



zartis GUIDES

OUT OF OFFICE

A no worries guide to managing remote tech workers

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You wanted the best candidates so you looked in all the best places. Now you're managing a team of tech talent that isn't even in the same time zone as you, never mind the same building. Managed properly, remote work can be a win-win situation.

But there's more to success than the technology and tools that make remote work possible – the human side of managing people you can't see is possibly the single most important factor in getting things right. These tips will make sure you get there.



Remote Control

If there's one thing you really, genuinely have to do to make remote work succeed, it's let go. If you're an "over-the-shoulder"-style manager, chances are your team members hate you already. If you're determined to exercise the same kind of control over remote workers, you're probably not cut out for doing this at all.

Trust is a valuable thing in any organization; when it comes to remote worker management, it's the secret sauce. And the key ingredient for that is your ability to measure what matters. In the unlikely event that your definition of productivity and effectiveness is a backside on a chair for a set number of hours every day, you're good to go, skip to the next section.

This requires you to understand exactly what success in your new hire's role looks like. If you don't know how to measure that, here's a tip: what do you expect from your on-site workers in the same roles? What are their goals? How can they demonstrate to you that they're achieving them? Work it out.

A woman with blonde hair, wearing a white business suit, is sitting at a desk in an office. She is looking down at a laptop screen with a thoughtful expression, her hand resting on her chin. The background is a blurred office environment with shelves and papers. The entire image has a teal color overlay.

95% of employers say telecommuting has a high impact on employee retention.

46% say it has reduced attrition.

globalworkplaceanalytics.com

Don't get hung up about the fact that you can't see your remote employees all the time. Focus on the deliverables and, unless there are genuine operational reasons that require them to be physically at the keyboard during specified hours, try not to worry about exactly which eight hours of the day they're working. If they're in a different time zone, it makes sense to agree that they're available at times where there's overlap in both your days.

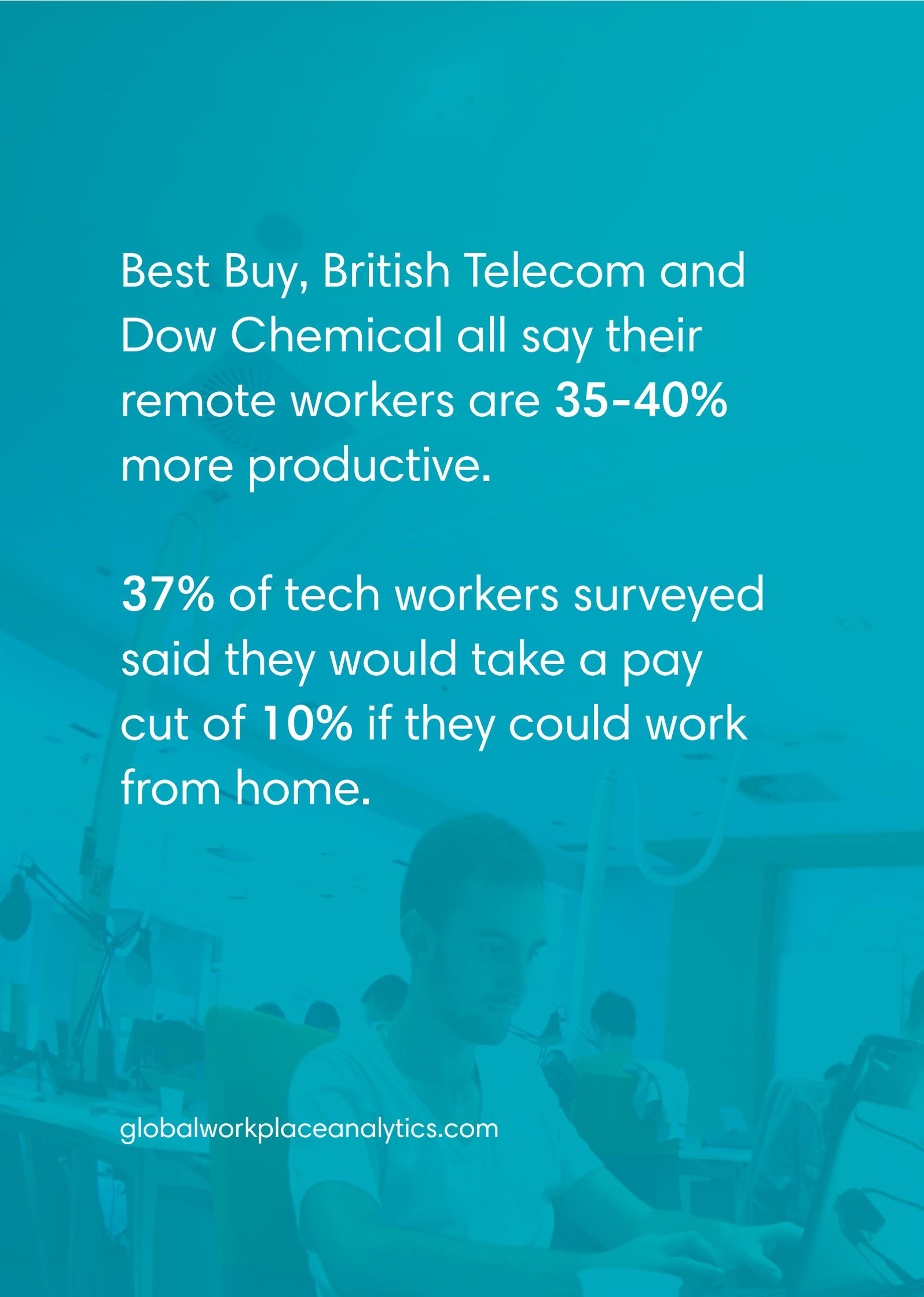
Otherwise, start from a position of trust – allow some freedom for remote workers to decide how they will meet your goals. With a little flexibility, you might even learn something new or develop a better process out of it.

