



HOW TO EMBRACE REMOTE WORK



The ultimate guide of tried and tested strategies, from the world's leading companies for remote work.



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Click on the logo to jump to that company's remote work advice:



A message from Michael Pryor, Trello's co-founder:

“

Adding ‘embrace remote’ to our list of team values was easy because it reflects the larger effort we are putting into Trello every day: We want to improve the way people work. There are many great theories about why remote work is worth it, but even more exciting are the outcomes we’ve experienced:

01

Our product is better.

By dogfooding Trello as a remote team, we bring a ton of different perspectives to the table and push the limits of its collaborative features.

02

Our talent is stronger.

We’ve been able to source and accommodate some of the best people in the industry because we can support them in more than one location.

03

Our purpose is clearer.

We have a distinct brand because we have a close team. By pursuing the best standards of communication and collaboration, we keep our silos down and our creative efforts shared across the organization.

Oh, and we all get to eat cake. Everyone gets a cake delivered to their place on their birthday.”

- Michael Pryor, co-founder of Trello



& DISPELLING MYTHS PROVIDING TIPS

When the topic of remote work comes up, it's not uncommon for people to become immediately skeptical. Common narratives include:

"That could **never work** with our system."

"In theory it sounds good, but remote people can't come to meetings and they never have all the information."

"HOW DO YOU KNOW PEOPLE AREN'T SLACKING OFF?"

“Yeah, we tried that, but it didn't really work and the remote people ended up **getting fired.**”

Yikes.

All of these statements are working off of either wrong assumptions or process failures. Remote work is getting a bad name when in fact there are easily identifiable behaviors and policies that are causing the problems.

Effective remote work starts at the top. When company culture leaders correct non-remote friendly behaviors and put inclusive processes in place, the effects trickle down into a successful experience for everyone.



MYTH #1: “REMOTE WORKERS ARE SLACKERS”

There is a perception that if you can't physically see someone sitting at their desk doing work, then they're not getting anything done.

Any worker, regardless of location, can slack off if managers are not properly communicating expectations and deadlines. If someone understands what work they are responsible for (goals) and when it needs to be done (deadlines), and they work accordingly (with regular status updates), then they surely won't warrant a “slacker” title, no matter where they're located. Teams that reward results will attract and retain people that will be productive anywhere.

Tip: In addition to a chat tool for quick conversation, managers should also be having weekly check-ins via video call with their direct reports to answer questions and learn of any setbacks.



“Never work from bed.

When I started working 100% remotely at Buffer, I set the rule for myself that I would never work from bed, and here's why:

- It becomes more difficult to fall asleep because working from bed weakens the mental association between your bedroom and sleep.
- You may start to feel like you're always at work and lose a place to come home to.
- Your quality of sleep will decrease because using electronics before bed reduces the melatonin you need to fall asleep.”

- Hailley Griffis, Future of Work Marketer, Buffer



A lot of remote workers feel like they constantly need to be “visible” in their digital workspaces to “prove” that they are working. They feel they need to be present for every discussion in chat, or can’t let a notification go unanswered for more than a few minutes.

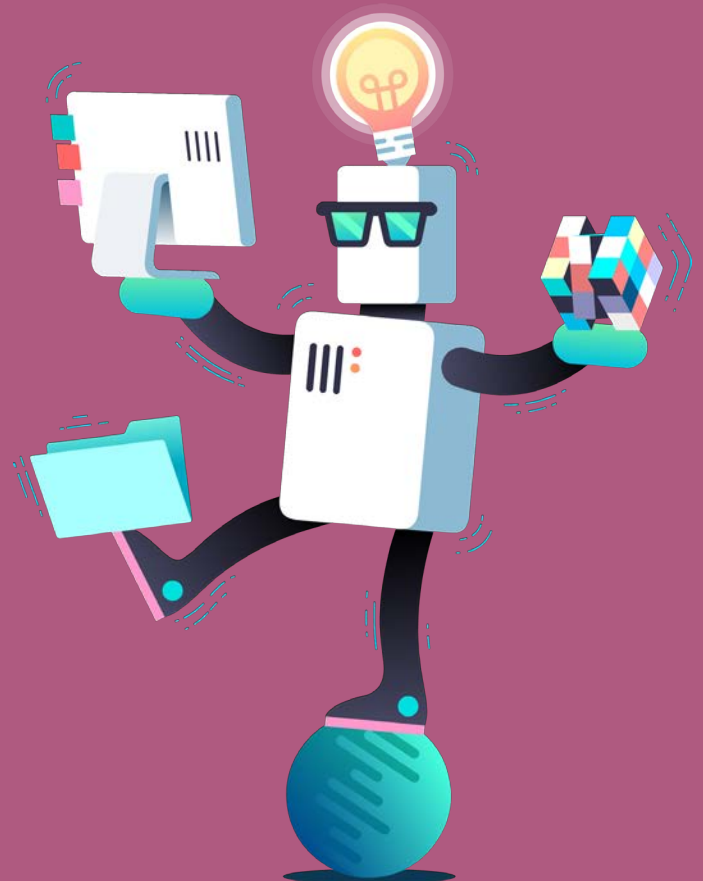
This pressure adds unnecessary anxiety. Instead of being able to do their deep work, they are constantly worrying about how their contributions are perceived.

Implicit in these beliefs is the concept that remote workers are “other” or somehow different than their other colleagues. If remote workers are feeling this pressure to be visible, then it likely stems from the idea that they’re not being valued at the same level as in-office workers.

Tip: These anxieties are ameliorated when remote work is normalized company-wide. These colleagues aren’t different or lacking (they may even experience fewer distractions). Everyone should indicate “deep work” times on their calendar, or use a status update in their chat tool to indicate their availability.

