



The Remote Manager's Handbook

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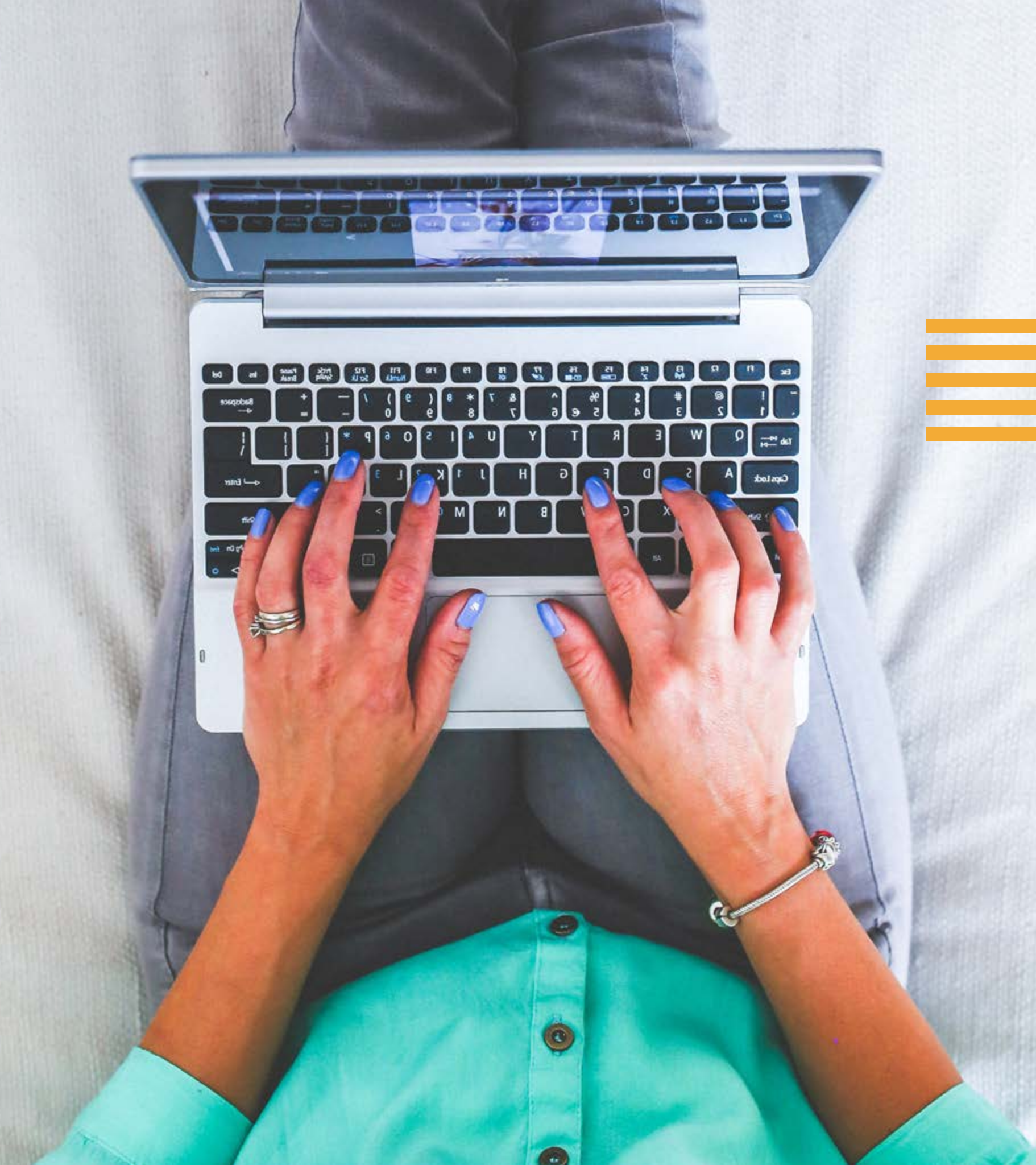
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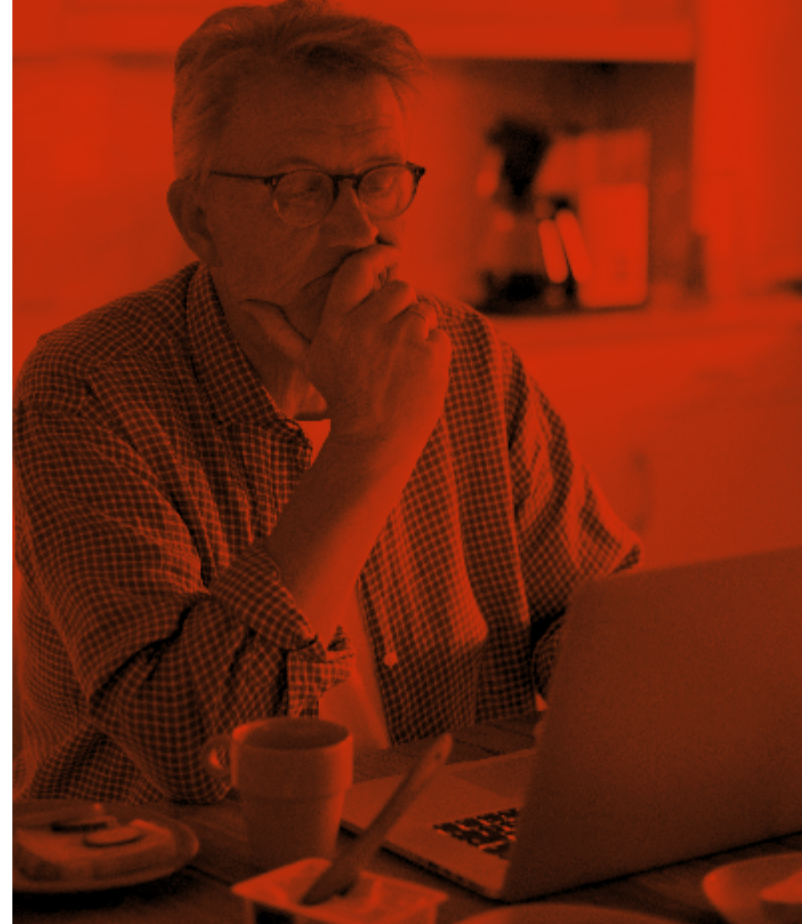
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Introduction: You Got This!

