

# A Practical Guide to Working and Leading from Home



**Polly**

# A Brief Introduction

## What do we know about working from home, and why should you listen?

Working from home is a skill that you can really only hone through a combination of your own trial and error, and by implementing the advice of others who have been doing it for a while.

There are countless factors that impact the Working from Home (WFH) experience. Small details can make or break your experience -- some of which won't even impact you until the medium or long-term.

Polly has been a distributed team from day one, and many members of our team worked remotely for years before joining. Through those decades of combined WFH experience, we've amassed a pretty sizable number of tools and strategies to make it easier.

While some of those tactics might work perfectly for some, they're not always going to fit -- and that's where your part begins.

It would be a lie to say this is going to be an easy journey, or that reading this eBook is going to leave you fully equipped to overcome every one of the new challenges you're going to face.

You're already walking down the road though, so you might as well bring a map.

**Part One:**  
**Make Working From Home**  
**Work for You**

# Chapter 1

## How to Make Working from Home Work Better for You

It's important to start by stressing that there's no one right or wrong way to establish your work from home practices and environment. What works for some people may not work for others. Some people like utter silence, while others thrive in a buzzing atmosphere.

It's also worth noting that it can take some time to fall into a groove with working from home. If it feels unnatural or awkward at first, don't be surprised - this is the stage where many prematurely decide working from home isn't for them.

Small changes can make a significant difference in the quality of your experience though, and any effort you put toward improving that experience is well spent.

### ***A special note to employers:***

It's equally important for employers to grant employees who are new to remote work a little extra slack as they learn the ropes. As you embark together on this WFH journey, please remember to show some extra patience for technical difficulties, kids or pets in the background, and a little general disarray at first.

It will get better.

With that in mind, we're going to cover a broad range of strategies, tips, and techniques for getting your best work done at home.

## *Your WFH Habitat*

There are a lot of things you can do to improve your Work From Home environment, from furniture to peripherals and decorations. At first glance, it may seem as though the design and outfitting of your habitat is more about creature comfort, but your habitat does affect your work output - both its quality and its quantity.

So what does it take to put together a WFH habitat conducive to success?

## **Tools of the Trade**

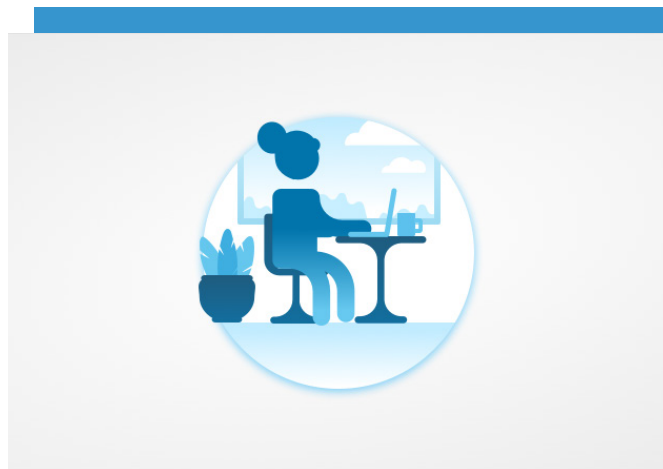
Any tasks you'd traditionally do in the context of "work" should be possible to do from your home office without any undue hardship.

That means your office or hardware setup at home should be similar (ideally, equal) to the sort of setup you'd have in any other dedicated office setting. For some, that might mean external monitors, a headset, a standing desk, a prized fidget spinner, or anything else you'd normally expect to have at your desk.

Creating a home office that reflects your dedicated office helps to avoid the context switch you experience when moving from one physical location to another.

You have the same screen, same keyboard, same mouse pad, same notebook -- all the things that make getting your work done easier and more pleasant. If you can keep these things arranged in the same order, all the better.

If your WFH workspace is poorly established in comparison to a dedicated office, you're going to be fighting an uphill battle just to meet your normal benchmark of productivity.



## **Wi-fi and Internet Connection**

**Internet connection speed and reliability are crucial to a good work-from-home experience. WFH means you'll likely be spending a good amount of time using SaaS tools and attending video calls -- both of which require a good amount of internet bandwidth.**

There are few things more frustrating than audio cutting out sporadically and having to repeat yourself again and again, or worse, video calls dropping entirely.

Getting your wi-fi nicely dialed in and performing at its best can be a bit of a journey, but it's worth the effort to have a stable, reliable internet connection.

