYC. So when they started allowing remote work it was a bit of a surprise. Like most of what they do, their guide to remote work is pretty great.

- [Fog Creek's Ad Hoc Remote Work Policy, or, Working From Grandma's House](#)

## Stack Exchange

Stack Exchange is founded by two of the most well-known engineers, Joel Spolsky and Jeff Atwood. Both are known for their great writing on engineering productivity. So it's no surprise that Stack Exchange has great posts on remote work as well as other subjects.

*Our favorite posts:*

- [On Working Remotely](#)
- [Why We Still Believe in Working Remotely](#)

## WooThemes

WooThemes has grown as an international remote team. And one of their founders, Adii Pienaar, is a fantastic writer and shared some great articles on remote work.

*Our favorite posts:*

- [Trust In People](#)
- [The Challenge of Remote Working](#)

## Popforms

Team building is one of those tough things to do in remote teams. Kate Stull was kind enough to share how Popforms makes this work.

- [Team-building for remote teams: how the best remote teams function, build trust, and get things done](#)

## StatusPages

Remote work isn't for everyone. The team at StatusPages gave it a try and they hated it. Here's why.

- [We Tried Building a Remote Team and it Sucked](#)

## iDoneThis

The iDoneThis blog is one of the best blogs out there on management. This post digs into remote team communication and how to make it work.

- [Remote Team Communication](#)

## HubSpot

HubSpot publishes roughly 15 posts a day across their blog. With so much content, they rely on a fleet of guest contributors, freelancers, and other remote writers. Here's how they pull it off.

- How to Build and Manage a Team of Remote Writers

## Remotive.io

Staying on top of current trends in remote working isn't something you have to do by yourself. Remotive is a great newsletter that will bring all the best content on remote work to you.

- Remotive
- 

Enjoy this book? Check out the other books and guides from the Zapier book at [Zapier.com/learn](https://zapier.com/learn) or follow along on our blog at [Zapier.com/blog](https://zapier.com/blog)

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