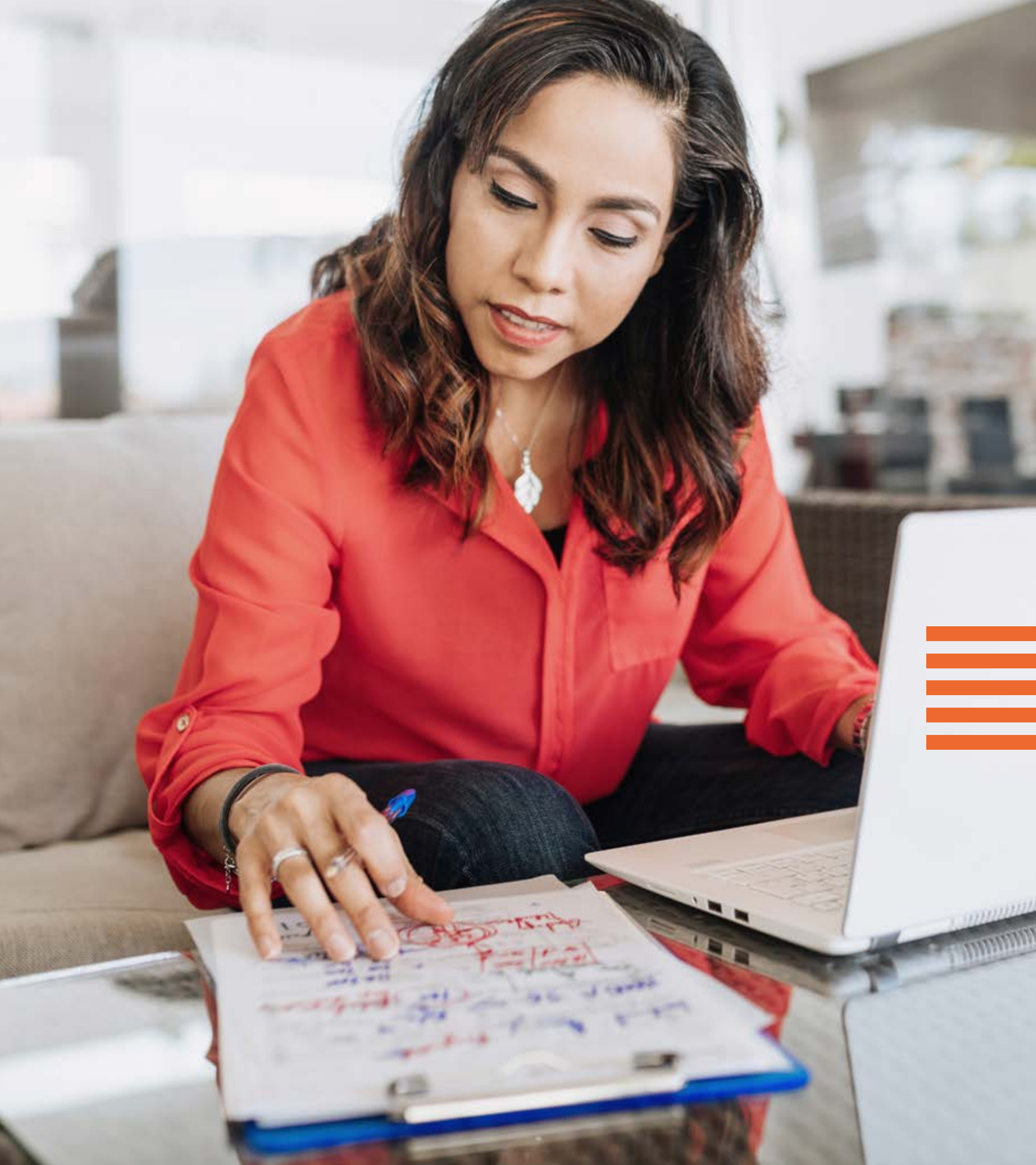
We're in new territory here. To help mitigate the spread of COVID-19, companies across the globe are shifting to a fully remote workforce – joining, as *Time* magazine puts it, “The World’s Largest Work-From-Home Experiment.” Leading a team during a crisis comes with its own unique challenges. And, as a manager, you’re probably feeling the pressure. We’re here to help ...