## **Comfort and ergonomics**

A good number of first-time or short-term WFH'ers will put up with a less than ideal setup, thinking that they can "tough it out" until they're back in the office.

That's a mistake.

If your WFH setting is physically uncomfortable, it's going to be difficult to get any work done, let alone your best work. That's when frustration sets in, and you decide working from home doesn't work for you. Even worse, "toughing it out" with poor ergonomics can lead to a host of repetitive stress injuries (RSIs).

Instead, invest in making your space healthy, inviting, and comfortable.

Make sure you have a suitable desk, and if you plan to sit for extended periods, a quality chair that won't leave your body strained after an hour.

If you find yourself squinting in a dark and chilly room, get a lamp and a cozy blanket. If you live in a place that gets hot and humid in the summer, get an air conditioner, or at least a box of popsicles.

The more comfortable you are in your WFH habitat, the easier it will be to focus on the work at hand.

# Design

While we're on the topic of comfort, it's important to look after your aesthetic comfort as well, otherwise you'll feel more trapped than inspired by your WFH office.

Make sure you're not sitting in a spartan, white-walled room unless that's really what you like. The key here is to ride the fine line between visual interest and distraction. Get some textured surfaces going and a pop or two of your favorite color.

# Tidy up

Unless you thrive in chaos (some of us do), make sure your WFH environment is clean and neat before you start your workday. It's easy to see something out of place, a dusty floor, or last night's teacup sitting out and convince yourself that fixing it is important enough to drag you away from your work.

# Pets and plants



Multiple studies have shown the benefits of pets in the workplace. Some folks find pets distracting, and they absolutely can be, but it depends on whether or not you find that beneficial.

Pets have an uncanny ability to know when you need a little break.

A 5-minute laser dot scramble with your cat or a 15-minute dog walk can be an

exceptional tool for smashing through a nasty creative block -- much better than staring at the wall or taking a third or fourth trip to the snack machine, anyway.

Plants are another thing to consider adding to your environment, not just because they look nice, but because they've proven to enhance productivity and job satisfaction.

# Shifting your perspective

It can take a while to truly adapt to a WFH environment. Remember, this is your home - the same place you binge Netflix and clip your toenails.

## Separation

To the extent that it's possible, make sure you're establishing a separation between "work" and "home." This is particularly helpful for folks who spend their time split between working from an office and from home.

It's easy to work up a pretty strong case of cabin fever if you spend all day working from home.

## Physical Separation

If possible, try to do your work in a different place than you spend your leisure time. For example, trying to be productive in your bedroom can make it difficult to associate that place wholly with sleep or work.

## Mental Separation

It's already quite easy to get caught up thinking about (or doing) work during off hours, and that's particularly true for those of us that work from home.

## Rituals

Rituals can make it easier to establish a healthy separation between work and home, even if those two things coexist in the same physical space.

For example: Taking a shower and dressing as though you're going to work in public every morning can have a measurable impact on your mood, and even your output. It's a cue for your brain that says "it's not leisure time anymore, it's time to make things happen!"

A remote colleague of mine has a ritual of closing his computer, then tidying up his desk, a visual and tactile signal that he's signed off for the day.



# Chapter 2

## Personal Productivity Tips

### **Building helpful habits**

Without anyone to check in or hold you accountable in a physical workspace, it's up to you to embrace accountability and build productive habits.

When building positive productivity habits, there are a few categories of things you can do to make the process much easier on yourself. James Clear has an excellent in-depth section that expands on this topic in his book *Atomic Habits*.

#### **Reinforce helpful actions by making them easier.**

Examples of this could be things like laying tomorrow's outfit out the night before so you don't have to stare bleary-eyed at your wardrobe while you're half asleep in the morning.

#### **Make unhelpful actions inconvenient to perform.**

An example of this might be leaving your phone in a different room from your office (if you struggle with screen time distractions).

#### **Make helpful actions rewarding.**

An example of this might be giving some of the time you've saved through productivity back to yourself as free time.

## **Do Not Disturb (DND)**

Notifications, by design, are difficult to ignore. It costs willpower to ignore them -- and wouldn't you rather save that precious resource for things you care more about? Luckily most operating systems, and even communication tools like Slack and Microsoft Teams have a DND feature. This can help you avoid answering notifications while spending less willpower.

