GEO-DISTRIBUTED DEV TEAMS IN PRACTICE

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GLOSSARY

- Geo-distributed
- Telecommuting
- Remoting
- Working from home (WFH)
- Digital nomad

INTRO

- Dabbling with computers since I was very young
- At ~13 (circa 1998) I discovered you could DEVELOP for THE WEB, never looked back

EARLY REMOTE WORK

- In college teamed up with a designer friend to run a web studio
- A 10 year collaboration with dozens of successful projects & happy clients
- Mostly worked from our homes
- Met in person only for brainstorming and the occasional work session

STUMBLING INTO REMOTE

- Took a "real job"
- Real job turned out to be outsourcing to a foreign company

- One particularly rainy morning…

- At this point I've been working remotely and hiring remote workers for over 10 years…

- …and I can't imagine going back.

WHY WORK REMOTELY

- A completely different approach to work from the usual office paradigm
- Not for everyone

- However, if you can make it work… It has some amazing upsides.

- No more commuting. Ever again.

- ½ hour commute every day means you spend 10 days a year commuting.

- An hour long commute means you spend more time commuting to and from work than you get vacation.

- No more miserable rainy days or blizzards.

- Better (and cheaper) food than in/around the office.

- Don't have to choose where you live based on proximity to work.

- And many others!

FLEX TIME!

- The ability to do your work outside of fixed office hours
- Comes often with the territory, but not always
- Not applicable to all types of jobs
- Depends how the company is structured and what the workflows & processes are like

- A double-edged sword
- Easy to end up working non stop

SOME PEOPLE CAN'T DEAL

- Need to dress for work, go to work and be at work to do…
- …work.

- Part of it is just what you're used to, part of it is just how you are or aren't.

- And that's fine. Nobody is saying working from home is for everyone or that companies should abandon offices en masse.

WHY I WORK REMOTELY

- This changed a lot over the years…
- …but I've always loved it

- It started primarily because I really hated commuting

- And then…

DEVIANTART

- 100 people, ~half in Hollywood office ("HQ"), ~half remote
- Engineering explicitly remote
  - No dev @ HQ
  - No two devs in the same city
  - Some of the best and most talented people I've ever worked with
- Regular meetups!
- Opened my eyes to fully remote companies
- Learned a lot about communication, organization, results-oriented work, etc.

LEAVING DEVIANTART

- Cofounded a startup in New York
- Immediately clear we couldn't hire in New York
- Quickly scaled up to ½ dozen people in the Balkan region
- Made a kickass product ☺
- Meetups in Amsterdam, Berlin, New York, Zagreb…
- But mostly over Skype & Hangouts

GETTING A REMOTE JOB

- Depends on your field
- Companies usually more open to hiring remote developers and support staff than designers and product managers (no hard rules, tho)

- But really the remote jobs are everywhere when you start looking for them
- Job boards, meetups, word of mouth…

JOB BOARDS

- Some will mark remote-OK jobs in the UI
- Some will not offer that so you'll find something like "remote OK" in the job post itself

- Even the ones that say nothing could be a remote position!

- But respect the ones that explicitly say "no remote"

- Fully onsite
- Phone screen, then onsite
- Entirely over Skype

- There are no rules. A lot of the time companies are just winging it.
- This is not exclusive to remote hiring

- Compensation: start high, just under what it would cost locally for them

COMMUNICATION

- Gotta be fluent. No going around it.

- Even if it's your native language and you're a shy, introverted person. Confidence makes a big difference.

- If it's a foreign language, fluency and accent make a huge difference

- Affects salary negotiations

WORKING REMOTELY

- No one true way, but here's how I do it

COMMUNICATION

- Communication is #1
- Need to recreate all the interactions that happen spontaneously in an office through textual communication

- Put in a conscious effort to be visible, to be seen.
- Themed Slack channels help

- Over-communicate & be reachable and responsive

WORKSPACE

- Just because you don't travel to an office doesn't mean you don't need an office

- Especially if you don't live alone. Something with a door that can be closed.

- Call it "the office". Makes it easier to set boundaries and curb interruptions.

- Also helps with getting into working mood, and being able to walk away from work

EQUIPMENT

- Invest in solid gear for your home office
- You will be glad you did

- Sometimes you'll get a budget for it, often times you won't

EQUIPMENT

- A solid desk
- A good chair
- A big monitor or two
- A good webcam & microphone

WHY COMPANIES HIRE REMOTE

- 1. Cheaper labor
- 2. Can't hire locally – market near office too competitive
- 3. Want the best talent, wherever they are

- Stay away from #1, be cautious with #2. The good experiences are at #3.

- Avoid local job boards unless you're just starting out.

HOW TO HIRE REMOTE

- If budget is #1 reason – use a local job board. Will need to invest time into grooming into high quality workers.

- Local jobs offer a kind of security remote jobs can't compete with

- People with experience expect an above-average pay

- Beyond that, hire as you would normally

- Perceived need for higher confidence is fake

- Hiring a few – no change in hiring process. A quick phone screen and then a full interview onsite.

- Hiring a bunch – invest in a better phone screen procedure.

- When hiring in a different time zone, expect people to take a certain dose of flex time. This is fine. Give them goals and deadlines and demand results. Who cares when they did it.

HYBRID SETUP

- Part of the company is remote while another part is in 1-2 central offices

- It can work, but the entire company needs to be on board
- Committed to using written communication and scheduling phone/video calls instead of a bunch of impromptu in-person discussions

- Implementation can be slow and painful, but it pays for itself immediately

HYBRID SETUP

- Onsite employees will appreciate a WFH policy

- A team where you **can't** WFH is a team that's working sub-optimally.

- Situations in which you can't be productive at today's jobs have shrunk in number

- Small fraction of people remote can be disconcerting and annoying
- But it can also work, if people choose so

GOING ALL REMOTE

- Can you have a successful company that doesn't have an office at all?

IN CONCLUSION

- Working remotely is awesome

- Remote workers are awesome

- Give it a shot, it might just change your life

QUESTIONS?

THANK YOU

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