

15Five



THE HR LEADER'S MANUAL FOR

Transitioning Teams to **Remote Work**

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Intro

Today, many companies are quickly making what feels like an overnight shift to remote work. While this may feel like brand-new territory for some, the rise of telecommuting began years ago with some organizations already operating as 100% distributed teams, and many others that support remote work policies for at least a portion of their employee workforce. But when leaders are prepared with a remote-first mindset and infrastructure, they can shift their companies to remote work without sacrificing productivity or culture. 15Five is proof.

15Five's employees are located all across the globe. Our company has been the recipient of multiple Best Places to Work awards despite almost half of our workforce working remotely full time. We've championed the benefits of remote work since our founding in 2011. The flexibility allows employees to focus on the life part of work-life integration because many people must adapt to disrupted schedules, whether it's caring for dependents, homeschooling kids, or coping with the general uncertainty of the times.

Supporting an agile work environment is now a necessity for organizations looking to retain and motivate their people.

For many companies, a sudden transition of this magnitude is new territory that can cause uncertainty and added stress. You may have unanswered questions like, what tools need to be provided to ensure teams can continue to work collaboratively? What practices can I use to keep remote employees engaged? How do I create a great new-hire experience for employees onboarded remotely?

In this comprehensive guide to help HR and People leaders transition their teams to remote work, you'll find the answers to your outstanding questions and be equipped with the right resources and best practices to smoothly navigate the shift and build remote teams that thrive.




Getting set up

If your employees have had little to no experience working as a remote team, focus on critical technology needs first. Every team or role may have a different requirement or pain point but the essentials for effectively working in remote teams are standard: hardware, collaborative tools, and performance management software. When adopting these practices, consider how you can utilize them long-term even if you revert back to majority office-based working.


“If done right, having a remote-first infrastructure will give you the best of both worlds. You can still get all the benefits of working in an office if you choose to, while also allowing you and all your employees to have the flexibility to be productive wherever, whenever,” says 15Five’s CEO, David Hassell.

Here’s a checklist to help you set up your employees for remote work:




 **Physical Hardware** Computers, monitors, and keyboards should all be considered when setting your employees up with a home office. In the case of computers or laptops, employers should generally not expect their team to use their personal hardware due to security reasons.



 **Reliable Internet** This one is essential to remote work. Few things are more frustrating and isolating than having a choppy connection during an important meeting. Check with your local state laws as there may be a legal requirement for employers to offer remote workers reasonable internet access. For example, to support employee’s internet access, 15Five allows remote workers to reimburse up to \$50 per month towards internet expenses.



 **The Right Software** Aside from physical hardware, the best tools you can provide your team are [collaborative software](#). This includes a video meeting software, communication platform, and a project management tool. These solutions help your people seamlessly collaborate across all timezones. Whatever tools you decide to use, make sure everyone on your team is using the same platforms so nothing gets missed.

15Five's Top Three Remote Workplace Tools



[Slack](#) is an excellent platform to mimic many of the social and work interactions that happen face to face in a physical office. Having channels for business related conversations like, company announcements and product updates, alongside water cooler type channels for shared interests can keep your employees connected to each other on a more personable level.

With a majority of our communications happening via Slack, we found it important at 15Five to set clear boundaries to limit distractions and be mindful of other employee's personal time. We provide our team with a handy [Slack Etiquette](#) guide, with tips on how to effectively communicate without getting lost in the noise.

In times of sudden change, Slack is a powerful tool for instantly getting out urgent news or updates to every person on your team and address any immediate questions or concerns. Leading with transparency is necessary for building teams with high trust that transcends physical distance.



[Zoom](#) is a video conference tool perfect for conducting remote meetings. Shifting meetings to a virtual setting can be cumbersome if your teams aren't yet used to it. Consider Slack an open office, while Zoom is the conference room. Just as with Slack, Zoom is most effective when guidelines are put in place to make sure everyone can communicate clearly and have equal input. Best practices at 15Five can be found in our [Video Call Etiquette](#) guide.

Virtual meetings have the added benefit of being able to record and share with offline employees, which is particularly helpful at a time when schedules may be disrupted.