## **Pomodoro units**

Pomodoro units can be a great tool for productivity. In essence, you recognize that it's nearly impossible to stay hyperfocused for several hours at a time. Instead, you break your productive time into either 1 hour or half hour increments, followed by breaks that last one fifth the amount of focus time.

### **For example:**

50 minutes of focus, 10 minutes of break or 30 minutes of focus, 5 minutes of break.

There are apps dedicated to timing these productivity blocks for you, or you can use a mechanical timer - the key is actually taking that break when the timer goes off. You might be surprised how much more focus you gain by knowing the time to focus is limited.

## **Goal setting**

This may sound trivially simple, but having stated goals for each day can make a meaningful impact on what you get done. Whether you write them out on paper or use an app to track them, stating those primary, secondary, and tertiary goals for the day helps cement their importance and relative priority in your mind.

## **Schedule flexibility**

Some (but definitely not all) folks prefer to ride the waves of their productivity, putting in focus work at odd hours. This is definitely what you might call an "advanced move" in the world of WFH because it can make collaboration more complicated, but it can and does work well for the right person and situation.

# Chapter 3

## Collaboration and Team Productivity

### Sharing your status

Whether you use Slack, Microsoft Teams, Google Hangouts, or signal flags to communicate, sharing your status becomes even more important when you're working from home.

Sharing your status communicates important context to your colleagues as to what you're up to, and in some cases, why you haven't responded yet.

### Collaborating across time zones

Adding multiple time zones does complicate collaboration, but with some planning and a few key tools, you can keep a solid pace of productivity.

### Asynchronous standups and check-ins

There are a number of great tools available to help distributed teams stay connected and in stride. From Github to Creative Cloud, Trello, Asana and JIRA, each has its own benefits and uses, and that's just to name a few.

Standups and check-ins, while they're normally completed face-to-face, can also be completed asynchronously, though it's still valuable to have everyone together occasionally for some high-fidelity communication, whether that's in person or on video.

Meeting in person might mean some members of the team calling in early or late in their day, so it can be good to rotate which timezone the standup is held in occasionally.

# Chapter 4

## Culture and Camaraderie

Taking time to reinforce organizational culture and the bonds of camaraderie you share with your team is always important - but in the context of working from home, that effort is especially crucial.

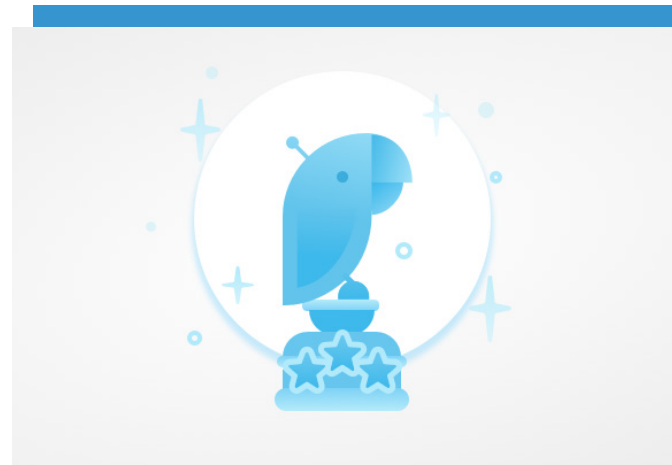
It's easy for remote employees to feel left out of the group, but community is not a one-way street. Working from home means accepting a bit more cultural and interpersonal overhead to compensate for the lack of daily interaction that happens as a result of sharing a physical space with others.

Aristotle posited that “distance does not break a friendship but impedes its exercise.”

We have an advantage in modern communication tools like Slack, Microsoft Teams, Google Hangouts Chat and Zoom that people in Aristotle's time didn't have.

While long distances may historically have made building strong, lasting relationships a challenge, that impedance is much smaller today, so take advantage of it.

Try to fit in a few lines of chat with each of your closest colleagues daily. It doesn't have to be related to any project you're working on together. Even taking a moment to say hello or share an interesting article or tidbit helps to strengthen the camaraderie you've built with others on your team and bridge that gap of physical distance.



## **Recognize great work**

Make sure to call out and celebrate the contributions your colleagues make on a regular basis. Doing this not only feels good, it builds camaraderie and helps everyone internalize the value in their work.

## **Cut yourself and your colleagues some slack**

It may seem difficult or awkward at first. You may feel as though you're less productive, but looking back on the day or week, you'll likely find that you were just as productive, if not more so.

