

A close-up photograph of a person sitting on a yellow cushion, wearing a dark blue, textured knit sweater. They are holding a silver tablet computer with both hands. The person is also wearing dark blue pants and brown leather boots. The background is dark and out of focus.

# The Comprehensive Guide to Remote Working



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Once you strip away the constraints of traditional office work – the daily commute, the face-time with co-workers and your boss, the shoulder taps, the close quarters – you're left with remarkable freedom on how to work and get stuff done.

The catch is that all of that freedom can be overwhelming. I remember my first day as a remote worker of sitting down at my home office and just not knowing where to start.

Since then, we've worked on and managed remote teams for the last 4 years, and we've learned a remarkable amount on how to create your own structure and reach new levels of peak productivity.

This eBook contains everything we've learned about remote work from the perspective of being remote team members and as remote managers. It's everything from how to manage your emotions to how to choose the perfect chair for your home office.

We'd love to hear what you think!

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## 1. Introduction

I remember back to when I started working remote. I had just quit an awesome job to start a company with a few friends and remote work seemed like the obvious path. The only path really.

We didn't have money to purchase an office space so the lifestyle kind of chose us by necessity. Once I spent a few days outside the office, I was hooked. It was great. It still is.

*Our greatest happiness does not depend on the condition of life in which chance has placed us, but is always the result of a good conscience, good health, occupation, and freedom in all pursuits.*

*-Thomas Jefferson*

I'm still an avid fan of remote working. I love this lifestyle and would defend it to the bitter end.

That said, the honeymoon is over and I'm now officially a remote worker. I've been a remote worker for almost two years now and it's definitely not the path of least resistance.

All of the benefits of remote work – being closer to your family, travel, freedom – don't come easy. With remote work, nothing is given to you, you have to actively build the work life that you dreamed of. Here's how.

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## 1.1 3 myths of remote work, busted

“Do you want to travel around the world and get paid for it? Do you want to work at home in your pajamas without having to put on your pants in the morning? Then remote work is for you!”

It’s embarrassing to think about now, but I admit that I bought into the hype of remote work. Here are three lessons I learned the hard way about the myths vs. the reality of remote work.

### **Traveling is easier said than done**

According to this [fantastic and popular post](#) by Jake Jorgovan traveling while working remote isn’t only something that’s obtainable, it’s a fulfilling and rewarding lifestyle. “I promise it is not as hard as you think and it is completely within reach. If you want to travel the world, and work remotely then start working toward it today” explains Jorgovan.

I just haven’t quite found the balance advocated by Jake and so many others. When I first started out as a remote worker I was incredibly zealous. The world was (and still is) at my fingertips and I could travel anywhere. I embarked on a multi-month journey of full-time travel and work but in reality, it wasn’t what I thought it would be. It was actually a lot more difficult.

I definitely saw my productivity suffer because of a lack of routine. Travel logistics distracted me from my work and became more time consuming than I’d anticipated. When I traveled, I wanted to travel, not work.

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## The seats suck in coffee shops

On the surface, the issue of coffee shop seating seems minor. But when the coffee shop is your daily office, you begin to appreciate just how important it is to have comfortable seating in the coffee shops you work in.

The Washington Post recently [featured a great infographic](#) outlining the importance of proper posture when sitting.

We've heard that all our lives but did you know that poor sitting posture can result in health problems from muscle degeneration to organ damage and everything in between. For me, it's the issue that my back is always in some sort of pain while sitting, unless the position is just right.

That said, I need a good chair in my life and when I don't have one, I get crabby and my productivity starts to diminish. Working from coffee shops is great and they're super convenient when you're in a pinch but be careful, especially if your back is anything like mine.



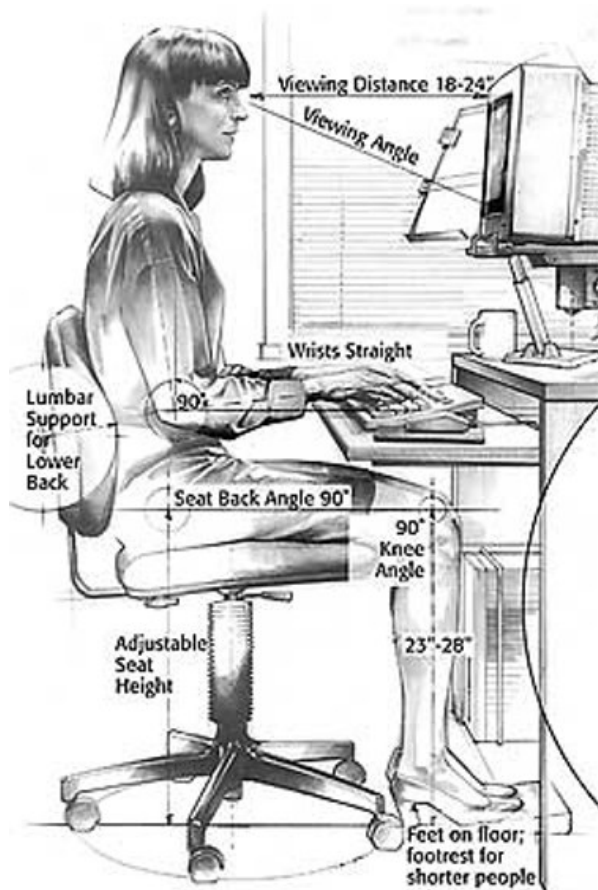
[Herman Miller Aeron Chair](#)

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## The attributes of a good chair

I would be remiss to simply tell you that finding a good chair is important without covering a few ways to do that. Here are a few key attributes in finding a good chair:



- A. Make sure all major points (elbows, knees, upper and lower back, butt) are not being strained because of improper chair measurements to the curvature of your body. All points should allow for comfort and flexibility.
- B. Your eye level is naturally looking straight ahead. Too far up or down can cause unnecessary neck pressure.
- C. According to [this post by Lumoback](#) 135° is the optimal sitting position so find a chair that compliments that angle.



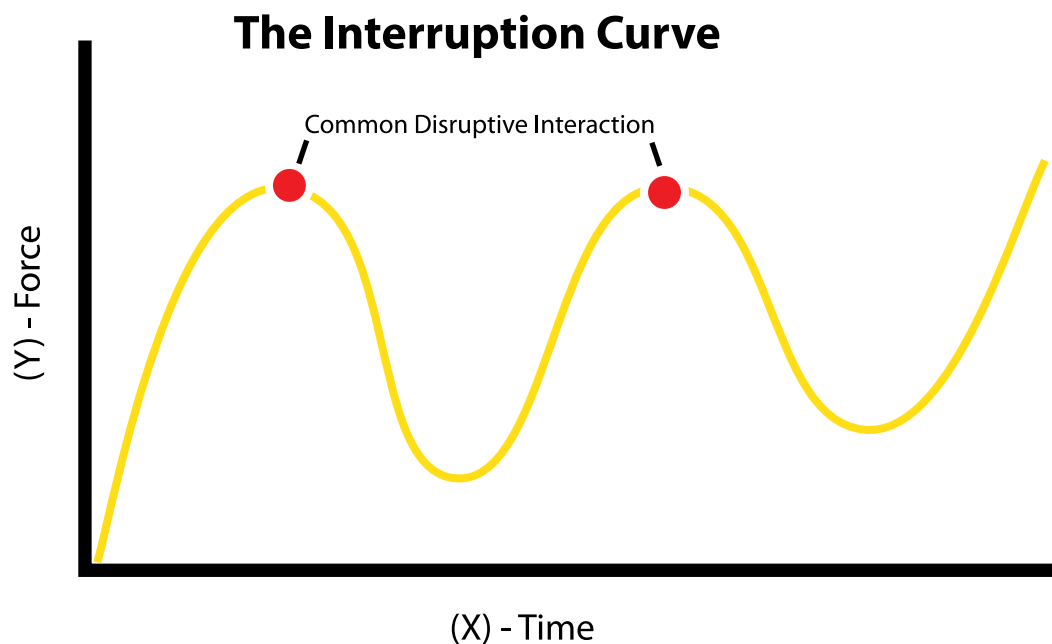
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## People don't understand that you're actually working

According to [this study](#) by University of California researcher Gloria Mark, “The average knowledge worker switches tasks every three minutes, and, once distracted, a worker takes nearly a half-hour to resume the original task.”

I'm constantly fighting [distraction and interruption](#) I've found that people just don't understand remote working and that includes the people closest to me like my girlfriend and my parents.



A pervasive misconception is that if you're not in an office, you're not working.

The office has always felt like the cornerstone of work in the business world. That's all changed and remote working has flipped this model on its head. You know that and I know that but the people around us truly don't understand.



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When you receive a healthy dose of passing judgment because “you don’t even have a job” or last-minute favor requests, just know that’s par for the course. Suck it up, say no, just turn your phone off. If your home office has a door, close it; if you’re in a coffee shop, put on your headphones.

## 1.2 Why Remote Work Still Wins

In spite of those drawbacks of remote work, I still choose remote work because it gives me the freedom to tailor my work-life in the way that I choose, around the things that are most important to me.

### I Actually Feel More Social

Feeling social can have a huge effect on the way you feel both mentally and physically. It can contribute to your health as well. According to [this research paper](#) by Emily D. Heaphy from McGill University and Jane Dutton from University of Michigan, “Together, these studies provide some support for the hypothesis that when employees experience their work relationships positively, the cardiovascular system is less taxed not only at work but also in non work and resting times.” Feeling social is necessary for a successful work/life balance.

When I’m going into an office every day, my life feels more rhythmic and naturally less spontaneous. At the end of the day, I tend to shut off and relax. But when I’m remote working, I prioritize my time and relationships throughout the day which means I have more meaningful social interactions. I’m more flexible in my schedule and my ability to interact socially is increased. It sounds counter-intuitive, but remote work actually does make me more socially engaged throughout the day.

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## My Diet is Better

When I'm working in an office, I'll eat anything. If my co-workers decide to eat the number seven at McDonald's, I'm in. Without thinking, I tend to go with the crowd and feel the pressure to be social. It's normal but my diet suffers because of it.

Our friends at Buffer [released a great blog post](#) correlating productivity to your daily diet. "Yes, what you eat will affect your productivity today. But even more so, it will also determine the productivity of your children and grandchildren's productivity." What you eat is important on many different levels to daily productivity and your future.



When I'm at home I don't even think about it. I open my fridge and eat whatever is at my disposal. If I'm shopping healthy, then I eat healthy which is not the case in the world of office lunches and food trucks. Don't get me wrong, I love a good food truck and will stand in line around the corner like everyone else but as a natural byproduct of working from home, I cook more and eat a little better than I would if I worked out of an office.

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## Freedom

I started off by taking a real, introspective look at how remote working has changed my perspective and my very first impression of the lifestyle.

My love for remote work hasn't waivered, but now, I'm armed with solid understanding of the investment it takes to pursue this life as a remote worker.

It's not easy, but it's still freaking awesome and I would recommend it to anyone looking for freedom and ownership of their daily schedule and work life.

## 1.3 Case Study: How to Avoid the Loneliness of Working Remotely

As a major advocate for the remote working lifestyle, I understand all too well the difficulties that come along with it. The top item on the list for me is [loneliness](#) and it's a hugely important concern that's not to be overlooked. In the words of Mother Teresa, "Loneliness and the feeling of being unwanted is the most terrible poverty."

The fact is, if remote working isn't implemented into the team [flow](#) properly, it can become a drain on productivity and it may threaten the livelihood of your company. If this lifestyle is to become a sustainable work option, then the difficult question of loneliness must absolutely be addressed.

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Here are three cutting-edge techniques for how to do just that:

## **Consider “timezone syncing”.**

The best way to remove the disconnected feeling between team members is to close the distance gap with communication. Basically, talk as much as possible. This can be done through a technique called timezone syncing, which involves ensuring that there is an overlap in your schedules across time zones where you are both working. If you know you’ll overlap for a few hours daily, then during those few hours, communication becomes the number one priority.

[Qualtrics](#), a Provo, Utah-based data company, is an [extreme example](#) of this technique. Its staff started work at 3 a.m. MT for over a year to accommodate the European workday and be time-zone synced with their European customers.

[Sqwiggle](#) is a web-based tool that’s a great way to stay connected with your team members when you’re timezone syncing, by offering an always [on video workroom](#) that runs on very low bandwidth. Keep Sqwiggle running while you’re timezone syncing and you’ll see the face of your teammates in your web browser. Rather than having to call them on Skype to start a conversation, just click on their picture and you’re immediately in a video chat session.

Sqwiggle makes remote work feel like you’re sitting around a table together, working face-to-face.

## **Be radically transparent with teammates**

The best way to fight any anxious feeling of disconnect is by education and solid understanding of how your teammates are doing and feeling. Creating an environment centered around the communication of these problems is a great way to know someone is dealing with loneliness, which will ultimately lead to a solution and a happier team.



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[Buffer](#) is a San Francisco-based company with a virtual office that [goes to extremes](#) to educate the team on the needs of its members.

At [Buffer](#), everyone knows what everyone is working on, what everyone is trying to improve on, what everyone on the team is reading and even how much everyone on the team slept and how much they make in salary.

The Buffer team uses [iDoneThis](#) to share all of their personal and professional information to be radically transparent with each other.

This builds an incredible amount of trust and intimacy in the team which is fundamental for communicating freely and making loneliness a thing of the past.

## **Overcommunicate your appreciation.**

Showing that you [value and appreciate](#) your colleague's work can make a dramatic difference in their happiness and productivity at work. And it's as simple as saying "nice job!" to someone that's feeling disconnected from the team dynamic. Make it your aim to praise good work, and over time that disconnected feeling will diminish.

[Adam Grant](#), a professor at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania, demonstrated just how important it is to feel like your work matters, has value and makes a difference. At a call center raising money for student scholarships, Grant found that call center workers who spoke directly with a student who would benefit from the scholarship would make three times as many phone calls as those call center workers with no connection to the students receiving scholarships. When your efforts are made to feel worthwhile, you'll feel a greater connection to your work that will make you more engaged, happier and more productive.

## 2. Harness the freedom of remote work to be incredibly productive

In spite of the myths and drawbacks around remote work, one truth remains: remote work gives you the freedom to design your work in a way that maximizes your productivity and your time spent doing those things in life that are most important to you.

Here are methods to unlocking your peak productivity that only remote workers have the freedom to use.

### 2.1 How to Kill the Lazy Slump and Keep Energy High All Day Long

Most workdays I feel myself slow down and my mind start wandering in the early afternoon. I often give in to the sleepy feeling and take a nap, but when I have lots to do I might go for a coffee instead, so I can keep working.