Aside from meetings, video communication platforms can also be used to connect your remote workers no matter where they are in the world. Remote happy hours, virtual coffee breaks, and new hire video introductions are some examples of how 15Five creates a recurring level of human connection and maintains an inclusive culture for our remote employees.



[Asana](#) is an agile collaboration tool that enables employees to create in-depth project plans and track progression in one place to hit deadlines. You can assign individual tasks or projects.

Giving your teams the tools to get their work done is easy, but keeping up with their productivity can be a challenge. 15Five emphasizes a regular cadence of [weekly check-ins](#) and dedicated [1-on-1 meetings](#) to keep managers updated on employee morale and workload, while [Objectives and Key Results](#) tracking helps employees at all levels prioritize tasks and stay aligned with company-wide goals.

Onboarding employees from afar

Building distributed teams generally includes remote onboarding whether it's a new hire to the organization or a team member transitioning into a new department. Over communicating and setting clear expectations and agreements are key to setting up successful onboarding programs, particularly for remote employees who may have a higher risk of feeling disconnected or working in silos. With that in mind, onboarding should be people-focused. Creating an environment of belonging early on sets a precedent for a positive working environment, thereby fostering productivity and intrinsic motivation.

Welcoming and celebrating new employees is a great way to kick off the employee life cycle. Every new hire at 15Five is introduced to the entire company via Zoom during our Monday all-hands meeting, whether they are remote or office based. Managers are expected to lead with why the employee is a great fit for the role, before handing it off to the new hire to share what they're excited to bring to the company, as well as some fun facts about themselves. These introductions are brief and no longer than two minutes, but provide the opportunity for stronger interpersonal relationships, and a more human work experience.

General and role specific onboarding processes should live in a digital format that can be accessed anywhere and easily updated company-wide. 15Five uses [Sapling](#), a HRIS platform that allows People Operations and

Managers to build out automated workflows for every stage of the employee life cycle. Employees have access to robust task lists with clear timelines that encompass all resources, training exercises, and self-study lessons in one place. Being strategic in building out the onboarding experience ensures employees start off with a consistent and scalable foundation, no matter where they're located.

Emphasize relationship building over self study or tactical tasks. Set up virtual team lunches, encourage 1-on-1 meetings with members from other departments, or post funny ice breakers in Slack. Having socially connected and emotionally intelligent employees increases productivity and engagement, but those bonds can be more difficult to initiate when employees don't share a physical space and have fewer chances for organic interaction. Leverage your telecommunication tools to design intentional opportunities for employees to build their community.

Employees should have a clear understanding of the mission, values and goals of their organization, as well as a connection to senior leaders who are driving the vision. Remote employees can sometimes feel several degrees of disconnect with executives up the ladder. To help new hires learn about the company and our executives, 15Five hosts a leadership team meet and greet with a Q and A session at the end. These meetings take place over Zoom so employees can join in from anywhere, or access the recording if they're unable to participate.



Managing remote teams

Managers newly adapting to remote teams may be inclined to overcompensate by micromanaging teams. But the truth is, the best way to support high performers from afar and boost levels of engagement requires a management approach rooted in trust and accountability.

Managers should [encourage more autonomy in their employees](#) by setting clear expectations and agreements, communicating effectively, properly measuring productivity, and showing appreciation for their employees. While adjusting to a shifting work environment has its challenges, leaders can leverage this opportunity to [reinvent their management style](#) by including more emotional resilience, empathy, and care.

Gracefully navigating drastic changes to an employee's work environment requires clear guidelines on how they should be structuring their work day. While high performers in office won't suddenly become slackers once they're unsupervised at home, managers should set expectations around acceptable working hours and communicating schedule changes. But these expectations shouldn't be restrictive. 15Five has always operated under a [Flexible Work Policy](#) which allows employees to plan their work hours around the needs of their life obligations while also taking into account the needs of their teams.

Flexibility for caregivers, parents, and others who are experiencing a change in their daily schedule is a wonderful benefit that should be offered to employees during this unpredictable time. Our company even issued a [Caregiver Memo](#) with accommodations for those who need to balance work with other high priority responsibilities. When you can reduce stress and friction for your teams, do it.