Remember: just because you can't physically see them on-demand, remote workers are no different from their on-site counterparts – a they don't have some special place to hide if the fact that they're not delivering.

Finally... abusing technology to covertly monitor your staff will not only get you into trouble from a HR perspective, but when they find out – and find out they will, they're tech staff, remember – they'll respond with what you deserve and leave.

Rule #1

Never confuse presence with productivity. Ever.



Best Buy, British Telecom and Dow Chemical all say their remote workers are **35-40%** more productive.

37% of tech workers surveyed said they would take a pay cut of **10%** if they could work from home.

globalworkplaceanalytics.com



Create the culture

This ultimately goes back to the trust thing. If your organization is the kind where rigid adherence to “the way we’ve always done things” is the norm, that’s going to have to change if you want to succeed with remote workers. Fortunately, the cultural change that’s needed benefits everyone in the organization...

Managers are forced to re-think their way of doing things. More importantly, they’re forced to re-evaluate - or at least clarify - what constitutes good work, and how you measure it. A rather pleasant side effect of this process is a more open, supportive company culture. Playing politics, territorial defensiveness and hiding in The Meeting That Is Always On are the negative company culture attributes most likely to dissolve as your organization shifts towards the more trusting, communicative culture you’re going to need to do remote working properly.

Rule #2

Culture counts. If you can’t re-think how you define ‘good work’, remote work won’t work.



90% of skilled workers don't want to relocate. Many of them will remote work.

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Communicate, communicate, communicate

Good communication is as important as trust when it comes to successful remote worker management. A sense of community is so important to human wellbeing, it's one of Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

For remote workers particular, "Out of sight, out of mind" management is ultimately as destructive as its micro-management counterpart. Firstly, it's bad for your company: if you don't regularly communicate goals, expectations and feedback, you can't have any accountability.

Secondly, nothing yells "I don't care" quite as loudly as ignoring someone. Here's a thing: the type of remote employee who's happy with being ignored and unaccountable is not the person you want to hire. To make this work, you need:

Feedback

Good remote workers are self motivated, highly disciplined people. No one spends long hours working hard on a project so they can submit it into a black hole of silence, broken only by the sound of the next task arriving.

