

A woman with long blonde hair is smiling while talking on a mobile phone. She is holding a young child with blonde hair who is looking at a laptop screen. The woman is also holding a stack of papers. The background is a blurred indoor setting with a plant.

MANAGING A REMOTE WORKFORCE

We've run a semi-remote workforce for years and we've helped hundreds of companies hire and train remote workers from across the country.

In light of the recent need for social distancing as a result of COVID-19, we've put together a compilation of remote work best practices, from creating and maintaining team cohesion, to accountability strategies, to physical workspace considerations and technology recommendations.



WORK SPACE & HARDWARE

Working from home requires a few things:

- Wifi, a phone, a computer, remote access to files (VPN, Google Docs, etc.), a surface
- Bonus: a quiet space to focus and hold virtual meetings

But not every one of your employees will have access to these things immediately. Many people don't have an open desk in their home, and fewer still have a designated quiet space. How can you help?

1

Be kind. Research shows that remote workers are productive and dedicated, so trust them to get their work done even if they at times appear distracted on video calls. Let your people know that they don't need to constantly mute themselves on calls to cover up the fact that their home life exists.

2

Offer resources to help build a functional workspace. Noise-cancelling headphones, a monitor, and a desk phone can do wonders for concentration. Some of these things will already be supplied by your company; allow your people to take these items home and provide IT support to get everything set up.

A few questions we are considering going forward:

- Is my IT department prepared for the influx of questions?
- What supplies do we already have that can make peoples' lives easier?
- Can my company offer any subsidies or discounts on office supplies?
- What guidance can I provide to help my people set up a home office? This [article](#) from Glassdoor is a great place to get started.



WHO HAS BROADBAND?

In 2018 Microsoft released in a statement that a shocking ***“162.8 million Americans are not using the internet at broadband speeds”*** ([ZDNet](#)). That means half of Americans do not have access to the type of online connection necessary for a successful remote workforce.

Although you probably have a sense of your employees' internet-status, don't assume that everyone has high-speed internet. Conduct a quick audit – a survey sent out via email should suffice – to get a better hold on your actual numbers. Then begin discussions about potentially subsidizing broadband or offering it as a reimbursable business expense.

VIRTUAL MEETINGS: ZOOM VS. GOTOMEETING

Transitioning your weekly and daily meetings to an online environment isn't as difficult as you might think; with modern technology options the experience can be seamless and even fun (think creative annotation and collaboration tools). *Zoom* & *GoToMeeting* have largely cornered the virtual meeting market and either one would be a good choice for your company's needs.

You can read an in-depth comparison [here](#).

The condensed review:

- Zoom's free version allows up to 100 participants to hold a 40-minute meeting. It requires no installation and offers very advanced screen sharing options. The Pro plan costs \$14.99/month per host and supports up to 100 participants.
- GoToMeeting is a robust business tool offering a number of features not offered by Zoom – agenda management, advanced interactive tools, etc. That being said, GoToMeeting requires a lot more bandwidth and better internet. The Business plan costs \$12/month per host and supports up to 150 participants.

For a one-to-one comparison of specific features, check out [this article](#) from Zapier.



IS YOUR DATA SECURE? SETTING UP A VPN

WHAT IS A VPN?

Virtual private networks (VPNs) allow you to establish secure internet networks granting employees encrypted, remote access to the company's files. VPNs have two major functions:

- For individuals, VPNs protect and encrypt the data being transmitted from a computer connected to an otherwise unsecured network
- For companies, VPNs allow you to share your proprietary data with employees working off-site without risk of anyone else accessing or hacking confidential information

HOW DO I GET A VPN?

VPNs come at a pretty reasonable cost, starting at around \$3/month. You can find a list of 5 highly recommended business VPN options [here](#).



ESTABLISHING COMMUNICATION PROTOCOLS

It seems counterintuitive to codify impromptu conversations – the type of discussions that happen through emails, texts, Slacks, phone calls, Whatsapp, etc. These interactions arise naturally and are the bedrock of your company's productivity and culture.