**Part Two:**  
**How to Lead a Successful  
Remote Team**

# Chapter 5

## Navigating those first few crucial weeks

If you and your team are new to full-time remote work, the first few weeks can be particularly challenging. That's why it's so important to have as many factors in your favor as possible, from hardware to plans, tools, and protocols.

### **Lead with patience, empathy, and compassion**

There is nothing more important right now than granting your team every last ounce of patience and empathy you can spare. They'll need it now more than ever. Like executive coach Suzan Bond explains in her Fast Company article:

“No amount of technological wizardry or personal autonomy negates the fact—which has long been true for office-bound workers as well—that job satisfaction is still closely tied to having an effective, emotionally intelligent boss.”

### **Anticipate, accept, and mitigate WFH obstacles**

Shifting from working in a co-located office to a WFH environment isn't always simple even in the best of times, and the circumstances in which many of your teammates transitioned to working from home probably weren't ideal.

Like many others across the globe right now, they're likely dealing with myriad issues from childcare snafus to food scarcity, financial strain, and either mild or severe restrictions on movement and daily activities.

In addition to those distractions, there's a physical element to this issue. Not everyone has a home environment conducive to work, whether they're in a small apartment, or living with roommates who are also suddenly working from a crowded home -- and that's just a few examples.

## **Exercise patience and give the benefit of the doubt**

Assume your team is doing their utmost to cobble together a WFH setup as quickly as they can, but it might be a few days (or weeks) before they truly find their groove.

### **Embrace the chaos together as a shared experience**

This doesn't mean you shouldn't expect good work from yourself and your team during this period -- it just might take a bit more time and effort than usual while everyone adjusts. As much as we'd like to expect "business-as-usual" levels of productivity during this transitional period, most of us simply aren't conducting

business as usual, and that will be reflected here.

Instead, expect a little mayhem now and then, provide support wherever you're able to, and if you can, try to embrace the chaos together as a shared experience.

## **Maintaining team morale and engagement**

Even in the best of times, measuring, maintaining, and improving employee morale can have a meaningful bottom line impact. In times of crisis, this is doubly true.

### **Learn to recognize signs of low morale early on**

Common signs to be aware of are things like reduced work output, increased absenteeism, and reduced initiative. But these things are all relative and based on a benchmark of normality.

It can be difficult to discern whether a teammate is exhibiting some of these signs because they're adjusting to remote work, or for other reasons. With that in mind, it's useful to track morale continuously over time so you have a sense of whether this is a new development, or something that has been brewing for months.



# Chapter 6

## Tips for boosting morale on a remote team

Even if you don't recognize signs of morale decreasing, it's valuable to put effort toward maintaining or improving it. Have you ever heard of a team suffering because morale was just too strong?

### **Celebrate contributions**

Recognizing, rewarding, and celebrating great work is one of the most simple, cost-effective, and direct ways to boost morale. The keys to giving highly effective recognition are:

**Frequency:** Recognition is not a limited resource and it costs nothing to give, so give it often.

**Timeliness:** Give recognition in the moment, when it has the greatest potential for impact.

**Visibility:** Give recognition in a venue where others can gain visibility into the valuable contributions their colleagues make day-to-day.

**Specificity/Authenticity:** You have to mean it. Don't just say "You've done a great job this week." Call out what made that work valuable, and why.

**Inclusivity:** Recognition should reach and originate from everyone in the organization, from last week's new hire to the CEO.

**Value Alignment:** Give recognition in a way that highlights and reinforces the connection between the work you're praising, and your organizational values.)

## Support and encourage “frivolous” social interaction

Why encourage people to waste their time posting GIFs and talking about their day? Because those activities are not a waste of time. As Arlene Hirsch explains in her article for the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM):

“According to VDI data, the greater the virtual distance, the higher the negative impact on the team in terms of innovation effectiveness, trust, work satisfaction, role and goal clarity, and project success.

Team leaders can reduce virtual distance by creating an environment where team members feel emotionally and psychologically connected to one another and to the business...An open channel for communication in a technology platform gives remote team members a “meeting place” where they can go to socialize.”



Activities like sharing pet photos, dinner recipes, jokes, and anecdotes help teams to build camaraderie around a shared positive experience. For example, one of our dedicated social channels, #pawllly, is a surefire cure for even the worst case of the blues.