Remote workers are getting up and going to work every day just like everyone else, except they probably have a shorter commute!

MYTH #2: “IT IS UP TO THE REMOTE WORKER TO CONSTANTLY PROVE THEY ARE WORKING”

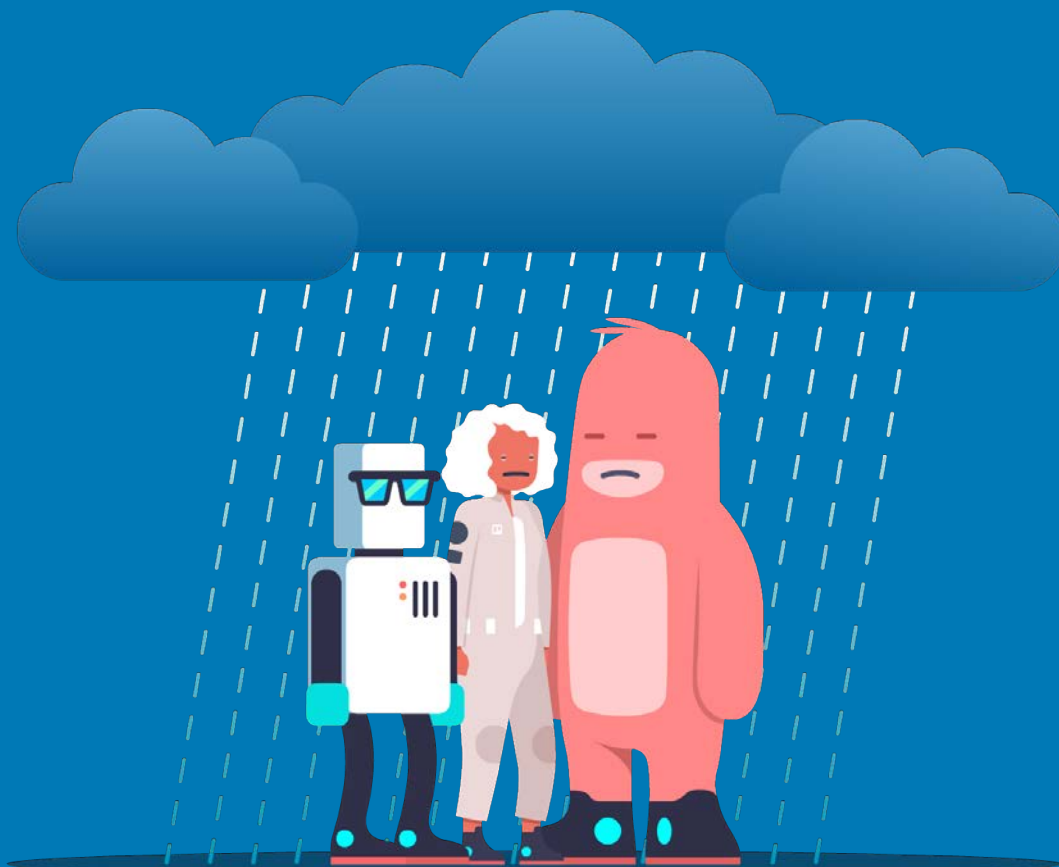


MYTH #3: REMOTE WORK MEANS COMPANY CULTURE SUFFERS

Some people are wary of remote teams because they fear a lack of team camaraderie. It's true that there are no silly interactions in the kitchen or casual hallway "stop and chats" on remote teams, however, with effective planning, these social moments can be baked into a remote dynamic.

Tip: Seeing as up to 10,000 non-verbal cues can be exchanged in one minute of face-to-face interaction, video meeting tools are essential for building relationships with others. You can set up team-building activities over video that play into the strengths of remote work, like sharing your office view or introducing your cat to your coworker's cat and watching the furry friendship unfold.

In fact, we've written an entire chapter on remote work company culture tips for this ebook. [Read more here.](#)



MYTH #4: “REMOTE WORKERS ARE AVAILABLE ALL TIMES OF DAY”

It's easy to assume that because someone is always at home that they are available to answer a quick work question at any time. This is unequivocally false.

One of the most espoused remote work best practices is to set strict working hours, just as one would if they worked in an office. Remote workers are encouraged to decide on (and communicate) available hours, take proper lunch breaks, and to physically turn off and exit their work space when they are engaging in their home life. Work-life separation is still very possible, even if your office is inside your house!

Tip: Track workday availability on a team board where other important information is housed. If it's unclear whether someone is currently available, you can double-check the card to know for sure!