How do you maintain productivity and employee engagement when the office rug has been pulled out from under you?

Here at Skillsoft, we've been answering questions about business continuity for more than twenty years. And we're dedicated to helping you unleash your greatness – wherever your desk happens to be. We've put together a handbook to help you navigate those challenges, embrace the change, and guide your team confidently into the future.





You're in Good Company

Numerous studies show remote work makes employees feel happier, less stressed, and better able to achieve work-life balance. But it's not just workers who benefit from the flexibility. Employers are realizing that offering the option is critical to staying competitive in their field, finding and keeping top talent, and even saving business costs.

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 for both workers and employers are convincing:



A typical employer can save an average of **\$11,000 per half-time telecommuter** per year.

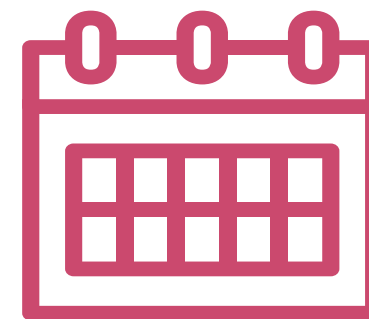
(GlobalWorkplaceAnalytics.com)



Remote workers say they're happy in their jobs

29% more 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)

Companies that allow remote work experience

25% less employee turnover

than companies that do not.

(OwlLabs)



Dress Your Desk for Success

You may have heard the saying “Keep your work separate, and your living space sacred.” Not as easy to do if you’re running a full team from a full house. That being said, the advice still holds. And it all begins by setting up your remote headquarters.

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 a dedicated workspace.

As a manager, you keep a lot of balls in the air. If you can't shut the door during calls, invest in a good set of noise-cancelling headphones, and choose a space free of major distractions. Make sure it's clean, organized, well-lit, and stocked with your work essentials. An ergonomic chair is a good investment – with all that's on your plate, the last thing you need is a backache.



Design your “uniform.”

Remember, you're setting the tone for the team. Dressing in comfortable but work-appropriate clothes can enhance your mood and help you feel more in control. A good rule of thumb? If you're video-meeting with customers, dress as you would in person to convey your professionalism. Chances are your customers are also adjusting, so follow their lead.



Tip: Short on space at home?

Set up your team's command central at one end of your dining room table. Just create a clear boundary between where you need to work and where others in your household (spouse, kids, pets, in-laws) can be themselves.



Establish regular working hours.

This may feel impossible at first, especially if your team is in catch-up mode. While managers need to be available for emergencies, they also need time to recharge. 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.

Tempted to bring your laptop along? Welcome to Hotel Insomnia. The blue light emitted by your tech screens has been shown to suppress the production of melatonin, the hormone that controls your sleep/wake cycle. During times of stress, quality sleep is vital to boosting immunity.



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 managing remotely, it's easy to feel disconnected or isolated from your team. You may be wondering how to keep tabs on your reports when you can't actually drop by their desks. Another concern may be how best to handle the personal health and family issues that crisis-mode operations inevitably bring.



Strong virtual teams are built on a foundation of trust. Start from a place of your shared humanity and send your team a message of solidarity: “We’re all in this together.” Research the details of company policy and share that with your team too. Offer transparency and be willing to consider flextime when needed.

If you’ve ever found yourself “micromanaging,” now is the time to move to “macro.” Keep your team in the loop. Write your playbook, pass the ball – and trust that your team will catch it.

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.

Create a team charter that describes how you will work together. Then, make a tech checklist to ensure everyone on your team is up to speed and connected. Reach out to your reports and determine what they might need to do their jobs.

2 Make your intentions clear. Establish context.

Review written messages before sending them to make sure you have struck the right tone, 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.

Check in frequently with your reports. Acknowledge important messages, even if immediate action isn't possible. Offer opportunities for informal as well as formal meetings. Seek clarification to better understand others' intentions before jumping to conclusions.

