

6 THINGS TO CONSIDER IN A NEW YEAR OF WORKING REMOTELY



Rolling into a new year of remote working ten months after the pandemic changed the world might look a little different, or it might be more of the same. Now, with almost a year under your belt, let's check in on lessons learned since our [original blog post](#), and look at six ways you can make the most of remote—for yourself and your colleagues.

Give people grace

2020 was full of watershed moments for elevating the concepts of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), and it turns out that remote working has been a fantastic avenue to help level the playing field. By taking people out of the office, it opened up new avenues to empowerment.

That said, it's important to recognize that what the pandemic has looked like for you may be radically different for your teammates. For some, going remote has meant long, lonely days, while, for others, it's meant working multiple roles in tandem as their day job blurred together with family care, running a household, homeschooling, and more.

Some of your colleagues may need to work at different paces, intervals, and hours from your own "normal."

- Think first before you set multiple meetings.
- Consider whether an e-mail will resolve the issue versus blocking out time on people's calendars.
- If you need to move a meeting, give more than one alternative for a reset as things might have

already been moved around once to fit the first timeslot.

- If you're trying to catch someone via an instant messaging tool, query availability first before you barrel into a stream of questions or tasks.

Lighten the mood

Unless you had a crystal ball (and if so, let's talk lottery numbers), you probably didn't expect to still be working from home, and the novelty may have worn off ages ago, especially if you're on back-to-back calls all day, every day. As you kick off a new year with your team, try a virtual [team building event](#) to reconnect and level set after the holidays, and check in with each other.

Does anyone need help or guidance? Did the holidays create an issue that's kept anyone from jumping right back into work, or that will require new scheduling accommodation? Give employees a safe space to relax, discuss challenges, and air grievances with a virtual "social" gathering—a Zoom happy hour, a silly pet or home show and tell, or a "game night" in the afternoon using your conferencing app's whiteboard for Pictionary.

Foster inclusive discussions

Diversity is a fact and inclusion is an act. Now that everyone in your meetings has an equal seat—no more jockeying for a specific chair or place at the table—make sure that seat comes with a voice. Give everyone an opportunity to weigh in and don't be afraid to have a firm hand in redirecting the conversation if one participant tries to dominate it.

Be mindful of your language. Don't address a mixed group of attendees with one gender salutation that's a form of micro-aggression, i.e., using "guys" instead of inclusive words like "team" or "everyone." Create allyship when you're setting up discussions. If you want a quorum of diverse insights—and really, that should be a requirement for every meeting—take a last look at your invite list before you hit send. Is it representative of multiple groups? If it isn't, add people who can help facilitate a better conversation.

Click [here](#) for a handy checklist on fostering more diverse and inclusive engagements every time you host a virtual meeting.

Expand diverse hiring

According to the [United Nations](#), 15 percent of the world's population are people with disabilities, yet in some countries, up to 80 percent of them are unemployed. And for those who do work, challenges still remain. A [2020 Accenture study](#) found that **77 percent of employees** and **80 percent of leaders** with disabilities choose not to be transparent about their disability at work. Flexible arrangements such as remote working were cited as one path to creating better working environments.

Remote working creates opportunities for people with disabilities to find jobs that might have previously been unavailable to them based on location, or for which they may have been passed over due to bias and preconceived notions about the perceived ability to perform a particular role. Moving the interviewing and hiring process online through remote tools removes many of the visual cues that might shift an interviewer away from a candidate, and for the interviewee, it can eliminate the stressors of physically getting to an interview. Both sides can hopefully be present and

authentic—and evaluate each other based on their best selves.

Set the stage

Now, back to you for a minute. If you're still using the tweener set up from when you thought you wouldn't be remote for long, this is a great time to go ahead and trick out your space with exactly what you need. Start with a great chair. Unless the straight back you borrowed from the dining table is actually really comfortable for you, invest in a quality chair that won't leave you debilitated at the end of the day.

The same goes for the workspace itself. How's your desk height? How's your lighting? Do you need another lamp, or to move your desk to the other wall so your screen isn't in direct sunlight for half of the day? Is your PC running like it should? If not, make time to apply all those patches and updates you keep postponing, empty your recycle bin, and uninstall any memory hog apps you never actually use.

If you're living your life on Zoom and Teams calls, test your tech—check your camera settings so you can see what your colleagues see behind you. Test your microphone and headset to confirm you can hear and be heard, and if you're using a wireless headset, make a habit of charging it at the end of the day so it's ready to go at the start of the next one.

Take care of your mind and body

Everybody has adapted—or not—to the events of the last year in their own way, but if you need help, don't be afraid to ask for it. If your company has an outreach program for mental and emotional health assistance, take advantage of it. If you're hesitant to go see a doctor in the middle of COVID times, explore virtual options. Don't wing it.

If you're doing OK, but are looking for ways to do and feel better, there are many online tools out there to help you relax, recharge, and focus.

Virgin Pulse has compiled a handy selection of [easy work-at-home exercises](#) you can do anytime during the day, and the [YMCA](#) has a range of free, short exercise, yoga, and meditation videos. Our [guidance](#) from the spring still holds, too—a few times a day, push back from your desk, put down the phone, and walk around. Block time in your calendar to take your kids or your pets for a short walk to clear your head and stretch your bones.

Try out an app like [Calm](#) to learn about meditation and mindfulness and get tips on stress management.

If you're one of the masters of time who's actually made more room in your day while remote, or you're itching to try something new, take a class—[Coursera](#), [LinkedIn](#), and [Google](#) have plenty of upskilling options, and some are free.

If you're still grieving that cancelled vacation, *The New York Times* has [52 places](#) you can visit virtually and [Smithsonian Journeys](#) can take you around the world from your laptop.

We're pretty clearly past calling this the "new normal." This normal is here to stay. Digital transformation, along with the accompanying evolution of businesses to becoming a future-state [Autonomous Digital Enterprise](#), is accelerating, and the human workforce—that's us—is part of that evolution. Our way of working, and how we work together, continues to adapt and change, and

because we're resilient, we're learning to adapt and change, too.