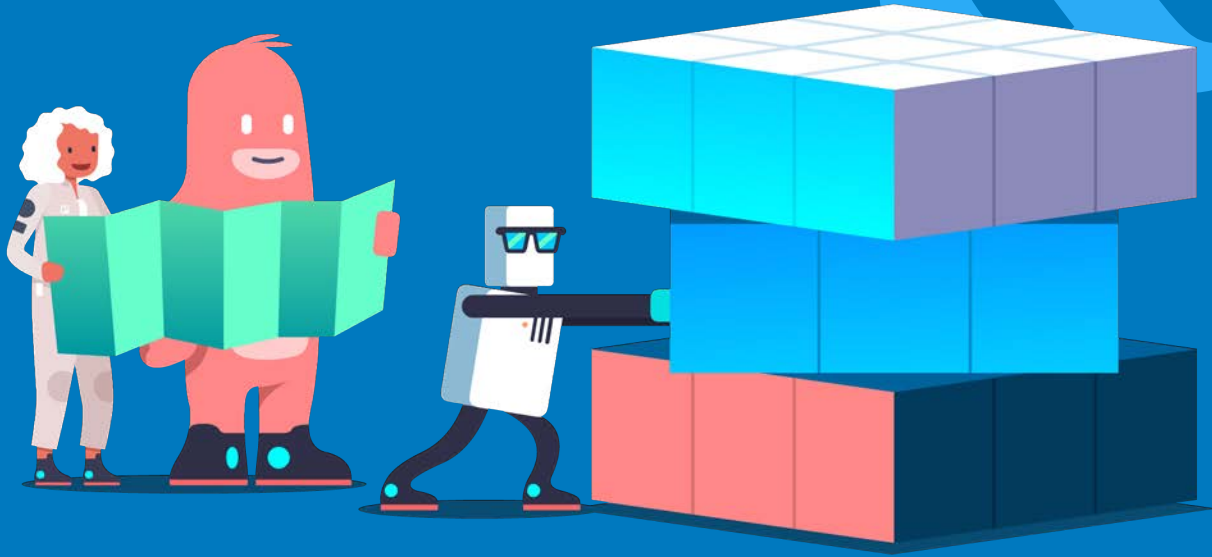
“Pace yourself.

Working remotely means you get a ton of quiet, heads-down time to do deep work. But deep work is exhausting! Build 5-minute breaks into your day: walk around the block, call your mom, pet your cat. Take care of yourself so you still have gas left in the tank on Friday to enjoy your personal time.”

- Sarah Goff-Dupont, Principal Writer, Atlassian, remote from Minnesota



COMMUNICATION COLLABORATION



Remote team communication requires two basic things: thoughtful consideration and some adaptations for the virtual office.

As more teams go digital and turn to remote work, it's important to remember that the kinds of nuanced communication you get in an office setting don't necessarily translate online.

Setting some ground rules for team communication goes a long way in making sure your team is productive and happy.

“It is important to establish communication rules in a joint team-code-conduct manner that includes teams and their wishes directly in the creation.

When do we use chats? Why do we write emails? At what point do we pick up the phone? These answers should be a joint effort and one that is reflective of the team's efforts versus that of one person.”

- *Beat Buhlmann, General Manager EMEA, Evernote*



EVERNOTE

CONTEXT IS KING

When you're communicating digitally, you never quite know what the other person is doing at that moment. They might be at their desk just like you are, or they may be frantically rushing to a sales meeting, only responding "Yes" to your question and not elaborating because they don't have time.

Without understanding the other person's context, you might think that person doesn't care about the issue you brought up, when they're really just running to catch a cab in San Francisco (good luck with that).

With the information on that person's context, all of a sudden, the curt answers make sense: It's not that your coworker doesn't care, they are just indisposed at the moment.

Prefacing communication with your context can really help to prevent any miscommunication when things are out of the ordinary. Let team members know when you are heads down on a project and can't respond to questions right away. Over communicating is always better than making assumptions.



“Tools can mask the intention and humanity of the people involved.”



If you're already working in a remote team, chances are your team has its roster of favorite tools. The important question to ask yourself is **how and when to use these tools to convey the right information**. All of these considerations can be boiled down to a simple question that saves you a lot of time and mental energy:

“Is the information time sensitive?
If yes, go to chat. If no, go to Trello.”

For example, if you have a project update that is not time sensitive, pinging people in chat may be distracting and take them away from the brilliant state of concentrational zen they've been trying to reach all day.

CHAT TOOLS VS VIDEO CALLS

Let these 4 truths sink in:

01

Tools can mask **intention** and **humanity**: Keep in mind that at the end of the chat is a human being with feelings and reactions.

02

If you have **constructive feedback** to give, do it over a video call so your intentions come across.

03

Due to a lack of verbal and emotional cues: One person may **perceive** a chat convo as an **argument** when the other person perceives it as a discussion.

04

Resentment builds over time due to underlying issues **not being addressed**. Digital communication gone rogue can breed misunderstandings and **hurt feelings**.



The easiest way to nip this in the bud is by recognizing the humanity in team members via seeing their face on a video call.

It's a game changer.



MEETINGS

Meetings get a bad rep, but nothing is more efficient than a meeting where all stakeholders know what is being discussed, how long it will last, and what to prepare.

How do you accomplish this?

IF...

You want every person in the meeting to feel like their input is on equal footing...

THEN

Do not gather co-located folks around a conference room screen and pipe the remote people in as giant chat heads.

WHY?

It's hard to track conversations both visually (trying to see who's talking) and audibly (with varying distances from the microphone).

“To make collaboration work for everyone, there is one key rule:

Unless every person is in the same room, all meetings are held over video conference.

We've all been that one person dialing into a call only to hear a room full of noise, echo, and side conversations on the other end. It's a terrible experience. So when one person is "remote" for a meeting, everyone is.

We follow a few guidelines to minimize disruptions and ensure productive, high-quality calls:

Provide every employee with **great headphones** to prevent bad audio quality.