You've probably been in a similar situation yourself: lacking in energy and with plenty of work to do, we tend to guess at the most effective remedy to perk us up and keep up going.

It turns out that recent science on productivity has a surprising answer to the question of what to do when you start to feel the afternoon lull.

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## Understanding our ups and downs

Although it's easy to forget, our daily lives are closely tied to our internal body clocks, called [circadian rhythms](#). These are the parts of the brain that determine whether you're a night owl or a morning lark, and control your natural ebbs and flows of energy during the day. Whenever you travel and get hit with jet lag, that's your circadian rhythm trying to catch up to the new time zone.

Circadian rhythms are slightly different for everyone, but most of us run a fairly similar internal clock. We all get [two peak periods of sleepiness](#) one during the middle of the night, and one in the afternoon. This is why it's so common to have a drop in energy after lunch. It's even become known as the "[afternoon slump](#)". Apart from getting a good night's sleep to keep your circadian rhythms running smoothly, there are a few ways you can manage that slump (or any others during the day) to keep your energy levels high all day.

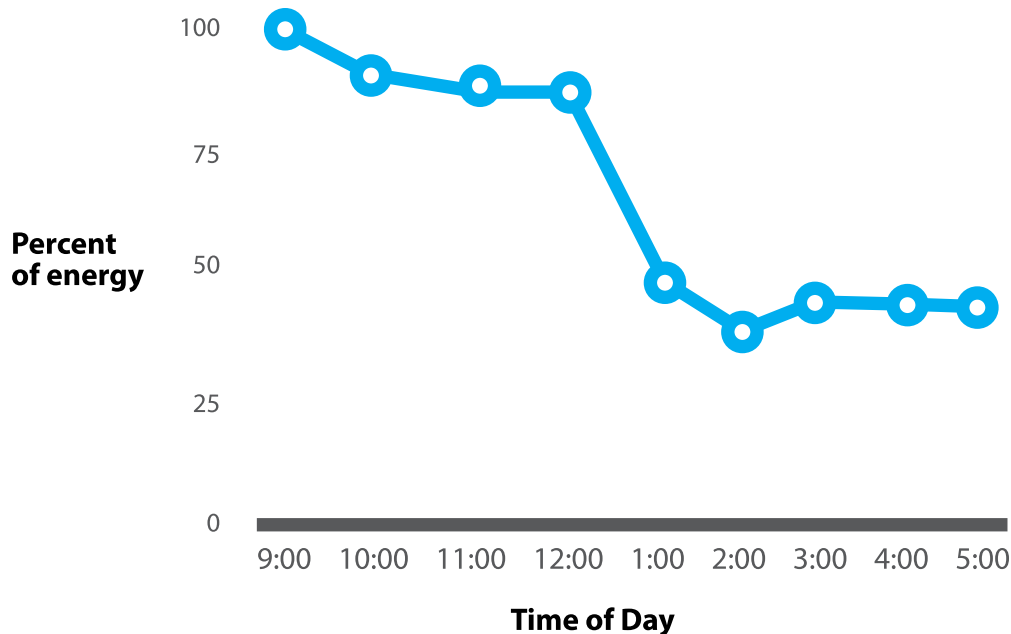
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## Energy map your workday

Before you start working on improving your energy levels, it can be helpful to get an idea of when [your own energy highs and lows](#) take place, since everyone's different. For instance, even though most of us experience a dip in energy in the afternoon, if you usually wake up late in the morning you might find your afternoon dip happens much later, relative to when you started your day.

A good way to get an idea of your own energy patterns is to make an [energy map of your day](#). It takes some effort, but all you need is a notebook and pen. During the day, make a note at regular intervals—say, every half hour—of what your energy levels are like. Do this for a few weeks and you'll be able to look for trends: do you have regular high spots? Common lows? This is a great starting point for applying these tips to improve your energy.





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## **Avoid the temporary fix: caffeine, sugar and energy drinks**

If you're like me, coffee is probably the first thing you think of when you feel your energy waning. For some people, the go-to-solution might be an energy drink or a chocolate bar.

Unfortunately, these “go-tos” aren't the best choices for keeping our energy levels high. For the most part, sugary snacks and coffee tend to give us a short-lived burst of energy followed by another (possibly even worse than pre-snack) energy crash.

Energy drinks are particularly sneaky because they often have far more sugar in them than caffeine, so they give us more of a quick sugar rush than a caffeinated energy boost, and can even make us [more sleepy afterwards](#).

## **Healthy ways to keep energy high**

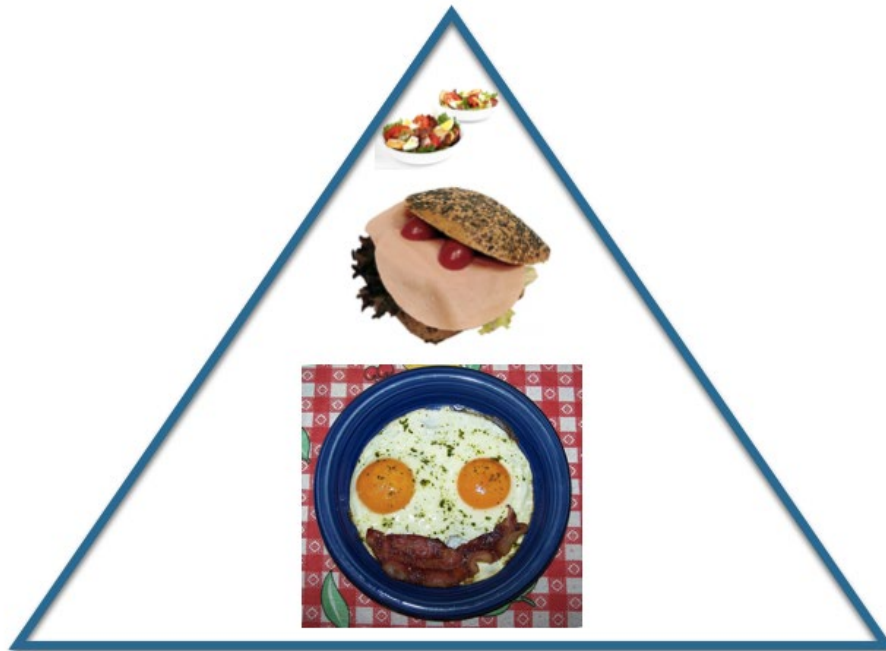
Rather than working against your circadian rhythms or trying to push past them, work with them to reach and maintain peak productivity. My research led me to a variety of ways to keep energy levels high — some quick fixes that are better than a chocolate bar or energy drink and some preventive methods to help us start the day high in energy and maintain it all day long.

## **Plan your meals like a pyramid**

Rather than eating a big dinner to cap off your day, try starting out with your biggest meal at breakfast and making lunch and dinner smaller. Imagine you're [building a pyramid over the day](#): starting with a big breakfast as the base and stacking progressively smaller meals onto it as the day goes on. This will load you up on food to turn into energy when you most need it rather than before you go to bed.

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Eat small snacks during the day, too. This will help you to maintain [more stable energy levels](#) than if you let them drop dramatically before boosting them up again with a meal.

Of course, what you eat makes as much difference as when you eat, so try to choose the right snacks. Low G.I. foods [take longer to turn into glucose](#) (a source of energy) in your body so they'll give you more long-lasting energy than something with a high G.I. like white bread which turns to glucose (and get used up) quickly. Snacks and meals high in protein are also good for maintaining your energy levels over time.

Lastly, avoid eating huge meals, especially at lunch, right before you go back to work. Scientists are [debating](#) why exactly big meals make us lethargic (some say it's due to hormone secretions in the gut after we eat, while others say it's because breaking down food takes blood flow away from the brain) but it's clear that this happens, regardless of why. So we're better off to eat a moderately sized meal and grab a snack a couple of hours later.

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## Work less

It seems counterintuitive, but by working a little less we can actually [do better work](#) the rest of the time.

Taking breaks more often, for instance, is a good way to feel refreshed and give your energy levels a boost. Studies have found [calling a friend or loved one, taking a short walk](#) or [spending time in nature](#) can improve energy levels and concentration.

One way to structure frequent breaks is to use the [Pomodoro technique](#). With Pomodoro, you work 25 minutes and then take a 3-5 minute break. After 4 Pomodori, take a longer 15 minute to 30 minute break. [Tomatoes](#) is an easy-to-use Pomodoro tracker that helps you break up your day using the Pomodoro technique.

Another way of putting this into practice is to only work to 80% capacity: [Justin Jackson](#) found that his energy levels improved significantly when he stopped taking on too much work and working at 110% all the time. He no longer finds himself burning out from too much work, his work is actually better and he's got more flexibility to deal with unexpected events.

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## Chew gum

One [study](#) of students who stayed awake all night found that chewing gum improved energy levels and mitigated feelings of fatigue. It also tested this theory on medical professionals working overnight and found that chewing gum during a 15-minute break was more effective than walking around, for relieving fatigue.

So next time you're struggling against the afternoon slump, try grabbing a piece of gum to ward off those sleepy feelings.



## Exercise

This suggestion probably won't come as a surprise, since [exercise](#) is touted as a way to improve almost anything. When it comes to energy levels, moderate exercise works best. [One study](#) found that low-to-moderate exercise completed regularly over several weeks improved energy levels more than a single, intense workout.

Walking is an easy moderate exercise to include in your day—whether you walk partway to the office, take a stroll at lunch or just wander out for ten minutes in the afternoon to grab some fresh air.



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## Stay hydrated

Dehydration can [lead to lethargy](#)- the opposite of high energy! And it's easy to avoid. Staying hydrated is simply a matter of keeping up with your fluid intake over the day. All fluids count, even coffee! But of course plain water is what you want to aim for, since it isn't full of fat or sugar like a lot of other drinks.

An easy way to drink more water is to make sure you have a full jug or sports bottle [on your desk](#). It's a bit like snacking: we tend to eat (and drink) things just because they're there. It's nice to know we can use this tendency to our advantage by putting something healthy in front of us.

## Nap

If you're not a fan of napping this might come as a surprise, but a nap is actually a [more efficient](#) way to get a [quick boost of energy](#) than a cup of coffee.



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The trick is to nap right.

If you nap for too long you'll find yourself feeling groggy when you wake up. Keep your nap to around [20-30 minutes](#) and you should feel refreshed soon after you wake up.

If you work from home this will be much easier to do in the afternoons, and making it a regular habit can help you to fall asleep faster, so your naps will be even more efficient.

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Knowing how your energy levels rise and fall can help you plan your to-do list into the high points and prepare yourself for the dips using methods like the ones above.

We're all so used to managing our time (or trying to), but we can be much more productive and healthy if we [manage our energy](#) instead.

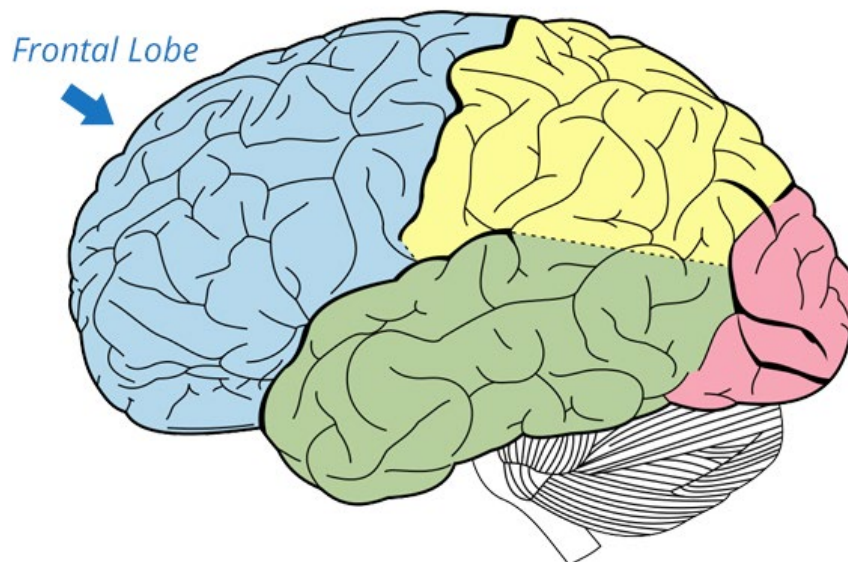
*Images by [Chef Cooke](#) and [Misserion](#) via Flickr.*

## 2.2 How to Improve Mental Clarity and Focus When No One Can See Your Screen

With social media, news headlines and many other distractions, a high level of mental clarity and focus is difficult to achieve. This is especially true for remote workers who aren't in an office environment with people who might peek over your shoulder at what's on your screen.

Here's why we get so distracted when we're working remotely and a few key things we can do about it.

### The Frontal Lobe – Focus Controller



Although many theories are in circulation regarding exact function of the frontal lobe, it's an incredibly complex mechanism that's known to be attributed to focus, memory and motor function.

The frontal lobe also controls your ability to distinguish whether your decisions are good or bad and to see future consequences of those actions. The average person's frontal lobe reaches full maturity in their late 20's.

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No one person is the same, so naturally, lack of focus can't simply be boiled down to one reason or another. Whether it's a case of simple distraction or something more serious like ADHD or physical or emotional trauma, simple steps exist to take each person down their own path of increased focus and clarity.

## Avoiding Distractions

Every single day, I'm dealing with some form of minor or [major distraction](#). It's just a part of life we all have to face. Recognizing these distractions, then cutting them off at their source is the only way we can move forward in productive fashion.

[According to this post on Lifehacker](#), research suggests that even the most simple distractions can cause big problems in your daily workflow. "The study, in which 300 people performed a sequence-based procedure on a computer, found that interruptions of about three seconds doubled the error rate..."

That's incredible.

Even simple distractions in regard to the procedural based tasks we all do every day can yield us only half as accurate and productive in comparison to normal conditions.

So what can we do?