In co-located offices, random social interactions happen as a result of sharing a physical space. Remote teams don't have any traditional areas that encourage chance encounters, or “collisions,” as they're referred to in Ben Waber, Jennifer Magnolfi, and Greg Lindsay's Harvard Business Review article “Workspaces That Move People.”

While you may not be able to build collisions into a physical space for your WFH team, it's easy to bring them into our collective digital domain.

## **Get creative**

We're always looking for more ways to connect as a distributed team on a regular basis. Sometimes that means using tools in an off-label format. Here are a couple examples of things we've tried lately:

### **Remote pizza party**

We recently celebrated the release of AgilePolly for Microsoft Teams. Since we've gone entirely remote over the past couple weeks, we decided to hold a remote pizza party. Every team member got to order a pizza of their choice (or buy ingredients and make a pizza of their choice).

We shared our creations in Slack, then everyone hopped into a Zoom chat to share in the celebration. Periodically, we'd separate into random break-out Zoom chats, then everyone would congregate in the full-team chat again.

This was a really fun experience for everyone. It gave us a venue to celebrate some truly amazing work on a project that touched every arm of our organization.

### **Zoom coffee break-outs**

After our most recent remote all-hands meeting, we've added some extra time for everyone who wants to have a "Coffee break" together. Everyone took part, because it was a welcome chance to chat and see everyone's faces again.

### **Wormholes**

Keeping a persistent two (or multi) way videochat running across different offices can help to bridge physical distance between those offices (so long as everyone is ok with it). If you want to talk to someone in a different office, you can simply walk up to the wormhole and start talking, just like you might in a colocated office.

# Chapter 7

## Communicating Effectively

When everything's turned upside down, it's immensely helpful to have protocols in place that people can trust in. Even something as simple as a steady communication cadence can provide support and sense of normalcy in an otherwise bewildering situation.

### **Communication frequency**

You won't be bumping into each other in the office, so it's crucial to have a process established for regular face-to-face (or screen-to-screen) communication.

Dave Lewis, VP of Marketing at LINQ, and a 12-year veteran of distributed team leadership shares some of his strategy here:

“I have had remote teams as large as 10 and as small as 4. For me, I have found that I need both a weekly team meeting and a weekly one-on-one.

Slack has been great for those needed conversations you'd usually get by stopping by another employee's office or cubicle. You can share your work, quickly get answers to those simple questions and even better you can create specific channels in which to communicate with specific groups so you can share and discuss projects with multiple people at the same time.”

### **Weekly Team Meetings**

“In our team meeting, my goal is to ensure that the entire team is on the same page with everyone's individual projects. I will make sure that everyone is clear about who is working on what, and when things are due.

I like to give each team member five to seven minutes to provide an update on their projects and to remind other team members about any deliverables owed.

I use Google Docs to not only store our work in an organized way, but my team is able to share and comment on projects.”

### **One-on-One Meetings**

“In our weekly one-on-one, I will go into the specifics about every project and gain agreement on priorities and due dates. For these meetings I have found that video conferencing is unquestionably the best method.

I feel that seeing your team helps you feel more connected. And with most video conferencing technology you have the ability to share your work. So now my team and I can share our work, timelines, priority lists, and more during our weekly meetings.

There’s no better way to keep your remote teams connected and engaged than simply meeting at the same time on the same day every week. Everyone has a voice, thus everyone feels like they are part of the team.”

## **Tips for holding more effective team and one-on-one meetings**

It is valuable to meet face-to-face to discuss projects and collaborate, but you can help improve the efficiency of those discussions by keeping a consistent dialogue going asynchronously with your team in the meantime.

### **Delegating Ownership**

Delegating ownership is one of the core skills any good leader must have, but it’s especially important for WFH teams. When people aren’t encountering one another in the office, learning about what each other is working on, it’s easy for things to get lost in the mix.

As LINQ's Dave Lewis shared:

“It's imperative that each project has one owner even if several team members are involved. One person who is ultimately responsible for delivering that project on budget and on time.

Too often if a single owner is not established, assigned work and deliverables become unclear and productivity declines because no one truly owns it.

I have found this especially true with distributed teams. Additionally, owning a project whether a new employee or a tenured one, fosters leadership, builds teamwork, and instills accountability.”

# Chapter 8

## Outfitting your team and investing in WFH success

A distributed work environment can lead to some meaningful savings in real estate, snacks, and a litany of other costs associated with a co-located office.