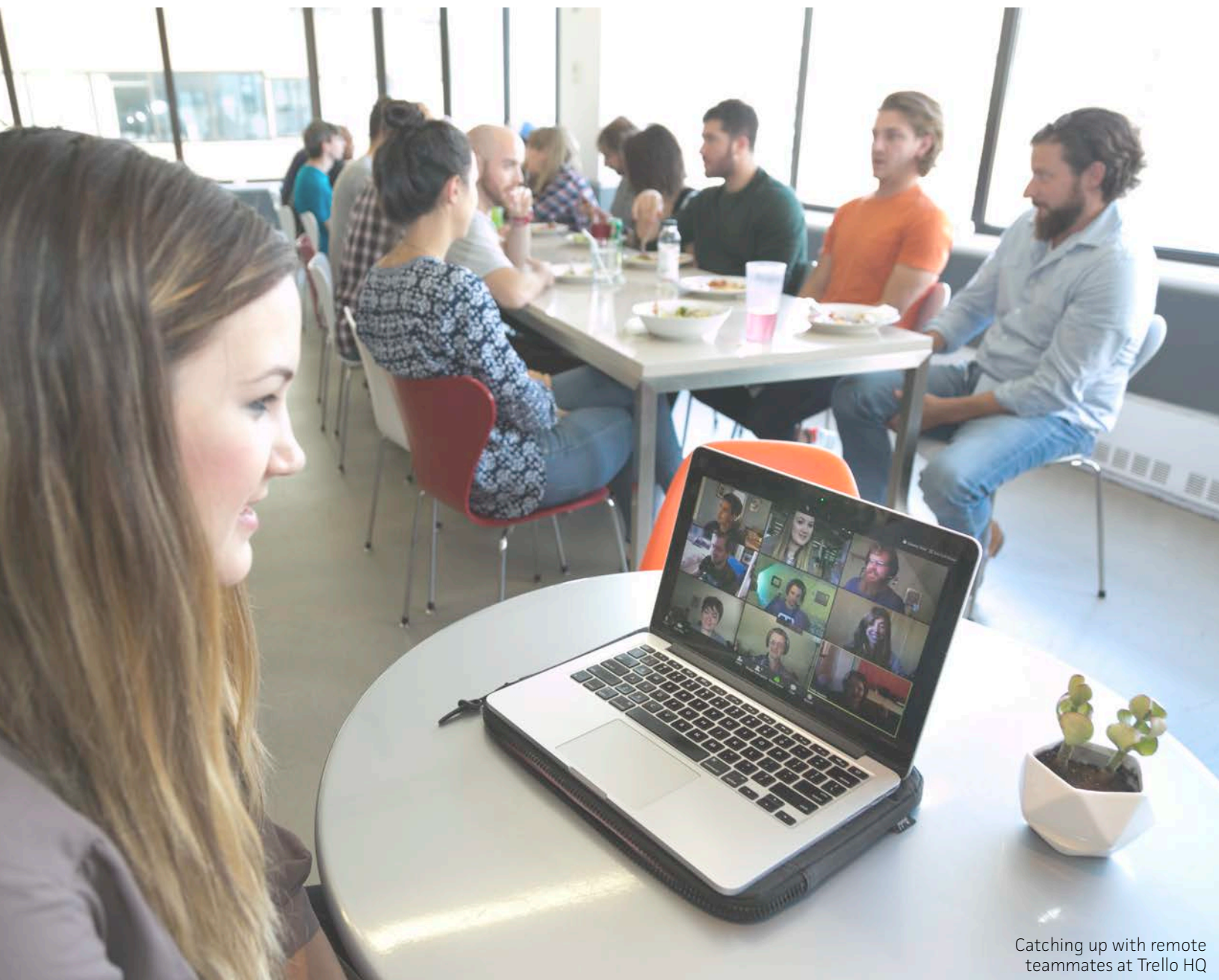
Make a reliable **internet connection** a priority for both local offices and remote setups.

Develop video call etiquette (and follow it!). Mute when you're not speaking, **keep your video on** to stay engaged, and avoid taking calls when in a noisy coffeeshop."

-Justine Jordan, VP Marketing, Litmus



“Each person should feel equally represented and present in the meeting.”



Catching up with remote teammates at Trello HQ

**IF...
THEN**

You want to help your remote team bond...

Allocate portions of the meeting for chatting about non-work activities, ice-breaker games, and catching up on company gossip.

WHY

- Keeping things positive by including a “Team Bravos” section is a great time for members to highlight each other’s contributions.
- “Gossip” section helps everyone feel connected to the company.

“ Video conferencing is not ‘Big Brother,’ it’s an avenue for personal, face-to-face connection. ”

IF...

