



The Working From Home Handbook

skillsoft  sumtotal 

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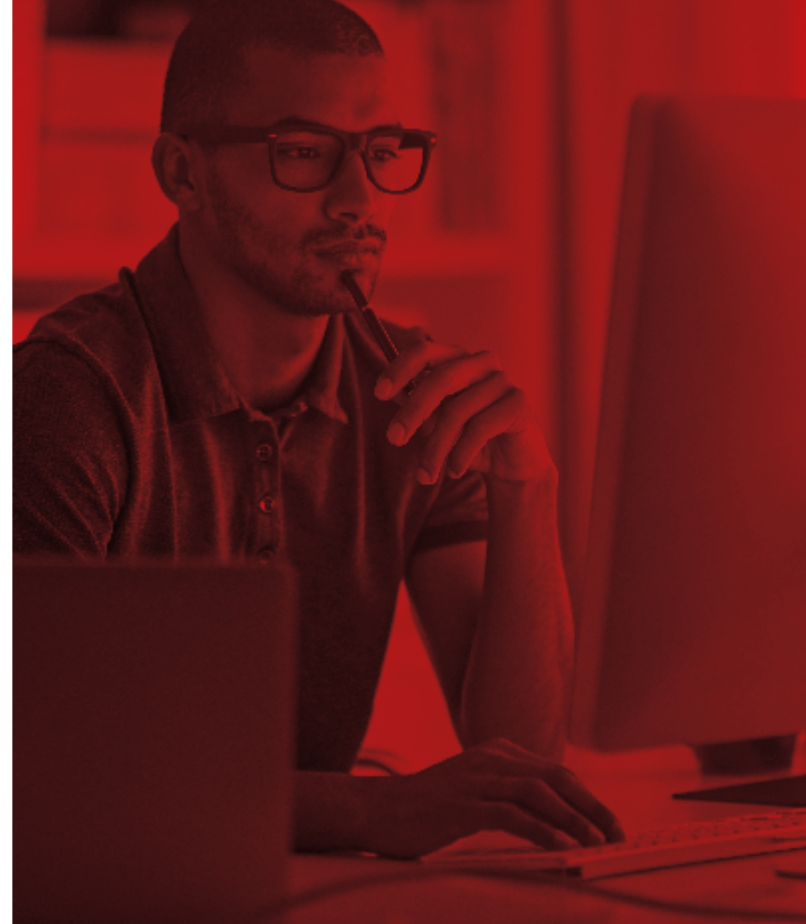
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Introduction:

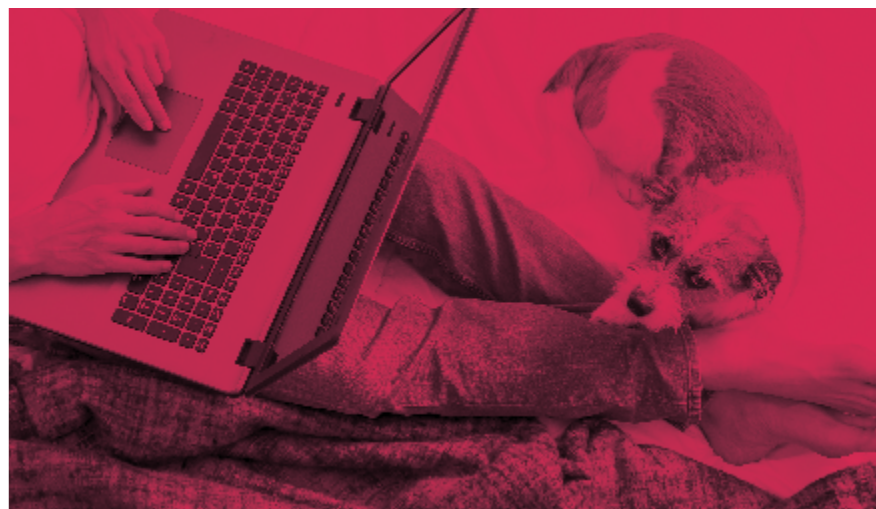
Embrace the New Normal

The future of work is already here. In the midst of a global pandemic, many companies are shifting to a fully remote workforce – joining, as *Time* magazine puts it, “The World’s Largest Work-From-Home Experiment.” But working from home during a crisis is a far cry from phoning it in from a lush tropical isle ...



What does it all mean for you?

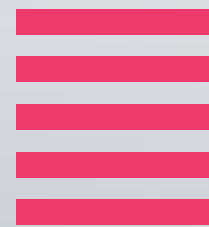
Here at Skillsoft, we're dedicated to helping you be your best – wherever your desk happens to be. We've compiled this guide to help you navigate the coming challenges, achieve a better work-life balance, and show up confidently for your team every day.