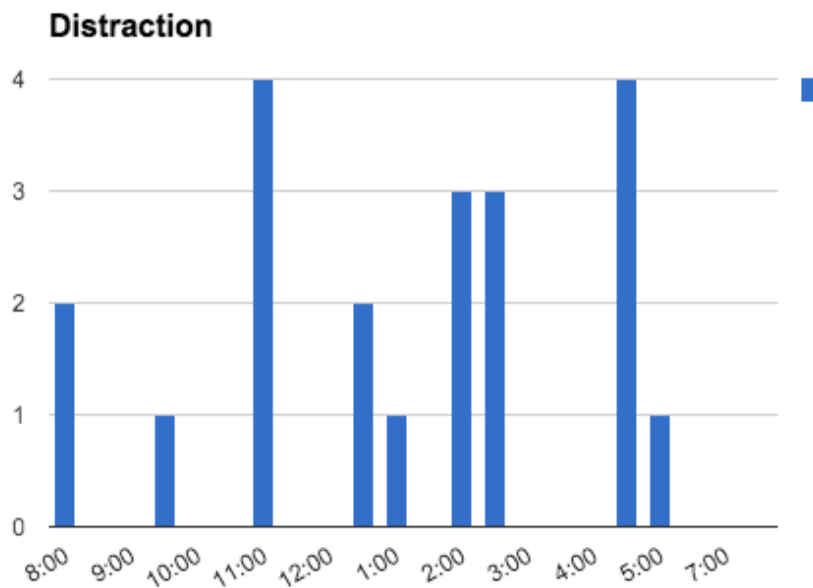
## A Solution in Measurement

I'm a sucker for a chart. One simple way to avoid distraction is to measure it, and compare over time. This approach will ultimately bring higher levels of transparency to your work and expose those annoying things that are bringing your productivity levels down.

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The process can be as simple as logging each time you experience a major “work interrupting” distraction throughout your work day. Also, on a scale from 1 to 5, log it’s severity. Once you’ve collected enough data over a week or so, build a simple chart to visualize your most and least productive times of each day. It should look something like this:



Over several weeks of ongoing tracking, this process will help identify which distractions are your most intense and help correlate which types of activities are actually distracting. For example: I know at 11pm every day, the UPS guy arrives and throws me outside of my workflow.

[Download your own distraction tracking spreadsheet.](#)

## Fixing the Problem, One Step at a Time

### Proper Nutrition

*The food that is good for the heart, is likely to be good for the brain.*

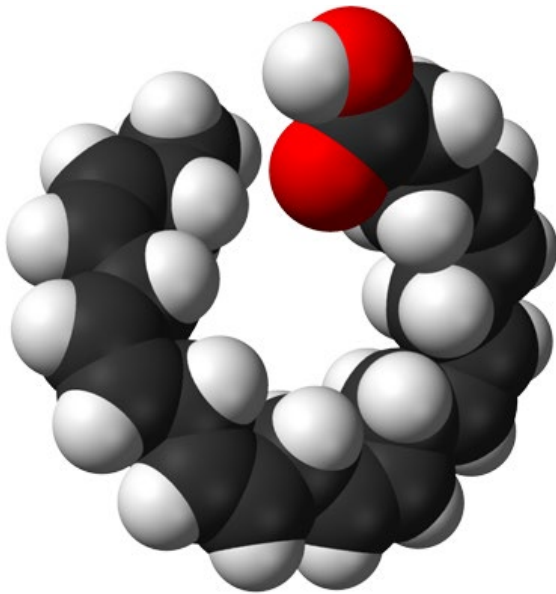
-Hippocrates



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DHA (Omega 3's) – DHA is incredibly important for the development of the human brain. I've always heard things referred to as "[brain food](#)" and DHA is the definition of that. It can be found in fatty fish such as salmon and tuna but also seaweed, walnuts, flax seeds, tofu, brussel sprouts and cauliflower are also rich in Omega 3's.



DHA is the primary fatty acid in your central nervous system and controls the improvement of memory and focus and has been shown to slow the effects of Alzheimers disease in early onset patients. Many other positive health effects can be a direct result in increased levels of DHA in adults including decreased risk of heart disease, better outcomes for autoimmune disorders, etc.

Lots of [research suggests](#) that Omega 3's actually cross the [blood-brain barrier](#) and feed your brain the necessary fats it needs, so do yourself a favor and eat lots of fatty fish! You most certainly won't regret it.

## Drink Tons of Water

I struggle with drinking water. I'm the type of person that will procrastinate hydration until the last minute, leaving me bone dry and seeking any garden hose I can find. [According to Joshua Gowin, PHD and writer for Psychology Today](#) "The ability to perform mental arithmetic, like calculating whether or not you'll be late for work if you hit snooze for another 15 minutes, is compromised when your fluids are low."



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Water is an absolute necessity for all life, but when you're at your highest level of cognitive function, high levels of hydration are imperative. "If water is important to you, not because you're parched, but just because you want to function optimally, imagine how much more some humans are forced to endure just to get the minimum daily requirements of water." explains Gowin.

Increased water levels have many positive effects on the brain including the removal of various kinds of waste, improved circulation and the ability to maintain heat levels of the brain. Dehydration can decrease brain function and, if not caught early, can ultimately lead to serious levels of brain damage.

Keep yourself hydrated at all times.

## **Fast for Clarity**

Research suggests that fasting can actually increase your brain's function and lead to increased levels of clarity. According to [this fantastic post on the Humans are Free blog](#), "it takes a lot of dietary calories to keep the human brain functioning. Fortunately, the very fact that we've developed such a large and powerful brain has provided us the skills and intelligence to maintain adequate sustenance during times of scarcity and to make provisions for needed food supplies in the future." Yep, you read that correctly. The human brain performs better under the weight of food scarcity to ensure the future planning and proportioning of food. According to [this research paper](#) on psy-journal.com, fasting can lead to an increased sense of well being, task vigilance and a better mood.

If you've fasted before, we'd love to hear your thoughts on how it worked out. If you decide to fast, be safe and practice normal healthy eating habits before and after. Fast in proportion to a healthy balanced diet for best results and don't overdo it!

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## Solve Puzzles, Reap the Reward

Puzzles can have massive impact on your mental clarity and focus. If ever you find yourself with the inability to get “into the zone” or flow ([as we mentioned last week](#)), simply take a break and solve a puzzle.

“..it is my cautious opinion that puzzles are beneficial to brain activity” explains Marcel Danesi, Ph.D [in this great post at Psychology Today](#) . Marcel goes on to explain, “The thinking involved in solving puzzles can thus be characterized as a blend of imaginative association and memory. It is this blend, I would claim, that leads us to literally see the pattern or twist that a puzzle conceals. It is a kind of “clairvoyance” that typically provokes an Aha! effect.”

For brain training games designed by neuroscientists, check out [Lumosity](#).

This isn't to say that puzzles can INSTANTLY create focus and clarity but as an alternative to the typical “Facebook break”, puzzles can keep your brain moving.

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Distractions rob you of productivity and while mental clarity is sometimes hard to come by, there are some solid steps to increasing your mental function and ability to pull through to heightened levels of focus. Something as simple as making sure you're putting the right fuel in your body, or drinking enough water can have unforeseen effects on your mental clarity.

Measure the severity and frequency of your distractions and identify exactly what times of day you're really getting the least/most done. Making yourself aware of everything that can possibly distract, will ultimately fuel your decision of environmental factors that lead to higher levels of focus.

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## 2.3 4 Great Ways to Measure Your Productivity

Measuring productivity is important. It's intrinsic in all people to know that what we're doing today is actually paying off.

The only way we can achieve this kind of insight and transparency into our progress is to avidly measure our daily tasks. Once we place a direct value on our productivity, we can make adjustments based on the result.

*Concentrate all your thoughts upon the work in hand.  
The Sun's rays do not burn until brought to a focus.*

-Alexander Graham Bell

Every personality is different. There will never be one single metric that works in every case across the board, so the ability to identify what works is a key step in monitoring your productivity. Take time and analyze the different aspects of your life, then create a series of metrics that fit your unique scenario.

Here's a list to get you thinking in the right direction.

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## #1 Track your “Flow”

Have you ever been so consumed with your work that, when you finally stop to take a breather, you realize that what felt like 30 minutes was actually 3 hours? Most people call that sensation “being in the zone” but it’s actually a phenomenon called “flow”, coined by Positive Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. As stated by the video below, flow can be defined by a few specific sensations:

- **Completely involved in what we are doing** – focused.
- **A sense of ecstasy** – of being outside everyday reality.
- **Great inner clarity** – knowing what needs to be done, and how well we are doing it.
- **Know that the activity is doable** – that our skills are adequate to the task.
- **A sense of serenity** – no worries about oneself, a feeling of growing beyond the boundaries of the ego.
- **Timelessness** – thoroughly focused on the present, hours seem to pass by in minutes.
- **Intrinsic motivation** – whatever produces flow becomes it’s own reward.

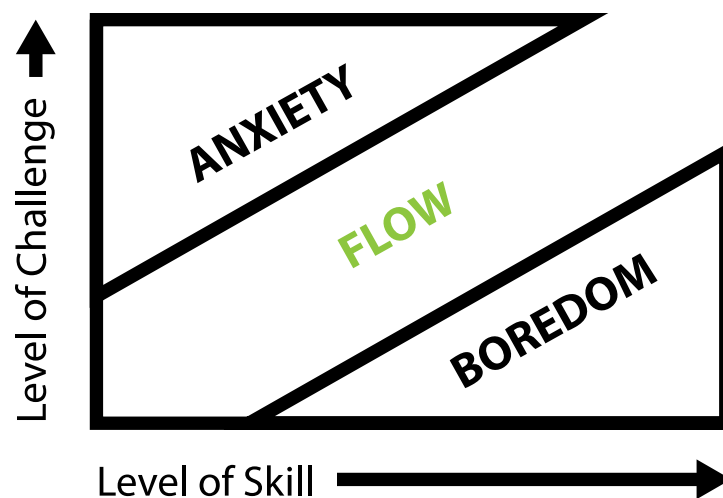
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In this recent TED Talk, Mihaly said “the question we are trying to address is how to put more and more of everyday life in that flow channel”. At some point in time, everyone has felt “flow”. The question is, when does it happen and how can we control it and use it to our advantage?

## When does flow happen?

Flow sits at the intersection of your own personal interest in a project and how well you think you can actually accomplish the task based on your skill and expertise. The result is an “I can do this” attitude toward the project and an increased excitement to get it done. Here’s a simple chart to emphasize what I’m talking about.

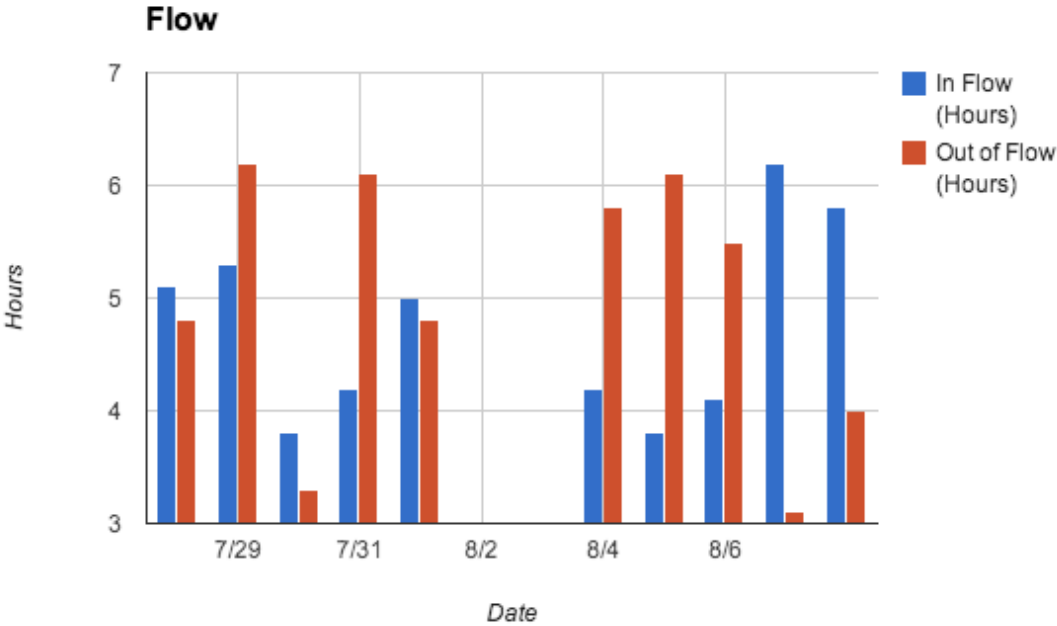


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## Measuring Flow

The best way to measure your flow state is to simply count your time in flow, and compare it with time out of flow. As time progresses, you should track your flow ratio and watch it grow. Simply charting it weekly is a great place to start. Your spreadsheet and chart should look something like this:

Day	In Flow (Hours)	Out of Flow (Hours)
7/28/2014	5.1	4.8
7/29/2014	5.3	6.2
7/30/2014	3.8	3.3
7/31/2014	4.2	6.1
8/1/2014	5	4.8
8/4/2014	4.2	5.8
8/5/2014	3.8	6.1
8/6/2014	4.1	5.5
8/7/2014	6.2	3.1
8/8/2014	5.8	4



Measuring your flow is an incredibly powerful way to quantify and improve your productivity. Set goals and always grow your flow!

[Download your own flow spreadsheet here to track your flow.](#)



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## #2 Set Goals and Measure Against Them

*What you get by achieving your goals is not as important as what you become by achieving your goals.*

-Henry David Thoreau

Setting goals is the linchpin of any good productivity strategy. The most powerful and prominent people in history are all widely regarded as great goal setters. There's a great reason behind it: Goals work.

According to the most thorough and prolific study on [goal setting](#) to date, Psychologists Edwin Locke and Gary Latham found that very specific and challenging goals like “Create 3 logo variations by the end of the day” push people to work harder than non-specific goals like “Work on logo variations.”

In their incredible book, “A Theory of Goal Setting & Task Performance,” Locke and Latham also outlined specific principles for good goal setting. Those principles are:

- 1. Clarity**
- 2. Challenge**
- 3. Commitment**
- 4. Feedback**
- 5. Task Complexity**

It all comes down to the sincerity in which you set goals and your ability to see them through. It's proven that goals will bring your best and most productive self to the table, so setting clear goals is a great long-term strategy for achieving heightened levels of success.