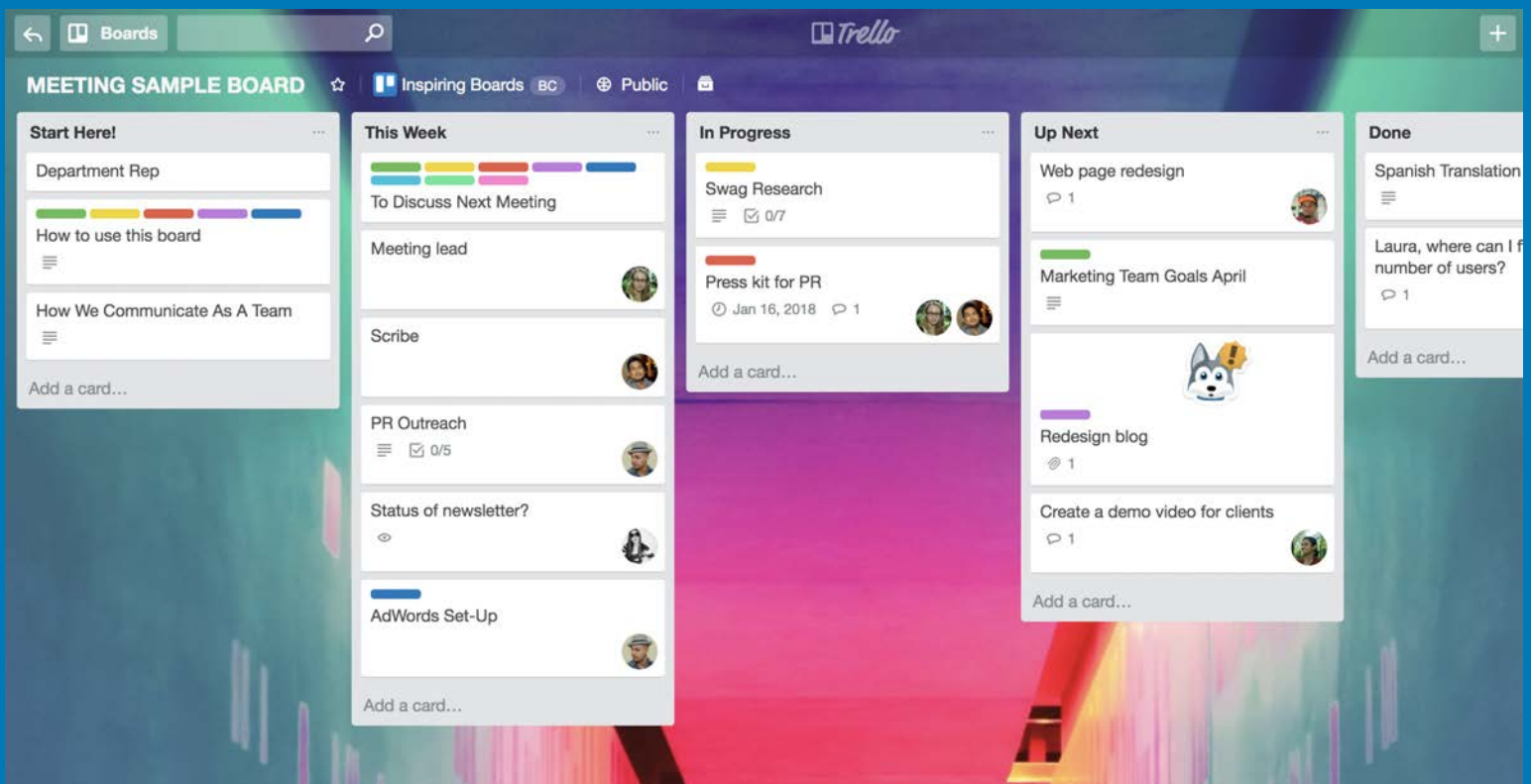
You want to avoid meetings where people drone on in seemingly endless monologues...

THEN

Use a Trello board to create both democratized participation and structure.

WHY?

- Team members need to know the structure, cadence, and expectations of team meetings.
- Anyone can add a card to the “Discuss During Meeting” list at any time.



**9 time zones.
17 people.
190 countries.**

See how UNICEF is pushing remote work to its furthest borders in this exclusive story of humanitarian aid and hurricane relief.

[Read more](#)



ALL THE TOOLS TO MAKE REMOTE WORK COOL

Tools matter more in remote work because they are the foundation for communication. You cannot walk up to someone's desk to talk to them; you need to adapt tools to become your "virtual office." After all, if technology hadn't advanced to what it is today, remote work wouldn't even be possible.

Here's a roundup of the most important types of tools you need to consider for remote work, as well as some specific recommendations:



CHAT TOOLS



Slack is the reigning powerhouse in the field and has proven to be an engaging and fun-to-use tool for team communication, especially for remote teams. “Social” features like emoji reactions are great for remote companies to communicate more naturally.



Stride is the new kid on the chat apps block and has some really cool, unique features like decision making and focus mode. Plus the status message settings (“in a meeting” or “sipping pina coladas on vacation”) are both useful and fun, especially for remote work.

“

At Zapier, we realize that transparent communication is key to successful remote work. Nearly all of our conversations happen in public Slack channels, so anyone can chime in and read up on what’s happening across teams and departments. That’s especially helpful when working as a team across different time zones. When team members wake up, they can easily gain context and pick up where others left off instead of not knowing what went on while they were sleeping.”

– Wade Foster, CEO, Zapier



VIDEO CALL SOFTWARE



When communication starts to get nuanced, confusing, or even heated, hop into video chat. The same way that you'd seek out a coworker in an office setting to discuss an important issue, video chat makes it much easier to mimic this interaction

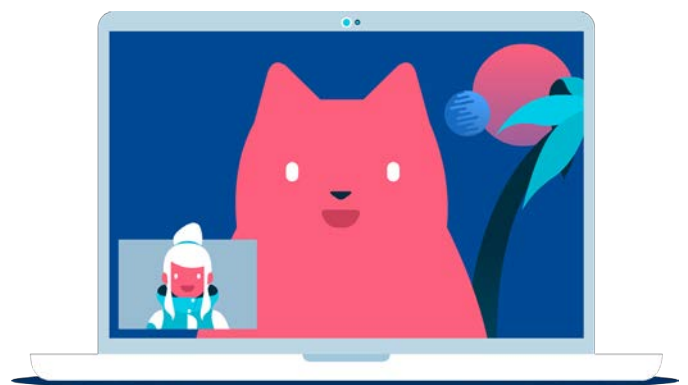
Good video conferencing is one of the cornerstones of an effective remote company, and we've tried them all. Here are our recommendations:

zoom

Zoom has proven to be the most reliable across all forms of internet connections, especially when handling hundreds of participants in company-wide meetings. The "gallery view" feature is a must for remote meetings with many attendees.

appear.in

Appear.in is faster to hop right into and you can customize URLs, thus making it perfect for 1:1 meetings. Plus it offers fun features like silly character overlays.

