

**REMOTE: OFFICE NOT  
REQUIRED BY JASON FRIED &  
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Remote: Office not Required by Jason Fried and David Heinemeier Hansson is an examination of the emerging trend of remote working. They discuss the benefits of working remotely for both the employer and employee while examining common excuses. Remote offers plenty of advice on how to get your company started on having remote employees and also advice on how to manage your work if you are a remote employee. A great all-round guide on the new way to work!

## **THE TIME IS RIGHT FOR REMOTE WORK**

If you ask people where they go when they really need to get work done, very few will respond “the office.” If they do say the office, they’ll include a qualifier such as “super early in the morning before anyone gets in.”

The office during the day has become the last place people want to be when they really want to get work done. That’s because offices have become interruption factories.

It’s incredibly hard to get meaningful work done when your workday has been shredded into work moments. Interruptions every 15 minutes.

Meaningful work, creative work, thoughtful work, important work—this type of effort takes stretches of uninterrupted time to get into the zone. But in the modern office such long stretches just can’t be found.

Yes, working outside the office has its own set of challenges. And interruptions can come from different places, multiple angles. If you’re at home, maybe it’s the TV. If you’re at the local coffee shop, maybe it’s someone talking loudly a few tables away. But here’s the thing: those interruptions are things you can control. They’re passive.

You can find a space that fits your work style. You can toss on some headphones and not be worried about a coworker loitering by your desk and tapping you on the shoulder. Neither do you have to be worried about being called into yet another unnecessary meeting. Your place, your zone, is yours alone.

### **Stop the commute**

Say you spend thirty minutes driving in rush hour every morning and another fifteen getting to your car and into the office. That's 1.5 hours a day, 7.5 hours per week, or somewhere between 300 and 400 hours per year, give or take holidays and vacation.

Imagine what you could do with 400 extra hours a year. Commuting isn't just bad for you, your relationships, and the environment—it's bad for business. And it doesn't have to be that way.

### **Technology**

If working remotely is such a great idea, why haven't progressive companies been practising it all along? It's simple: they couldn't. The technology just wasn't there. Technology snuck up on us and made working remotely an obvious possibility. In particular, the Internet happened.

But past generations have been bred on the idea that good work happens from 9am to 5pm, in offices and cubicles in tall buildings around the city.

The future, quite literally, belongs to those who get it. The great thing about technology, and even working remotely, is that it's all up to you.

### **Escaping 9-5**

The beauty of relaxing workday hours is that the policy accommodates everyone— from the early birds to the night owls to the family folks with kids who need to be picked up in the middle of the day.

A company that is efficiently built around remote work doesn't even have to have a set schedule. This is especially important when it comes to creative work. If you can't get into the zone, there's rarely much that can force you into it. When face time isn't a requirement, the best strategy is often to take some time away and get back to work when your brain is firing on all cylinders.

“Release yourself from the 9am-to-5pm mentality. It might take a bit of time and practice to get the hang of working asynchronously with your team, but soon you'll see that it's the work—not the clock—that matters.

### **The new luxury**

Your life no longer needs to be divided into arbitrary phases of work and retirement. You can blend the two for fun and profit—design a better lifestyle that makes work enjoyable because it's not the only thing on the menu. Shed the resentment of golden handcuffs that keep you from living how you really want to live.

This doesn't mean you have to pick up and move to Colorado tomorrow, just because you like skiing. Some people do that, but there are many possible in-betweens as well. Could you go there for three weeks? Just like working from the office, it doesn't have to be all or nothing.

### **It's not about the money**

Letting people work remotely is about promoting quality of life, about getting access to the best people wherever they are, and all the other benefits we'll enumerate. That it may also end up reducing costs spent on offices and result in fewer-but-more-productive workers is the gravy, not the turkey.

### **It's not all or nothing**

Embracing remote work doesn't mean you can't have an office, just that it's not required. It doesn't mean that all your employees can't live in the same city, just that they don't have to. Remote work is about setting your team free to be the best it can be, wherever that might be.

### **There's still a trade off**

Remote work is not without cost or compromise. - Giving up seeing your coworkers in person every day might feel a loss. - The same goes for the loss of imposed structure and regimen. - And what about the family men and women who choose to work from home? It's not always easy to set boundaries.