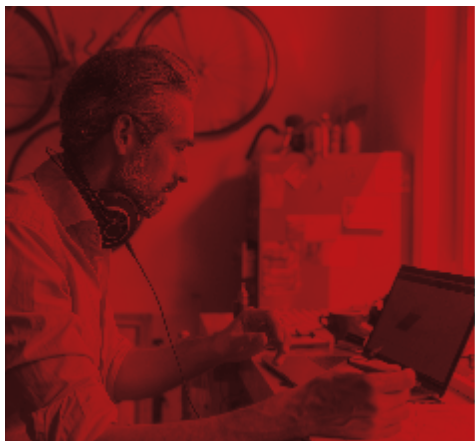
4 Be responsive and supportive. Build trust early.

Encourage everyone to respond promptly to requests from their teammates, proactively 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. Involve the whole team in important communications and decisions. Accentuate the positive aspects of diversity and recognize the rich opportunities in enlarging your talent pool.

Check out this video for more great tips on [the basics of remote management](#).





What's in Your Toolbox?

The first step in determining which medium to use when 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

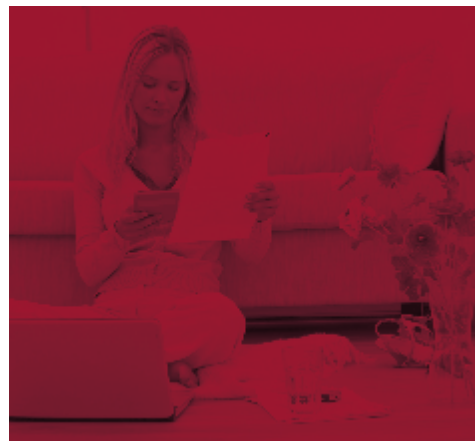
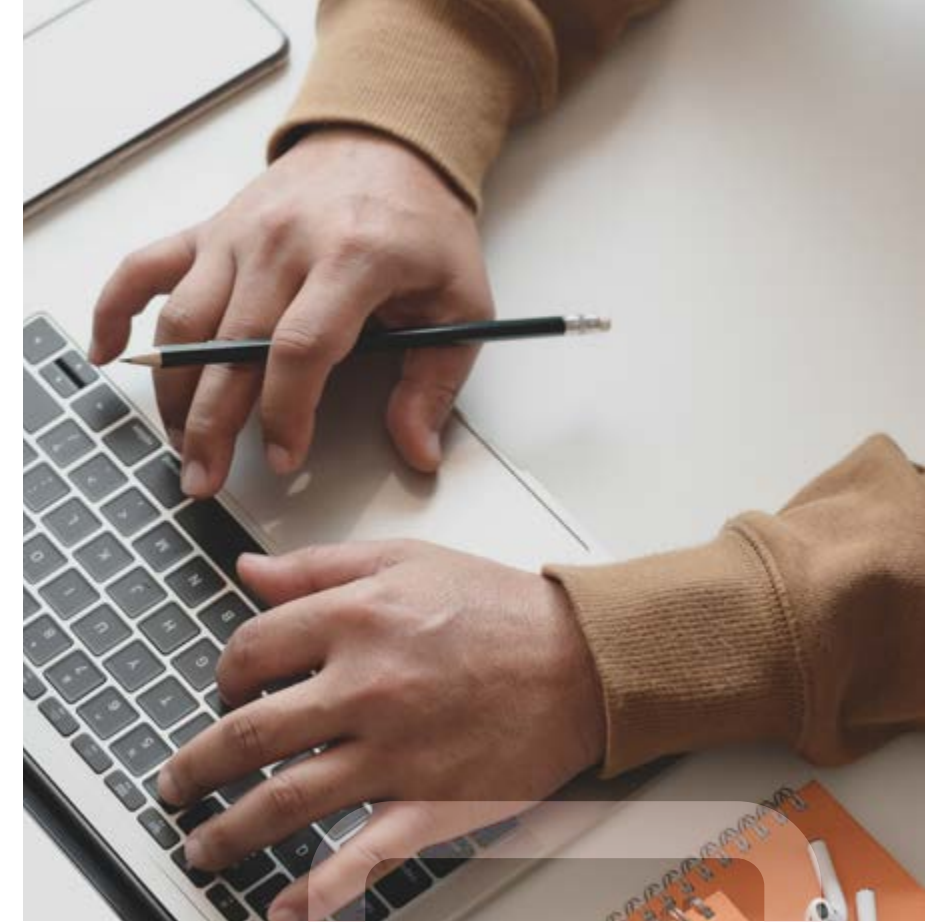
Asynchronous communication:

Participants are not communicating simultaneously.
Response can be delayed.

Examples: Sending email, using project
management software

Successful remote managers 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 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 communications 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

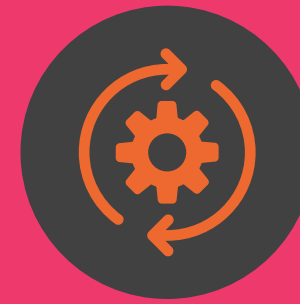
Fun, flexible, fresh collaboration capabilities with built-in workflow automation.