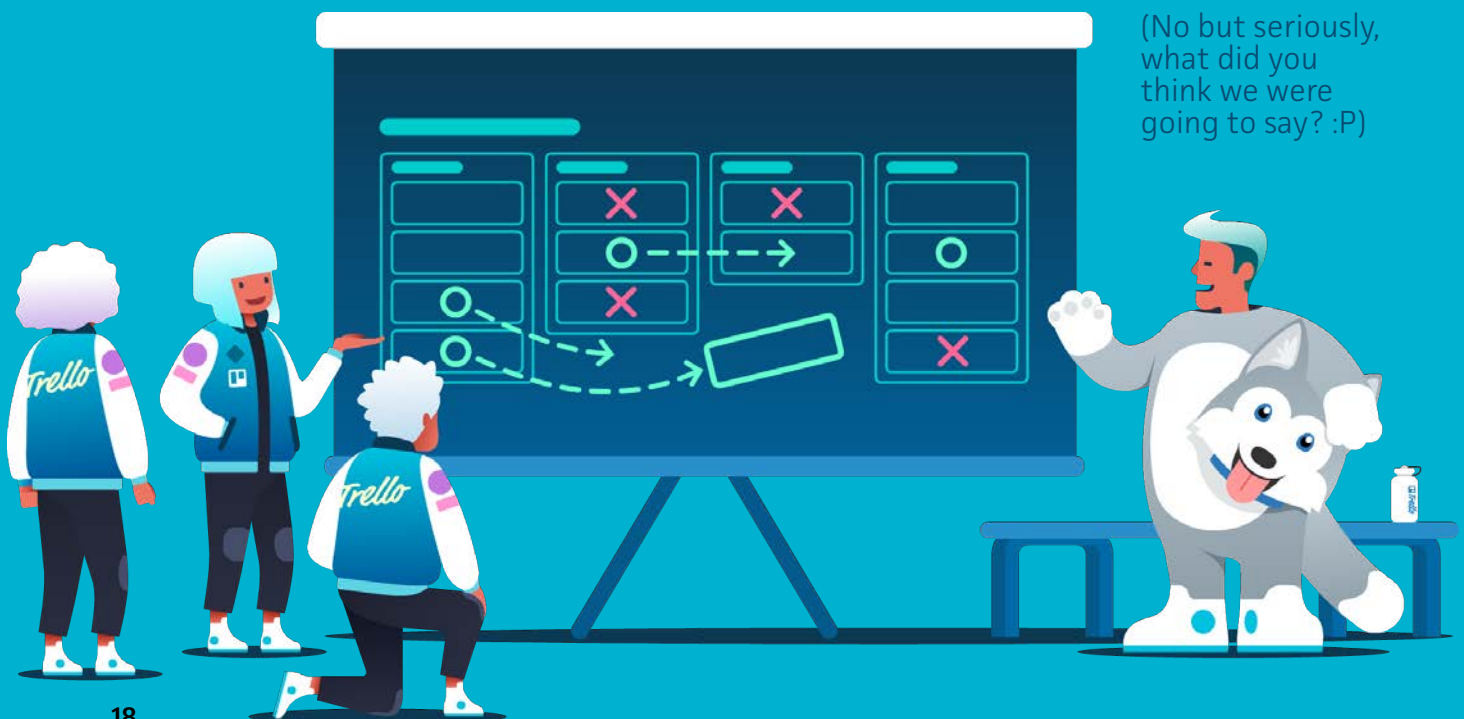


& COLLABORATION STATUS TOOLS



When you need to see progress, at-a-glance status updates, and all relevant resources related to a project or team's work, Trello is your virtual office. All the information updates in real-time and lives there 24/7, so team members can pick up the context, communications, and status of any request, project, meeting agenda, or other item at their convenience.

Trello, by the way, would not be as user-friendly of a product without the constant dogfooding it receives from the remote team that builds it. Sign up: it's free!



COMMUNICATION & DOCUMENTATION



(Internal): Whether it's outlining policies, taking meeting notes, or writing a blog to share with your team, Confluence is a fantastic internal communication and collaboration tool. Use it for projects or as an employee handbook. It helps teams share ideas, build community, and get work done all in one open and shared workspace, regardless of timezone.

(External): When it comes to collaborating with people outside of the company, like freelance writers or external partners, Google Docs is the industry standard. The ability to simultaneously edit, comment, and chat back and forth is flawless. Also, the robust permissions settings make sharing private and public information a breeze.



CREATING A REMOTE TEAM CULTURE

One of the biggest concerns when considering remote-friendly work is the perceived culture hit. Workplaces have relied on co-location to build corporate culture for so long that it seems bleak to think of a December without the requisite tinsel-and-punch office holiday party.

