



MANAGING REMOTELY: A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR HR & MANAGERS

Remote managers are the future
– invest in them now

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REMOTE WORK IS HERE TO STAY – ARE YOUR MANAGERS PREPARED?

Whichever side you sit on in the return-to-work debate, the data is pretty clear on the working norms of today. *Remote work is here to stay.*

According to McKinsey, 58% of Americans have the option to work from home for all or part of the week, and when offered, almost everyone takes the opportunity to work flexibly. Remote work also factors heavily into job seekers' motivations for finding a new job – it's a top 3 motivator along with greater pay and better career opportunities.

Many HR and People teams are embracing the remote trend and shifting strategy to shepherd their teams into this new era of work. And one of the most important connection points between HR and their broader teams? **Managers.**

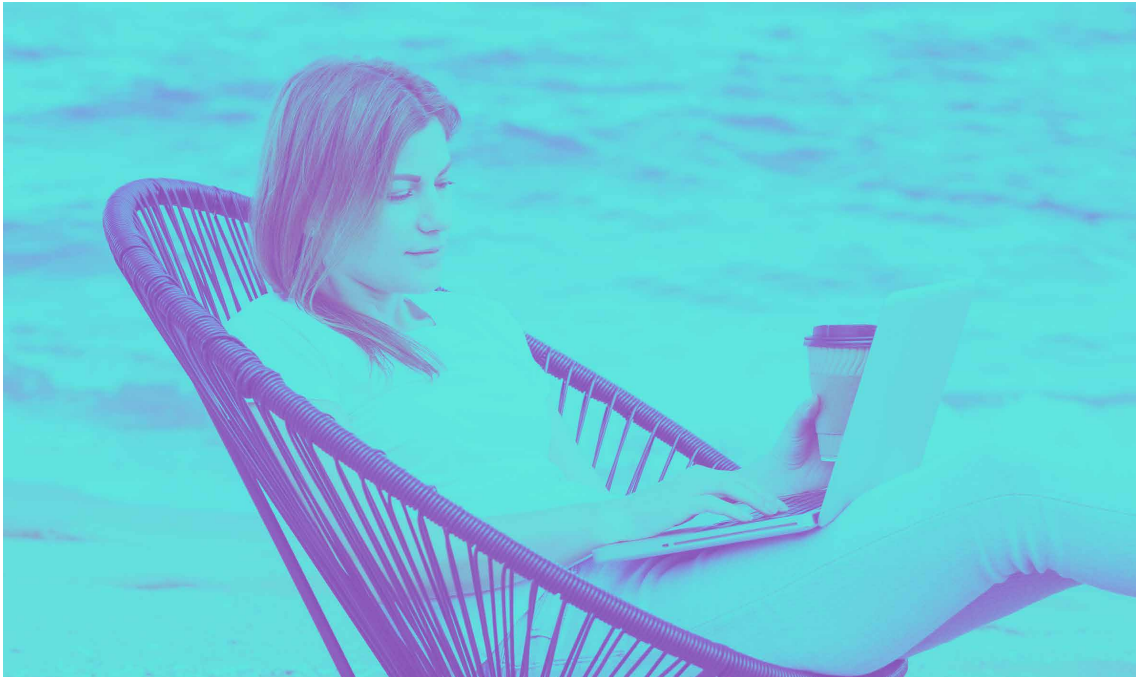
So, what role do managers play in making remote work successful, and how can HR and People teams best support them?

In both remote and in-person workplaces, managers play a critical role in showing team care and appreciation, driving team performance and productivity, building team culture, supporting the personal wellbeing of employees, and creating social connection and belonging.

However, in a remote environment, the skills, behaviors and tools managers need to lead are different to what's needed in an in-person workplace.

For example, when we work in-person, so much knowledge transfer and creation of care happens naturally and spontaneously (in the hallway, around the coffeemaker), which we can't rely on in a remote world. We need to be intentional about recreating those same experiences, using different means and the new online tools at our disposal.