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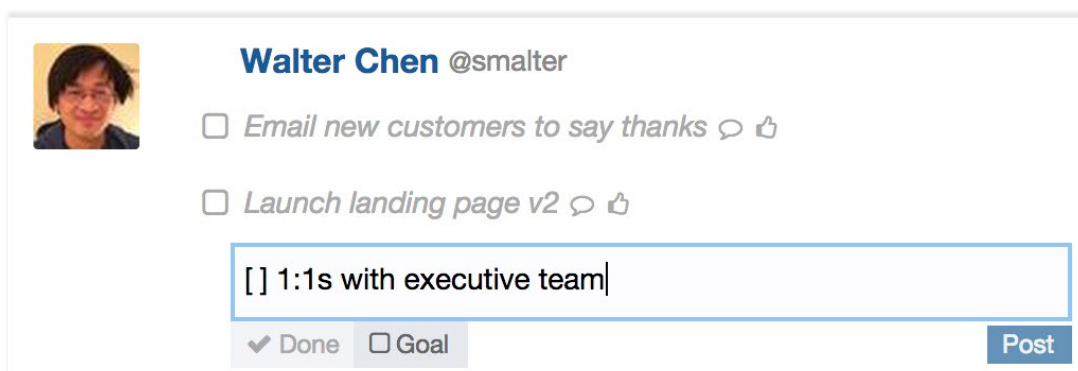
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## Measuring Goals

At the end of the day, goal setting isn't really a science. It's more like a discipline which can pay off dividends in the long run. A simple way to track your productivity through goal setting is to make a daily task list and apply a simple weight to each goal. For example:

1. Score each goal based on their level of importance. Your #1 goal can be weighted higher than your other goals but the sum of all goals in a specific day should equal 100.
2. Add up the scores of each goal you've accomplished today.
3. Track that score in a spreadsheet and monitor it over time.

An easy way to track and measure your goals is using [iDoneThis](#). At the beginning of the day, set your goals. At the end of the day, the app will remind you what your goals were and ask you which of those that you accomplished.



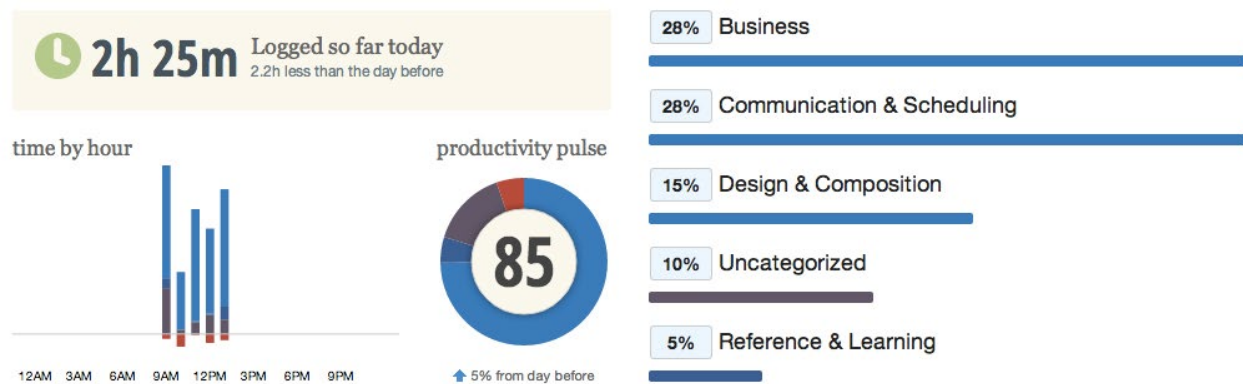
The screenshot shows the iDoneThis app interface for user Walter Chen (@smalter). It features a profile picture, the user's name, and a list of goals. The first goal is "Email new customers to say thanks" with a checkbox and icons for comments and shares. The second goal is "Launch landing page v2" with a checkbox and icons for comments and shares. A third goal, "[ ] 1:1s with executive team", is currently being edited in a text input field. Below the input field are two buttons: "Done" (with a checkmark icon) and "Goal" (with a checkbox icon). A "Post" button is located at the bottom right of the form.

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## #3 Use RescueTime

If you're not familiar with [RescueTime](#), it's an awesome app that's installed on your machine and runs in the background. It tracks your productivity throughout the day and monitors the apps you use. After a day's work, it outputs an incredibly useful dashboard of productivity statistics. Here's mine so far today:



I absolutely love this tool, because it shows me how I'm doing and it inspires me to improve my productivity day after day.

2. Add up the scores of each goal you've accomplished today.
3. Track that score in a spreadsheet and monitor it over time.

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## #4 Schedule Your Day

Creating a simple schedule for each day can serve as a guiding light to keep you on task, but it's also a great way to measure what you're getting done. Lifehacker is always on point, and according to this great post, "I've found that calendaring the important-but-easily-dismissed events in my daily routine—that is, setting specific times at which I drop everything to eat, shower, exercise, do laundry, and so on—has kept me on track in a way that I never manage to do on my own."

Pre-determining where you spend your time takes the guesswork out of your day which, if you can stick to it, is an incredibly powerful tool to keep you on task. Here's a quick example of what your Google Calendar might look like if you decide this approach:

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Knowing exactly how you spend your time by pre-determining it beforehand is not only a great way to stay on task, but it's also fantastic for measuring your productivity. If you know that every day at 2pm, you spend 30 minutes on email, it's not a far reach to figure out exactly what percentage of your time every week is spent on email. Simple, yet effective. As I mentioned before, the key in any initiative like this is consistency. Keep consistent and you'll see results.

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In tracking your productivity, find the data inputs that work for you and track them in rigid fashion. Keeping consistent in your tracking is the only way to adequately monitor if your efforts are actually paying off.

Be creative and build a set of unique metrics that match your specific use case. Once you've quantified exactly how you're spending your time every day, higher levels of productivity will follow.

8 – Wake Up, Eat Breakfast
8:30 – Shower and Get Ready
9 – Read Through Emails
9:30 – 11 Write
11 – 12p Edit Yesterday's Post
12p – 1p Daily Appointments
1p – Team Meeting
1:30p – 4p Project #1
4p – 5p Project #2
5p – Customer Support
5:30p – Meet w/ Michael
6p – Email
6:30p – 7:30p Write

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## 2.4 How to Build The Perfect Home Office: A Scientific Approach

Getting your home office right is actually more important than you think. [This study](#) by Sheffield Hallam University, concludes that among all generations tested, an organized workspace with lots of light and [free of distraction](#) contributes greatly to your ability to focus on the task at hand.

An [open floor plan office](#) for a co-located team can be one of a non-remote team's biggest disrupters to team member productivity. Your own home office is your chance to exercise control over your environment to make facilitate peak productivity.

Creating a space that's conducive to your personal ability to achieve is quite possibly the most valuable investment you can make.

Let's dive into the specifics and talk about how you can design a space that will work for you.

*The brain is a wonderful organ; it starts working the moment you get up in the morning and does not stop until you get into the office.*

-Robert Frost

### #1 Funnel and Shape the Light to Enhance Your Work

Lighting can come in a few different forms. Whether it's natural light which flows freely in or artificial lighting, testing to find out what works for you can have big implications on your productivity. Let's take a look at the different options and see how we can maximize on both.



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## Lighting Levels, the “Lux” Effect

Activity	Illumination (lux, lumen/m <sup>2</sup> )
Public areas with dark surroundings	20 - 50
Simple orientation for short visits	50 - 100
Working areas where visual tasks are only occasionally performed	100 - 150
Warehouses, Homes, Theaters, Archives	150
Easy Office Work, Classes	250
Normal Office Work, PC Work, Study Library, Groceries, Show Rooms, Laboratories	500
Supermarkets, Mechanical Workshops, Office Landscapes	750
Normal Drawing Work, Detailed Mechanical Workshops, Operation Theatres	1,000
Detailed Drawing Work, Very Detailed Mechanical Works	1,500 - 2,000
Performance of visual tasks of low contrast and very small size for prolonged periods of time	2,000 - 5,000
Performance of very prolonged and exacting visual tasks	5,000 - 10,000
Performance of very special visual tasks of extremely low contrast and small size	10,000 - 20,000

Chart courtesy of <http://www.engineeringtoolbox.com>

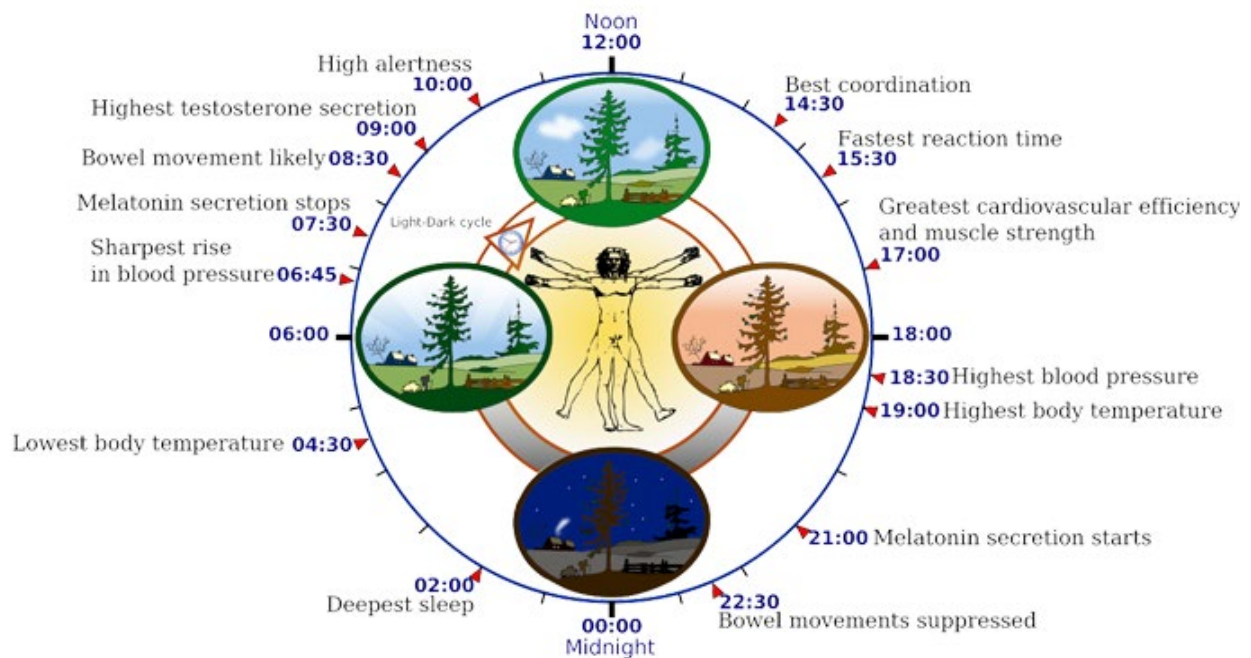
The illuminance of any location is measured in “Lux” or Lumens per square inch. On a clear day, the outside can be measured at approximately 10,000 lux. Indoors can be much lower and as low as 25 lux. Lux is a simple measurement which tells us something that we probably already know, that being indoors comes with much lower light so it takes a bit of extra effort to avoid the psychological effects of indoor lighting. [Read about the indoor/outdoor Lux scale here.](#)

Think heavily on your lighting setup because low light can be attributed to increased levels of depression and in the winter, it can create something called “[Seasonal Affective Disorder](#)” which can be characterized by early waking in the morning, binge eating, nausea and much more. If access to lots of natural occurring light is difficult in your particular situation, [Light Therapy](#) and “[Dawn Simulators](#)” are becoming prevalent methods in treating Seasonal Affective disorder. Just remember, if you’re locked in an engineering basement in an office building, there are options!

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## Circadian Rhythm

Your body's "Circadian Rhythm", more commonly called as one's "biological clock", is known to influence many psychological variables such as cortisol, melatonin levels and the feeling of being alert.



Low sunlight can have a big impact on your naturally occurring circadian rhythm and when these rhythms are thrown out of whack, random mood swings and low productivity results. At some point in our lives, we can all relate to plugging the day away indoors, but keep a steady stream of natural light with higher lux values filtering through your workspace to avoid these negative symptoms of low light.

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Here are a few ways we can increase the light exposure in an existing space:



**Instead of installing extra windows, [try a tube skylight](#)** . They can be purchased and installed for around \$500 and can save \$1,500 in the installation of a window according to [This Old House](#).

[Tubular Skylight by Arizona Energy Products](#)

**Use Translucent blinds** – Translucent blinds are a cheap and effective way to add more light without installing extra windows. Think of it like capitalizing on the light that’s already there and accentuating the space.

**Clean Your Windows** – You’d be surprised how dirty windows can get. With a constant stream of dust being kicked up by the wind, you can naturally let in more light by a quick clean!



[Extra Larger Roller Blind from Niche Blinds and Curtains.](#)

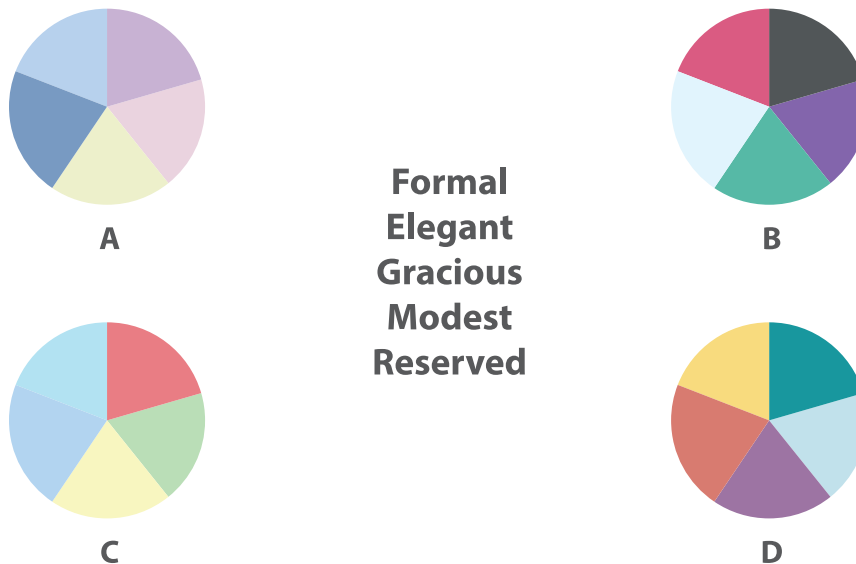
**Trim the Trees and Hedges** – Most people don’t quite realize how out of control their outdoor greenery can get until they step back and examine the situation. Cut em down and let the sunlight flow!

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## #2 Find Colors that Compliment Your Thinking

Angela Wright, psychologist and color theorist has spent the last 30 years researching how color affects our productivity, mood and overall mental state. [Her findings](#) conclude that four basic color families exist and correlate exactly with four different personality types and their affinity toward one family or the other. Based on these findings, depending on which group you're a part of, the corresponding color palette can accent your way of thinking to provide a breeding ground for creativity in your work.



Sherwin Williams, masters of color stand behind this way of thinking too. [In a recent blog post](#), “As with all interior design, context is everything. Bright, saturated colors in an advertising agency may elicit energy and creativity. But they might seem overwhelming in an oncologist’s office, where muted tones can help staff (and patients) focus on their serious tasks. Workplace color choices can have unintended consequences. Gray, tasteful and neutral may be common for cubicles, but such interiors can make women depressed”.