While a remote team may indeed provide cost savings, your remote work program is one of the last places to look when cutting costs. Instead, consider re-investing some of the resources saved by not co-locating into a stellar WFH setup.

### **Hardware**

Something as small as an extra monitor or a mouse and keyboard can mean the difference between a comfortable, productive setup, and one where you're just "making do."

### **Connectivity**

In addition to hardware, some companies provide a stipend for internet and phone service, so they know their employees always have a solid connection.

### **Software**

Having good software can mean the difference between an excellent WFH experience, and a non-starter. Even with the best software, remote teams still face some unique challenges, so please, try not to add to those challenges by skimping on your software budget.

Find out what your team needs to be effective as a distributed force, and do your best to make it happen. With that, let's review some of the technology you can use to build an outstanding experience for your remote team.

# Chapter 9

## Leveraging technology

Even just a few years ago, managing a remote team posed a greater challenge because there were less purpose-built tools available to serve this need; however, there are hundreds today -- each with its own strengths.

### **Communication/collaboration**

The communication/collaboration tool you choose is one of the most crucial decisions you have to make as a WFH team leader. Luckily, there are a few excellent options, depending on what ecosystem you're already working in.

**Slack** brought a whole new way of collaboration to teams across the world. It's a place for employees to chat, collaborate, share documents, and more. In addition to these features, Slack's app directory makes it possible for you to extend its native toolset by bringing third-party tools directly into your workspace. Take a look to see which of your favorite software tools have a Slack app, and of course, check out Polly while you're there! We've built native Slack experiences geared toward keeping remote teams together and on the same page.

**Microsoft Teams** is another priceless communication tool -- one which you and your teammates may already have a license for if you're Office365 users. Teams also has a full-featured video chat feature and a library of third-party functionality to unlock within App Source. If you need a tool for gathering continuous insights on your people-driven processes, check out Polly. If you need a tool geared toward running efficient check-ins and standups in Teams, check out AgilePolly.

**Zoom** is the bellwether for video communication. Even if you have video calling capabilities included as part of another software, it may still be worth giving Zoom a try.



## **Document Sharing**

There are several options for document storing and sharing available, with Google Drive and Microsoft's Sharepoint being some of the most popular options; however, there are also several other more specialized document sharing systems, like Adobe's Creative Cloud.

## **Project Management**

Trello and Asana are both great tools for managing projects as a remote team.

GitHub and JIRA make it easy for software teams of any size to manage massive complexity with relative ease.

## **Your WFH tech stack**

While all of these tools are immensely helpful on their own, that's just the beginning. The true benefits are unleashed when you begin to connect these tools and processes together.

### **Walking**

For example, you can connect Slack with a tool like Google Calendar in order to set your status automatically when there's a meeting booked on your calendar. That way, your remote teammates will know you're busy, even if they can't see a meeting happening in your office.

### **Running**

You could take this a step further by connecting something like JIRA Service Desk to Slack, immediately bringing critical data directly to your team in the context of their work.

### **Flying**

You could take this even further by connecting JIRA Service Desk with Slack and Polly in order to automatically survey the service ticket's participants for qualitative information about the resolution.

# Chapter 10

## Coordinating across time zones

There are some cases where you'll be collaborating with colleagues across the country, or even across the ocean. That's not a problem at all in itself but if you don't have a communication plan, it can get complicated quickly.

### Avoiding the 48 hour email

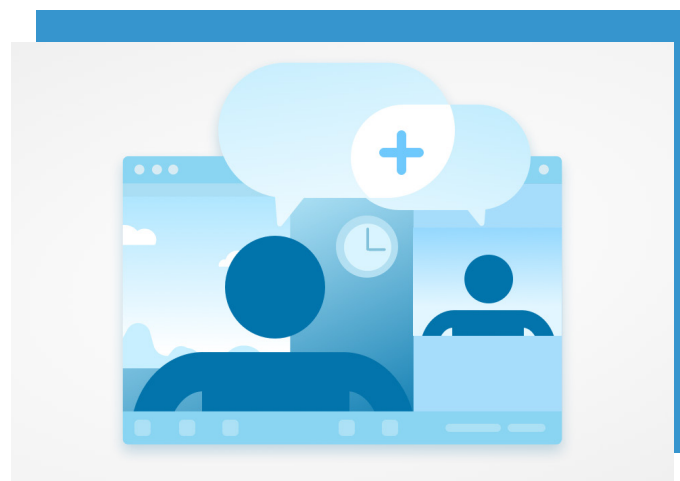
Many of us are familiar with the 48 hour email: you send a message about a project to a colleague overseas, but at that time, they're fast asleep. They open and respond to it first thing in (their) morning, but by the time you receive their response, you've been asleep for hours. You wake up, see their response, realize you need a change made, and respond again -- but of course, they're asleep.