## **DEALING WITH EXCUSES**

### **Magic only happens when we are all in one room**

Everyone's sitting around a table, ideas are building on ideas, and intellectual sparks are lighting up the room. It's tempting to think that this kind of magic only happens when people can see and touch each other.

You'd be amazed how much quality collective thought can be captured using two simple tools: a voice connection and a shared screen.

By rationing in-person meetings, their stature is elevated to that of a rare treat. They become something to be savored, something special.

### **If I can't see them, how do I know they are working?**

A manager thinks, Will people work hard if I'm not watching them all the time? If I can't see them sitting pretty at their desks, are they just going to goof off and play video games or surf the web all day?

Hate to break it to you, but if they are going to slack off and surf the web, they are going to do this in the office to.

### **People's homes are full of interruptions**

If you're sitting in a dedicated room intended for work with the door closed, you stand a far better chance of staying on task. If that's not possible, or not enough, you can always try working outside the house entirely. You can work from a coffee shop or the library or even the park.

But in reality goofing off is much less of an issue than people fear. Most people want to work, as long as it's stimulating and fulfilling. And if you're stuck in a dead-end job that has no prospects of being either, then you don't just need a remote position—you need a new job.

### **Only the office can be secure**

Security is a big and serious deal, but it's also largely a solved problem.

Creating security protocols and algorithms is the computer equivalent of rocket science, but taking advantage of them isn't. Take the time to learn the basics and they'll cease being scary voodoo that you can't trust. These days, security for your devices is just simple good sense, like putting on your seat belt.

### **I need an answer now!**

First, it takes recognizing that not every question needs an answer immediately.

Once you've grasped that, you're truly on the path to enlightenment and productivity. Questions you can wait hours to learn the answers to are fine to put in an email. Questions that require answers in the next few minutes can go into an instant message. For crises that truly merit a sky-is-falling designation, you can use that old-fashioned invention called the telephone.

### **We paid a lot of money for this office**

If you want to get all mathematical about it, take out a napkin and jot down a few numbers. Say you can get five productive hours out of the office (ha!) and six productive hours out of working from home. That's 20 percent more productivity by working in your living room. Who's going to argue against that?

### **That doesn't work for our size or industry**

There really are very few industries left in which working remotely can categorically be ruled out. Don't let "industry fit" be the lame excuse that prevents remote work from happening at your company.

## **HOW TO COLLABORATE REMOTELY**

### **Overlap**

Working remotely, if it is to be successful, usually requires some overlap with the hours your coworkers are putting in.

Thankfully, there are lots of enjoyable work-life schedules outside the regular 9am to 5pm. Embrace that. Ironically, you'll probably get far more done when only half of your workday overlaps with the rest of your team.

### **Seeing is believing**

Fortunately, it's an easy problem to fix. WebEx, GoToMeeting, Join.me, and similar tools all make it simple to share a screen. Use a shared screen to collaborate on everything from walking through a presentation, to going over the latest website changes, to sketching together in Photoshop, to just editing a simple text document together.

### **All out in the open**

Here's the key: you need everything available to everyone at all times. If Pratik in London has to wait five hours for someone in Chicago to come online in order to know what he should work on next, that's half a workday lost.

There are countless tools available these days to ensure everything is out in the open for your team. Some companies manage simply by using Dropbox to share files.

The point is to avoid locking up important stuff in a single person's computer or inbox. Put all the important stuff out in the open, and no one will have to chase that wild goose to get their work done.

### **The virtual water cooler**

We all need mindless breaks, and it helps if you spend some of them with your team. That's where the virtual water cooler comes in.

Chat rooms and instant messaging are a great way to interact. Login and send a quick message when you need a quick break. This means that you, the remote worker, are in control of your social interaction—when it happens and how much of it you need.

### **Forward motion**

To instill a sense of company cohesion and to share forward motion, everyone needs to feel that they're in the loop. A weekly discussion thread where you can discuss what you've been working on and what you're intending to work on can keep everyone up to date and on track.

### **Not just for people out of town**

You can work remotely from down the street. Remote just means you're not in the office 9am–5pm, all day long.

If you're an owner or manager, letting local people work remotely is a great first step toward seeing if remote will work for you. It's low risk, it's no big deal, and worse comes to worst, people can start working at the office again.