*In a remote world, “**the what**” of great management is still the same. It's “**the how**” that's different.*



The task for HR? To be aware of these differences and be intentional about how you incorporate them into manager training and development programs. This ensures our remote managers have the right skills and capabilities.

We recognize it can take a little while to shift course on your manager enablement strategy, **and your managers need help ASAP.**

To help, we've pulled together some best practices and pro-tips for managing remotely that you can roll out across your management teams, **today.**

Let's grow!



Mel Miller

Co-Founder & COO @ The Mintable

SECTION 1

DEVELOP HIGH-PERFORMING TEAMS



Without the distractions of an office or a commute time, a remote environment can lead to solid gains in productivity and performance for many teams.

But the adjustment to a remote environment can also be challenging, particularly without the structure of an office and clear separation between work and home life. This can be heightened for cross-border teams who are working across multiple time zones.

Managers who successfully lead high-performing teams in a remote environment are those who communicate hyper-clear expectations, unite their direct reports around common objectives, and take the time to ensure they have what they need to succeed. Here are some of the best, practical ways managers can build high-performing, remote teams:

Hold weekly 1:1s with your remote direct reports

With in-person teams, managers may find they get enough informal touch points on performance that they only need a 1:1 every other week.

However, with remote teams, these informal interactions are fewer so we recommend weekly meetings on performance to ensure alignment.

Small issues can become bigger than necessary if we don't touch base with our direct reports often enough. So even if there isn't anything the manager needs to address, it is important to give the time and space to direct reports in case they need it.

[Check out our 1:1 template here.](#) Managers should ensure that the business progress is agreed to and filled out by their direct reports during or before each 1:1.

2 Set iron-clad expectations and keep them at the top of 1:1 documents

While we recommend setting clear expectations for both remote and in-person teams, the need for extreme clarity in communication cannot be over-emphasized for remote teams. Managers can use the template below and refer back to it in every 1:1 with their direct reports.

We agree that you will **accomplish** _____ **result** (what, metric/milestone) with _____ **people** (who, if applicable) **by displaying** _____ **skills/behaviors** (how) **by** _____ **time** (when) with **check-ins on** _____ **dates** (when) **because** _____ (why, motivation/context).

Encourage your managers to check any of their implicit expectations. For example, do your managers judge engagement based on how active people are on Slack during the day? If that is an implicit expectation of the role, ensure managers make it explicit so direct reports know what's expected of them.

3 Aim to fill out the feedback section of the 1:1 template weekly

Setting a weekly cadence of feedback – both positive and negative – has important benefits. It will help establish a culture so feedback feels expected and natural to direct reports. It will also catalyze managers to know enough about their direct reports' workflows so that they're in a position to deliver feedback.

Ensure your managers know that feedback is a two-way street. They should encourage their direct reports to give them feedback as well. A great way to do this is to have your managers share 2-3 things they are working on and ask the direct report for feedback on those things. This opens the door for direct reports to feel more comfortable giving feedback to their manager.

4 Host a regular team meeting to align direct reports around common goals

While it's important for direct reports to be clear on the expectations managers have of them personally, these will feel even more important when they're understood in the context of the goals the broader team is working towards.

To facilitate this, managers should host a weekly or bi-weekly meeting with a regular agenda to bring the team together. Start the meeting by restating the team's status toward achieving certain goals or objectives – these could be metrics-based or progress toward a project's completion. Our suggestion for a standard team meeting agenda is below:

- ✓ Celebrate the wins (round robin on things to celebrate that week)
- ✓ Metrics check in (consistent check in on the metrics that matter and discussion around the hits and misses)
- ✓ Discussion topics (added per week)
- ✓ Commitments (name + action item committed to during the meeting + due date)

This will help direct reports understand how they fit into the overall picture, give context on their work, and build accountability.

5 Schedule monthly shadowing time with direct reports

In offices, so much learning and passing along of best practices happens from employees sitting near each other, swiveling their chair, asking for help, and sharing pro-tips. Remote managers can replicate this learning through scheduling regular shadow sessions.

