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**How to Thrive in the Virtual
Workplace: Simple and Effective
Tips for Successful, Productive
and Empowered Remote Work**

Made by Blinkist



These key insights in blinks were written by a team of experts at Blinkist. We screen the world of nonfiction to choose the very best books. Then, we read them deeply and transform them into this concise format that brings you the most inspiring ideas from the text.

Maybe these blinks will inspire you to dig deeper, or maybe they're enough to start you thinking and then on to something new. However you read blinks, we hope they help you become an even brighter you.

What's in it for me? Make working remotely work for you!

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, few people could picture a world in which almost everyone worked from home. But thanks to lockdowns everywhere, millions of companies have found themselves in what many have dubbed the biggest remote work experiment in history.

The result? Countless organizations have discovered that remote working isn't only possible; in some ways, it's better, too. For example, tech giant Twitter announced that employees can continue working from home even after the pandemic ends. And more companies will likely follow suit.

But it takes more than an announcement to successfully introduce remote work, and that's where these blinks come in.

They offer practical advice for thriving as a remote organization or employee.

In these blinks, you'll learn

- how much productivity is lost due to office distractions;
- why psychological safety matters in remote workspaces; and
- what organizations and individuals can do to combat isolation.

Remote work has great benefits for both companies and employees.

In March 2020, COVID-19 turned remote work into a new normal for people across the globe. But clocking in from the comfort of your own home isn't all that new. Remote work has been on the rise for years. In America, for instance, it increased by more than 90 percent in the last decade.

And the reason for this growing popularity is simple: remote work actually works! Many people question how productive employees can be if they're left unsupervised, while others believe that brick-and-mortar offices give companies credibility. But early adopters have known for years that there's a lot to gain from remote work.

The key message here is: Remote work has great benefits for both companies and employees.

So, what exactly makes remote work so great? First, not having to commute to an office every day saves employees valuable time. Rising housing costs around the world mean that many people can't afford to live close to their workplaces. So they spend more and more time commuting. Workers in the United Kingdom, for example, commute for an average of two hours a day.

Traveling to work isn't the only thing that's not ideal. The office itself is full of distractions that reduce productivity, and working from home eliminates many of these. Think of how often you're pulled into chats with colleagues, or of how office noise and activity can make it hard to focus. That time adds up! In fact, a study by the *Guardian* found that employees lose almost 90 minutes of productivity a day due to office distractions.

In addition to improving productivity, working from home gives employees flexibility and autonomy, both of which are in high demand. People want work arrangements that allow them to spend quality time with family, travel around the world, and even take up hobbies and side projects. Companies that offer such arrangements are more attractive to potential hires.

Speaking of hiring, remote work also creates a larger talent pool for organizations. The authors' company, Acceleration Partners, has benefitted from this. Being fully remote means it can hire anyone, regardless of location. As a result, it boasts 170 employees in eight different countries. And it's not just employers who win. Companies based in expensive cities like London and New York can be inaccessible for people with limited economic resources. Remote hiring evens the playing field for these

candidates, many of whom are people of color.

Effective remote work starts with a great organizational culture.

Imagine you're a CEO, and, after discovering the benefits of remote work, you're completely sold on the idea. Eager as you may be to introduce working from home, there are a few key things to consider first.

You see, in order to excel in a remote setup, employees need a solid foundation. And that foundation is a well-established organizational culture. This consists of the principles, objectives, and processes that drive a company and its employees. It's what helps people make the right decisions even when there's no one supervising them.

The key message here is: Effective remote work starts with a great organizational culture.

To build a great organizational culture, you first have to define the core components – your *vision*, *values*, and *goals*.

Vision is what the organization aims to be and achieve. Acceleration Partners, for instance, has this vision: “To lead the partner marketing revolution while changing the work-life paradigm.” And as people work toward the vision, they need values to guide how they operate. Examples of values include “creating positive, lasting memories” and “succeeding together.”

Organizations also need to ensure their values are upheld, and that they’re moving closer to their vision. This is where goals come in. Goals are the key steps and achievements required to bring a company’s vision and values to life. Everyone, from teams to individuals, should have goals as well as metrics to

gauge whether they're achieving those goals.

Great organizational cultures have two more components: *clarity* and *consistency*. Vision, values, and goals must be shared clearly and often enough for everyone to understand. There shouldn't be ambiguity about what people are working toward, or what's expected of them. And the vision, values, and goals of a company shouldn't change from one moment to the next.