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 Your Team Accountable

According to this insightful *MIT Sloan Management Review* **article**, it's a given that remote teams still need leaders. But it takes a shift in perspective to lead effectively in times of uncertainty.



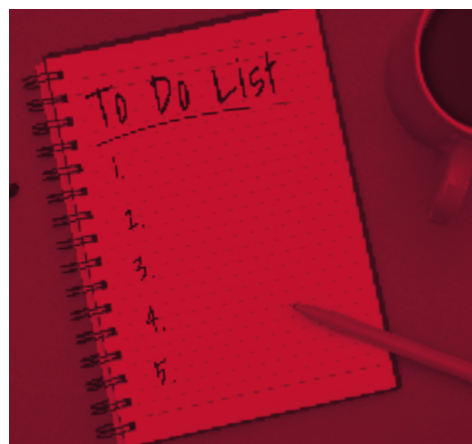
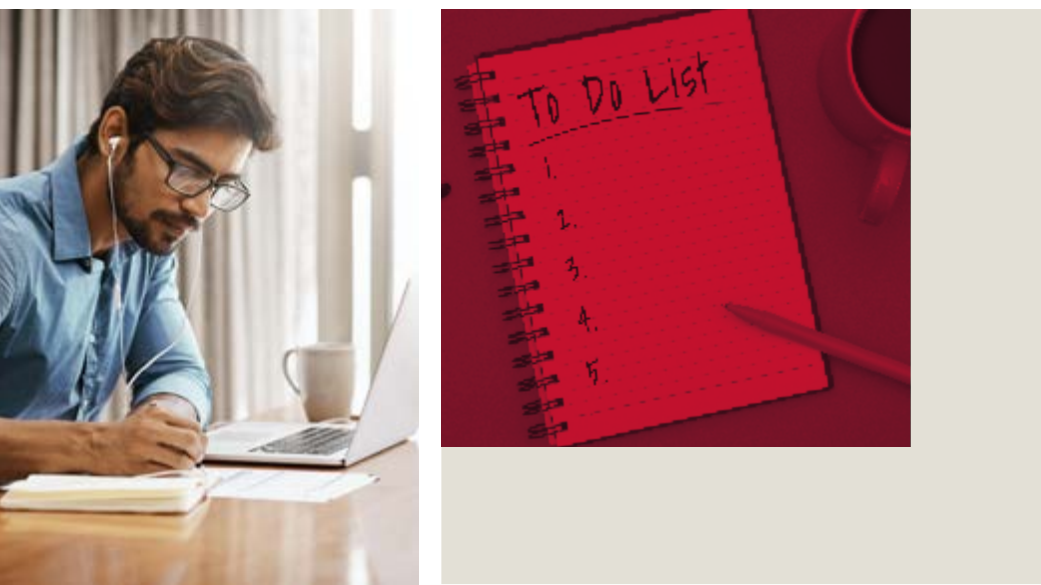
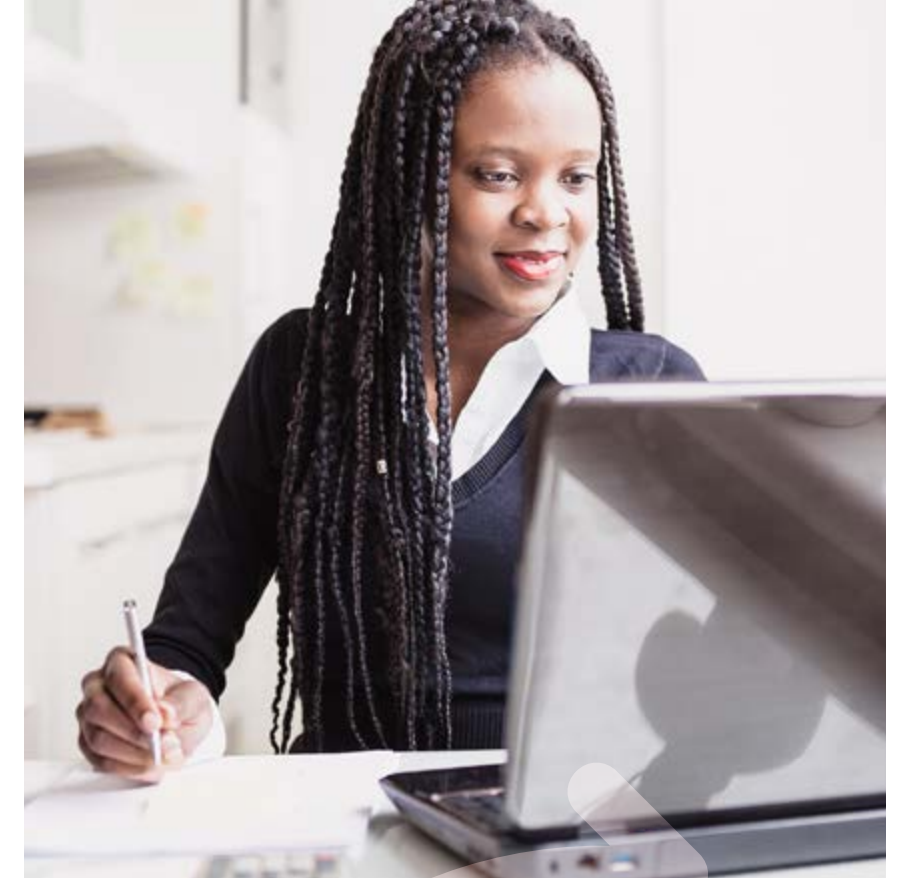
The best remote workers are self-motivated and good at time management. Not everyone finds this easy at first. Jason Fried, the founder of Basecamp, has this to say: *“One of the secret benefits of using remote workers is that the work itself becomes the yardstick to judge someone’s performance.”* Letting your team know that you’re focused on results can ease their stress levels and help them find new ways of working productively.