This is not a time for managers to nitpick about what their direct reports are doing, but more of a time to understand how they work and to best support them.

This time can be as simple as direct reports sharing their screens and walking through their workflows, while managers observe. It is a time for managers to:

- Provide positive feedback on what the person is doing great
- Absorb best practices to share to other teammates
- Share pro-tips on how to make the work more efficient and effective

Done wrong (i.e. leaning only into constructive feedback or nit picking every action), shadowing will feel like micro management and big brother. Done right, shadowing empowers employees to be the best at their jobs.

6 Don't assume familiarity with tools

Zoom or Meets? Gmail or Outlook? Slack or Teams? Trello or Jira? With such variety in the tools we use to work online these days, we can't assume that new hires, regardless of their level of experience, will know how to use the tools your company prefers.

For managers, even if new hires think they know how to use your company's tools, it's worth investing in their capabilities since they will rely on these tools to do their jobs. Especially since they can't just look over another colleague's shoulder to observe and learn.

Managers should schedule a dedicated time when a new hire starts to make sure their direct report has access to the essential tools required to do their jobs and walk them through how to do things like:

- Schedule a meeting
- Set up a video call and add it to a calendar invite
- Access internal materials on a Wiki

7 Don't assume people's ability to time manage

Without the structure of an office, it can be difficult for people to manage their days. This can result in missed lunch hours or breaks, or working way into the night without a defined "end of day."

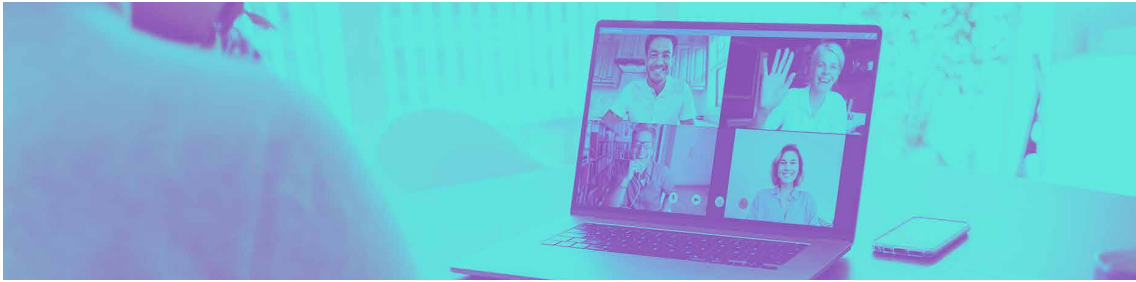
Managers can help provide this structure by talking through what a new direct report's routine will be like in one of their first 1:1s, and encouraging them to add lunch or personal break blocks to their calendars so others know not to schedule that time. **Managers can also help their direct reports do a calendar audit – what meetings aren't necessary? Do they have too many back-to-backs?**

8 Use real-time insights to identify management patterns, strengths, and areas for improvement

With technology like The Mintable's managerOS, managers receive meaningful, actionable insights from 1:1 meetings and calendars. With real-time awareness about their strengths and areas for improvement, managers can focus on what they need to do to better develop high-performing teams, meet targets, and retain talent.

SECTION 2

BUILD TEAM CULTURE



One of the most important roles a manager plays is to create and foster a positive team culture. What does this actually mean in practice? It encompasses the way team members behave and interact with each other, and as a result, their overall experience and engagement at work. **And according to research**, companies with great cultures have 72% higher employee engagement ratings. Even better – highly engaged business units realize an **81% difference in absenteeism and a 14% difference in productivity**.

The fundamentals of building a great culture don't differ too much from a remote to an in-person workplace – in both, clear communication and building team connection is key.

However, in a remote environment, managers can't rely on the usual face-to-face interactions typically experienced in an office environment. They need to use different tools and approaches to build culture on their teams. Here are some of the ways HR can coach managers to do just that.