Once you've established the culture, you need to hire people who'll thrive in it, whether they're working in the office or at home. This means recruiting people who believe in your values, visions, and goals, and screening for traits that make them good remote-work candidates.

Are they accountable and self-motivated? Do they value autonomy and flexibility? And do they have healthy social lives that don't revolve around

work? Questions like these can help you identify people who'll be happy in a remote setting, and who'll work enthusiastically toward the company's vision.

The right technology and management strategies make remote work seamless and productive.

So, we've discovered that culture is the foundation of effective remote work. But that's all it is: a foundation. If you were building a house, this is when you'd add the walls, doors, and windows, not to mention the plumbing and electrical systems.

It's the same with working from home. To create a thriving remote workforce, organizational leaders need to build on their culture with processes, tools, and strategies. If this is done well, any organization, big or small, can successfully implement remote work.

The key message in this blink is: The right technology and management strategies make remote work seamless and productive.

One of the first things companies should invest in is technology that helps people communicate and work efficiently. This includes cloud-based services for collaboration and safe storage of documents, like Google Workspace. For daily communication, there are platforms like Slack and Microsoft Teams, while project-management tools like Asana help teams track projects and deliverables.

It's also useful to have knowledge- and learning-management systems for training material, company policies, and best practices. Easy access to such information is vital when employees can't walk up to coworkers and ask questions.

After technology, organizations should reconsider meeting strategies. Meetings are harder to set up when people follow different schedules or are in separate time zones. And spending hours on video

calls is draining. So, leaders must assess which meetings are necessary, and which ones can be replaced by emails or video messages. One way to do this is by asking attendees to rate meetings on a scale of one to ten. Any meeting that doesn't get a high average rating should probably be scrapped.

Meetings that do get the go-ahead can be made more efficient with the *memo system*, a strategy promoted by Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos. It involves sending memos with background information and discussion points ahead of meetings. Attendees then arrive better prepared and ready to engage, resulting in shorter and more productive meetings.

Outside of meetings, leaders also need to manage employees remotely. In addition to using goals to track progress and hold people accountable, managers should establish *psychological safety*. This is the feeling of being free to act,

raise issues, and even make mistakes, without fear of criticism or punishment. Psychological safety can be communicated through company values, and reinforced by managers. Employees should feel comfortable and trusted enough to work without supervision.

“If your meeting involves one person talking 90 percent of the time, it should have been replaced with an email memo or video message.”

Organization leaders need to facilitate meaningful, in-person interactions between remote workers.

One of the fears associated with remote work is that people will feel isolated. And this makes sense. If employees spend day after day working alone, and never interact with their colleagues in real life, they may not feel connected to the company or their team. Plus, they miss out on the social connections that are possible in office environments.

But remote work doesn't have to be isolating. And making connections shouldn't be left up to employees. Leaders should do as much to connect a remote workforce as they do to help them work effectively.

Here's the key message: Organization leaders need to facilitate meaningful, in-person interactions between remote workers.

One strategy to help remote workers connect and bond is the *Hub Model*. Here's how the authors used it at their company: they chose several cities as hubs, hiring at least ten employees in each one. This makes it possible for groups of employees to meet and socialize, or even work alongside each other in coworking spaces. An added benefit is that potential hires in these locations can be interviewed in person by team members to ensure that they fit in.

Organizations can also connect people by bringing them back to the office every now and then. Going remote doesn't have to mean getting rid of the office space completely. Instead, offices can be used for work and activities that are much better in person, like brainstorming, training, and team building. Dropbox, the file-hosting company, went down this route in late 2020, announcing that its offices would

be redesigned specifically for team gathering and community building.

And on top of encouraging regular in-person meetings, leaders should also consider hosting annual events that bring the entire organization together. For example, Automattic, a remote web-design firm, has an annual week-long retreat called the Grand Meetup.

Meetings like this aren't only opportunities to realign with the company vision and values; they can also bring about deep, meaningful connections. For instance, at one retreat organized by the authors' company, Acceleration Partners, people were invited to give a speech. They pretended it was their last day on earth, and spoke accordingly. The speeches were incredibly personal and emotional, and helped listeners better understand the speakers. They also encouraged more

openness and vulnerability among the entire group.

To get the most out of remote work, set expectations and boundaries, and learn how to focus.

As an earlier blink revealed, a benefit of remote work is employee flexibility and autonomy. Sophie Parry-Billings, an associate director at Acceleration Partners, learned firsthand just how valuable this is.