If you're going to give it a shot, give it a real shot. Try it for at least three months. There's going to be an adjustment period, so let everyone settle into their new rhythm. You can even start with two days remote, three days in the office. Work up to a full week out of the office.

### **Easy on the M&Ms (meetings & managers)**

We believe that these staples of work life—meetings and managers—are actually the greatest causes of work not getting done at the office.

When meetings are the norm, the first resort, the go to tool to discuss, debate, and solve every problem, they become overused and we grow numb to the outcome. Too many meetings can destroy morale and motivation.

Further, meetings are major distractions. They require multiple people to drop whatever it is they're doing and instead do something else.

Managers are good. They're essential. But management, like meetings, should be used sparingly. Constantly asking people what they're working on prevents them from actually doing the work they're describing. And since managers are often the people who call the meetings, their very presence leads to less productive workdays.

## **BEWARE, THE DRAGONS**

The occasional drawback of working remotely is that it can feel like you're surrounded by online interaction. But as good as all that is, it's not a complete substitute for real, live human interaction.

Fortunately, one of the key insights we've gained through many years of remote work is that human interaction does not have to come from either coworkers or others in your industry. Sometimes, even more satisfying interaction comes from spending time with your spouse, your children, your family, your friends, your neighbors.

You can go further, for example, find a co-working facility and share desks with others in your situation. Such facilities can now be found in most larger cities, and even some smaller ones.

## **Check in, check out**

When you're set free from punching in at 9am and out at 5pm, it's easy to don the shackles of working around the clock.

You wake up by opening your laptop in bed and answering a few work emails from last night. Then you make yourself a sandwich and work through lunch. After dinner, you feel the need to check about that one thing. Before you know it, you've stretched the workday from 7am to 9pm.

It's crucial for everyone to pace themselves. One way to help set a healthy boundary is to encourage employees to think of a "good day's work." Look at your progress toward the end of the day and ask yourself: "Have I done a good day's work?" Often, if the answer is an easy "yes," you can stop working



feeling satisfied that something important got accomplished, if not entirely “done.”

### **Ergonomic basics**

Working from home gives you the freedom to work wherever you want.

Maybe you start at the kitchen counter, continue on the couch, and, finish up outside while enjoying the sunshine. But if you’re going to make a real go at working from home for the long term, you’ll need to get the ergonomic basics right.

You'll need a proper desk, chair & screen. Try for variation, use a stand up desk for a few hours a day. Fashion one out of your breakfast bar.

### **Mind the gut**

If you’re not making a conscious effort to the contrary, working from home will likely afford even less opportunity to hit your recommended 10,000 steps per day.

If there aren’t built-in reasons to move during your day, find excuses to move—for example, instead of just eating lunch at your desk, walk to a café. Take your dog for a long walk. Use a break to run on your treadmill. Now that you’ve saved time by skipping the commute, there really is no excuse for not finding the minutes to exercise or cook healthy meals.

### **The lone outpost**

You can’t experiment with working remotely by sending one or two people to Siberia. To give it a proper try, you need to set free at least an entire team—including project management and key stakeholders! And then you need to give it longer than it takes to break in a new pair of shoes.

Give remote work a real chance or don’t bother at all. It’s okay to start small, but make sure it’s meaningful.

### **Working with clients**

1. First, when pitching businesses, let the prospective client know up front that you don’t live where they live.
2. Second, provide references before the client even asks. Show right up front that you have nothing to hide.
3. Third, show them work often. This is the best way to chip away at a client’s natural situational anxiety.

4. Fourth, be very available. Since you can't meet face-to-face, you better return phone calls, emails, instant messages, etc.
5. Lastly, get the client involved and let them follow along. Make sure they feel that this is their project too.

### **Taxes, accounting, law**

"Is working remotely even legal?" is a common question. The answer is "yes"—but you have to be careful with the implementation.

Don't let a little work up front scare you away from the idea of remote working. The long-term benefits are worth it.

## **HIRING AND KEEPING THE BEST**

When as an employer your eyes first open to the advantages of remote work, it's natural not to think outside your home country.

Once you've formed good remote working habits, the lack of proximity between coworkers will start mattering so little that you'll forget exactly where people are.

Thinking internationally when it comes to worker recruitment doesn't just drastically increase the size of the talent pool; it also makes you better fit for tackling global markets.

### **Life moves on**

Given how hard it is to find great people, you should be doing your utmost to keep them.