1 Establish remote meeting norms

No one likes a meeting that could have been an email. Remote meeting norms allow everyone to know what to expect from meetings and make sure they're prepared for the role they'll be expected to play. For example, if your company expects people to be on camera during a meeting, state that so managers won't waste time with people explaining why they're off camera. Here are some of our favorites:

- Label calendar invites with the objective of the meeting
- Ask people to include simple agendas in meeting invites – topics, key outcomes, relevant materials
- Ensure people know what should be a meeting vs an email vs 1:1 – Time is precious, managers need to know how to use it wisely

2 Book a 10 minute morning huddle each day or establish a daily check-in on Slack

Managers can ask their teams to share their goals for the day and if they need any support from the team. This ensures direct reports are connected to the work each other is doing and knows how they can contribute.

Here is a sample Slack stand up template:

- Top priorities for the day
- Where I am blocked
- [Optional] Emoji of the day (*e.g. how someone is feeling, or what emoji best represents them that day*)

3 Book one hour of virtual office hours each month

Virtual office hours help create an open door policy and make managers more available to their teams. Direct reports can take advantage of the additional face time with their managers when and as they need it.

Here are some pro-tips for managers:

- Host at the same time each month
- Invite all of your direct reports as optional
- Make the purpose of this time clear (*i.e. to discuss a new idea, just to chat, etc*)

4 Be intentional about sharing experiences

Even though you're not in the same place, creating moments where people feel like they're sharing the same or similar experiences can bring them together. Here are some examples managers can try out:

- Send everyone on the team a piece of swag (*e.g. company socks or a water bottle*). Have them take a photo in their “natural habitat” and share on Slack.
- Ask everyone to bring their favorite mug to meetings and share about it.
- Have people change their meeting background to their favorite vacation spot ever.
- Have everyone change their Slack or other profile picture to one from their childhood.
- Do a “walking” virtual team meeting and have team members get outside in their local community – walk around the block (or a safe equivalent), head to a park, or sit in a local cafe.

SECTION 3

ENSURE PERSONAL WELLBEING

While some employees love a remote environment, there's no doubt that for many, remote work can be pretty lonely on the personal front. This can lead to stress and disengagement and seriously impact an employee's personal wellbeing.

It's always been important for managers to support the personal wellbeing of their direct reports, whether in the office or not. However, in a remote environment, it becomes an even more important part of a manager's role and requires different behaviors, skills, and support structures.

Here are some ways managers can build a sense of connection with their direct reports and stay in touch with how they're doing on a personal level:

Prioritize 1:1s and focus on listening

1:1s are sacred, recurring, dedicated meetings between managers and their direct reports and are essential for building relationships and trust. The sole focus of this time should be for managers to make sure their direct reports are set up with everything they need to be successful.

This includes checking in on their personal wellbeing. Here's how managers can make the most of this time:

- ✓ Do not make a habit of rescheduling or moving 1:1s (unless for extenuating circumstances). Keeping the time consistent signals to direct reports that managers prioritize their time and can be counted on. Continually moving or being late for 1:1s can erode trust over time.
- ✓ Focus the first part of each 1:1 on a personal check-in. Ask how the person is doing and what their highlights and lowlights for the week have been. This will ensure managers are still getting the personal interactions that typically would have happened in the kitchen or walking back from a meeting.
- ✓ Mix up the 1:1 format. If direct reports are on Zoom or video calls all day, managers can offer a phone call and walk instead of a face-to-face 1:1. This gives much needed respite from being on camera and opens up a new forum for discussion.

2 Make sure people are physically well set up

A comfortable, safe work environment can make all the difference to someone's day and overall work satisfaction. Here's what managers can do to make sure their direct reports have what they need:

- ✓ Do they have a place with a stable internet connection that feels comfortable, well-lit and safe?
- ✓ Remind direct reports to take walks and screen breaks
- ✓ Start meetings with off-camera stretching
- ✓ Host meetings as walk-and-talks

Importantly, managers should stay attuned for signs of stress or physical discomfort. While they should never comment about someone's appearance or body, if they hear from a direct report that (for example) their back hurts week after week, they should take time to pause and make sure they're taking care of themselves – see below for a script managers can use. It may even be an issue to bring to HR to ensure the employee is supported correctly.

