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# How To Be A Successful Leader In Our Work-From-Anywhere World



**Naomi Cahn** Senior Contributor 

Leadership Strategy

*I write on gender equity in the workplace.*



Lead from anywhere! GETTY

Last week's good news about the Pfizer vaccine holds open the promise of going back to work in an actual office. But even after we've confirmed the success of the vaccine and figured out how it will be distributed, many of us will continue to work from home, at least

part of the time. It turns out that we *like* working from home. A [number of companies](#), including [Google](#), will work to accommodate those of us who want to work from our living rooms (or anywhere else).

For leaders, and those who want to be leaders, working remotely gives us numerous benefits and also raises numerous challenges: 1) how do we manage our remote employees; and 2) how do we manage our own careers. As a Gallup report succinctly noted: [Your remote workers' productivity depends on one role — the manager](#).

For advice on how to be a better manager and how best to manage your own career in a remote world, I turned to [Aliza Knox](#), who has been keeping remote teams motivated and engaged for nearly four decades. As head of Asia Pacific business for Google, Twitter, Cloudflare, and others, she's made an art out of working with teams and moving up the executive ladder, all while thousands of miles away from headquarters. She's had to figure out how to navigate management when the company's physical headquarters are located thousands of miles away, and she won't bump into the CEO in the micro-kitchen or even the coffee room.

Here are her tips for leaders to help employees feel part of the team and fully professional, even if they're logging on in their comfiest fleece pajama pants.

1. **Take the “r” out of remote.** Knox has found that emotion plays a surprisingly important role in employee productivity when people are not meeting face-to-face. Indeed, research shows that [emotional connection matters even in normal time](#). But as Knox puts it, “I don't even like the term remote because it either means that you

are far away, which is distancing, or, when we use it to describe people, it means they are unemotional/aloof.”

Instead, even when you are all working online, there are ways to create team spirit. She prepares treasure hunts, pop quizzes with fun prizes, lunch vouchers so people can eat together (albeit online), and even monthly goals, such as organizing employees to cheer on the men in the team who are growing mustaches for November.

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**2. Help Employees Build Social Capital.** One of the problems with remote working is that the connections you've made with colleagues and higher-ups can slowly lose their “stickiness.” It's easy for bonds to fray. But camaraderie and connection are critical to success, particularly in many of today's super-collaborative environments. Additionally, moving up requires making connections with management and leaders. In the pre-Covid-19 days, this means physically travelling to headquarters for meetings a few times per year. In today's world, it still means making sure to meet with the CEO or CFO at least once a quarter, albeit online. And, Knox points out that working remotely might even make it easier to reach out to a potential mentor because you don't have to find them in their office, and it is entirely acceptable to contact them via email.

3. **Lavish Praise.** Everyone loves to be acknowledged, and this is even more true when we're home alone all day, or home alone with two toddlers demanding Goldfish crackers and refusing to listen.
4. **Offer Public Acknowledgement.** Don't just let your employees know how much you appreciate their efforts. Let everyone in the company know, too, particularly their higher-ups. At team meetings, there can be shout-outs and gold stars for particularly strong efforts. Leaders can recognize all kinds of efforts.
5. **Set Boundaries with "Bump-Outs."** We all need boundaries between work and the rest of life, but during Covid-19, this can be a huge challenge, particularly for those who are homeschooling. For Knox, working in Asia has always meant that meetings with headquarters get scheduled long after the traditional work day ends. When she knows she has a midnight meeting, she takes time between 9 and 5 to do personal stuff. But that means being "on" at midnight or at 5 am. She emphasizes the need to be flexible, but also make sure to set boundaries that accommodate the reality of life.

To lead remotely, you need to build on your existing management skills – and develop new ones. And if you do, you'll be more successful than ever.

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**Naomi Cahn**

I am the Justice Anthony M. Kennedy Distinguished Professor of Law and Nancy L. Buc '69 Research Professor in Democracy and Equity at the University of Virginia School of... **Read More**

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