There are myriad reasons why people have to—or want to—move, even if they love their job.

As it turns out, people who've been with a company for a long time make ideal remote workers. They already know everyone, how everything works, and what they need to do. Throwing away all that knowledge and good spirit is not only dumb, it's expensive. No matter how well qualified a candidate, nobody will hit the ground running like the person who's been in the position for years and proven their worth.

**Keep the good times going**

If anything, the human connection is even more important when hiring remote workers because it has to be stronger to survive the distance.

That's one of the key challenges of remote work: keeping everyone's outlook healthy and happy.

The old adage still applies: No assholes allowed. But for remote work, you need to extend it to no asshole-y behavior allowed, no drama allowed, no bad vibes allowed.

**The cost of thriving**

As a company owner looking for a way to reduce payroll, it's tempting to recruit from places with a lower cost of living.

If your entire workforce is located in a hot hub and you pay market salaries, you'll be under constant attack from poachers. People are naturally more inclined to change jobs when it's a level playing field and the poacher's pay is higher.

Don't look at remote work as a way to skimp on salaries; you'll save on lots of other things. Your star designer out in the sticks is just as valuable (maybe more so) to the team as those working from the big-city home office. Make sure she feels that way.

### **On writing well**

Being a good writer is an essential part of being a good remote worker. When most arguments are settled over email or chat or discussion boards, you'd better show up equipped for the task. So, as a company owner or manager, you might as well filter for this quality right from the get-go.

### **Test project**

It doesn't matter if someone is local or remote—we still want to judge their work, not their résumé.

The best way we've found to accurately judge work is to hire the person to do a little work before we take the plunge and hire them to do a lot of work. Call it "pre-hiring." Pre-hiring takes the form of a one- or two-week mini-project.

### **Meeting them in person**

Do you hire remote workers the same way you hire local workers?

Assuming the person you're considering has met your basic qualifications for skills, competency, etc., the next step is figuring out if they're the right fit culturally. Even though they'll be working remotely, it makes sense, before making the final hiring decision, to meet them in person. You can learn a lot about a person from a quick face-to-face.

### **Contractors know the drill**

If there's an ideal training regimen for remote workers, it's being a contractor for a while. As a contractor, you have to be able to set a reasonable schedule, show good progress at regular intervals, and convert an often fuzzy definition of the work into a deliverable. All these are skills perfectly suited for remote work.

## **MANAGING REMOTE WORKERS**

### **When is the right time?**

In general, it's best if you start as early as possible. Cultures grow over time, and it'll be a lot easier if your culture grows up with remote workers.

That said, if you do have a company that's well established, you can always introduce remote workers to the mix. It won't be as easy, but lots of things that are worth doing aren't easy.

So start early if you can, but if you can't, start small. Take a tiny step with a few trusted current employees. Let them work outside the office a couple days a week. See what happens. It's low risk and you'll immediately start learning whether the policy makes sense.

### **Stop managing the chairs**

"If I can't see workers come in and leave their desks, how on earth can I make sure they're actually working? What is my managerial role at the company, if not to ensure that the workers are working?"

The job of a manager is not to herd cats, but to lead and verify the work. The trouble with that job description is that it requires knowledge of the work itself. You can't effectively manage a team if you don't know the intricacies of what they're working on.

What's certain is that a clued-in manager does not need to manage the chairs. When or where someone is doing the work is irrelevant most of the time.

### **Meetups and sprints**

Just because you don't have a permanent office, or not everyone is working out of one, that's no reason not to get together every now and then. In fact, it's almost mandatory to do so occasionally.

### **Level the playing field**

If you treat remote workers like second-class citizens, you're all going to have a bad time. The lower the ratio of remote worker to office worker, the more likely this is to happen. It's the normal dynamic and it won't get solved unless you tackle it head-on.

As a company owner or manager, you need to create and maintain a level playing field—one on which those in and out of the office stand as equals.

### **One-on-ones**

While we advocate frequent check-ins with all your employees, it's a good idea to check in a bit more frequently with remote workers.

The goal here is really just to keep a consistent, open line of communication. Pick up the phone and have a chat, it can be casual and conversational but get a guide of how they are doing, what they are working on and keep them feeling included.

### **Remove the roadblocks**

Nobody wants to have to waste time simply waiting for someone to approve something or wait for something to get the 'go ahead'.