"Hey, I noticed you mentioned [X] discomfort in the team meeting. I wanted to check in if you are set up for success in your work-from-home environment?"

3 Show flexibility – interruptions happen!

For many, working remotely means working at home. Which, as many of us have experienced, brings with it a whole range of interruptions and challenges!

Whether it's a barking dog, crying child, or a random interruption from a FedEx driver, managers should show humanity and flexibility where they can. A great example of showing support can be admitting when it happens to the manager themselves!

SECTION 4

CREATE SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

Building friendships and connections with people we work with is what many of us thrive on at work. And while those spontaneous catch-ups in the company kitchen or bathroom may have seemed trivial for those who experienced them in the office, they went a long way to creating a sense of connection.

In a remote environment, it's still very much possible to build strong, social relationships with team mates – in fact, employees are often now working with co-workers across broader geographies, often international, exposing them to a more diverse, richer range of cultures and norms. That said, the ways to facilitate these these relationships need to be different and more intentional.

It becomes a big part of a manager's role to establish norms and habits to ensure direct reports feel included and part of the team. Not only does this improve employees' overall experience at work and sense of connection to their team and company, it can also help to improve team collaboration and reduce staff turnover.

Here are some practical things managers can do to bring their teams together:

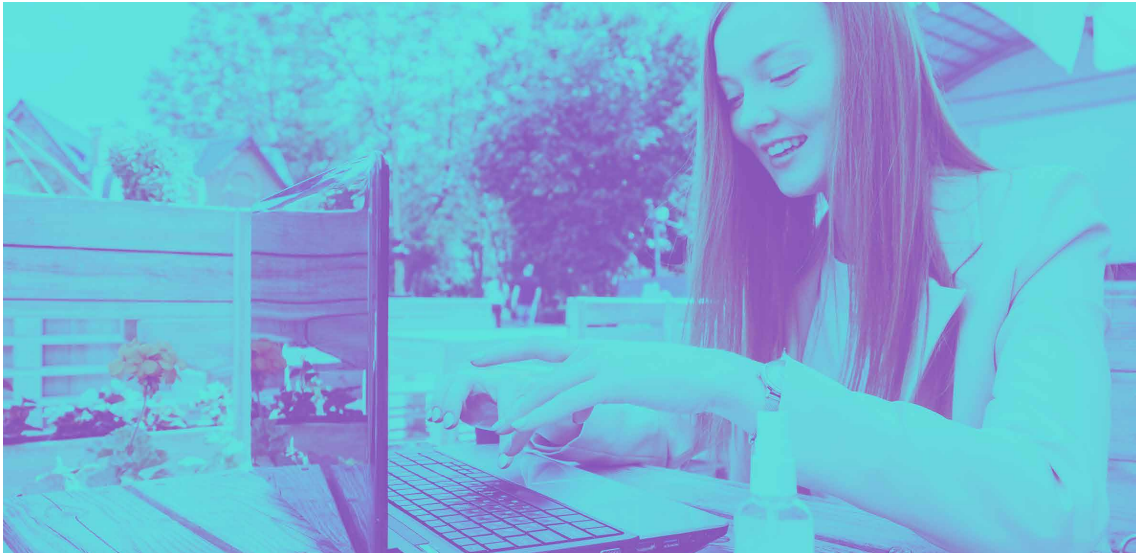
Book 15 minute morning brew socials every other week

Here are some pro-tips to help managers make these quick windows times that their teams love:

- ✓ Host every other week on the same day at the same time
- ✓ Keep them to 15 minutes only – the shorter time period will make it easier for direct reports to consistently attend
- ✓ What's on the agenda? Anything but work! Make this clear in the meeting invite
- ✓ Always end on time
- ✓ Take note of important topics that come up (i.e. birthdays, partners' names, pets) and follow up or celebrate people in a personalized way

Start a Monday ritual of posting pictures from the weekend on Slack

Sharing updates about their lives outside of work will help teams form personal bonds with each other even while remote. You can even **set an automatic reminder on Slack** to remind your team to post their update.