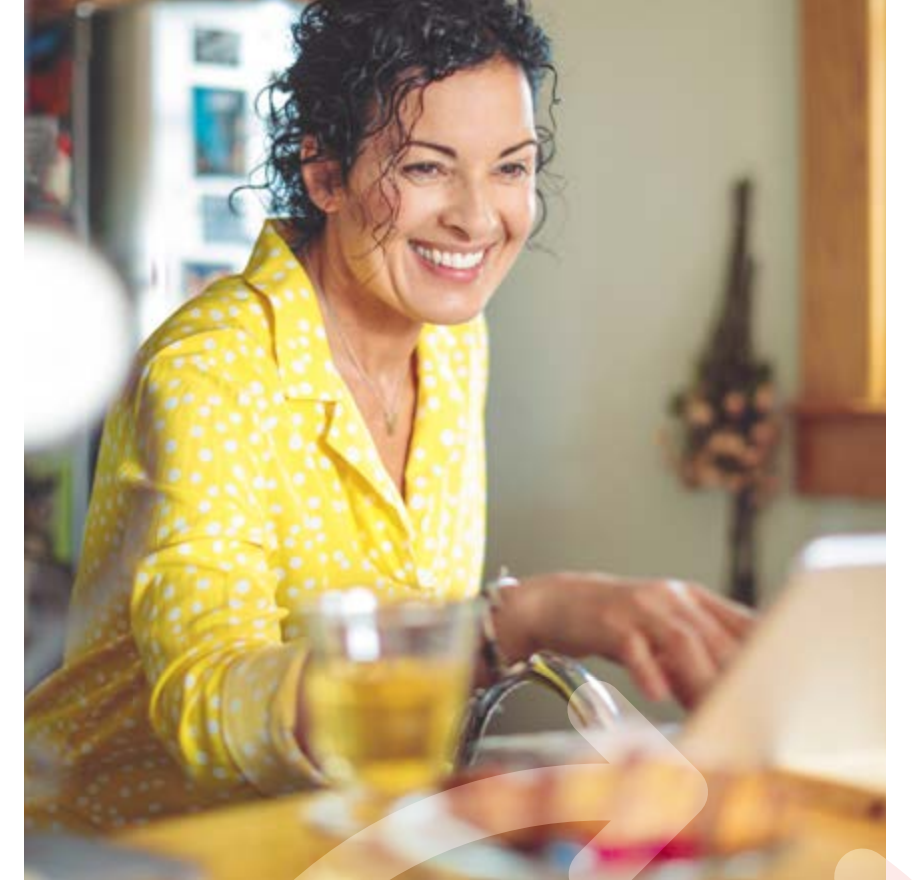
Organize your organization.

Sticky notes are great visual cues, and there’s a reason your CEO still uses a yellow legal pad. But when you’re going 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.

Redefine performance metrics.

Shift your focus away from “time spent” to “goals met.” Recognize that your team members may be putting in extra hours anyway as they figure out their new normal. Set clear parameters for success, establish guidelines for use of project management software, and then track productivity through task completion.





Set up regular individual check-ins with your team.