You're in Good Company

Studies show remote work makes employees feel happier, less stressed, and better able to achieve work-life balance. (Some of today's workers are even inclined to take a pay cut to benefit from the added flexibility.) Working from home is economical. Just consider the savings when your commute is measured in footsteps rather than miles, and your morning latte is home-brewed.



Green Bonus:

Half-time remote workers could reduce greenhouse gas emissions by **54 million tons** every year – the equivalent to taking the entire New York State workforce off the road!

(GlobalWorkplaceAnalytics.com)

4.7 million US employees work remotely at least 50% of the time.

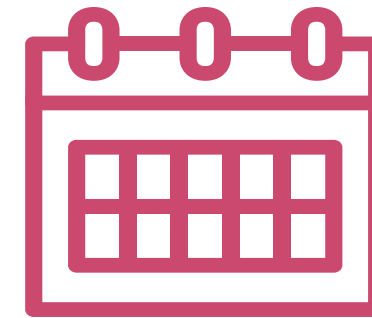
From financial perks to the happiness factor, the stats are impressive:



Remote workers earn salaries higher than **\$100,000 per year**

2.2x more frequently than on-site workers.

(OwlLabs)



A half-time telecommuter saves the equivalent of **11 workdays** per year.

(GlobalWorkplaceAnalytics.com)



The average employee saves between **\$2,500 and \$4,000 per year** by working at home just half the time.

(GlobalWorkplaceAnalytics.com)



Remote workers say they're happy in their jobs **29% more** than on-site workers.

(OwlLabs)



Dress Your Desk (and Yourself) for Success

Here's some advice: keep your workspace separate, and your living space sacred. Not as easy to do if your current "office" is a corner of your kitchen counter and your kids are having a meltdown. That being said, the advice still holds. And it all begins with mapping out a place to work.

Bring nature indoors.

Studies suggest that adding plants to workspaces can lead to a **60% reduction in stress levels**, and actually help clean the air.



Choose your workspace with care.

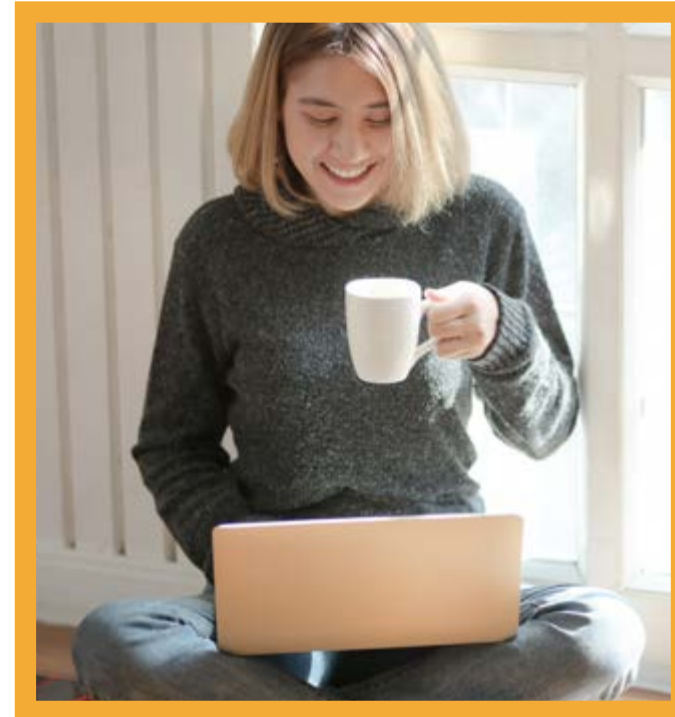
Designate a space for work that feels right. Ideally, choose a spot with relative privacy and free of major distractions. Make sure it's clean, organized, well lit, and stocked with your work essentials – laptop, notebook, pens, pencils, calendar, healthy snacks, your lucky paperweight – whatever you need to trigger your own internal “it’s time to work” response.

Ditch the PJs.

While it might be tempting to revisit the 90s grunge look, resist the urge. Dress in comfortable but work-appropriate clothes that make you feel good about yourself. You’ll thank us when that unexpected video call pops up (and your boss will, too). A good rule of thumb? If you’re virtually meeting customers, dress as you would in person to convey your professionalism.

Tip: Short on space at home? Get creative.