3 Build icebreakers into team meetings

Take five minutes at the beginning of regular meetings to ask quick icebreaker questions. This can work particularly well for international teams – for example, asking employees to label the words they use for objects that differ by country (e.g. sweater versus jumper).

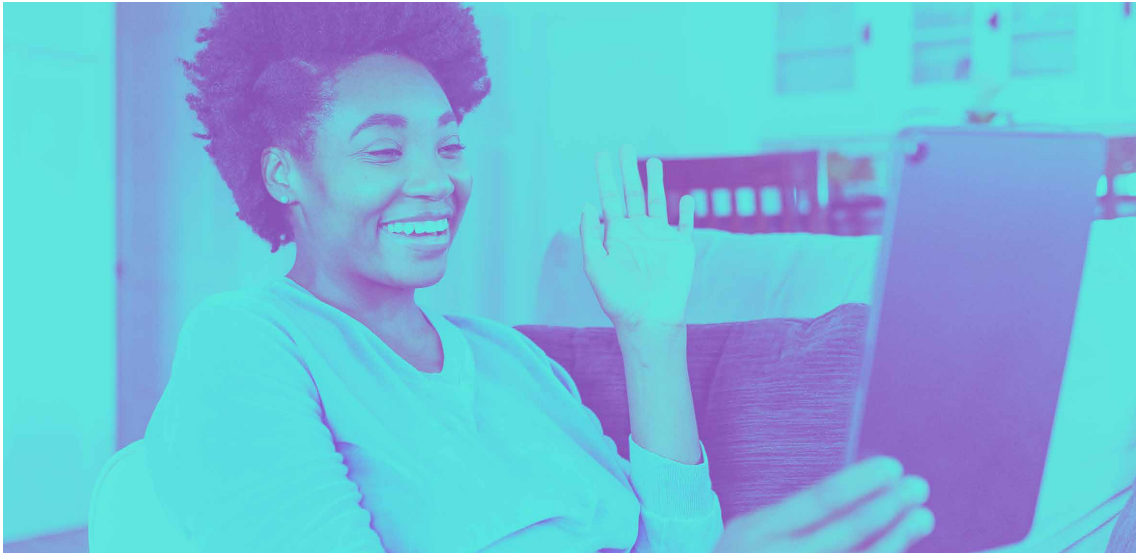
This helps give meetings a burst of energy and helps teams get to know each other faster.

4 Book a virtual event for your team once a quarter

Set aside the time so your team of direct reports can bond while doing an activity together. This might be a joint activity – like building a lego set that managers have sent to their teams in advance, or a shared learning experience, like learning how to make origami or a fireside chat with a special guest. You can also schedule an online scavenger hunt where everyone has to find common household items (a napkin, something blue, a red pen...).

Book this during work hours so most direct reports can attend and participate. It could also be an opportunity for a team member to share their talents or expertise with the broader group!

Pro-tip: No more Zoom happy hours, please (unless your team loves those).



CONCLUSION

REMOTE MANAGERS ARE THE FUTURE: INVEST IN THEM NOW

As the world moves towards a remote and flexible workstyle, managers who have the skills, support, and tools to lead remote teams will be one of the most valuable assets for modern organizations.

As we've said a few times in this eBook, many of the foundations are the same for both in-person and remote workplaces, it's the behaviors that look different in the remote world. Managing remotely is not simply in-person management on Zoom. It requires intentionality on how to translate management skills to the new environment.

For HR and People teams, now is the time to support your managers by investing in remote-focused training and development and give them the tools they need to succeed. This will pay off with high-performing, happy, connected teams – regardless of where they're located.

And remember, The Mintable is here to help. If you have any questions about any of the tips we covered in this eBook or would like to learn more about how we partner with HR and People teams to give their managers the insights, training and ongoing support they need to succeed, just reach out to our team!

[TALK TO OUR TEAM](#)