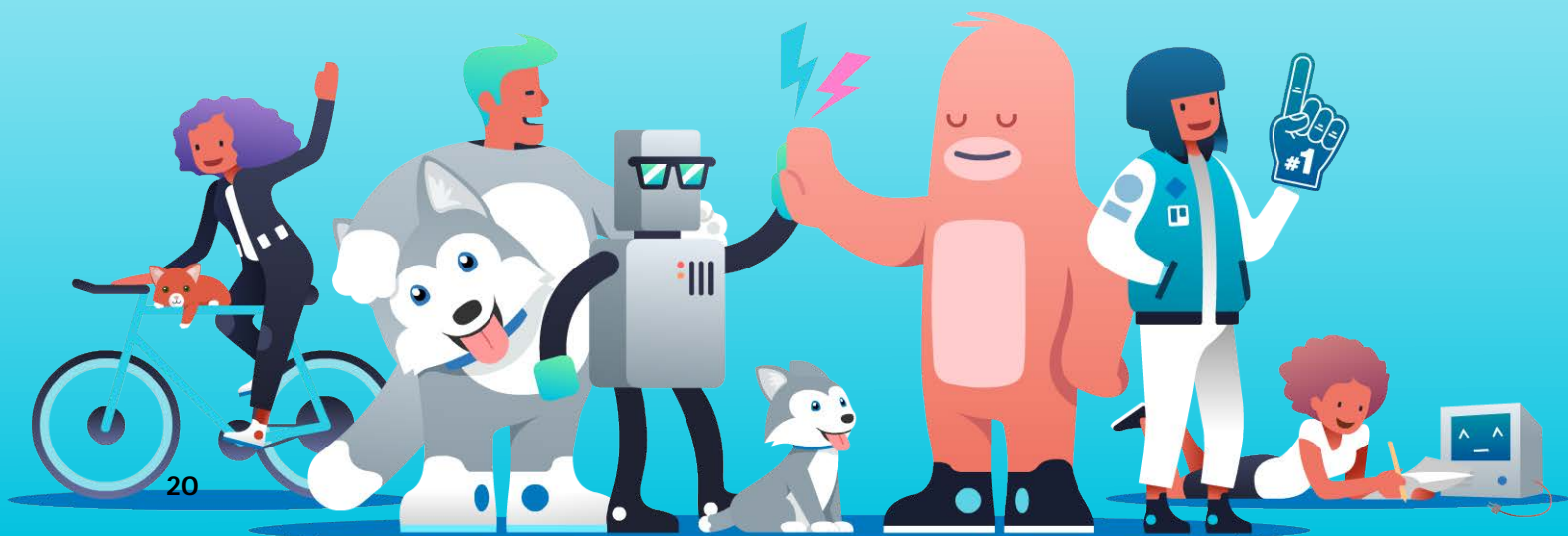
The key to building great remote relationships is **intention**. You need to try harder to find common interests, have meaningful meetings, and truly understand each person's perspective. The result can be a lasting network of true friends that you can depend on, no matter where your travels might take you.

Creating a strong remote team culture depends on two things:

1. A clear set of “rules to live by” that have 100% buy-in across the company.

2. A healthy system of meetings, events, and habits that keep people communicating.

Oh, and don't forget to use a lot of 🤔👍 and 🙌



01

Empathy Is Everything:

Always assume positive intent. Tone and nuance can get lost over chat, so assuming your colleague is coming from a positive place helps with any potential misunderstandings.

02

Treat Others With Transparency:

Keep important information accessible for everyone: log side chat decisions, record video meetings, and always take notes to share in public spaces.

03

Asynchronous Is A-OK:

Embrace communication across distributed time zone work schedules. Plan ahead: No decisions are made last minute. It may seem like extra work, but it's actually more organized.

04

Expect Structure:

Establish a process, structure, and agenda around meetings and updates so everyone can follow along no matter their location. Assign a meeting lead and scribe to ensure key decisions are captured in writing.

05

Different Yet Equal:

Accept this fundamental reality: All remote team members are equal, but their experiences differ. It's OK for co-located teammates to get together in person. The key is be considerate. If it is a company-sponsored event, provide an alternate perk for remote folks.



For more insight on balancing co-located and remote teams, see Trello's six commandments of culture between office and remote team members [here](#).

REMOTE CULTURE RULES TO LIVE BY

When you think of a vibrant, self-sustaining culture, you might not think of rules. But in this case, rules are social norms that provide participants with an expected experience when they enter the proverbial office. The special thing about norms is that they are collectively agreed upon. With 100% buy-in, these rules build trust, understanding, and support.

Doesn't that sound like a great place to work?



A SYSTEM OF SOCIALIZING

Give both extroverts and introverts alike the chance to chat with their co-workers in meaningful ways.

Here are three types of social interactions that you can easily set up for your remote team:

COMPANY-WIDE TOWN HALL

Throw out any notions of the traditional quarterly update speech. This should be an open forum for questions, discussions, and (short) team presentations occurring at least once a month.

Each Trello Town Hall opens with a review of the company's values, priorities, and employee anniversaries. Then new hires get to introduce themselves. The rest of the hour is filled with agenda items crowdsourced from the company in advance.

OH HEY THERE, MR. ROGERS

As companies grow, you can't guarantee everyone knows or talks to everyone else.

Enter "Mr. Rogers," a 15-minute weekly random grouping of team members who connect on a video chat to, well, just chat.

Post-session, a screen capture of the members and highlights are logged. How else could you learn that Bobby would rather fight 1 torch-wielding mob-sized lobster than 700 lobster-sized torch-wielding mobs?

Why does the Town Hall work?

It's curated, plus it's energized, as well as democratic. It's on a set schedule, and you get to see each person's face in their own video screen. Try doing that in a room of 100 people!

Learn more

Why does Mr. Rogers work?

It reveals common interests and sparks conversations that can be picked up at the annual offsite. It provides a break from work talk and builds personal relationships at a reliable cadence.

Learn more



REMOTE TEAM “OFFSITES”

Flying everyone to an exotic location and having a big company bonding session is amazing, but also expensive. It shouldn't be your company's only solution for getting together.

You can also share experiences as a remote team with a “choose-your-own” company adventure. At Trello, this translates into a summer day off for the whole company during which co-located office members head to the beach, and remotes receive a stipend to expense their own fun adventure.

Why does the Choose-Your-Own event work? We bring everyone together with a hashtag and shared Trello board filled with recaps and pictures that is reviewed at the next Town Hall. Everyone has an equal (but different) opportunity to have some fun, and then bond over those stories afterwards. [Learn more](#)



Remote work, and being able to structure life and live where and how you want is awesome! This flexibility is a strength of this unique workstyle.