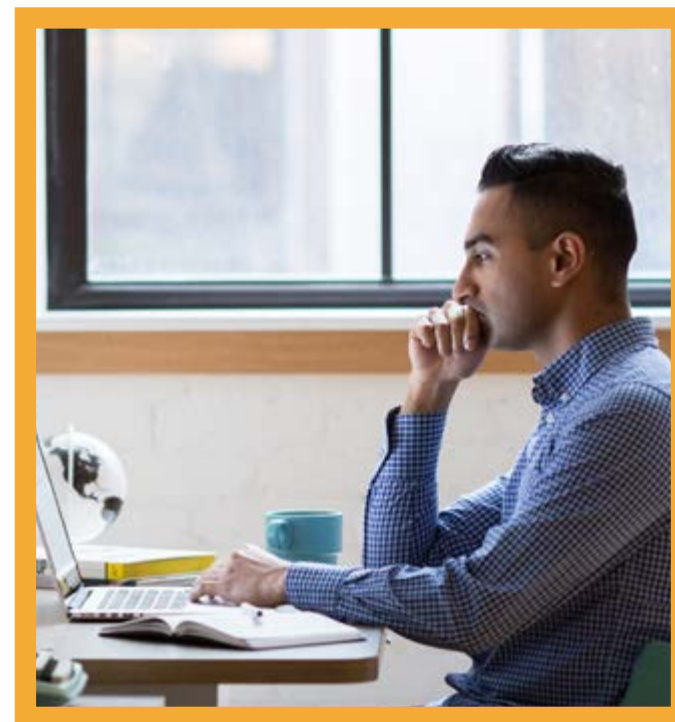
Transform a closet into a “cloffice,” find your Zen with a cushion and a coffee table, clear off a floating shelf and pull up a chair. Even an ironing board can be a makeshift desk.



Establish regular working hours.

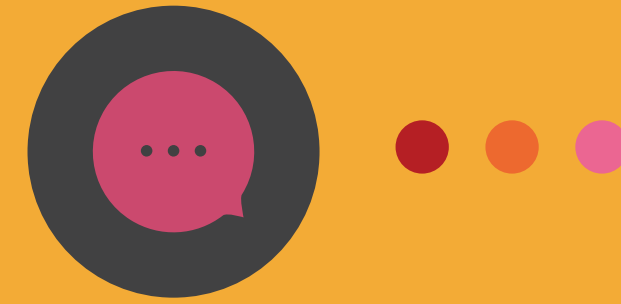
This may feel challenging at first, especially if your team is in catch-up mode. Pitch in to get things done, then decide on your availability, clear it with your supervisor, and communicate it to your colleagues. Establish your peak performance times, take actual rest and lunch breaks, and “turn off” and exit your workspace at the end of your day.

Need some time management tips? Check out this [video](#).



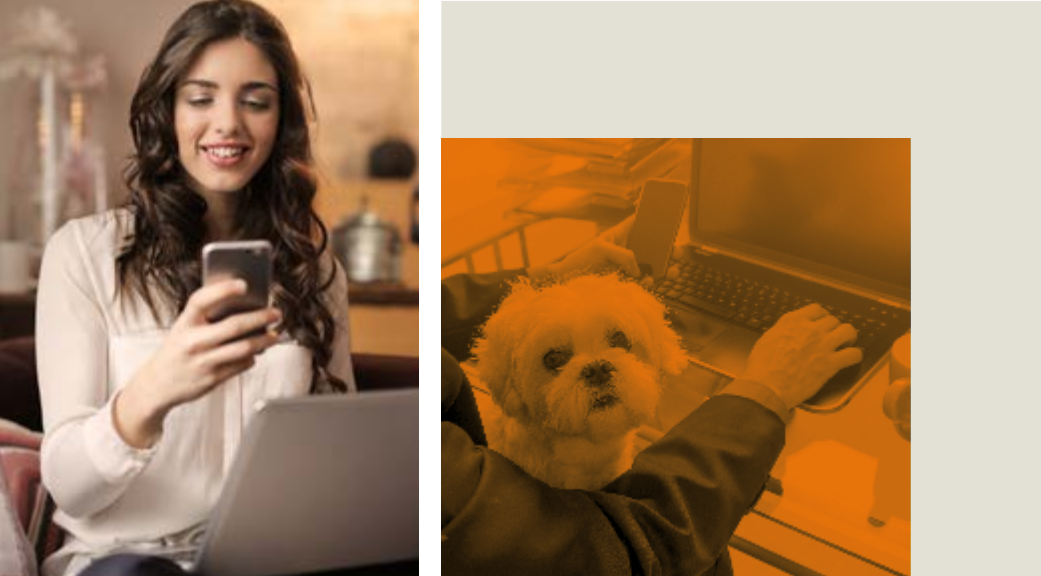
And, take our advice: never, never work in bed.

During times of stress and disruption, quality sleep is very important. That blue light emitted by your tech screens has been shown to suppress the production of melatonin, the hormone that controls your sleep/wake cycle.



The Long-distance Relationship: Communication Is Key

From shaking hands to holding doors, non-verbal cues and body language during physical meetings engender trust and enhance understanding.



When you're working from home, it's easy to feel disconnected or isolated. The key? The basics of **Being a Good Team Member** still apply. The rules of engagement just need to be adapted to online interactions.