Speaking of alleviating friction, calendar management is a powerful practice for creating more cohesive remote teams. Using visible calendars with set working hours and correctly labelled time blocks for meetings or work

sessions keeps team members aware of when others are free or busy. This transparency makes collaborating with remote employees easier and can limit distractions and support deep-work blocks.

PRO TIP Remember to use time zone features for employees on distributed teams to make sure you aren't accidentally pinging someone at an unreasonable hour.

To support managers in this new environment and minimize anxiety they may be feeling during the transition, give them easily accessible resources and tools to help them up-level and become the best coaches they can be. All 15Five people managers are expected to complete our Best-Self Manager Checklist, which provides complete role clarity and outlines what is expected of them daily, weekly, monthly and quarterly. We also host monthly "Virtual Manager Mastermind" meetings to provide ongoing training and a safe place for managers to ask questions and receive feedback.

Consistent and effective communication is critical to building engaged, high performing remote teams. Holding [regular 1-on-1 meetings and weekly check-ins](#) creates the space for managers to build valuable relationships with their direct reports, stay updated on professional and personal development objectives, and proactively surface any blockers before they become insurmountable obstacles. More importantly, these practices build a [culture of feedback](#) where honest conversations around performance are seen as positive drivers of desired business outcomes.

Time spent connecting with employees directly can be valuable and [transformative](#) when these conversations have a purposeful agenda, acknowledge highs and lows, and balance critical feedback with appreciation and recognition.



Here are a few ways you can optimize your 1-on-1s with remote employees:

✔ **Ask meaningful questions to [optimize for high-impact conversations](#).** Focus on discovery questions that solicit insight into the employee experience, areas of work that are energizing or draining, goals and desired skills development, and what motivates them both personally and professionally. Ask employees how they're doing, and be fully present when they answer.

When vulnerable conversations need to happen in a virtual setting, be mindful of the language you're using to communicate. Unclear body language and tone can affect the delivery of humor or sarcasm, so default to direct and straightforward speech. Be aware of cultural differences, and limit colloquialisms and idioms when interacting with team members who aren't fluent in the dominant language used at the organization.

✔ **Measure progress with objective tracking.** Using time spent on tasks, or weekly hours worked to get a pulse check on output is like reviewing attendance to decide if an employee is ready for a promotion. Consistently checking in with employees and tracking

[OKRs](#) are a more efficient way to understand how employees are performing. Autonomy and accountability go hand in hand, so worry less about the process of getting things done and focus on driving meaning and ownership.

✔ **Show appreciation.** Communicating recognition is scientifically proven to increase positive emotion and build psychological safety, which is the ability to show and employ one's self without fear of negative consequences of self-image, status or career. These traits are foundational to a high performing team.

Heidi Collins, Vice President of People Operations at 15Five says, "[Sharing genuine gratitude](#) for your employees helps them see how they are contributing to the organization's purpose." Giving appreciation reminds your employees that they are the driving force behind an organization's success, and keeps them connected to the bigger picture. 15Five uses virtual [High Fives](#) to praise employees, which can be shared company-wide. Public appreciation helps us build a culture of gratitude for every employee, no matter where they are.



Keeping your people healthy

A major key to remote team success is supporting holistic and mental health practices. Feeling stress and anxiety is a normal reaction when a sudden shift occurs. Employees experiencing the emotional and mental weight of change should feel supported through this transition. Encourage employees to set healthy work boundaries and provide resources that will reassure employees that they are fully supported. This includes virtual accessibility to Human Resources or People Operations teams and comprehensive response plans.

Separating home life from work life can be extremely difficult when both happen in the same physical space. Encourage and respect employee's set working hours. One way to do this is by being mindful of response times to emails, Slack, etc. Create company-wide expectations that allow employees to schedule deep-work time as well as time to take care of themselves.

Sticking to a routine, setting rituals to mark the start and end of the work day, and creating designated work spaces at home are equally important to creating healthy work-life boundaries.

Check in with your people about what their work experience is like on a daily basis. 15Five tracks individual employees pulse score via our [Weekly Check-In](#) tool. Individual responses are aggregated into a company-wide score, allowing employers to understand how their teams are doing at a glance.