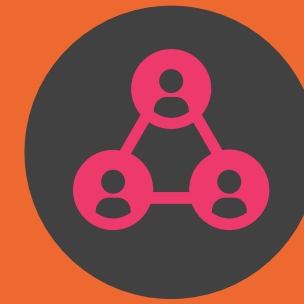
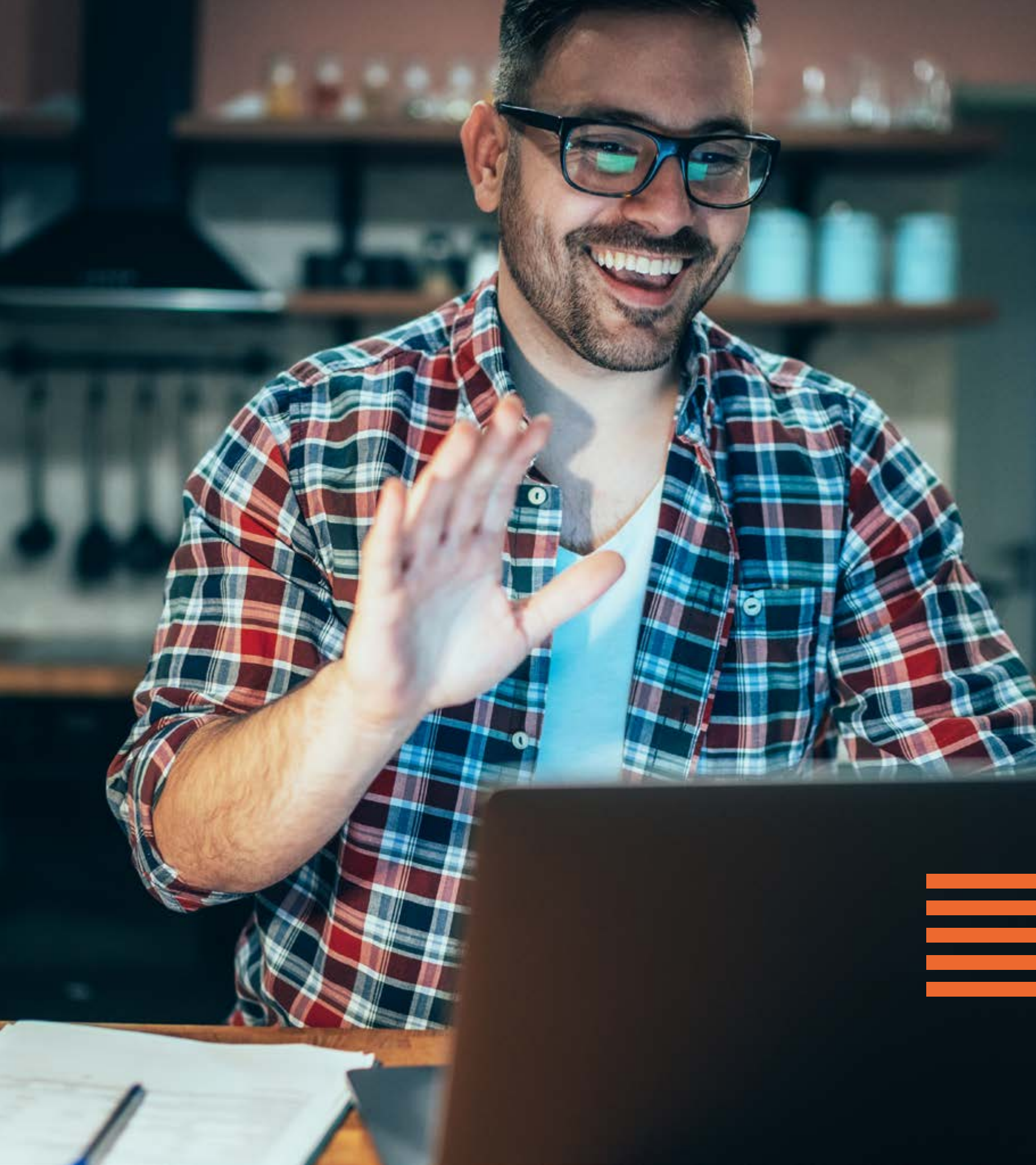
Before you log on or pick up the phone, make a plan. Write a list of what you'd like to cover, and lead with positives. Clarify your goals, enquire on project status, and ask for input. As in office one-on-ones, be sensitive to time constraints, and always begin and end conversations with a personal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

Recognize and reward performance.

It's human nature to find satisfaction in a job well done – and a simple “Great job!” or high-five can go a long way in boosting motivation. But these moments can get lost when your team is virtual. Show your appreciation with frequent email communication, share and celebrate both individual and team successes, and get creative with online rewards. If you usually treat your team to lunch, give them a gift card or allowance for a delivered meal.

For more great insights on managing remote teams with resilience, check out these *MIT Sloan Management Review* **articles**.





Keeping the “Social” in Social Distancing

Across multiple studies, “loneliness” is cited as a major challenge faced by remote employees. In normal circumstances, in-person team events and meetings get folks connected. When that’s not an option, lead the way by taking team happenings online.





Unexpected remote work benefit:

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

Used to a “stand-up?” Start the day with a “coffee-up.”

Starting the day with an informal check-in helps your remote employees feel less “remote.” Have everyone bring their favorite mug to the table and debate the benefits of cold brew vs. espresso. Whatever the ice-breaker, begin the meeting with a greeting or exercise that fosters connection before getting down to business.