According to highlights from an **MIT Sloan Management Review survey** of virtual teams, following these simple suggestions can help:

1 Match the technology to the task. Establish best practices.

Know when to use chat, email, phone, or video conferencing. Your boss may choose to create a simple team charter that describes how you will work together. Then, write a personal tech checklist to make sure you're up to speed and connected.

2 Make your intentions clear. Context and clarity matter.

Review written messages before sending them to make sure you have struck the right tone and use emojis to minimize negative interpretation. Emphasize important information, highlight priorities, and use "response requested" in the subject line. Err on the side of over-clarification, take notes, and keep a record of conversations.





3 Stay in sync. Out of sight, not out of mind.

Maintain regular communication with team members. Acknowledge important messages, even if immediate action isn't possible. Seek clarification to better understand others' intentions before jumping to conclusions.

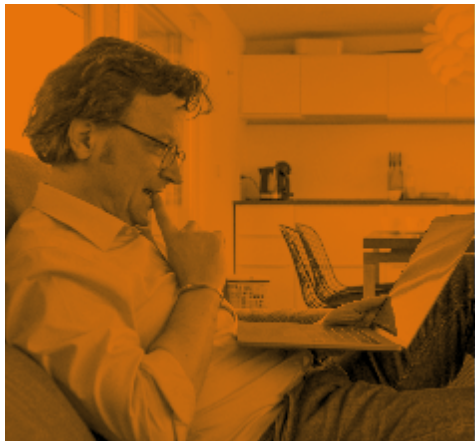
4 Be responsive and supportive. Build trust early.

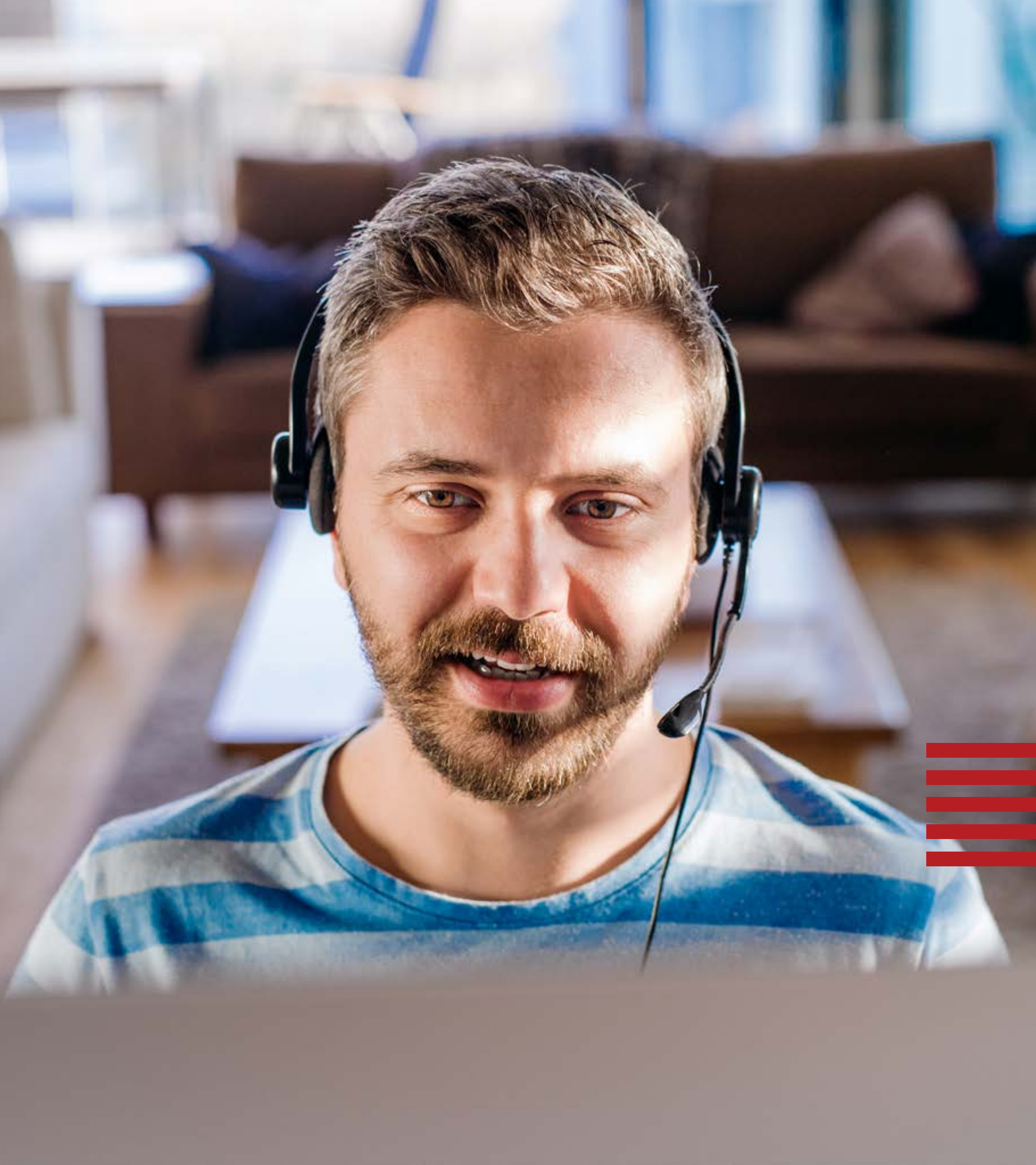
Respond promptly to requests from coworkers and take the time to provide substantive feedback. Suggest solutions to problems the team is facing and maintain a positive and supportive tone in communications.