Sophie started working remotely in 2017, and, in her own words, it's given her a "drastically better quality of life." She's gone from eating junk food after a tiring commute to having time to cook healthy dinners. She can focus for hours without interruption, and exercise during the day. Sophie even visits her out-of-town family more often because she can work from their homes.

But thriving like Sophie while working remotely doesn't just happen. It requires a number of deliberate steps.

The key message here is: To get the most out of remote work, set expectations and boundaries, and learn how to focus.

First, you need to set expectations by determining and communicating your work hours. To do this, create a schedule that allocates time for meetings, uninterrupted work, and personal activities like hobbies or school drop-offs. Then, share the schedule with your team and stick to it! If you're never available during set working hours, you won't be trusted to work remotely.

A schedule also helps with managing your energy and working more effectively. If you concentrate better in the mornings, you might reserve that time for intense work and save less-taxing activities for later in the day.

Next, establish physical and mental boundaries to prevent work from spilling over into your personal life. Start by creating a designated workspace,

whether that's a home office or a corner of the kitchen table. This helps you focus, and also lets anyone you live with know when you're busy. And when the workday ends, do something to wind down. This can be a short walk, meditation, or listening to music.

When you've sorted out a schedule and created boundaries, it's time to focus and work. But this isn't always easy. You may not have colleagues interrupting you at home, but things like dirty dishes and a dusty floor can be just as distracting. One way around this is setting aside time for housework. You can also improve your focus by concentrating on tasks for bursts of 15 to 20 minutes at first, and then slowly increasing the time. Eventually, you'll be able to focus for longer periods, regardless of your surroundings.

Self-care is essential to safeguard your well-being while working remotely.

It's an unfortunate truth: work, whether it happens in an office or remotely, can be stressful.

No matter how great you are at committing to a schedule and creating boundaries, you'll sometimes be faced with tight deadlines or difficult coworkers. Not to mention the fact that your personal life comes with its own frustrations. And stress from one area of your life can easily seep into another, especially when your work and personal life all happen in one space.

For this reason, it's important to prioritize self-care as a remote worker. This prevents and combats stress, improving your well-being and helping you do your best work.

The key message in this last blink is: Self-care is essential to safeguard your well-being while working remotely.

Making sure that you get high-quality sleep is a crucial part of self-care. The better you sleep, the more prepared you'll feel to tackle challenges throughout the day.

To improve your quality of sleep, establish a consistent bedtime routine. Put your phone and devices away at least an hour before bedtime. This prevents distractions from emails and other work notifications. Then, do something relaxing, like reading a book. After just a week of following a bedtime routine, you'll start dozing off faster and feeling more rested in the morning.

When you find yourself experiencing stress during the day, it's important to have an outlet that reduces the tension. This can be anything from regularly scheduled exercise and meditation

breaks to walking for a few minutes. One of the authors' employees spends half a minute taking deep breaths. The trick is to find the stress-relieving activity that works best for you.

In addition to managing your sleep and stress levels, self-care also involves tackling a side effect of remote work – isolation. Spontaneously grabbing lunch with a colleague or having a quick chat by the watercooler doesn't happen when you work from home, and this can leave you feeling disconnected.

Fortunately, you can build social connections with some planning and effort. Try organizing virtual catchups over coffee, lunch, or drinks after work. These sessions should be used to bond and discuss anything, as long as it's not related to work. You can also start chat groups dedicated to interests that you and your coworkers share. And, finally, make plans to meet your remote

colleagues in person from time to time.
This will help strengthen your
connections.

Final summary

The key message in these blinks:

Remote work has something to offer both organizations and employees. Companies get access to a larger talent pool and a more productive workforce, while workers gain time, flexibility, and autonomy.

To make sure that remote workers do their part, organizations should set a vision and establish clear and consistent values and goals. Organizations also have a responsibility to provide the right tools and processes for remote work, and to help foster social connections. At the same time, it's important for employees to find effective schedules and workspaces, and to look after themselves so that neither their work nor their personal lives suffer.

Actionable advice:

Find an email strategy.

Remote workers can easily feel pressured to constantly respond to emails. This increases stress levels and eats up time that could be used more productively. Luckily, there are ways to prevent this. For instance, allocating time slots for checking and responding to emails, or using an email-management tool to flag anything that requires an immediate response. It's also a good idea to set expectations by giving colleagues a timeframe within which they can expect a response to nonurgent emails.

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