Help your team thrive in

The Age of Remote Work

8 tips to boost engagement, collaboration, and morale

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With much of the world having to adapt and work remotely where possible, it can be hard to manage even a single team because of virtual distances. Managers might feel powerless to keep a group cohesive and productive, whether in the office or working remotely. Distance working has its own set of challenges and cultural issues, just like working in the office does.

So, what can you do to shrink this cultural divide and prevent your colocated or remote team members from feeling isolated on either side?

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Are the 7 Habits® as relevant today as they were when they were first created? Absolutely, they are more relevant than ever before. The greater the change, the more difficult the challenges, the more relevant the 7 Habits become. Why? Because they are based on principles of effectiveness that endure."

— Stephen R. Covey

1. Openly discuss the benefits and challenges of remote work.
Habit 4: Think Win-Win®

Don't assume you all share the same understanding of how remote work may affect the team. By initiating group discussions — perhaps in quarterly video lunches — about what remote work means for everyone, you can help people in both groups become more sympathetic and accommodating toward each other.

As a group, explore solutions to challenges like time-zone mix-ups.

As a group, explore solutions to challenges (like time-zone mix-ups) and discuss the potential benefits of having people in different locations (like getting a broader set of opinions).

If your team has recently added some remote members, that's a great reason to start a conversation. Or if remote workers are nothing new, you could kick things off by saying:

Some of you have been working remotely for a while, and I thought it might be helpful for the whole team to check in about what's working well and what we could all be doing differently to make things better for each other. Sound okay?

Remote work habits will continue to change as new tools and norms are created in the present work environment. Be prepared to adapt, change, and grow.

2. Be an active facilitator during virtual meetings.
Habit 1: Be Proactive®

Virtual meetings are often rife with technical glitches and frustrating delays: colocated team members who forget to look at the screen and inadvertently freeze out those who aren't in the room; remotes who aren't sure when to jump in with a comment, or who give up trying and zone out.

Set up and test technology before the meeting.

Not on your watch! By becoming an active facilitator, or assigning the role to someone else on the team, you can keep these troublesome issues from derailing your meetings and causing low-level friction to build up between remote and colocated teammates.

Focus on the issues specific to virtual interactions:

- Set up and test technology before the meeting and act as a fixer when technical issues arise. For example, as soon as you hear audio feedback, remind people to mute their microphones.

- Explain and interpret for remotes what's happening in the room that they can't perceive. Simple comments like "Rosa is nodding in vigorous agreement" or "Chad just drew a 2x2 matrix on the whiteboard" will help them keep up with the flow of the meeting.

- Ask follow-up questions to ensure everyone speaks. This is critical. And it's hard to do. It requires knowing which questions are relevant for which team members, keeping track of who hasn't expressed anything yet, reining in meeting monopolizers — and putting it all together in the moment.

- Set some ground rules. Let your team know that you'd like them to speak up and be part of the conversation, and use the chat and icons.

- Use the camera. Create a culture where everyone is expected to join virtual meetings with the video on. Even if your colocated people are in the same room, this approach lets team members connect with each other and see each other's responses.

Some people have biases toward new ways of working. Overcome them by addressing fears and filling knowledge gaps about technology.

3. Set remote-friendly expectations around communication tools.
Habit 4: Think Win-Win®

Remote team members can't see that a colleague who is still working in the office stepped away from their desk for a moment — or that a higher-up who has returned to the office is in a meeting for an uninterruptible hour.

Set the tone by conscientiously updating your own calendar and status.

And the more time those remote employees spend helplessly waiting for replies or hesitating over whether to reach out, the less time they spend on the project you need the team to finish this month.

Here are a few ways to increase visibility for all:

- Share your calendars and set team standards for how your team blocks time for projects and meetings. This approach allows the team to be adaptive as they schedule time together.

- Adopt standard online status labels like available, lunch, BRB ("be right back"), on a call, coding, travel, or whatever makes sense for your team. Discourage people from using an "invisible" status.

- Set the tone by conscientiously updating your own calendar and status.

