

# How To Work Remotely, Without Feeling Alone.

**What should you do if you're suddenly working from home, with no warning?**

Many workers have been “thrown into the pool” so to speak, of home workers, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and they are lost, not sure how all this works, and how to stay productive with all the new distractions.



The office can be a fun place. We usually make friends, we have a feeling of community, purpose, mission—it can be hard to go from an office environment to working from home, with all of the distractions.

So, how do you maintain productivity, relationships, build morale, and prevent loneliness and isolation?

At HBBTech, we have been a distributed office for nearly two years, and it took us a while figure everything out. Here are some recommendations we have discovered, and some web researched I have done, to help you quickly transition to a work from home (WFH) position.

First, allow yourself 15 to 30 minutes every day to contact with coworkers, to catch up and find out how they are doing. This will help maintain the relationships you have developed at the office, keep your morale up, and will help you empathize with what's happening in their lives.

The important thing is that you view that social time as a core part of work. When working remotely, social connections become extremely important. The more time you

can spend having conversation with each other, the easier it is when you have to get on a video call and have to start coordinating work.

You will also be more productive because you aren't only focusing on work. As human beings, we need to be connected to other human beings to feel complete.

The easiest way to stay connected with your coworkers and friends is with a free version of the [Zoom](#) video conferencing tool. If you find you need to host longer meetings than 40 minutes and with more than 3 attendees, the next level of Zoom only costs \$14.99 per month. If you pay by the year it's only \$150 (2 months free)

Supervisors should spend 5 to 10 minutes every day (minimum) with each of their employees and half of the time should be social. This helps the person you're talking to still feel like they are a part of the business, and your team.

I would highly recommend at least 1-2 time per week; you hold a [Zoom](#) video conference and require every member of the team to attend these meetings (and to turn on their web camera) to set goals and let each employee report their status. This helps keep your team member's productivity up and builds the team mentality, even with remote workers.

## Embrace social time

[Sarah Park](#), president of [MeetEdgar](#), suggests trying to mimic your office culture in the new remote environment.

If your culture is based on water cooler conversations, then set up [Slack channels](#). That allows your people to get in a Slack room and do some sort of social activity?



Sarah also suggests figuring out what it is that your employees miss the most about the office culture. Is it the coffee breaks or eating lunch together? Whatever it is they like most about working in the office, try to make the virtual version of it happen from home.

At Zapier, they have over a hundred channels devoted just to socializing. All of these off-topic channels are prefixed with #fun-: there's #fun-gardening, #fun-parenting,

#fun-home-ownership. People can congregate around these shared interests, show off pictures of their new puppy, or show a more personal side of themselves. The time people spend in these channels isn't seen as slacking off—it's valuable team-building, as long as it doesn't consume too much of their time.

Here's an interesting idea from Zapier; if productivity is slowing down, do what Zapier did. One of their employees suggested "let's have a [virtual] dance party." Everyone picked a song on Spotify, recorded themselves doing a dance, then put the gif in Slack. They created a montage of everyone dancing - people pulled their kids into it, pulled their dogs into it. This kind of thing helps people feel engaged and prevents that loneliness and isolation that everyone worries about with remote workers.

## Transparency is critical!

One of the biggest hurdles for team leaders and team members is how to build and demonstrate accountability. Managers want to be sure their team members are getting things done, and team members want to prove to their managers that they're being productive.



Part of that transparency, says [Natalie Nagele](#), co-founder of [Wildbit](#), involves setting clear goals and sharing them. That leads to less confusion about what team members should be working on and how often they should be communicating, with their leader and each other. It's an opportunity to break things down into smaller deliverables so that everyone knows what's expected of them

Sarah agrees. "The vast majority of people want to do a good job. But if they don't know what you're expecting their day to be, they'll have a hard time meeting those expectations." "Managers need to state the absolute obvious, making everything as clear as possible...Your team needs to know that you're not going to change the goalposts on them."

At Zapier, they have all conversations in public channels. It mimics the open-office feel and allows everyone to search the chat logs if they need to find something that happened when they weren't around.