Choose your color choices wisely!



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## #3 The Space Should Enhance Your Natural Patterns of Movement

We all move in patterns so build a space to take advantage of your movement. One place these patterns are often used is in retail spaces.

[According to a research paper](#) by the Department of Geoinformation and Cartography at Vienna University of Technology, a phenomenon called “Gruen transfer” exists when the design of a retail space can actually trigger a sensation to spend more by creating a feeling of being lost in the moment.



Photo Courtesy of [Jorge Franganillo](#)

*According to the research paper, “Successful retail architects name the slightly bent path that creates a constant urge to explore what is beyond the immediate view field as one of the most successful layout concepts to prolong the time spent in shopping environments”.*

The question is, can we take this concept of Gruen transfer and apply it to our workspace to create an aura of [increased productivity](#)?

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The elephant in the room here is the fact that any given workspace isn't nearly as big as a retail space, but the idea is to recreate this effect on a smaller scale. A few ideas:

Lay out your furniture in a walkway format which requires a quick glance of your work as you travel through the space.

- Place items on your desk (books, papers, plants, etc.) which create a sense of enthusiasm and excitement as you walk through.
- Don't simply put together an open space by placing your furniture against the walls. Put things where they'd be least expected. Just be careful that you're not constantly tripping over the ottoman. That
- approach would probably be counter-intuitive to what we're trying to achieve here.

## **#4 Tailor Your Daily Working Conditions to How they Will Affect Your Productivity, Not Simply to What You Prefer**

You'll be spending loads of time in your office space so there are a lot of factors at play. Not only ask yourself what your preference (art, temperature, etc.) is, but take it one layer deeper and say "what are the implications of my space being too hot?". If you do the research, you'll find not only the optimal temperature for your personal well being, but what will ultimately empower you to do your best work.

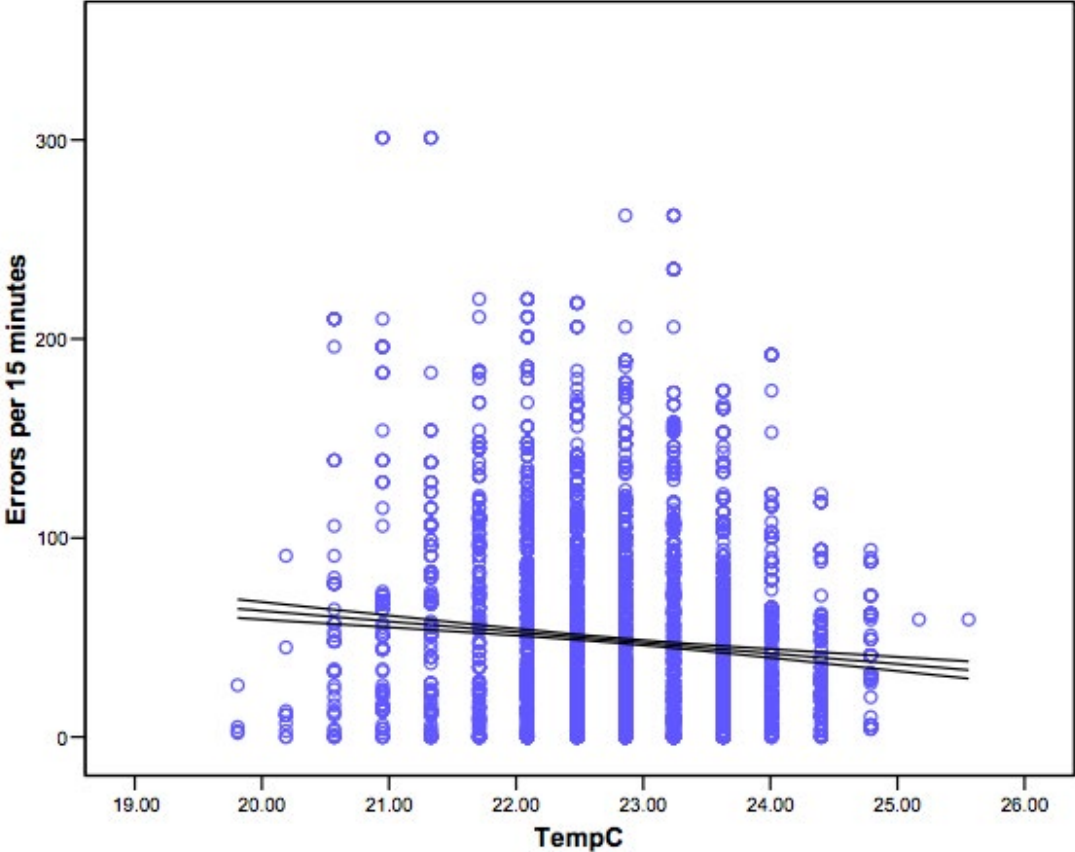
[An amazingly quantitative study](#) performed by Cornell University directly correlates room temperature to the amount of errors in a given task. The findings state that on a simple task of typing, the most errors were made at 21 Celsius or 69.8 Fahrenheit, which was interesting and actually the exact opposite of what I would think.



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My basic instinct is to say that more heat would create the most errors, but I'd be wrong. Actually at increased temperatures, fewer errors were made.



Armed with this kind of research, you can avoid common missteps of following your own personal preferences and yield to higher levels of research when building out your workspace.

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## #5 Create a Sense of Customizability

In anything we do as humans, it's important for us to feel ownership and control. That sentiment translates to the office where minor changes on occasion can make the place feel like it's always fresh, and that you have complete creative control over your cave.

[In this piece by Meredith Wells-Lepley PhD](#), the importance of a customized work environment is emphasized, *“At the most basic level, personalization is a form of territoriality by which you are marking your space, subtly indicating, ‘This workspace is mine.’ For new employees, marking your workspace with personal belongings fosters an emotional connection or a bond to the new environment.”*

Personal ownership of your workspace is an important step to realizing the space's potential in relation to your work. A few ways to customize your space on a regular basis are:

### **Netflix for Art**

If you're looking for a simple way to customize your space on a regular interval, [try Artsicle](#)! Think about it like Netflix for fine art. It's a super cool concept if you're looking to create that sense of customizability and change the space frequently.

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## Paint on a Cycle (Quarterly, Two Times a Year, etc.)

As mentioned previously, painting your space is a great way to make the room feel like it's your's but also to accentuate your personality. Of course, cost is an issue so use [this calculator](#) to budget the project and see if it's worth it personally and factor in the frequency in which you'd like to paint.

## Plants Can Change the Entire Dynamic of a Space



According to [several studies](#) a plant per every square meter of the office contributed to higher quality air which ultimately lead to a 15% increase in office productivity. Plants can not only change the air quality, but they can create a sense of creativity by bringing the outdoors in. Another benefit to plants is that they're easy to move around a reconfigure, which accomplishes a simple but customizable space.

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Your office space is where you'll accomplish potentially the [biggest wins of your career](#).

Big things happen in your workspace so the investment opportunity is clear. Maximize its productivity by using simple things like light and color to your advantage. Think through the layout of the space to provide ease of movement. Make the space customizable and bring in a taste of the outdoors.

Your office space plays a pivotal role in your success so take the time and build a space that will accentuate and embody everything you see for yourself and your future. If you do that and take a few of these points to heart, you and your space will jump for joy.

## 3. Radical Habits of Highly Successful Remote Teams

Working remotely requires a totally different approach from how we've come to define our workday. We're so used to the commutes, having to deal with our cubicle neighbor, the water cooler chats, and shuffling in and out of meetings. That's the way we know how to get stuff done. Removed from shared physical spaces, remote teams have none of that.

The physical workspace — from layout to furniture configurations to break-room — create a certain working environment that affects how you communicate and collaborate. Without those traditional areas in play, remote teams face a tougher challenge of figuring out how to work together, simply because there's no conventional wisdom to lean on, no way to bump into someone on your way to the bathroom, no coffee break to take together.

But necessity is the mother of invention, and that's why the most [successful remote teams](#) are reinventing how to work together with methods you might consider extreme or crazy.





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## #1 Total transparency about yourself with your remote team

Do you know exactly how much your co-workers making, how much sleep they're getting, or their self-improvement goals? Exchanging that amount of information sounds intrusive, but it's what the [distributed employees at Buffer](#) share every day with each other.

Just by virtue of being co-located and literally sitting by your teammates, you become privy to an incredible amount of information about them — who they are as people and what challenges and frustrates them — that adds up day after day. While those details may seem trivial, that richness of context breeds trust.

[Remote teams](#) gain none of that contextual information because they are scattered across different locations and time zones. That's why Buffer co-founders Joel Gascoigne and Leo Widrich made such a conscious choice to inject personal context into its team — so much so that they made extreme transparency a fundamental value in their company.

For example, every Buffer employee receives a Jawbone UP wristband that tracks how you're sleeping and shares that with the team. They also use [iDoneThis](#). Every day, everyone at Buffer logs their accomplishments and what they're working on — and just as if they bumped into each other in the kitchen, interact with each other by commenting and asking questions about what they're up to.

## #2 Leave your webcam on all day

Tapping someone on the shoulder to talk feels easy. Yet spontaneously Skyping your colleague feels like a major intrusion, instead requiring a formal calendar invite. Since mutual scheduling is a major pain, that often means I let opportunities for [virtual face-to-face moments](#) with my colleagues go by when I'm working remotely.



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When the New York-based Foursquare opened its San Francisco office, they deliberately took a drastic step to ensure sure their teams on opposite coasts would stay connected instead of having the odd, scheduled videochat. So they put a twist on the traditional idea of videoconferencing to create something that they call “The Portal.”

While most videoconferencing is used in preplanned meetings in separate conference rooms, the Foursquare team devised The Portal as a video system that was always on and running in the primary work area, rather than in a little-used room, providing a window into each office.

You can walk up to The Portal in San Francisco and wave good morning to your colleague in New York and start a spontaneous conversation. [Daily standups](#) take place in front of The Portal, bypassing all the annoying problems that pop up when trying to set up a group video call.

For remote teams without a Foursquare-sized budget, there’s [Sqwiggle](#), an always-on video chat system that works pretty much like The Portal while requiring only your webcam and monitor instead of expensive Cisco videoconferencing equipment. This provides a persistent, passive view of your colleagues that makes you feel like you’re in the same room, working together at the same table.

## **#3 Replace physical space with software — lots of it**

When you work on a remote team, you lose the primary way you’ve communicated with people your whole life: face-to-face conversations. Without this kind of interaction, communication often deteriorates, creating inefficiencies, missed emotional context, not to mention, [loneliness and disengagement](#).

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Laura Roeder, founder of LKR Social Media, manages her distributed team by adopting an extreme policy that resulted from realizing a crucial distinction between how communication happens on remote versus co-located teams.

Just because a remote team can't take advantage of the communication benefits of sharing physical space doesn't mean they don't have options. Instead, [technology becomes that shared space](#). A company could have a room for desks, a kitchen, conference room, and a break room all kinds of physical spaces to catalyze different types of employee interaction. Similarly, a remote team can use a varied range of technological conversation channels.

Rather than be like some companies that only use email, at [LKR Social Media](#) they use six times as many tools. They use Hipchat for work-related chat and water cooler conversation, [iDoneThis](#) to keep everyone in the loop on work status, Google Hangout for weekly Monday meetings, UberConference for quick conference calls, Confluence as an internal Wiki, and Wrike for structured conversation about projects.

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To Wade Foster, co-founder and CEO of [Zapier](#), one of the most powerful mental advantages of having a remote team is that you take nothing for granted.

When you have a co-located team, you can get lulled into a false sense of security about how well your team is communicating.

When you're remote, the challenges are big, hairy, and in your face, so you have to be explicit about how you're going to work together and tackle those challenges head on.

What you end up with may be unconventional and extreme, but the proof is in how it empowers your team to get stuff done and with all of the autonomy that remote work enables.

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## 3.1 3 Hidden Keys to Successful Communication as a Remote Team



The biggest challenge of working in remote teams isn't dealing with the physical distribution of your teammates but **reducing the psychological distance** between everyone. Bridging that distance is probably a test for all types of teams but requires more work as a remote team.

“One thing that excites me about building a company is **the human experience of making something out of nothing together**,” our co-founder and CEO Walter at iDoneThis recently wrote in a company email. As a distributed company, we have to sweat to achieve that communal sense of creation, but in doing so, we've had to consider and resolve aspects of our work culture with deliberation.

Culture takes shape from a sense of coherence, built through shared experiences, expectations, and values — **and one key to cohering is learning how to communicate effectively with each other.**

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I wanted to dig deeper into what we've learned about remote team communication that deals with building those shared relationships, expectations, and values and that help shape the cultural foundation of how we get stuff done.

## **#1 Make sure that you're closing the loop.**

One of the great advantages of remote teams is the ability to work asynchronously, giving people the [time and space to focus without disruption](#). However, with asynchronous communication, it's tough to settle **the problem of discovering you've sent a message out into the void.**





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At one point, Ginni, our Chief Happiness Officer, was constantly frustrated because engineers weren't responding to and resolving their customer support emails quickly enough. Tickets demanding technical expertise sat as Ginni kept sending reminder emails and nudges in chat. What made the problem worse was that Ginni, like anyone would, hated nagging and feeling like she wasn't being supported.

When we discussed the issue in person at a recent team retreat, we discovered where our remote team communication was breaking down. To the engineers, a ticket assignment in HelpScout looked like just another email in your inbox, which was too easy to put on the back burner.

 A snippet of a HelpScout ticket. It features a green circular icon with an 'i' on the left. The main text reads "idonethis · Welcome page "Settings" link should be changed" followed by a red "customer-support" tag. Below this, it says "Opened by ginnichen 3 days ago (updated 3 days ago)".

 A snippet of a HelpScout ticket. It features a green circular icon with an 'i' on the left. The main text reads "idonethis · Reminder emails not received, digest service normal." followed by a red "customer-support" tag. Below this, it says "Opened by ginnichen 5 days ago (updated 5 days ago)".

 A snippet of a HelpScout ticket. It features a green circular icon with an 'i' on the left. The main text reads "idonethis · Anonymous "Likes" in Team Digests" followed by a red "customer-support" tag. Below this, it says "Opened by ginnichen 6 days ago (updated 5 days ago) 3 comments".

We settled on creating issues in GitHub for now. Since the engineers spent most of the day there already, switching gears to customer support is easier. They could also prioritize and make sense of the tickets because the description of specific technical problems could be seen and understood at a glance.