If you respond to all submitted work in the same way, regardless of quality, all you're telling your team member is that you place so little value on their contribution, you don't even notice how hard they're working. When you take

someone for granted that much, there's also a chance you're demanding too much of them They won't stay.

Hook up

In addition to regular team meetings, if you haven't arranged a recurring one-to-one call with each of your team members – whether it's once a week or once a month – you're a bad manager. If your team is too big to do this, delegate to respected, senior team members or functions within the group – and make sure everyone know you'll be listening to their feedback.

Don't know what to say to someone you've barely met? The world's easiest – and most useful – agenda: Ask them to tell you one thing they're enthusiastic about/that's going well, one thing that's bothering them and one thing that you can help them to do their job better.

Shout out

A close relation of feedback, this is particularly important for managers running combined on-site/remote teams. There's a tendency for managers to emphasise the work done by the people who have the chance to walk up to them every day and tell them how great they are. Take care to highlight the work done by remote teams when you're on calls or presentations. Be generous with acknowledgement and recognition – you'll not only keep them motivated, but ensure that on-site workers see their remote colleagues are pulling their weight.

Be accountable

The easiest answer to “how do I know how everyone's doing?” is “Team Updates”. Depending on the kind of work you're doing, this could be weekly/fortnightly/monthly. Everyone on the team posts what they shipped or completed during that time or updates on how their current project is going. Don't make this about list length – everyone knows sometimes one thing can take more effort and skill than 15 easy wins.

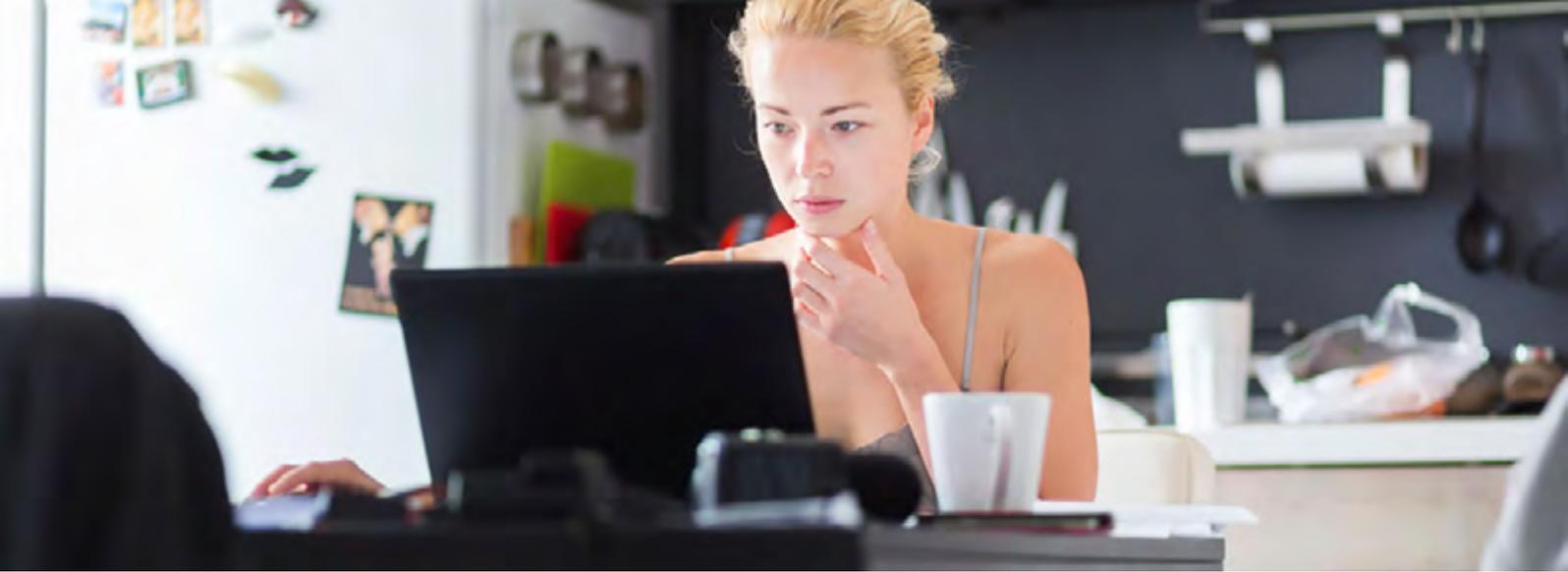
Be inclusive

Keep remote employees up-to-date with what's going on on-site. Make sure they're included on internal circulars or newsletters. Poorly managed combination teams can become rumour mills where employees who position themselves as 'in the know' or having the boss's ear can use that to manipulate remote co-workers, undermine them or otherwise work against them.