Having a streamlined approach for how employees can contact their Human Resources team while remote goes a long way in reducing the stress of your employees. Consider a public Slack channel such as, #people-ops-triage where the wider team can go to seek support. Employees at 15Five use this channel to post non-sensitive questions and can expect a response from a Human Resources team member within 24 hours. This living resource allows employees to support each other and share their experiences in real time.

While Human Resources and People Operations teams should be accessible to all employees, be proactive in giving employees the resources to inform themselves. All policies, guidelines, and other documentation should live digitally in an easy to access platform. At 15Five, most personal requests, such as requesting sick or flexible time off, can be managed by employees via Sapling.



Creating a COVID-19 Response Plan

During this of a global pandemic, it's important to help your employees remain safe and feel supported. If your employees or their loved ones have a suspected or confirmed COVID-19 infection, how will your company respond? Do your employees know where to go?

If you don't have an answer to the above questions, it's time to create a response plan. This Response Plan should outline the step-by-step process that their Human Resources team will implement to support them in the case that they do contract the novel Coronavirus. When writing your response plan, think about accessibility. Every employee should be able to locate, understand, and use this resource with minimal assistance from Human Resources. **Note:** If you have international employees, you will need to investigate the laws and benefits that are applicable to them in this time.

Here are steps you can take to create a company-wide response plan:

1. Link your resources. 15Five is staying informed and basing important decisions on the [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#) in conjunction with information from the [Center for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#) and other reliable sources. For US Labor Laws, we recommend you turn to the [Families First Coronavirus Response Act](#) and [Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\)](#). If you are distributed in the US like 15Five, remember to include state based Labor Laws where applicable.

2. Remind your employees that your first priority as a company is their wellbeing and the wellbeing of their loved ones. Encourage employees to seek digital medical assistance before in-person assistance. This step will help relieve pressure on medical staff and practices and limit the spread of COVID-19. Provide them with a list of medical providers from your benefits provider.

3. Let employees know that it's ok to take time off to care for themselves and loved ones. The [Families First Coronavirus Response Act](#) offers "80 hours paid leave for workers who are sick, quarantined, or attempting to get preventive care or a diagnosis for the corona virus. It also covers the worker if they are providing care for sick family members." Where applicable, utilize this resource and track your COVID-19 Sick Leave separately from any standard Sick Time Off Policies. Doing this will assist you if you are eligible for tax credits. [Saplinc](#) is a great platform that can support you with this.

4. Be explicit about what criteria an employee needs to meet to return to work if they are recovering from an infection. 15Five makes an effort to work with our employees to build back-to-work programs. These programs document any agreed on or reduced hours and the period that the program covers. Offering your employees the use of their Annual Leave or Sick Time Off to stagger their return to work is also possible.

Further optional resources to consider as part of the response to COVID-19 is our [Accommodations for 15Five Caregivers](#) and our [COVID-19 Resources and Support guide](#) for keeping everyone entertained while we practice physical distancing. We also offer a [Mental Health Resources](#) guide on how employees can access practitioners via their benefits, along with any information about free sessions or associated costs.

Conclusion

Some organizations think even a temporary shift to remote work can be scary. Many leaders fear that employees will have difficulty staying focused on their daily duties, and the relationship between managers and employees can suffer.

But the truth is a remote team can have a ton of benefits if managed well. The transition to managing remote employees can be made easier with advances in technology and a belief that your employees will be just as productive, and maybe even more so when you give them the trust and flexibility to do their job wherever they're located. By using the resources from this guide, you'll be equipped to help support your entire organization and facilitate a successful shift to remote work.

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15Five

15Five is a leading continuous performance management solution that not only guides employee growth and development but empowers people to become their best selves. Through strategic Weekly Check-Ins, 15Five delivers everything a manager needs to maintain visibility and impact employee performance, including continuous feedback, Objectives (OKR) tracking, recognition, 1-on-1s, and 360° reviews. Over 2,200 forward-thinking companies use the solution to bring out the best in their people, including Credit Karma, WPEngine, and HubSpot.

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