Even though this created another step for Ginni's workflow, it ultimately saved her time, improved our customer support as a whole, and Ginni didn't have to feel ignored. This problem might not seem to be one of remote team communication. It's not confusing to get assigned a support ticket, but that doesn't make a message sent and received. **The communication loop had never quite closed.**

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The increased responsibility to communicate well in remote teams falls to both the speaker/sender and the listener/receiver, especially with such dependence on written correspondence. On the one hand, writing something down in a shared space doesn't necessarily mean you're communicating well, and on the other, you have to make sure you're not leaving your teammates hanging.

## **#2 Always have a clear purpose for any remote team communication tool or process.**

The best remote teams aim to overcommunicate. They use an arsenal of [remote team communication tools](#) to make up for how information travels around an office, providing channels for the various types of conversation that take place in different spaces, such as brainstorming around the whiteboard or chatting in the break room. The calculation of which tools and processes to use as a remote team requires understanding **their roles and functions**.

When we discussed the issue in person at a recent team retreat, we discovered where our remote team communication was breaking down. To the engineers, a ticket assignment in HelpScout looked like just another email in your inbox, which was too easy to put on the back burner.



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For a while, we fell into a [bad habit of holding weekly meetings](#) over Google Hangout because we skipped the calculation. We knew that regular face-to-face contact was important for building camaraderie, and regularly checking in as a team seemed like something we should be doing. But that was neither clear nor compelling enough.



Since we didn't set forth a specific enough protocol or purpose, the Hangouts were unfocused, devolved into rambling discussions about product, and ended up wasting our time. Nobody stepped up to provide direction, largely because it was hard to tell why we were having meetings in the first place. They were vaguely characterized as a weekly standup but we ended up rehashing what we were already sharing in iDoneThis.
































Instead, we moved to frame our weekly calls as a Friday “Show and Tell”. **The purpose and protocol is clear** — each person spends a few minutes demonstrating some work that they're proud of or sharing something noteworthy about the week. It's an opportunity to celebrate our wins, see visuals and demos of progress, and shift mental gears into a more proactive mode so that everyone has something to show every week.

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Bad remote team communication habits such as [holding pointless meetings](#) or implementing time-wasting tools happen all the time, no matter what structure you have. Still, as a remote team, you're always looking for tools and ways to enrich remote team communication. It's imperative to think first about the why and how and to unpack any practice you think you should be doing.

### #3 Make room for emotional conversations.

Informal conversations are more difficult and important than you might think when it comes to co-worker communication. Most remote teams use tools like HipChat or Campfire for water-cooler conversation, where off-topic jokes, banter, and chatter can take place in addition to work-related discussion.

Walter Chen	haha
Rodrigo Guzman	the battle of the queries continues! 
Rodrigo Guzman	i think i'm talking to you guys in order to use emoticons  "ㄒ(ツ)ㄒ"
Janet Choi	
Janet Choi	  
Janet Choi	uggghghghghghghghg
Walter Chen	
Walter Chen	                       
Janet Choi	Whoa.

But the more interesting thing we've found is that **emotional conversations are really hard** as a remote team.

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Emotional conversation isn't all heart-to-hearts (though those can certainly count) — but the **communication of emotional context**, which is often non-verbalized or falls outside the informal conversation of collective water-cooler chat.

Since we didn't set forth a specific enough protocol or purpose, the Hangouts were unfocused, devolved into rambling discussions about product, and ended up wasting our time. Nobody stepped up to provide direction, largely because it was hard to tell why we were having meetings in the first place. They were vaguely characterized as a weekly standup but we ended up rehashing what we were already sharing in iDoneThis.

Instead, we moved to frame our weekly calls as a Friday “Show and Tell”. **The purpose and protocol is clear** — each person spends a few minutes demonstrating some work that they're proud of or sharing something noteworthy about the week. It's an opportunity to celebrate our wins, see visuals and demos of progress, and shift mental gears into a more proactive mode so that everyone has something to show every week.

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Getting in the habit of exerting yourself to share how you're feeling — not to mention getting comfortable with it — is quite difficult. And it's pretty hard to understand your co-workers' emotional state if they don't actively communicate them. **This is why video chats and in-person get-togethers remain so crucial for distributed teams**, to gain a sense of who you work with every day as human beings and to build the trust and relationships that will help enable those emotional conversations.



**Rodrigo Guzman**



2 commits in [idonethis](#) on [master](#)   

destroyed @janet at ping pong  2 



Janet Choi 2 points do not a destroy make.



Walter Chen hehe!

[+ Add Feedback](#)

added ability to customize the recipient email per subscription in the admin  

caught up on customer support  

inbox 0!  

the week in vegas seems like it was pretty productive and good  

We're also getting better at recording more emotional context and informal conversation in iDoneThis rather than a straightforward list of what we get done. If I've expressed downer sentiments for a few days in a row, Walter or Rodrigo will bring it up in my weekly one-on-one, someone will write an encouraging comment, or Ginni will offer to co-work with me since we're both located in New York.

Emotional communication and how we deal with each others' feelings is a tremendous part of building morale, a sense of togetherness, and culture — and that's a key factor for remote teams to consider in how they work.

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Figuring out how to working effectively as a distributed startup is a constant process. We learn from our experiences and our mistakes, not to mention the brightest distributed companies like [Buffer](#), [Zapier](#), [LKR Social Media](#), and [Sqwiggle](#) who write and share so thoughtfully about the subject.

## 3.2 An Ode to Distributed Teams

There's not much mystery behind how a distributed team works. We show up, in our respective locations, talk to each other, and make stuff happen. The alchemy of coming together to make it work is the same that any team experiences when they build something together. There are a lot of ingredients that go into that magic, and these days, people's physical proximity to each other is not necessarily one of them.

Like many of the teams we serve, our own iDoneThis team is dispersed. While we experience both the challenges and benefits of the form, what stands out is how naturally that form compels teams to consider and resolve the process of daily collaboration. When we get down to it and count the ways we love distributed teams, **we see the alignment of four elements — company culture, communication, productivity, and the right people — that help make the magic happen.**



half of the magic-making iDoneThis team

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## #1 The Company Culture Advantage for Distributed Teams

Despite having reached that fuzzy buzzword point of meaning whatever you desire, company culture is widely acknowledged to be, as Ginni Rometty, CEO of IBM, put it, “the defining issue that will distinguish the most successful businesses from the rest of the pack.”

[Company culture](#) is not made of ping-pong tables but of **a mission and vision, shared values, and a meeting of minds on how to (and how not to) work together**. VC [Mark Suster](#) points to supposedly weaker company culture in claiming that distributed teams are less effective. “The best companies are built on common beliefs and culture – a common sense of purpose,” he writes, and those commonalities are built through “human connections.”

Yet, human connections are exactly what technology has been so great at facilitating. [Ravelry](#), whose close-knit distributed team has created a site and network that gathers a tight community of approximately 2.8 million zealous users, is just one example of the power of such connections. How does Ravelry make it work? They found the right people and “[tools that work for the business to stay in touch](#)” to advance their shared principles and priorities of utility, connection, and fun.

**Without a physical space to connect, distributed teams are bound by a strong sense of common purpose.** People have to get on board and ride in the same boat with that sense for it to move forward.



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## #2 The Communication Advantage for Distributed Teams

One of the most prominent challenges of any organization is communication, which the mere fact of everyone being in the same place does not resolve. There's always potential for miscommunication and lack of transparency leading to unequal information, politics, trust issues, and overall weaker company health. Even within an office, think about the game of telephone that can play out when distributing information, the people whose last names you hardly know, the manager who speaks solely through e-mailed memos, the meeting that spends one hour to impart five minutes of information.

Though communication tools can address those issues and lower the [coordination cost](#) involved in making sure everybody is on the same page and communicating well, the right communication tools become even more vital for distributed teams as shared technology becomes its shared space.

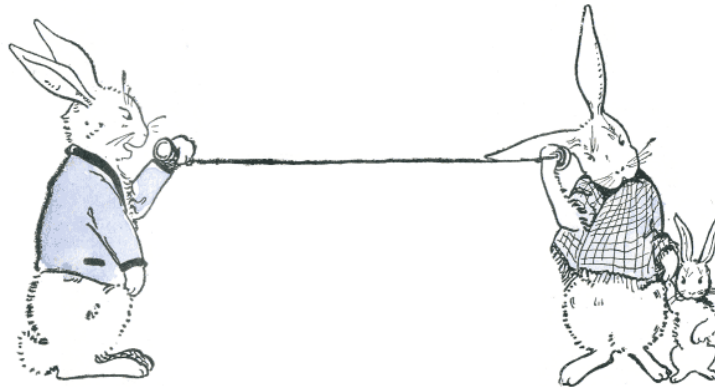
[Toni Schneider](#), of Automattic, illustrates the communications trade-off that happens with a distributed team:

[A] chat conversation is simply not as rich as a real life one. But there are advantages as well. A chat conversation can be archived, searchable, and visible to the entire team, whereas in person conversations in meetings and hallways are often lost to the ether. Being distributed is a good excuse to abolish inefficient meetings, conference calls, and email silos, and get the whole team to use better online collaboration tools.

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Such communication methods can also provide the benefit of adding to transparency and work culture. For example, the ability to build a [visible record](#), as iDoneThis has for Reddit's distributed team, helps both to keep everyone in the loop and to build a company narrative.



## 3.3 The Ultimate Toolbox for the Remote Team: 15 Tools You Can't Live Without

If you're a part of a remote team, finding the right tools can be difficult. It's an integral part in [determining your company culture](#), progress and productivity. Your choice of tools can either make or break your company, so make sure you choose the right ones.

*Technology is nothing. What's important is that you have a faith in people, that they're basically good and smart, and if you give them tools, they'll do wonderful things with them.*

-Steve Jobs

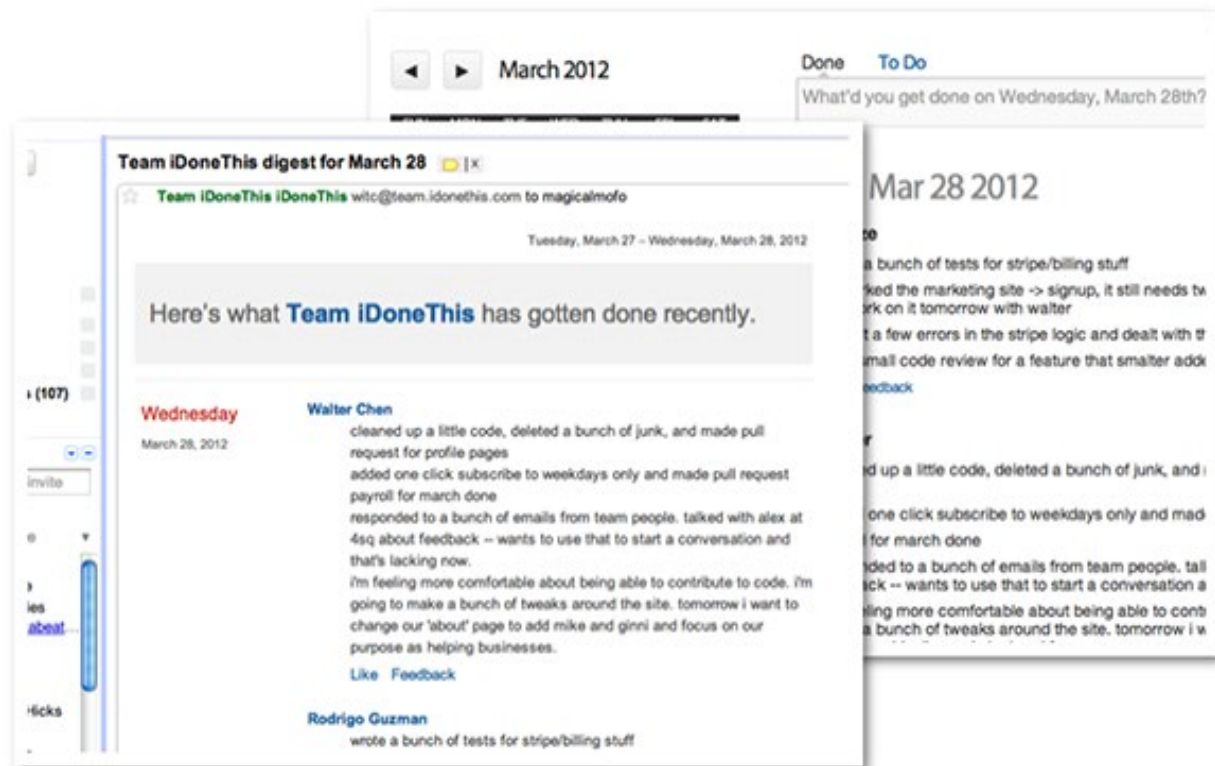
We've tested lots of different tools here at Sqwiggle. Here's a list of our favorite tools to make the life of any remote worker better.

