

Still Adjusting to Remote Working? I've Been Doing It for 20 Years.

The future of leadership in a stay-at-home economy.

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For the past ten years, I've been fortunate enough to work remotely and managed teams who do the same for over two decades. As a result I was prepared for 2020's exodus from the office. I made the important decision to live in Northern California, away from the major tech hubs of San Francisco and not once did I feel like my career path was stifled. In fact, I was promoted to my current role as CMO while working from home. Based on my experience, I've outlined three key things for other business leaders to consider as we approach this post-pandemic economy.

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Successfully running hybrid teams

While we're all remote now, the New Year is expected to usher in a more hybrid work setting. Many employees will remain at home, some in the office, and others will choose to do a bit of both. Either way, the office won't look like it did in February. My team has discovered new ways of working this year, especially as parents are dealing with challenges we never thought possible. Solutions involve offering flexible

hours or a part-time schedule for parents, while they assist their children who are distance learning. No matter the situation, being flexible and empathetic is critical.

Supporting the personal growth of your employees is also one way to ensure the longevity of your team. There's no reason that career-path exercises of the past can't remain intact while everyone is remote. Make sure you're still facilitating career development discussions on a regular basis. Share clear feedback, kudos and areas for growth the way you would in person. In the end, everyone involved will feel more excited, rewarded and challenged in their roles.

Don't helm a command-and-control center

Everyone is dealing with a crisis this year. As business leaders, we need to come from a place of understanding. We can't come off as robotic micro-managers who are overcompensating for the lack of face-to-face management. Instead focus on individual empowerment, providing a path for learning and growth. More likely than not, an empathetic and understanding approach will encourage employees to stay with the company, weather this storm together, and be confident in the path forward.

Maintaining culture remotely is difficult, there's no hiding that. Nothing beats the feeling of wrapping up the week with a team happy hour, but it takes effort from the top to maintain that comradery online. Get creative. Think of things that have worked at past events, and see about bringing them online, like wine tastings and cooking classes. Similarly, I've always been the type of leader with an "open door" policy. I want my colleagues to feel I'm approachable and committed to their happiness. This too is something that's possible while remote. Make yourself available for quick catch-ups. If everyone is feeling video-conferencing fatigue, encourage

walking meetings over the phone. While remote, it's critical to make sure those important, and sometimes challenging, conversations still take place.

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Create space between work and home

I've learned by working remotely that in order to maintain physical and mental well-being, I need to create space between my job and home. I make an effort to go for a midday walk and sign off at an appropriate time in order to achieve this so-called space. I've encouraged my teams to think about having a "no meeting day" while we're all remote or a "no video" day to create a break in the week and encourage people to take a step back, think about their larger priorities and refocus. I find lunchtime strolls are critical to regroup and come back for the second half of the day with new energy.

While 2020 has presented travel challenges, it's still important to encourage vacation. I'm a firm believer that we're our best selves at work when we're mentally and physically healthy, and although we may not be able to travel, it's important to encourage your teams to still unplug. It's not healthy to let work consume your life. I've seen this work well when leaders set the example at the top. By not sending late-night emails, or working months on end without a day off, it sets the tone for the rest of the company.

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I've talked to several business leaders who are faced with the challenge of deciding whether to continue remotely or try to pull the team back to the office. When public health is at the forefront, this is not an easy conversation. The most important thing is for leaders to be transparent about decision-making processes. Flexibility may be the answer

until normalcy is achieved again, but keeping a transparent approach to this will help ensure your team sticks with you, whether it's at home or in the office.

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