MANAGING REMOTE TEAMS

because teams don't build themselves

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THE CULTURE GUY.

Remote doesn't have to be distant

Teams need glue

What is holding your remote team together? Is it you, is it them, is it your corporate culture? Holding a team together is difficult face to face, but remote management has raised some very real issues in relation to managing and developing teams. Every team needs glue - learn how to be that glue and hold your team together remotely.

Culture needs to be cultured

If you work for an established company, it's likely you have a cultural structure to work with. Every company has culture (whether you want one or not). If you think your business is too small to worry about culture, you'd be wrong. Working remotely doesn't mean that culture isn't important, it's the opposite.

This innovative management whitepaper is designed to give you the insight you need to make remote working insanely successful.

How to build successful remote teams

It's not enough to use the same paradigms and same systems to manage remote team as you did to manage a team who are all in the office.

There are *five things* that you need to consider when building remote teams:

1. Redefine balance.

2. Choose a different metric.

3. Clarify expectations.

4. Communicate better.

5. Find ways to build trust.

Redefine balance

The word balance is ok when you're talking about nutrition. It's a great thing when you're riding a bike: without balance there is only grazed knees and tears. When it comes to work, we need to move beyond balance.

The term refers to the ability to separate the different parts of our existence so that we do not overwork and give away any more of our precious time for free than we absolutely have to? It means completely decoupling paid work from the rest of life and never the twain shall meet. It means you as a company exchanging an individuals 9am - 5pm for your money.

When we gathered everyone in one place, it was reasonable to do it all at the same time, It made it easier and more efficient to manage. It did how ever come with certain draw backs. Not everyone does their best work between 9 and 5 and secondly, even in an office, people have a lot of ingenuity and they will find ways to slack and get away with it, when they want to.

If this paradigm continues when teams are working remotely, then businesses will definitely struggle to get the best out of their teams. it can also have knock-on effects. If people cannot manage their own time and are expected to be available at their desk from 9 am to 5 pm it will increase social isolation.

Ultimately, this paradigm will reduce productivity, because under the time-for-money controlled system, people need to be externally motivated, which is really difficult for an organisation to do especially remotely.

When your team is remote, you need to think about fluidity rather than balance - a concept that allows us to make sure we live life enjoying the best of both worlds - being fulfilled in work and fulfilled in life. A way to have enough time to enjoy our family and leisure time, and also feeling like we are doing good, worthwhile work on something that matters.

To do this well, you need to provide a compelling reason for people to get up, get to work and deliver well. They need to understand and articulate the reason the organisation exists - the 'why' as Simon Sinek calls it - and allow your teams to see the worthwhile, important and impactful work they are doing, so they are internally, personally motivated to bring their best, whether in an office or at their kitchen table.

Businesses need to realise the one size does not fit all and that if people have a compelling, worthwhile and fulfilling cause to be part of, they need less managing, less control and CAN be trusted to deliver, whether that's in an office or remotely. Finding balance is about allowing work-life and life-life to co-exist in a fluid harmony. Sometimes that has strict boundaries. Sometimes that is lots of give and take. The ultimate aim is not to de-couple, but find fulfilment, joy and meaning in the whole of life, including our work.

The wider implication of this is that those businesses that are actually doing good and do give their people a compelling "why" will be better suited to survive in the changing economic world of the 21st century and that's good for business, good for society, good for capitalism and good for our shared future.

Let's treat individuals like adults and not resources.

Choose a different metric

The great thing about moving to a more fluid rather than balanced operating model is that it frees up a company from having to do the management heavy task of accounting for and controlling people's time (the hours they "buy") and they can allow people the freedom to deliver how the individual considers best. Personally I work better from 7 am to 1 pm and then I need a long break, but can do some of my best work between 6 pm and 9 pm. After 9 pm I'm done for though, so my phone and my emails go off.

So if we are not exchanging time for money, how do we measure the value of an employee to a company.