It's also super important to get face-time with your team. If you have the opportunity, meet your team members in person, break bread together, and share memorable experiences.

Stephen Olmstead, VP of Design Partnerships, InVision



FIND (AND LAND) THE PERFECT REMOTE JOB

In 2016, 43% of employed Americans said they spent at least some time working remotely. That's a lot of jobs!

Remote opportunities aren't just becoming easier to source, they are being developed by companies who are purposefully building a remote-friendly work culture (and looking for the right candidates to thrive in it).



WHERE TO SOURCE...

It's a challenge to source out true remote opportunities amidst vague "work from home!" ads. Here are some places to start:

YOUR CURRENT COMPANY:

If you feel that your situation could be vastly improved by removing the commute, communicate with your manager. You might lead the charge on remote culture!

FLEXJOBS:

FlexJobs vets remote opportunities that fit your skills, job experience and country of employment for a small fee.

REMOTE.COM:

Build a profile and let potential opportunities come your way thanks to AI tech that matches employees and companies.

STACK OVERFLOW:

If you're a developer looking to level up, this is your stop. Add criteria like tech stack and flex hours to find a great fit.



"Hiring remote workers means that you can get the absolute best person for the job – not just one who is willing to live in your city.

If your company doesn't include remote working options now or in the future, you could be cutting your possible candidate pool in half and be eliminating the most qualified people from consideration."

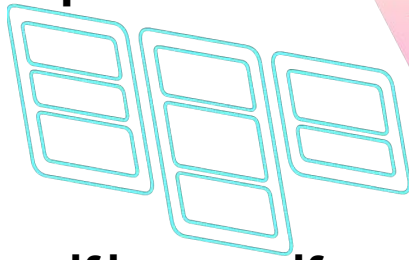
- Rachel Ferrigno, Content Marketing Manager, Stack Overflow

Other top remote job boards include Remote OK, We Work Remotely, Remotive, Remote.co, and Jobspresso.

HOW TO PREP

A remote job interview can also be a slight departure from the traditional in-office interview. How you approach and interact with a remote hiring team during the vetting process can really separate you from the pack.

Here are some expert tips:



01

Help yourself be yourself:

You don't want to be worrying about interruptions while trying to explain your best attributes. Make sure you have a solid internet connection, a quiet place to take the interview (no coffee shops!).

02

Over-communicate:

The foundation of distributed teams is [communication](#). Approach your application by providing as many details as needed. This kind of communicative effort shows you're reliable when working remote.

03

Get into the remote interviewer mindset:

Put yourself in your interviewer's shoes and anticipate what will make their lives easier. Provide examples of your work that shows results, integrity, drive, empathy, and how you add value as a trustworthy team member.

04

Know your tools:

You should be comfortable managing all kinds of collaborative tools like chat apps, video conferencing, email, calendars, and project management platforms, because your interview will likely require them.

ARE YOU (REALLY) READY TO GO REMOTE?

At the end of the day, choosing remote for remote's sake won't keep you satisfied. If the role is as much about the work as it is about the lifestyle, you'll be on the right track to find a fulfilling career.

“Remote work is an important shift in how our society operates, in that it opens doors for many who weren't able to walk through them before.

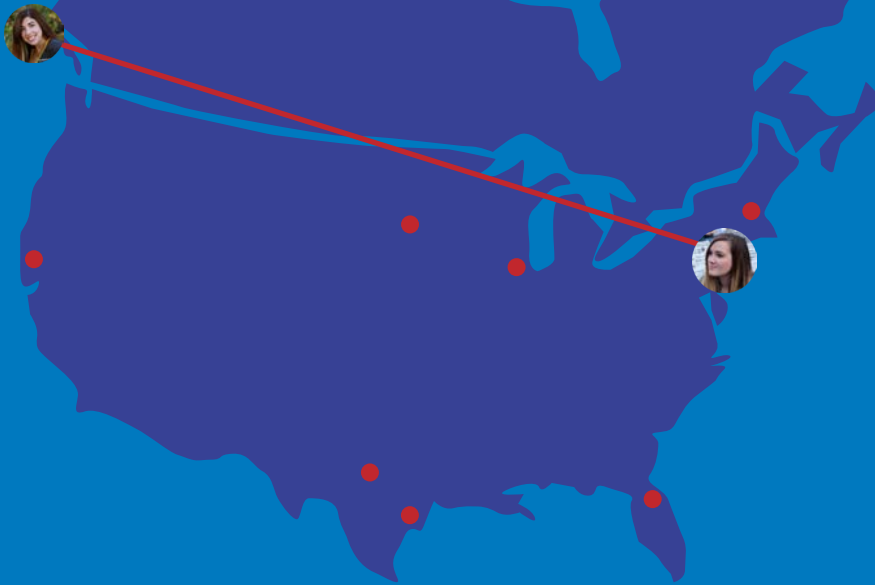
People who cannot afford to move where the work is, people who cannot adhere to a traditional 9-to-5 workday because they care for their families—remote work is already creating new opportunities for them, and this effect will only grow stronger.

We're shaping the future of work, and it's on us to make sure that it's getting better for everyone.”

- Leif Singer, Product Manager, Automattic

AUTOMATTIC

This book was created entirely remotely by two people living 3000 miles away. We also received lots of input from our remote teammates across the country:



We dedicate this book to all remote workers, whose pioneering efforts have helped us to learn, evolve, connect, and empathize in a whole new way.

And to our remote colleagues at Trello:
Thank you. Without your honesty and advice, we would never be where we are today.

Writing and editing: Leah Ryder and Lauren Moon
Some additional reporting done by Stella Garber
Layout: Lauren Moon
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