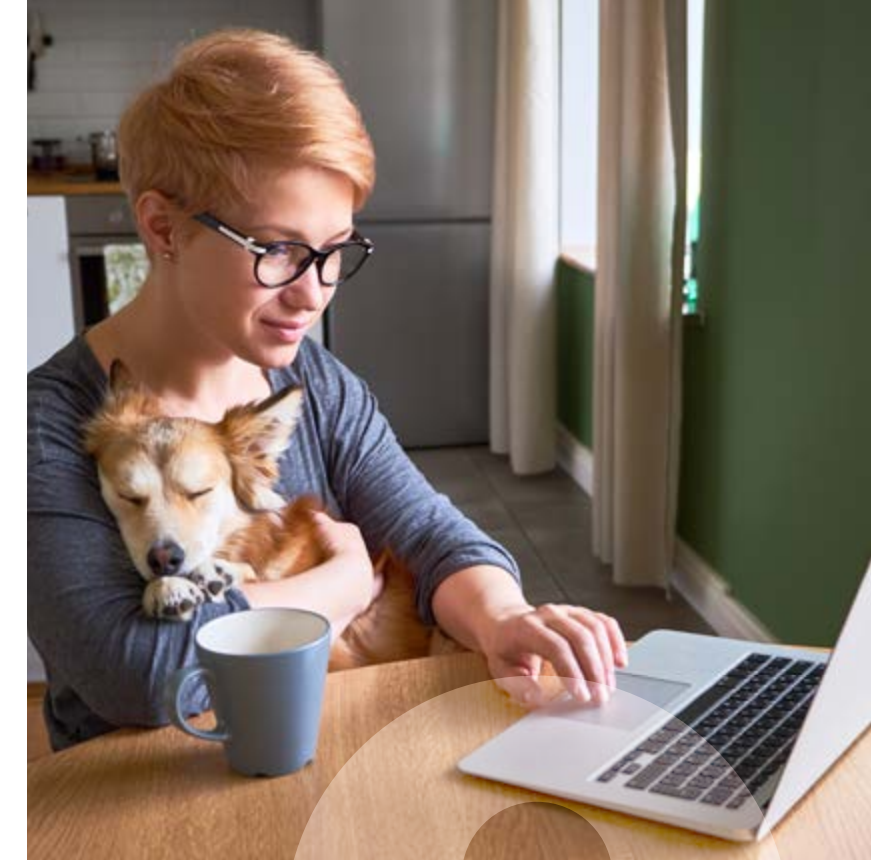
Use the buddy system.

Assigning and rotating partners every week is an easy way to help your team socialize beyond their usual circle. It’s especially helpful with new hires, as more seasoned team members can serve as informal mentors along the way.



Play together, stay together.

It’s important to respect your employee’s private time. So, rather than schedule a virtual soirée at 7 pm, reward a project finished with a 4:30 pm “happy hour.” Raise a toast to your team, but make it short and sweet. Or use the time to celebrate an office birthday and sing your most rousing birthday song.





Work/Life Balance: The Art of Self-care

With your remote team's needs top-of-mind, your own may not feel like a priority. Self-care is not self-indulgence – it's actually the foundation for effective leadership. So, the sooner you establish the boundaries that work for you, the better.

Here are some ideas to get you started.





Make your bedroom a tech free-zone.

If it's been a day of putting out fires, it's always tempting to bring your laptop to bed to finish that last email. But studies show that exposure to blue light can interrupt sleep patterns. The good news? Limiting exposure even 30-60 minutes before bedtime can help you reset your snooze cycle.

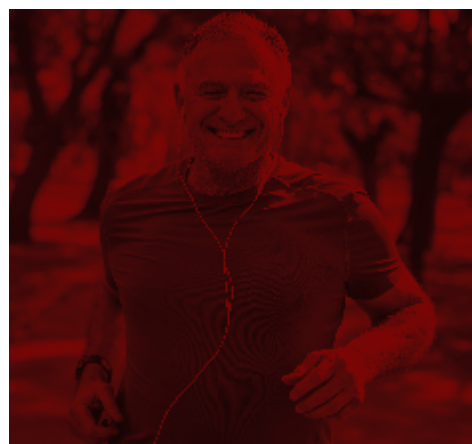
Schedule time for exercise.

Congratulations. That saved morning commute time is now your time. Go for a run and take in the sun. Or check out online training apps and join a class. Use movement as a bridge between work hours and personal hours – your body will register the switch.

Take mini-meditation breaks.

Mindfulness training has gone mainstream and managers are taking notice. Meditating just fifteen minutes a day has been shown to lower blood pressure, improve stress levels and improve decision-making. That beats “stress-snacking” for time spent vs. benefits gained!

However you choose to decompress, when your workday ends, shut it down, turn it off, and make time for yourself, your health, and your family. You'll be better off for it ... and so will your team.





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 to lead more effectively during this difficult 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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