Well you need to choose a different metric. The only reason we have used time in the past is because when people worked factories they were needed to be there at specific times and different people did the same work at different times. In the knowledge economy, we have however moved beyond, but we are still using the same measurements. This is partly because time was a reasonable proxy for work completed and outputs delivered.

However, it was the outputs that we really wanted. It was the clients seen, calls made, accounts balanced, reports written, projects completed, code written, bugs fixed, problems solved that we were really paying for.

So let's measure them. Let's measure the actual deliverables rather than the time. What does it matter whether someone completes the work between 9am and 5pm or 4pm and 11pm, if we get the same results.

What's more it's easier to measure the outputs rather than the time when people are working remotely, and by giving me the space to manage my own time, an organisation gets better quality work and I get to connect with people when I want to, solving the mental health issues of isolation.

Don't get me wrong, there are situations when prescribing time is needed - we have to be available to clients when they want; we have to gather a team together at specific times; but often people can be trusted to do the right thing at the relevant time, especially if they are motivated by the purpose and have the choice as to when or even whether they do the work or not.

I worked with one organisation who implemented unlimited holiday and fully flexible working times and both productivity and revenue went up, because if someone was at their desk, it was their choice, so they chose to do their job well. (People will often surprise you!)

Let's be really though. There are also some people that will struggle with the freedom and lack of outside imposed routine. That's OK too, maybe they need the option of coming into the office to do their best work. Nothing wrong with that. It's all about choice and fluidity.

Choose the right metric and make life easier for you and your people.
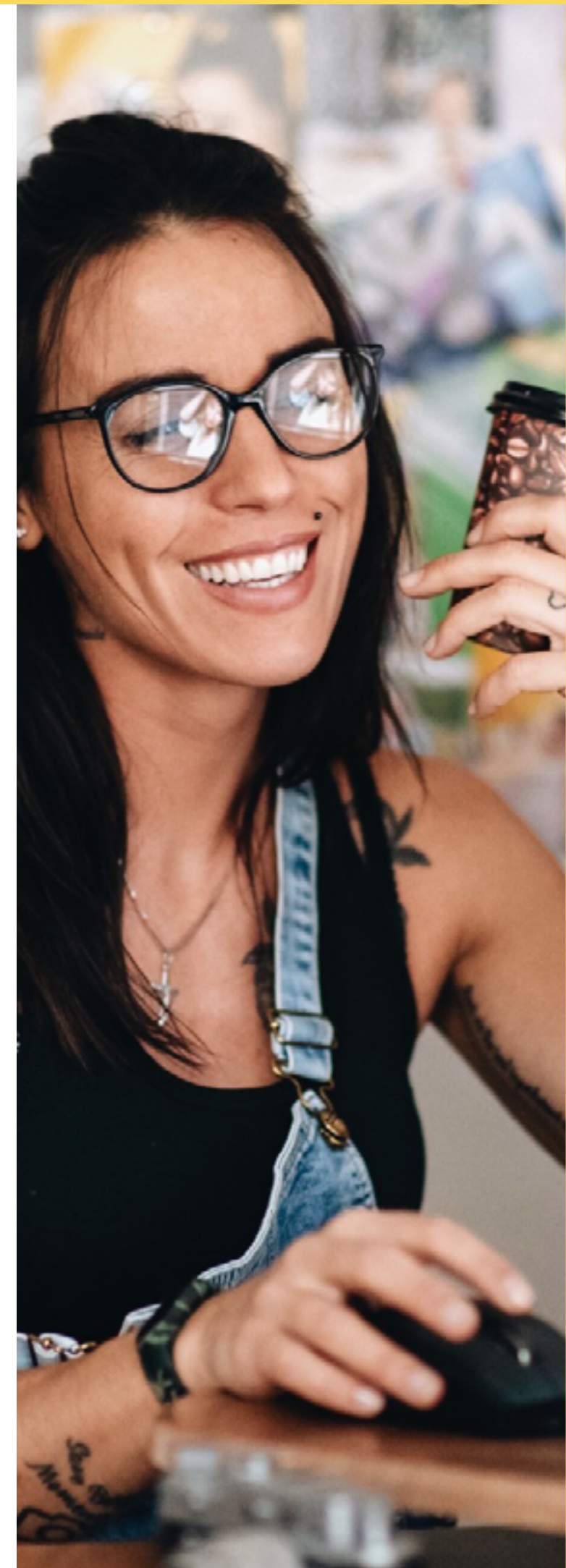
Clarify expectations