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## #1 iDoneThis – Async Team Updates

Free w/ Premium Upgrade

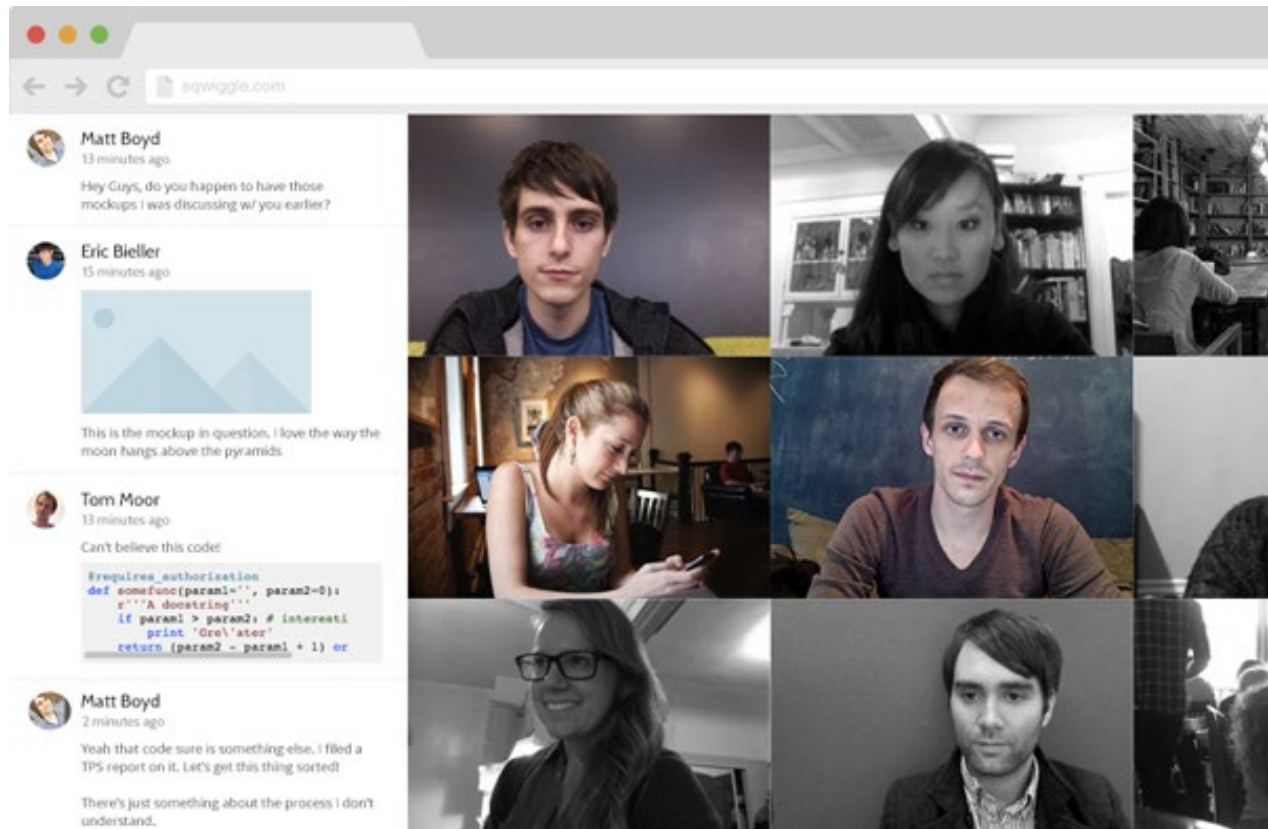


If you're looking for a passive way to keep up with your team, give iDoneThis a try! iDoneThis is a simple email reminder. When you reply, it will send an daily digest the next morning of everyone's progress. It's very simple, but incredibly powerful for passive, asynchronous communication.

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## #2 Sqwiggle – Chat/Video Presence for Remote Teams (Free w/ Trial)

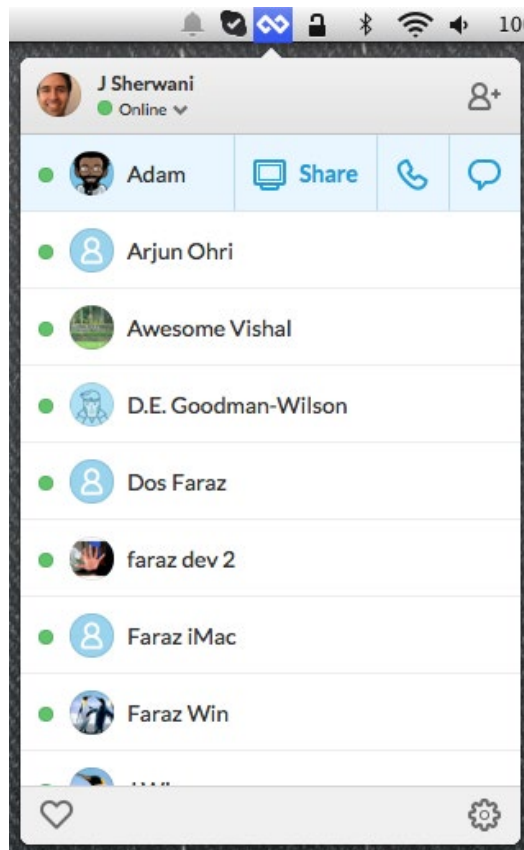


Sqwiggle is a communication app, specifically designed for remote teams. Keep it running throughout the day and receive visual status updates from your team. When you wanna talk, just click and start talking. No calling or accepting, just instant discussions!

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## #3 Screenhero – Screensharing Collaboration (\$9.99/User/Month)



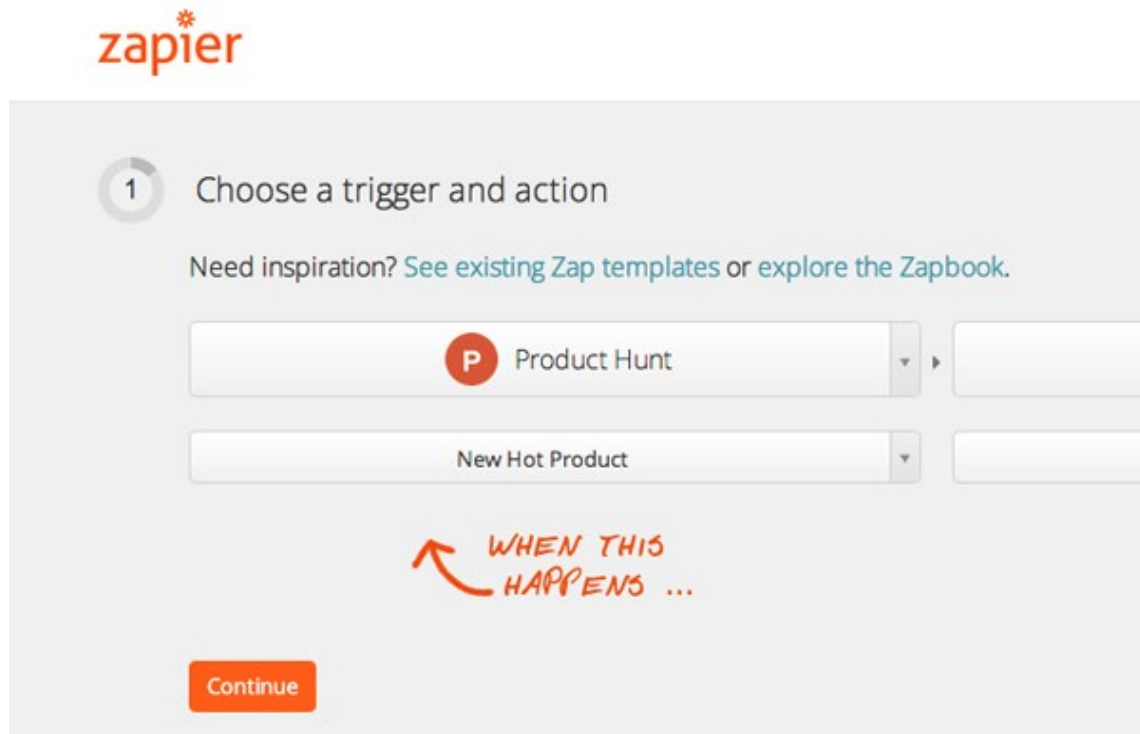
Screenhero is seriously great screensharing. Features like dual mouse cursors and voice chat set this app apart. If you're pair programming, designing with a coworker or collaborating in any way, try Screenhero!

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## #4 Zapier – Web/App Automation

(Free w/ Premium Upgrade)



Use Zapier to automate your web experience and save time throughout your day. Zapier allows you to hook up two apps together to perform task based operations. If one thing happens in App A: trigger something else to happen in App B. It's a fantastic time saver for avoiding repetitive tasks and optimizing your workflow!



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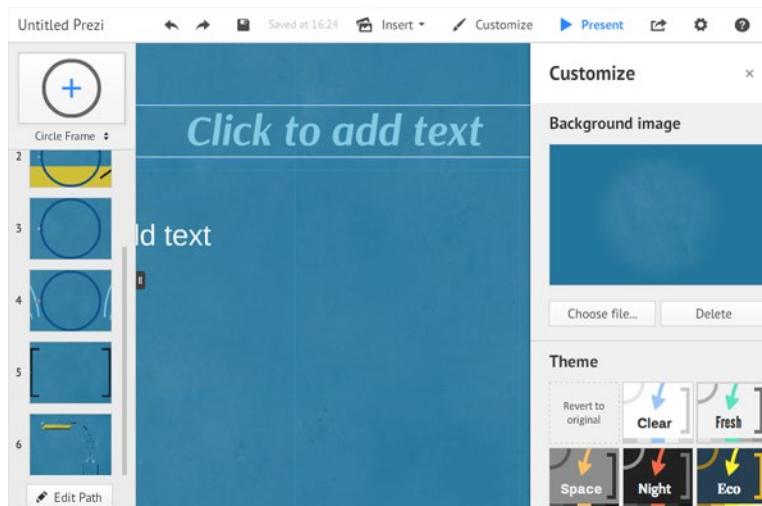
## #5 Every Time Zone – Timezone Visualizer



If you find yourself constantly worrying about what time it is in China or New York, Every Time Zone is the app for you! It's a simple but powerful visual representation of every current time in relation to your timezone. Quickly and easily reference every time in the world in a visually interesting UI.

## #6 Prezi – Cloud Based Presentations

(\$4.92/month, first month free)



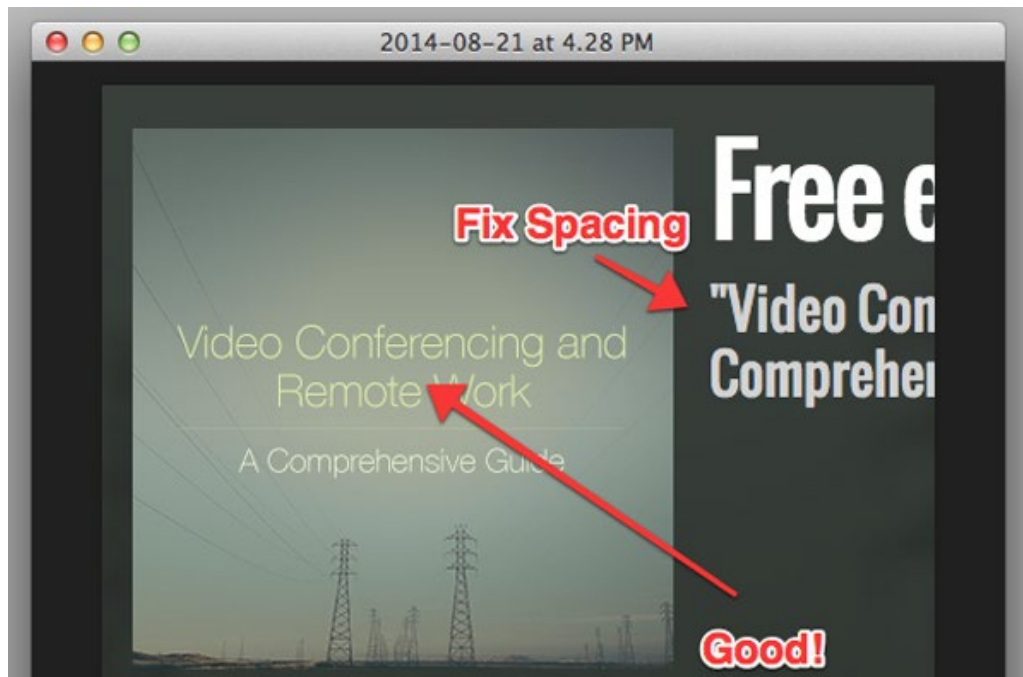
Prezi is simple, cloud based presentations wrapped in a [fantastic user experience](#). Forget the dark days of bad PowerPoints. Use Prezi and take your presentation game to the next level.

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## #7 Glui – Shareable Screenshots

(Free)

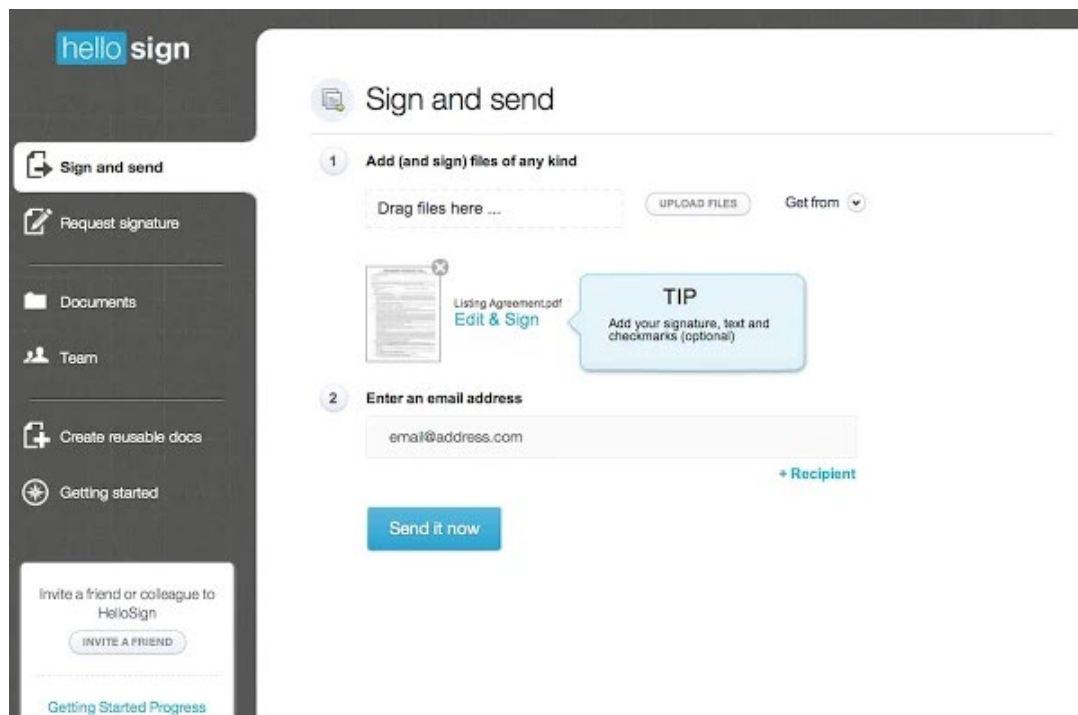


Do you ever find yourself in need of quick, shareable screenshots? Use Glui to quickly take a screenshot of any app and with the click of a button, annotate and upload it directly to your dropbox. Think of it like a better Skitch without the weight of Evernote.