- If some team members drag their feet about adopting another tool, make time to help them to learn how to use it.

- And when calling out direct reports for not following a team practice, remind them why it's important:

"Posting our statuses and calendars makes us more transparent about when we're accessible, and it helps remote team members feel more included."

To facilitate effective behavior change, hold team members accountable using digital tools.

4. Share news through digital channels and encourage others to do the same.
Habit 4: Think Win-Win®

You probably don't realize how much news comes your way every day — and never makes it out of the building.

Summarize and post news that's relevant to your remote team members.

- Imagine most of your team is back in the office working face to face. Then your manager stops by your team's area and shares their takeaways from a meeting. Or you take a tough customer call that your colocated team members overhear and learn from.

- The reality is that remote employees are almost always the last to know, limiting their opportunities to expand, elevate, or deepen the team's conversation.

- Don't shrug and accept this problem. Solve it with the myriad online collaboration tools in your arsenal. Summarize and post news that's relevant — or just plain interesting — to your remote employees.

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Give remote workers the trust and attention they deserve. Doing so can make them your highest performers."

— Kory Kogon
Bestselling Coauthor, *The 5 Choices*

5. Have team members pair up for work or virtual chats.
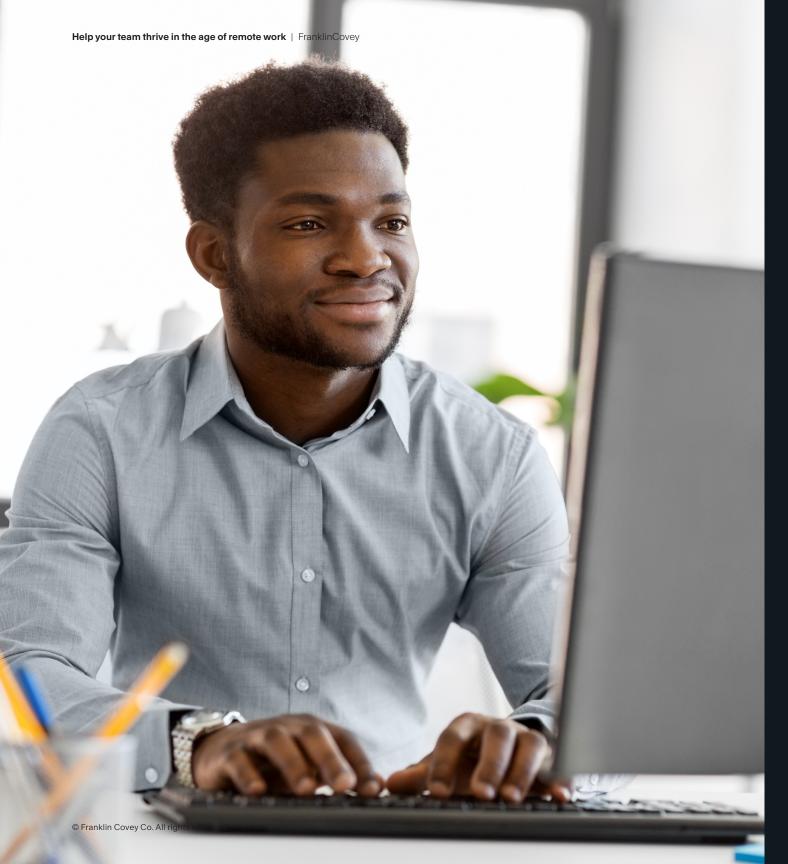## Habit 7: Sharpen the Saw®

Gallup has long reported that having a best friend at work is one of the better predictors of workplace engagement and productivity. Human connection invigorates us and brightens our days.

Consider pairing work buddies based on coaching opportunities.

Team members don't want to let down a trusted colleague — especially someone who has shared a major milestone or life event with them. However, it's often harder for remote workers, who are physically isolated, to cultivate strong working relationships.

To help foster connections, consider pairing work buddies based on coaching opportunities. For instance, you could ask your remote sales veteran to mentor a new hire.