### Communication cadences

Keeping your communication flowing naturally across timezones might seem difficult, but with a little bit of planning, it's easily achievable.

At Polly, we have esteemed colleagues across the United States, and some in Pakistan, which is 12 time zones ahead of our HQ in Seattle.

To keep things in sync, we meet at a regular cadence at a time that isn't perfect for anyone, but is perfectly acceptable for everyone.



The regular cadence by which we meet makes this arrangement work. If we expected to have these conversations ad-hoc, it could easily spiral out of control. Instead, we're all aware of the upcoming meeting.

We plan for our weekly meeting by working asynchronously on the objectives and initiatives we individually own, then bring relevant thoughts, questions, blockers, and action items to the table while we're all looking one another in the face.

Our team also uses collaboration tools like JIRA, Slack, Microsoft Teams, GSuite, and Polly's own agile apps to keep track of project progress asynchronously so that when we do meet, we don't need to spend much time catching up on where everyone is at.

# Chapter 11

## Building and extending trust

Trust is essential in any relationship, and the trust between an employee and leadership has an outsized influence on engagement, productivity, and retention. While this trust is of paramount importance to build even in a co-located office setting, it's even more crucial for remote teams.

You can't survive long-term as a team without it -- especially as a remote team.

Douglas McGregor posited a theory in which there were two ends of a management spectrum: Theory X (authoritative) and Theory Y (participative).

If you're interested in a more detailed look at McGregor's management theory, you can find it [here](#), but to briefly summarize:

**Theory X managers** believe that employees are innately unmotivated, and require their influence (through rewards, coercion, or punishment) in order to be productive.

**Theory Y managers** believe employees enjoy taking ownership of their work, and find it fulfilling. These managers tend to cultivate a more collaborative and trust-based relationship with employees.

Theory Y managers (in general) are much better suited to leading remote teams, simply because their style distributes accountability and ownership, while a theory X manager leans on a command-and-control leadership style.

Just like any spectrum, there are few if any managers who sit exclusively on one side or the other; however, you may find it useful to understand where your own management style fits within that spectrum.

## Listen to your team

During uncertain times and times of crisis, it's important to keep open channels of communication with your team.

In good times, and in times of turmoil, employee safety is priority number one. As Obaid Khawaja, Senior Product Manager at Polly recounts:

“Back in 2012-2014, there were a lot of political protests, and my startup's office was at the heart of all the action. We made some quick judgement calls to enable our employees to work from home effectively.

We had some incredibly brave and committed folks who put their lives at risk to make it to work. I only realized how tough it was for them to make it to work after they told me their stories.

I learned an important lesson that employee safety and health comes first, work is secondary. So we had that chat with them to let them know what the boundaries between safety and work were and that safety always comes first. It's not even something we need to discuss.”

Listening to your team is one of the most important things you can do as a leader. It's imperative that you have a channel for them to have their voice heard.

Doing this isn't just in service to the team, it's in service to your entire organization. Keeping that channel open could mean the difference between missing an important piece of information and capitalizing on it.

Providing a channel might not always be enough though - you can help prime that information flow by asking proactively on a regular basis about how things are going, and what could be improved.

## Flexibility is key

Remote work may also be an opportunity for an employee to flex into a different, yet crucial role they wouldn't otherwise have taken part in.

“We had our scrum master/tech lead step up his efforts in terms of planning and assigning tasks to the team,” Khawaja shared. “He’d run through a pretty efficient remote daily standup, code reviews and weekly demo regimen. This helped the team make progress on a day to day level.”

## Moving forward

Leading a team is probably not the easiest thing you’ll do in your life, but it can be incredibly rewarding. Leading a remote team adds another layer of complexity; however, there are enough tools and guidance available to make it not only possible, but even preferable in some cases.

The key is to keep working toward a better WFH experience. No matter how good your team’s experience is, it can always improve. Keep learning, and keep growing as a team.

We hope you found this guide useful as you and your team continue your WFH journey. If you need 1:1 help building a better remote experience for your team, we’d love to meet you and learn more about your challenges.

-- Your friends at