Once you introduce this new level of self motivation and self organisation for people, they will have a lot of space and a lot of decisions to make themselves about how, when and what work they do and when they complete tasks, so it is imperative that they understand the rules of the game, the expectations, the framework for making the right decisions that reflect the values of the company and the expectations of clients.

As a leader you need to be really clear on what you expect from them. Are there a certain number of calls that are required each day, each week? Are there a certain number of billable hours on client projects that are required each week? Are there specific meetings that must be attended? Is there a deliverable that is required on a deadline? Are there times when someone needs to attend a client site to do work? And while we are not necessarily prescriptive about daily hours, there maybe times when an employee is expected to be available = like team meetings or calls to other time zones. Be really clear on the non negotiables and the expectations.

It's not just leaders and managers that need to be clear. Defining expectations cuts both ways. Employees need to be clear on what they require to get the job done. If they have more autonomy in delivering results, they need to make sure they have the resources and support they need to meet the expectations of the organisation. Do they require certain tools and software to work remotely? Do they need access to specific people in the wider organisation and perhaps at certain times or intervals? Do they need administrative resources to help complete projects? When are they absolutely not working? Maybe after 9

pm is off limits so phone and email go off. Maybe the kids are put to bed or dinner with the spouse is between 6 pm and 8 pm. Maybe there is a business need to be available on the phone from 9 am to 1 pm every day.

Whatever the needs are, both managers and employees have to explicitly and fully clarify their needs to be able to effectively make remote working a success.

You won't necessarily get it right first time. That's OK. It will be an evolving understanding. As long as you are open and foster good communication, you will find that perfect balance of prescription and autonomy. Which brings us to the next consideration.

"Time is something we invented to make motion seem simple."

Albert Einstein

Communicate better

While everyone worked in the same geographical location, most communication happened organically - chatting over an office divider, popping over to a colleague's desk to ask a quick question, or grabbing some coffee together and having a 10 minute catch up or gossip.

When people work remotely none of this can happen organically and communication requires a more organised approach. There are three levels of communication that need to be considered and managed.

Firstly, there is the explicitly organised communications - team meetings, client visits etc. The times when we deliberately gathered people for a purpose even when working together in an office. For this type of communication we seem to have been quick to move it online with Zoom or Teams and carried on as normal, which is fantastic.

However, it's worth asking whether the same schedule of meetings works as well online? Do you need to look at the duration and frequency of those meetings to improve communication and connection for people working remotely? Face to face, a twice a week 60 minute meeting may have worked brilliantly, but perhaps when running them online shorter more frequent meetings would work better. Fifteen minutes daily could be better to keep everyone up to date and check in with progress and how people are feeling. More frequent meetings can increase connection to compensate for the lack of office banter.

Secondly, how do you replace digital water-cooler time? When people work remotely, how to do simulate those serendipitous moments in the break room, where people laugh and chat for 5 minutes while making coffee or grabbing a snack. Those moments that help us build connections and sometimes lead to interesting innovations. This is something you need to be deliberate about. In offices, this just happened. Remotely it definitely doesn't so you need to engineer it.

You could try online tools like Wurkr. io that keeps people online in virtual rooms in the background so colleagues can drop in if they need to ask a question, or meet up in a virtual breakroom when having a coffee. Perhaps a simple slack channel where people can post when they are off to make a drink and others can join them in an impromptu video call. Maybe keep a permanent zoom call running that people can drop in and out as when they want to chat to someone. Find a way to create those "passing in the corridor" moments. They are not just an unnecessary side effect of office life, they are fundamental in building deeper relationships in high performing teams.