The best way to ease the remote worker's plight is to do away with these roadblocks entirely. Start by empowering everyone to make decisions on their own. If the company is full of people whom nobody trusts to make decisions without layers of managerial review, then the company is full of the wrong people.

### **Be on the lookout for overwork, not underwork**

In reality, it's overwork, not underwork, that's the real enemy in a successful remote-working environment.

This is especially so when you have people working in multiple time zones and at all hours of the day. In the traditional office setup, people might stay a few hours after closing time, but they surely go home at some point. For remote workers, the lines are sometimes blurrier.

If work is all-consuming, the worker is far more likely to burn out. This is true even if the person loves what he does. The best workers over the long term are people who put in sustainable hours. Not too much, not too little—just right. Forty hours a week on average usually does the trick.

### **Using scarcity to your advantage**

One obvious side effect of a remote workforce is reduced face time. On the surface that seems like a bad thing.

When most conversations happen virtually—on the phone, via email, in Basecamp, over instant message, or in a Skype video chat—people actually look forward to these special opportunities for a face-to-face. The scarcity of such face time in remote working situations makes it seem that much more valuable. And as a result, something interesting happens: people don't waste the time. An awareness of scarcity makes them use it wisely.

## **LIFE AS A REMOTE WORKER**

### **Building a routine**

Working from home offers you far greater freedom and flexibility. Without clear boundaries and routines, things can get murky.

While some might be able to juggle that floating lifestyle, most people need some sort of routine—something they can stick to at least most of the time.

- It can be helpful to separate the clothes you wear, depending whether you're in work or play mode. Maybe don't wear your pyjamas all day.
- Divide the day into chunks like Catch-up, Collaboration, and Serious Work.
- Make sure that real work only happens when you're in your dedicated home office. No checking work email or just getting a little more done in the living room or your bedroom.

### **Morning remote, afternoon local**

Remote isn't all or nothing. Some people can be local, some can be remote. Or some days can be spent in the office, and some outside of the office.

But you can break it down even more. Days don't have to be all or nothing, either. You can slice the day in half and work remotely in the morning and at the office in the afternoon.

### **Compute differently**

We've found that using a completely different device for play and work—say, a tablet instead of a laptop—can bring a healthy change of scenery.

You can back this up by confining the work computer to the home office. No checking emails on the couch.

### **Working alone in a crowd**

Certain remote workers will find, though, that it's actually harder to get into the flow when they're sitting in complete isolation. If that resonates, here's a simple strategy: Take your laptop and head to the nearest coffee shop with WiFi. There you'll get to work alone with no interruption from coworkers, but still enjoy the buzzing white noise of the crowd. Try the library or a park or a co-working facility.

### **Nomadic freedom**

"When I retire, I'm going to travel the world" is a common dream, but why wait for retirement? If seeing the world is your passion, you shouldn't wait until old age to pursue it. And if you're working remotely, you can't use the "but I have a job" excuse to defer living.

Creative work that can be done remotely generally only requires a computer and an Internet connection. The computer you can bring with you, and nearly anywhere in the world you'll be hard-pressed not to find an Internet connection. Remember, the work doesn't care whether it's being done on a bench in Maui or a boat off the coast of Tampa (3G and LTE connections are plenty fine for most purposes).

### **Family time**

Once you factor in the hurried rush to get ready in the morning, the commute, and the lingering at the office after hours, the part of your day where you actually connect with your family seems frustratingly slim.

Working remotely—especially from home and especially on flexible hours—can dramatically change that dynamic. Imagine eating breakfast with the family without the stress, taking half an hour over lunch to play in the yard together, or being there for a sick child without missing a whole day of work.

### **No extra space at home**

There is a wealth of options available to anyone looking for an office away from the office. The simplest, is to use cafés. Plenty of people work full-time from an array of coffee shops.

But if you want something more permanent, you can also look into renting just a single desk from another company.



There're also a growing number of co-working facilities popping up in major cities. They function on the same idea as subletting a single space or a few desks from another company, except everyone in the office is doing just that.

## **CONCLUDING THOUGHTS**

Remote work is here, and it's here to stay. The only question is whether you'll be part of the early adopters, the early majority, the late majority, or the laggards. The ship carrying the innovators has already sailed, but there are still plenty of vessels for the early adopters. Come on board.