If you think morale is only important on-site, you're mistaken. And believe us, at some point, you WILL have employees who will try to exploit remote worker invisibility to sow dissent or take advantage. Your best defence against this is open communications.

Rule #3

Don't set and forget. Open communications, feedback and clarity on expectations are the foundation of a healthy, happy remote team.



Stop the clock

Tempting as it may be, don't expect permanent availability. This is particularly true of team members working from home. If you're not performing in the communications, trust and accountability departments, the natural fallout from that is a remote employee who will overwork to 'prove' they're performing. Don't encourage, facilitate or take advantage of that.

Sure, there are times when overtime or weekend work is a necessary evil. Well-balanced employees are high performing ones – and with remote workers, you can't see the physical warning signs of burnout.

Make sure you let them know that you know what constitutes a good day's work. Don't turn Skype/Slack/Lync into your answer to remote surveillance. Some managers can't resist the urge to ping remote workers at random, to see if they're at their desk or working late. Don't be a jerk.

Rule #4

Don't take advantage of remote worker flexibility. Just because you can't see them, it doesn't mean they can't burn out.



It's not for everyone

Some people actually want a strict 9-5.30 life and the security of knowing their boss is around to guide them in an office environment. That's fair enough. Obviously, these are not your candidates for the job.

But you're not just looking for people who've had enough of standing on a crowded train for an hour-and-a-half each way every day (and paying for the privilege). You're looking for people who have the self-discipline, self-motivation and self-reliance to deliver at a high level – even when no one is looking.

They're looking for a manager who recognizes this – and will let them get on with it, safe in the knowledge that results and productivity will quickly show whether or not they're keeping their end of the bargain.

And while the person you're looking for could well be someone who wants to be able to work in their pyjamas – you'll find out fast enough whether or not that's their only motivation in life.

#Rule 5

Hating the commute isn't enough to make a good remote or home worker. You need to find out what motivates people and whether they can work independently. Some people just can't.

THE LIST

7th heaven for effective remote team management

One

Do: Communicate regularly

Don't: Micro-manage or helicopter. If you don't trust them, they won't return the favour.

Two

Do: Be inclusive – particularly on mixed on-site/remote teams

Don't: Allow 'us and them' sentiment to build – ensure on-site colleagues understand that their remote counterparts are productive, contributing team members.

Three

Do: Give regular feedback on work.

Don't: Leave high performing, low maintenance remote workers to take care of themselves – acknowledge receipt of work and be sure to give feedback.

Four

Do: Embrace the time difference – remote workers are usually highly motivated people, don't fret about what they are/aren't doing when there's no overlap. If you're communicating effectively, you'll be fine.

Don't: Forget to rotate unsocial times for calls – spread the late night / early morning love evenly.

Five

Do: Set meaningful goals and expectations – clearly define priorities for your developers, ensure they know where their work fits into the overall project.

Don't: Drown teams in schedules, timetables, constant updates or goals they don't need.

Six

Do: Learn to walk before you run.

Don't: Panic if things don't run smoothly every time – people take time to settle and adjust and that can be more difficult for remote workers. By giving people clear goals and communicating regularly to make them feel welcome, you ensure there's always more smooth than rough.

Seven

Do: Be flexible. If you don't mind which eight hours of the day your remote workers put in, let them take advantage of this – it's one of the greatest bonus features of remote work.

Don't: Be a jerk. Unless it's genuinely important, don't intervene on personal time – and make sure remote employees aren't over-doing it. Don't create a culture of insecurity, where people are afraid to log off.

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