Finally, there is the social connections we build in our workplaces. Popping to the pub after work. Grabbing some lunch together. Heading to the gym before work. Like the water-cooler moments these are important rituals in developing team cohesion, trust and support. Find ways to reproduce these non work interactions while working remotely. Some organisations gather people together geographically for an extended period, like four days away together at a retreat. Some teams organise online socials like poker over zoom. You need to find something that works for your context and your people. There is no "one size fits all" and It can be different each time. Ask your team what they think, ask your peers what they do, but find a way to create regular non work interactions, it will have a significant effect on your teams performance.

How ever you communicate, find the tools and systems that support the team to get their best work done.. What you have may work great, but remote working is so different, you need to try alternatives to find the perfect blend that improves engagement and productivity.

Find new ways to build trust

Trust is the foundation stone of any team's success. Without trust a team is nothing more than a group of individuals with their own personal agendas. It is definitely not a functioning, high performing team.

Building trust is fundamental. Brené Brown talks about it often, Patrick Lencioni writes about it in pretty much every one of his books. Trust is absolutely necessary, but it is hard to cultivate even when a team comes together in a common workspace. It is twice as hard when teammates don't spend time together regularly. Trust is difficult, for two reasons.

Firstly, trust means different things to different people and secondly, trust takes a long time and living through many difficult experiences to grow. We can go through 80 years of life and trust completely very few people. The trust that we are talking about here equates to vulnerability, openness and exposure to one another's weaknesses and failures.

Sounds touchy feely, but it is not.

It is built on a simple and practical idea that people who are able to be vulnerable with each other will not engage in politics that wastes everyone's time. They will forgo their own hidden agendas and personal goals for the good of the team. Everyone will be able to grow and learn and become better, increasing results and delivering more.

However, vulnerability is difficult and is not often rewarded quickly. In fact it can be quite uncomfortable in the short term without much compensation, so cultivating it takes determination, perseverance, and courage, but it is definitely worth it.

Trust goes both ways, so to build it managers and leaders need to regularly demonstrate a genuine concern and care for team members. Finding opportunities to show empathy, interest and look after team members beyond the deliverables of work.

Equally, team members need to exhibit trust worthiness. They need to deliver what they promised. They need to commit to the team and show that commitment by doing more than the minimum expected.

Building trust within your team will be the hardest part of the transition to remote working, but as leaders you need to create opportunities where vulnerability and openness is rewarded and encouraged. When you manage this you will see your team move from a group of people working on the same projects to a high performing team delivering exceptional work.

There are the five things

So there are *five things* that you need to consider when building remote teams. Focus on these and you will rid your team of politics and deliver amazing results.

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2. Choose a different metric.

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Book a FREE advice call today to build your high performing remote team.

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What people say

"Ben has done nothing but impress me from the moment I met him. Not only does he know his stuff, he's an absolute expert at what he does and working with him has transformed my business. I highly recommend Ben to anyone looking at understanding their values and creating the culture within their business enabling the business to run effectively even when they aren't present."

Ross Crawford - Mr Digital

"With Ben's help we have managed to get all our ideas out of our head onto paper and next steps will be to produce a document that we can share with the whole organisation. What better way to make sure we are all on board and working towards a shared goal."

Kelly West - ONLE Networking

"Ben exceeded my expectations! Ben is so knowledgeable and insightful on the subject of company culture. Thanks to Ben's engaging manner the workshop was just as effective as a face to face meeting, He has the knack of really drilling down into your business culture and making you reflect on your "whys". I would recommend Ben wholeheartedly – a really good guy to know."

Pru Gayton - PAC Copy writing

"We worked with Ben over the course of several months and saw exponential change in our company in many ways. The ideas he brought were easily implemented and created immediate changes for the better. This guy knows what he is talking about."

Andrew White - PRC

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