5 Be open and inclusive. Learn from each other.

Dispersed teams are more likely to have members from different cultures and backgrounds. Accentuate the positive aspects of diversity and recognize the rich opportunities in working together.

Check out this video for more great [tips for effective communication](#).





What's in Your Toolbox?

The first step in determining which platform to use is understanding the difference between synchronous and asynchronous communication.



Synchronous communication:

Participants are communicating simultaneously.
Response is immediate.

Examples: Audio and video conferencing,
instant messaging

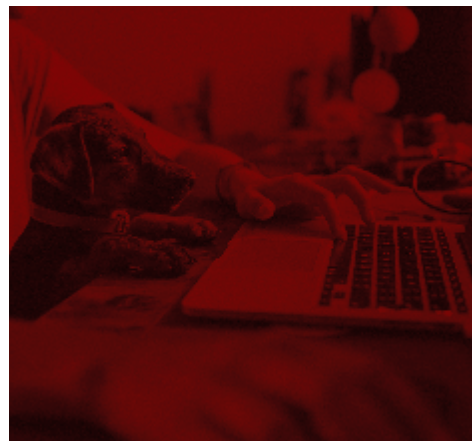
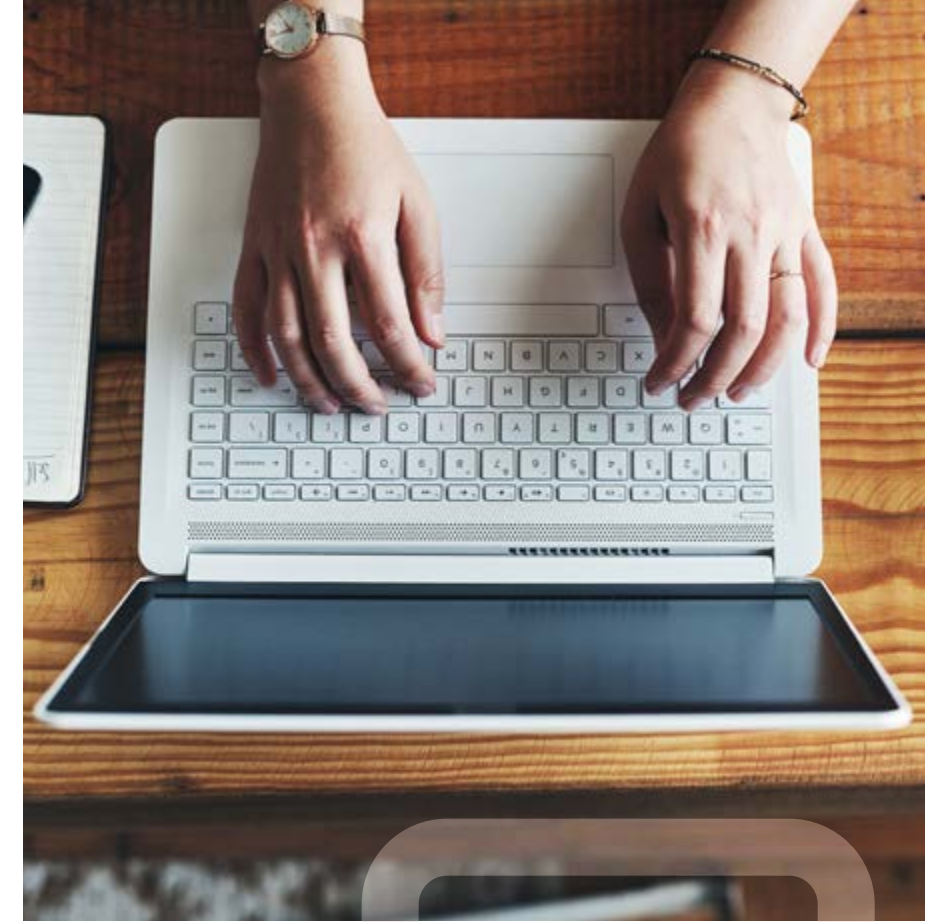
Asynchronous communication:

Participants are not communicating simultaneously.
Response can be delayed.