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## #8 HelloSign – Group Signatures (Free w/ Premium Upgrade)



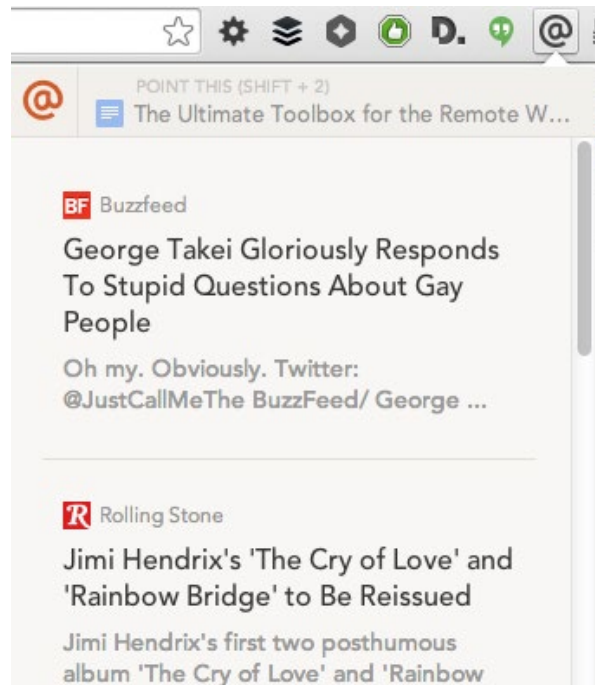
I'm always signing documents and maybe it's the UX designer screaming inside me, but I can't stand most of the existing doc signing apps out there. HelloSign is a breath of fresh air with its fantastically simple UI and easily shareable document storage. Use HelloSign if you just need a simple way of signing and sharing documents.

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## #9 Point – Link/Content Sharing

(Free)

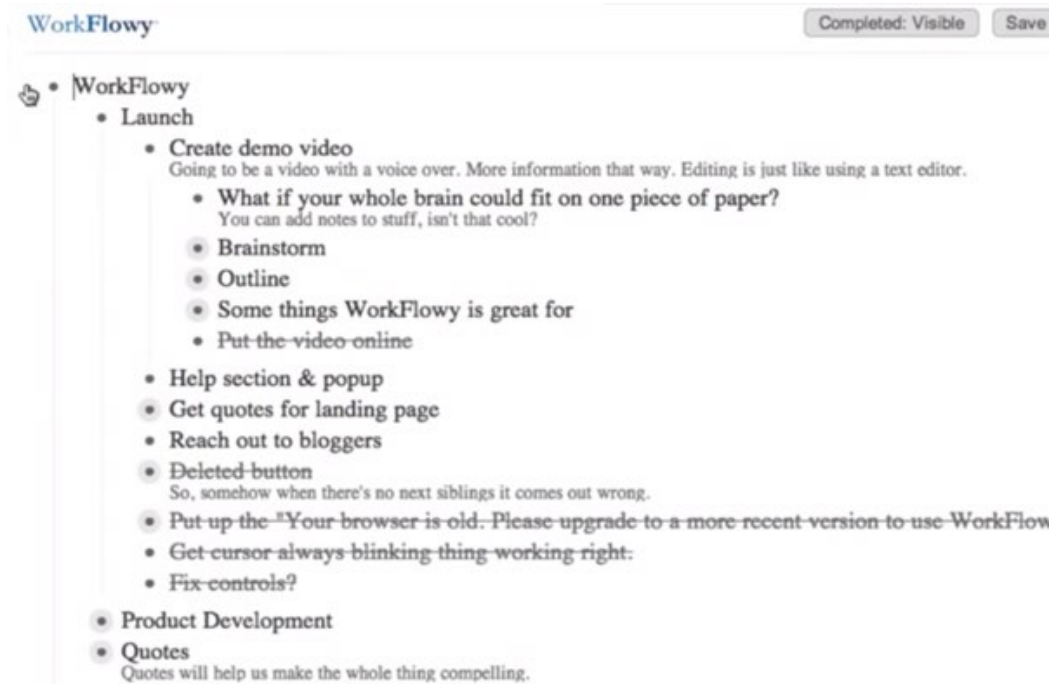


Point is a brand new way of sharing fun or interesting links with your colleagues. It's a Chrome extension that, with the click of a button, will allow you to add any link on the web into it's own shareable interface, complete with commenting, tagging and other cool features.

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## #10 Workflowy – Brainstorm/To-do List (Free)

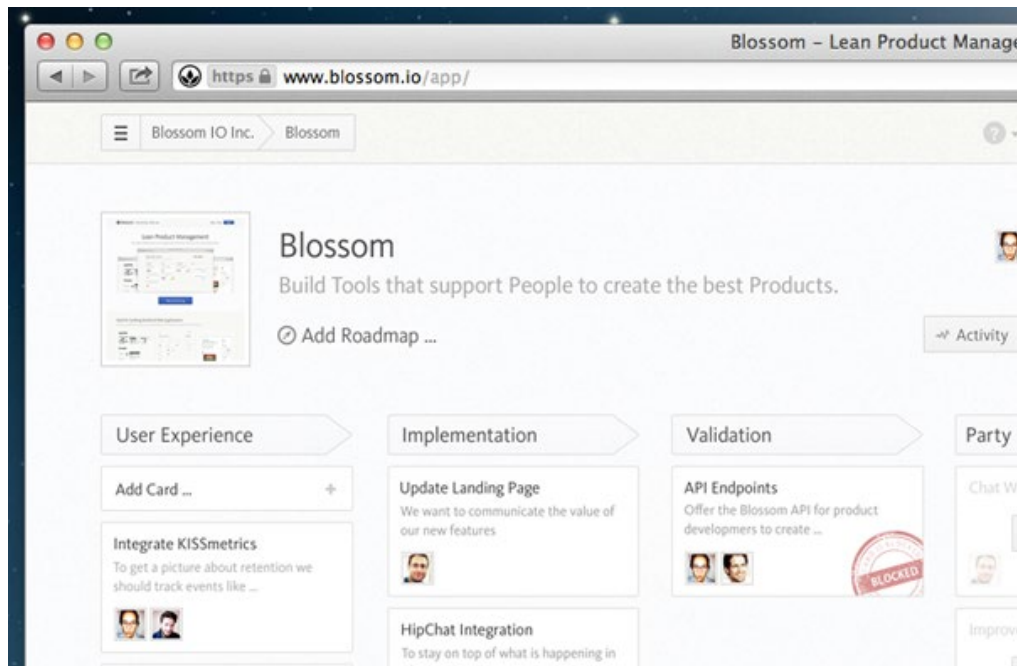


Workflowy is a self-described “brain organizer”. Its core competency is the simple but amazing interface, designed to store information in the exact way your brain thinks. Use Workflowy as a tool to brainstorm, organize your to-do lists or map out a future project.

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## #11 Blossom.io – Agile Project Management (\$19 per month w/ trial)

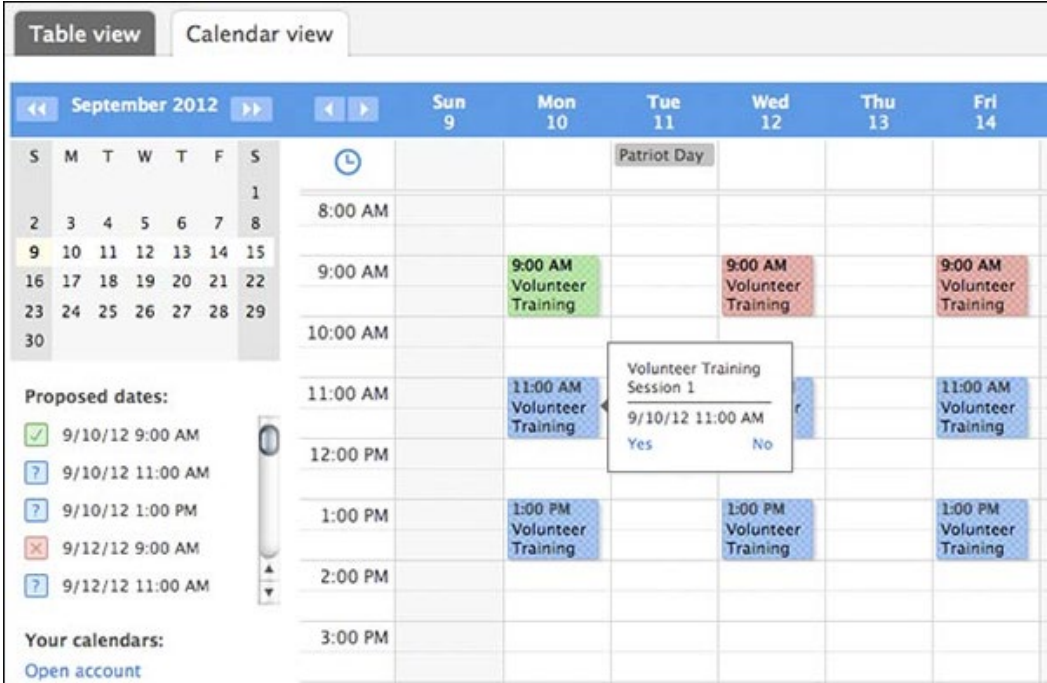


Blossom is an agile project management tool with simplicity in mind. It's designed to keep your team focused on the things that matter and track them through the implementation process. If you're in need of a seriously great project management tool, give Blossom a try!



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## #12 Doodle – Simple Scheduling (Free w/ Premium Upgrade)

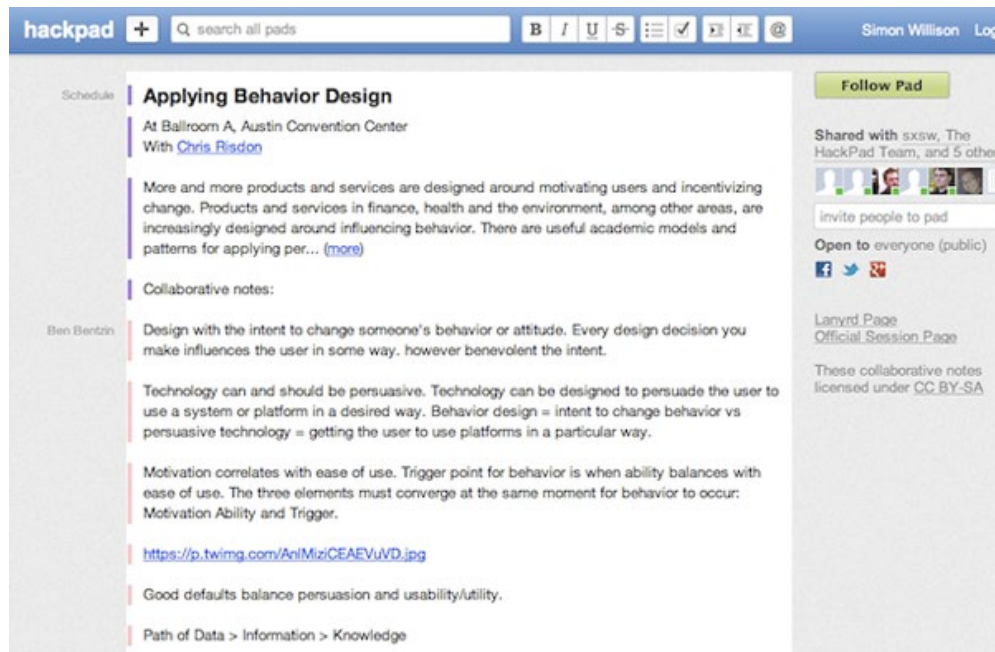


Have you ever been caught in a complicated calendar invite process that just takes too much time to setup? Doodle simplifies the process by removing the need to think. It shows a few times slots that are available in your calendar and let's you choose which one works for you.

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## #13 Hackpad – Team Collaboration (Free w/ Premium Upgrade)



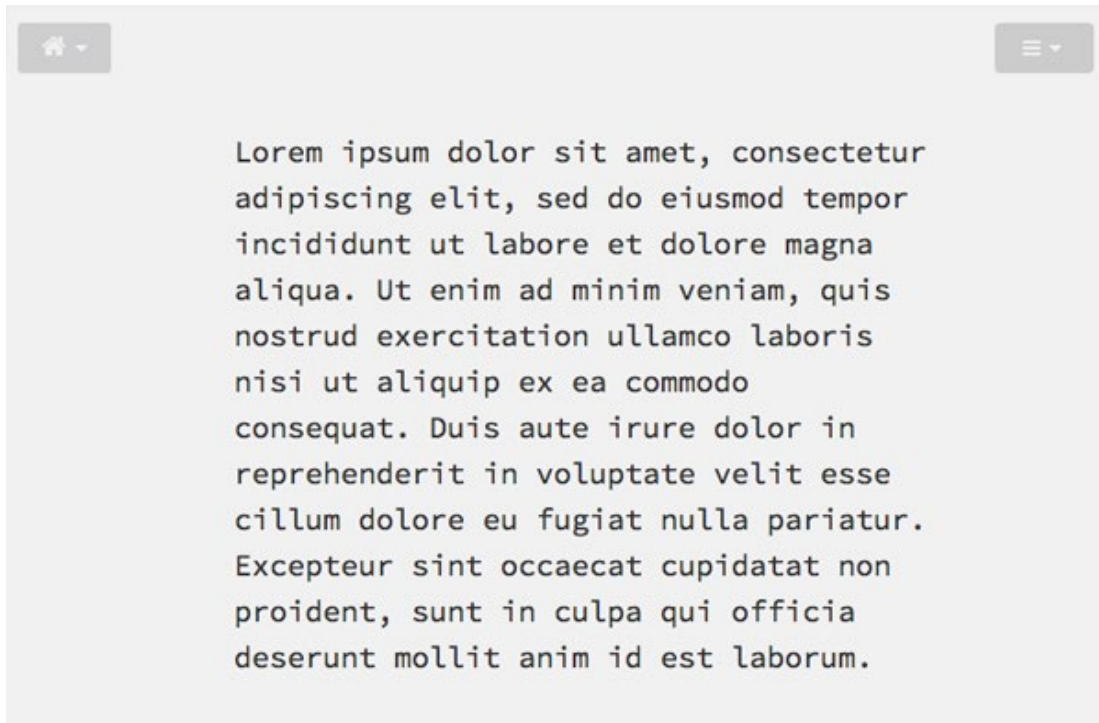
Hackpad is a fantastic collaboration tool that can be used both in real time or asynchronously. Keep on task with group to-do lists, milestone tracking and much more. Hackpad is everything you need in a collaboration app, without the unnecessary stuff.

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## #14 Draft – Collaboration for Writers

(Free)



Draft is fantastically simple “version control” for writers to collaborate together. With features like “Hemingway mode” where you can write now and edit later, Draft is an app that every writer should become familiar with. It’s amazing.

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## #15 SyncSpace – iPad Whiteboard

(Free in App Store)



If you're anything like me, you live on your iPad. SyncSpace is a whiteboard and collaboration space for the iPad to work with your friends and colleagues. Simply invite someone and start sketching together. SyncSpace is a fantastic tool in the arsenal of any remote worker.

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