But when these are the only modes of communication – as is the case when your company is fully remote – you risk people texting others who would prefer to be emailed; people Slacking things that belong in a video call; people writing novel-length emails that could have easily been communicated in two minutes over the phone.

Communication protocols set up norms and expectations for how, when, and with what frequency people can expect to be contacted. These protocols also explain how quickly you would like people to respond to messages when working from home, and how they should go about clarifying when they will be on/off the clock. Be clear about expected meeting times, response-times, communication channels, and communication frequency.

These protocols provide certainty to a necessarily uncertain situation. Articulating these protocols will make your people less anxious, more accountable, and more empathetic ([HBR](#)).

PROMOTING PRODUCTIVITY

It's critical that you lay out clear expectations of what you need to see from your team and how often. Are they to send you a summary of what they're working on daily, weekly, bi-weekly? How often do you expect them to call you, and you to call them?

Your people may be used to shouting to you from across the room – not from across the city. They may not be as fast to ask questions now because they don't want to appear confused or lost in this new remote landscape. It's on you to be their guide.



A few questions we are considering going forward:

- How exactly will productivity be measured? How often?
- What makes a successful workday, work week?
- What expectations do I have of my workers?
- How will people signal when they're not working?
- Is it on me, or on my workers, to signal their productivity?

MAINTAINING COMPANY CULTURE

"Shared Affinity" is the glue that keeps your team happy and cohesive; essentially, it's the shared values and trust that exists between coworkers. Without it, your team will feel distant and disjointed - so it only makes sense that Harvard Business Review points to "Affinity Distancing" as the #1 cause of a deteriorating company culture in remote teams.

HBR advises switching (almost) all communications to video calls and establishing "virtual team-building rituals," like virtual book clubs and birthday celebrations to help combat affinity distancing ([HBR](#)). You can also designate specific communication channels (say, Slack or Whatsapp) for different interest groups (sports, art, movies) to foster a healthy sense of community.

A few questions we are considering going forward:

- What events or rituals defined our culture when we still worked in a shared office?
- How can I encourage impromptu chats? Leaving conference lines open 15 minutes after meetings, 'quote of the day' emails, book clubs, etc.
- What meeting format would most induce creative collaboration?
- Do I have the communication software in place to promote chance discussions between team members on non-work-related topics?



COMBATTING LONELINESS

In today's uncertain environment, it's likely people will not be working from home alone – they'll be surrounded by their roommates, partners, and children. But it still warrants saying that working far from your team can feel isolating or stressful.

Some people may feel they lack the support they need to do their job properly, while others may feel demotivated or distracted by their new surroundings. Check in with your people regularly with anonymous employee sentiment surveys to make sure everything is running smoothly and adjust your communication methods according to the results.

Most of all, make sure that you are still taking an active interest in the lives of your workers. The best leaders will ask questions about their peoples' experiences, concerns, and families – not just questions about their work output ([HBR](#)).



PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

It can be difficult to plan for the future in a quickly changing landscape such as this. Whether this shift to remote work is temporary or permanent, these are the questions we are starting to ask ourselves and our team:

- How will business travel fit into this new world? Without the possibility of such extensive business travel, will we decrease our business travel allocations by 25%, 50%, 75%?
- Going forward, will we be requiring strict hours? Should we have core overlapping hours, and then flex time for the other hours?
- How much more should we be investing in technology to support our remote team? What tools will most help them to thrive in the coming months?
- How will we continue to conduct business in this volatile environment? One thing we are considering is hiring more contract/temporary workers in the coming months.



LET'S HELP EACH OTHER

This is an unprecedented situation and we do not have all the answers. Difficult decisions will have to be made and new challenges will arise over the coming weeks and months.

At the same time, many great people and companies will step up to help support our community, our jobs, and our families.

Please see us as a resource and reach out with *any* questions whatsoever. Again, we may not have all the answers - but we're happy to work through your challenges with you.

Our CEOs are available to address any concerns or just to talk:

Louis Song

858.412.1122

lsong@provenrecruiting.com

Ingram Losner

858.412.1133

ilosner@provenrecruiting.com