Examples: Sending email, using project
management software

Successful remote teams use a blend of the two depending on their needs. Too much synchronous communication can lead to constant interruptions, which can harm productivity and lead to professional – and personal – burnout. Too little, and you risk losing the personal connection that builds trust and makes work feel more worthwhile.

Thankfully, there's a rich bank of technologies today that can help get your team on the same page, boost collaboration, and increase productivity. Many popular apps are multi-functional, offering both synchronous and asynchronous communication capabilities.



Some of the most popular remote communication tools include:



Slack

Widely used, great features, integrates with Google Docs and Dropbox. Slack-averse? Check out [Ryver](#), [Glip](#), [Twist](#), [Fleep](#), and [Flock](#).



Microsoft Teams

Seamless integration with Office 365. Offering a free version in the effort to connect folks during a crisis.



Google Hangouts

Integrates with G-Suite or third-party calling apps, offers livestreams.



Webex

Great video conferencing features, cloud calling, and first-class tech support.



Zoom

Video first, unified communications platform, offers a free basic plan for small businesses.



Basecamp

Premier resource for remote work, user-friendly, “The All-In-One Toolkit for Working Remotely.”



Trello

Fun, flexible, fresh collaboration capabilities with built-in workflow automation.



Asana

Simple to use, great reporting and feedback capabilities. No-charge data storage.

Need to sharpen your skills? **Skillsoft's Productivity and Collaboration Tools Collection** provides training for the applications, operating systems, and devices most used by today's organizations. **Try it free!**



Process and Performance: Holding Yourself Accountable

There are countless online resources for remote managers on how to effectively guide, evaluate, and improve their team's performance.
(Hint: for a good example, **check this out.**)



As an employee working from home, you are essentially your own supervisor. The best remote workers are self-motivated and good at time management. Not everyone finds this easy at first. But with a shift in perspective, a little practice, and some helpful organizational tips, you can add a whole new skillset to your resume.

Start with a self-evaluation.

An honest self-evaluation is more than a tool for reflection; it's an opportunity for you to recognize your accomplishments and acknowledge areas for improvement. Remember, there's a reason you were hired for the job you do. Lead with your strengths and a healthy sense of pride will follow.

Write your mission statement.

Define what professional and personal success mean for you. How do you intend to approach your work? How do you want to communicate? And what legacy would you like to leave behind? Use it as a tool for self-motivation as you transition into new challenges.

Your “To-Do List” is your new boss.

Working from home, you're shifting between three modes of behavior: “Personal, Supervisor, and Worker” modes. Keeping performance top of mind, organize your day according to the best times for all three. Concentrate tasks





from each mode together, so that a larger portion of your workday can be dedicated to collaboration and deep work. For greater productivity, your day should begin and end with self-care. Then let supervisory tasks bracket your workday.

Invest in organizational software.