## Brainstorm differently

How do you brainstorm remotely?

Kieran's team uses [Miro](#), but there are all kinds of [online whiteboards](#) that offer templates and let you drag-and-drop, add commentary, and collaborate in real time. At Zapier, they sometimes use Google Docs for the same purpose, Microsoft Office 365 is another tool you can use, brainstorming doesn't require a sophisticated tool.



## Don't expect normalcy

There's a book called [High Output Management](#) by the chairman and CEO of Intel, Andrew Grove. In it, he talks about the concept of "task relevant maturity." The idea is that you can have a high performer who excels in one area and not in another—and that's okay.



Right now, your environment has shifted. No one is prepared for the sudden shift to remote work, which means everyone's task relevant maturity is really low. Managers can't expect their team members to be as high functioning as they usually are, and team members can't expect their managers to know how to manage them remotely.

So, as you start shifting to remote work, as Natalie suggested, maybe have regular checkpoints, more than you normally would. Managers can give their team a little more direction than usual to help them flex their remote work skills and get the guidance they want and need in an uncertain, new scenario. Then, as you build up more of a routine, you'll see task relevant maturity going up.

Another thing that won't be normal is people's working hours—and that's okay. From Natalie: "What we learn on teams that have been remote for a long time: eventually

we don't care how long your butt is in your seat. You make a promise to each other, and if you deliver on that promise, that's what matters."

## Be flexible

Even if you do have a plan for normal remote working, things are a little different right now: daycares are closed, schools are closed, resources feel scarce, and emotions are running high.



Everyone suggested maximum flexibility. Let people switch the times or days that they work. Be understanding if folks must suddenly leave in the middle of a meeting. But most importantly: prioritize.

We are all stretched thin right now, much more than usual. It's up to business leaders to figure out what needs to get done, and make sure everyone keeps their eyes on the prize: "If there's a single parent whose kid's school is canceled, maybe someone else, whose work isn't quite as urgent, can jump in for them."

What it comes down to is understanding that things are outside of the normal routine right now for everyone.

Even if you don't have the kids, or a spouse, or the menagerie of pets running around the house, it's a really noisy time out there right now. We have to allow space for people to be emotionally dealing with stuff, whether it's happening in their own house or not. With all the overwhelm—some people find solace in finding productive work and getting things done, and some people don't.

There are so many other things in our world that are taking our attention and time. It's different from a normal remote situation, and we're all figuring this out together. The good thing is, we tend to be resilient in times like this. We're going to see a lot of creative solutions. And if you're willing to learn as you go - and be patient during the adjustment period - you might find that remote work, works for you.

Many people have been predicting a move to a more and more distributed workforce. COVID 19 has just exponentially accelerated the process.

As your employees move away from your “office” PLEASE keep in mind the security risks that may occur as a result of so many endpoints (personal computers) that are no longer protected by your business.

During the global coronavirus ([COVID-19](#)) pandemic, hackers are taking advantage of the situation and have now automated their coronavirus-related scams.

According to multiple reports, cybercriminals are creating and publishing [thousands of coronavirus-related websites](#) on a daily basis.

Many of these sites are hosting phishing attacks, distribute malware-laced files, or are used to commit financial fraud or for tricking users into paying for fake COVID-19 cures, supplements, or vaccines.

Please make your remote workers aware of these threats!

If your remote workers are logging into your business network, you are now facing a substantially greater risk due to a much larger attack surface.

## **HBBTech is here to help!**

Who is HBBTech? We are a small office/home office technology support team with over 75 combined years in the IT industry. We provide a full range of tech services from remote repairs and support to cyber security, managed computer and server services, backup solutions, VoIP internet phone services and more.

HBBTech is committed to assisting small offices and home offices make the move to distributed workers as smoothly as possible. We will provide planning and implementation documentation and IT support whenever possible to help you successfully navigate this new business culture. Check out our website resources [HERE](#)

Call us today at **(636) 542-8653** if you have any questions.