Or simply pair team members for co-mentoring or virtual coffee chats. You might choose to change the partnerships quarterly so that the team builds stronger connections overall.

And don't assume someone is adequately self-sufficient or too difficult to befriend. That just perpetuates a cycle, for instance, if a coworker is considered independent, shy, or grumpy, no one may get to know them, so they will remain isolated.

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It's not just the people, but the nature of relationships between people that truly establishes an organization's competitive advantage."

— Todd Davis
Bestselling Author, *Get Better*

6. Encourage people in different places to ask each other for feedback.
Habit 1: Be Proactive®

A lot of feedback happens in the moment — for those in the room, that is. Since many employees are working remotely, they frequently miss out on spontaneous sessions ("Hey, got a sec?"), as well as opportunities to weigh in on group decisions.

Since remote team members aren't in the room, they miss out on a lot of spontaneous feedback.

This isn't just bad for them, it's bad for the entire team to operate without the different perspectives your remote team members could bring to various projects. Also, explaining an idea over the phone or online gives people a chance to flex a fuller set of communication skills, since they can't rely on nonverbal cues and visual aids.

Look for opportunities to build a robust feedback culture on your team. When team members have an interesting idea that might benefit from further input,

suggest they present it to a distant peer. You can also model this behavior yourself, and give reinforcing feedback when you notice someone proactively involving colleagues, regardless of their location.

Make sure you have a virtual process for team members to give each other feedback. They'll do it if you make it easy.

7. Devise celebrations that include remote team members.
Habit 7: Sharpen the Saw®

When team members who are usually in the office achieve something, they get high-fives, applause, or even a toast.

Urge your team to come up with creative ways to celebrate the achievements of their remote peers.

But employees who have to work remotely are more likely to get a few generic words on chat or on video conferencing. Over time, this massive inequity can breed resentment, causing your remote employees to feel underappreciated and eroding their motivation.

Wise managers are proactive about leveling the playing field a bit. For example:

When remote team members are back in the office, revisit some of their previous, bigger accomplishments — the ones that were only celebrated virtually.

If your team likes getting creative, urge them to come up with ways to share the love, despite the distance. You could even make it an informal contest, voting on ideas — from the thoughtful (a signed card and gift card), to the silly (a singing telegram), to the personalized (a video message from the team posted to your team's chat channel).

Include remote team members when celebrating the accomplishments of team members who may be back at the office too — live over video or with follow-up posts.

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People want to win. When you or your team achieve success, celebrate it."

— Scott Miller
Bestselling Coauthor, *Everyone Deserves a Great Manager*

8. Set a calendar reminder to assess your team's remote culture. **Habit 1: Be Proactive**®

Everyone is working in different circumstances these days. Whether colocated or remote, you'll need to consciously pursue the goal of team unity over time.

Urge your team to come up with creative ways to celebrate the achievements of their remote peers.

Add a recurring reminder to your calendar to assess your team's remote culture — perhaps on a quarterly basis — and build it into your regular team evaluations.

Pay particular attention to what's changed over time. For example, did team member Usain's departure leave remote Remy without a virtual coffee buddy? Are some team members growing lax with keeping their status updated? Is there a new technology for enabling virtual meetings that's worth exploring? Over time, you might even create a checklist to review based on your team's patterns around remote work.

Your organization's success depends on strong individual performance.

Stephen R. Covey's book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* has empowered and inspired readers for 30 years. It continues to be a bestseller for the simple reason that it ignores trends and pop psychology and focuses on timeless principles of empathy, collaboration, self-management, problem solving, and communication.

No matter how competent your people are, they won't generate sustained and lasting results unless they're able to effectively lead themselves; influence, engage, and collaborate with others; and continually improve and renew their capabilities.

Renowned as the world's premier personal leadership-development solution, The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People® aligns enduring principles of effectiveness with today's technology and practices. By making these principles part of your organization's shared culture, you can propel all of your employees toward their very best performance.

You can apply the 7 Habits inside your organization through Live, Live-Online and digital learning experiences.

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