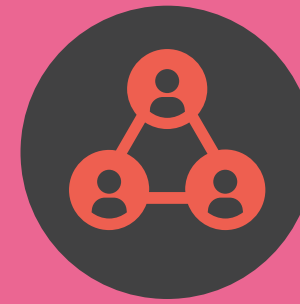
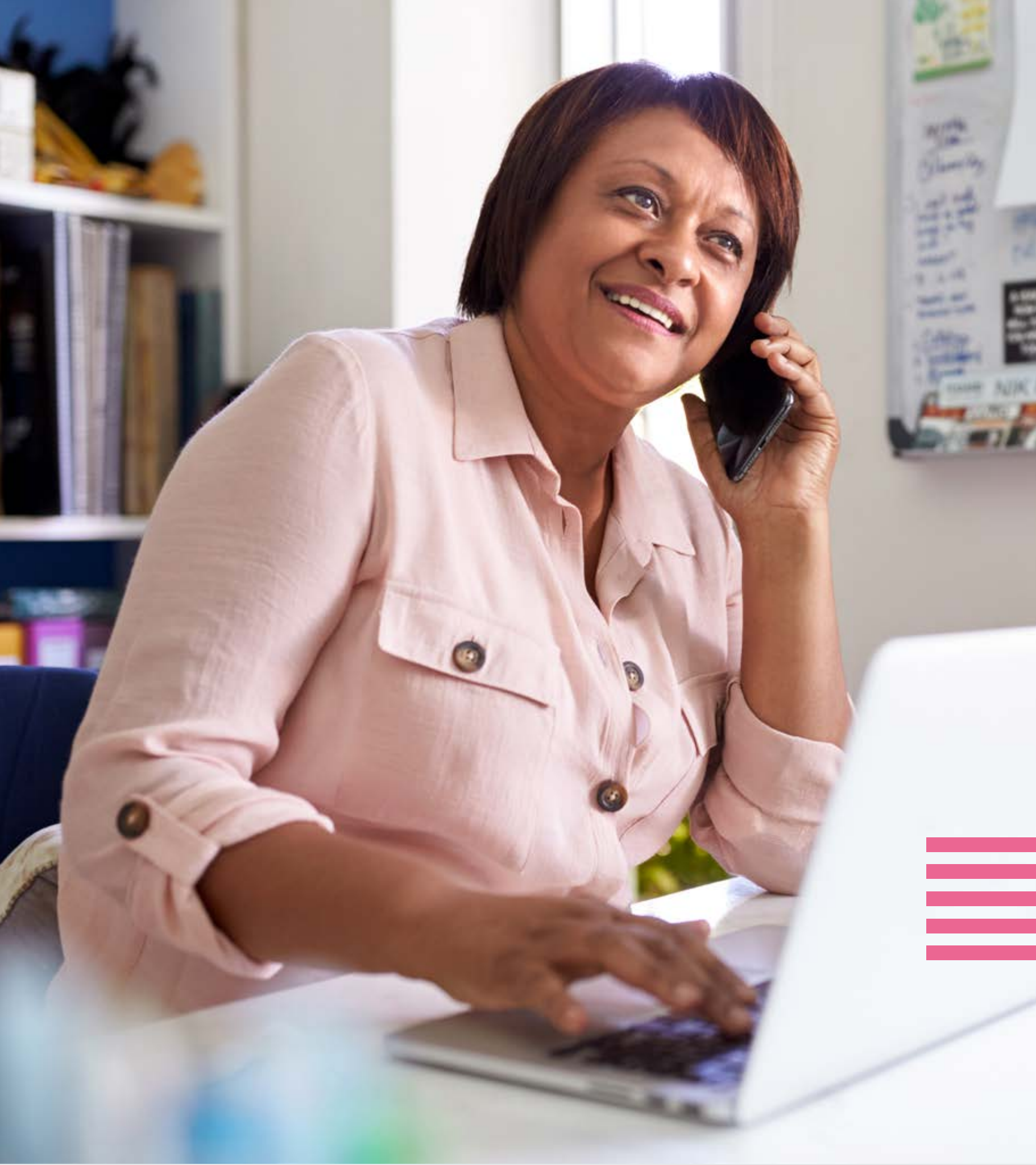
Sticky notes are great visual cues, and there's a reason your CEO still uses a yellow legal pad. But when you're going all-out remote, it helps to keep your to-do list organized in an app that syncs across your devices. Some highly rated choices include

ToDoist, **Any.do**, and **Microsoft To Do**. If your creativity flourishes best with pen in hand, give your notes an upgrade and choose a smart notebook that lets you switch between platforms.

Set up regular check-ins with your boss.

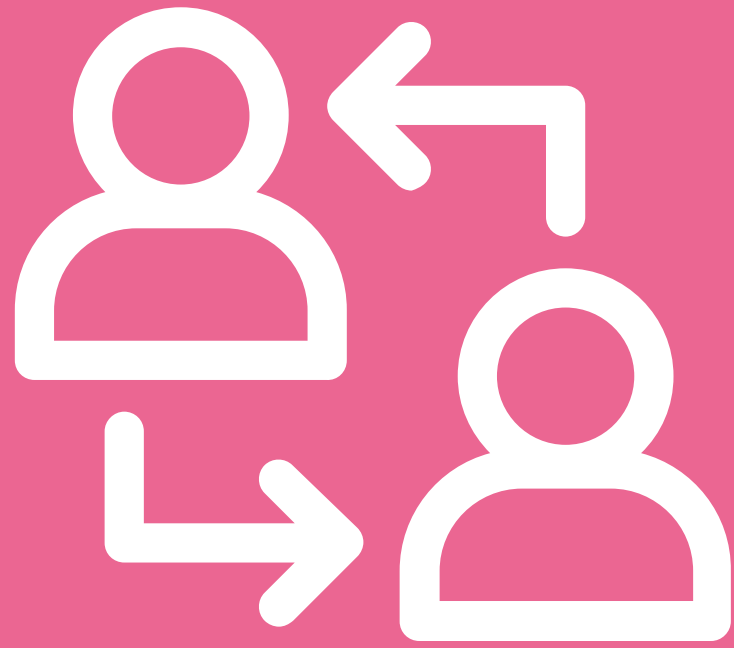
Before you log-on or pick up the phone, be prepared. Write a list of what you'd like to cover, and always lead with positives. Share project status, clarify your goals, and ask for guidance and input. As in office one-on-ones, be sensitive to time constraints, and always begin and end conversations with courtesy.





Keeping the “Social” in Social Distancing

Across multiple studies, loneliness is cited as a major challenge faced by virtual employees. With the current social distancing recommendations added to the mix, “remote” work has never felt more aptly named. While there’s no one-size-fits-all solution, connecting on a personal level throughout the workday can go a long way toward camaraderie.



Unexpected remote work benefit:

You may find that the lack of on-site “office drama” can actually lead to more meaningful relationships.

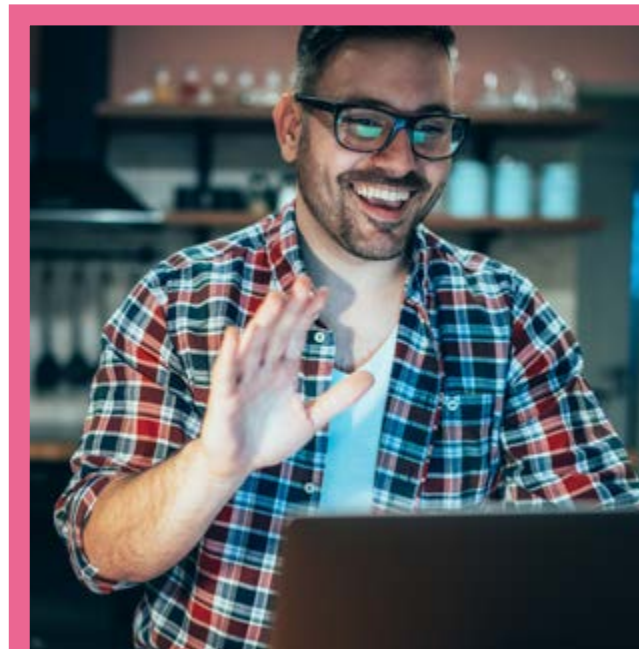
Try these simple suggestions:

During daily “stand-ups,” stand up and be counted.

If your boss holds morning check-ins, she may choose to start with an ice breaker. Follow her lead, get involved in the conversation, and put a positive spin on your contribution. That way, your day is already off to a good start.

Drop by the virtual water cooler.

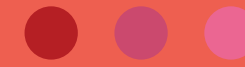
Many virtual teams have learned to shift informal chatter to a dedicated messaging channel. While participating is usually optional, it’s a great way to get to know your colleagues better, foster friendships, and share ideas.



Reach out and dine in.

If you’re missing dim sum with your office chum, schedule a virtual lunch date. Reconnect over delivery (or even a PB&J). Invite the kids to the table, or introduce the dog(s). Is your team onboarding a new recruit? Bonus points for inviting the new kid on the block to join you.





Work/Life Balance: The Art of Self-care

In today's uber-connected world, there's always one more email to answer or one more hour to log. Ignoring the need to rest and recharge can be disastrous to your work and health, not to mention your relationships.

Here are some ideas to help you set reasonable boundaries.





Sleep is not a luxury.

Studies show nearly half of employees who always work from home report suffering from insomnia. One of the culprits appears to be our smartphones and laptops – their blue light can trick your body into thinking it's daytime. Make your bed a no-tech zone and let the snooze cycle begin.

Start and end your day with exercise.

Use that saved commuting time well. Get in that extra half-hour of shut-eye, and then get moving. Gym closed? Go for a brisk walk and take in the sun. Or check out online training apps and join a virtual class. Use movement as a bridge between work hours and personal hours – your body will register the switch, easing you out of work time and into “you time.”

Take mini-meditation breaks.

Working from home can lead to bad habits like “stress-snacking.” If you find yourself reaching for the donuts, find a quiet spot, grab your headphones, and try a meditation app instead.

When your workday ends, shut it down, turn it off, and make time for yourself, your friends, and your family. Then bring that peace of mind to your work the next day.





Brought to You by Skillsoft and SumTotal

While we're working together to flatten the curve, there's bound to be a learning curve, too. We hope this handbook has inspired you, and helped you find useful tools during this challenging time.

About Skillsoft and SumTotal

We help companies unlock the potential in their most valuable asset – their people – by delivering engaging content and powerful technology that drives business impact for modern enterprises. Skillsoft comprises three award-winning systems that support learning, performance, and success: Skillsoft learning content, the Percipio intelligent learning experience platform, and the SumTotal suite for Talent Development.

Skillsoft provides a comprehensive selection of cloud-based corporate learning content, including courses, videos, books, and other resources on Leadership Development, Business Skills, Digital Transformation, Technology & Developer, and Compliance. Percipio's intuitive design engages modern learners, and its consumer-led experience assists in accelerating learning. The SumTotal suite delivers measurable impact across the entire employee lifecycle via award-winning technology that powers talent acquisition, learning management, and talent management. Skillsoft and SumTotal are trusted by thousands of the world's leading organizations, including many within the Fortune 500.

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