

The logo for nudge CONSULTING, featuring the word "nudge" in a dark red, lowercase serif font, with "CONSULTING" in a smaller, dark red, uppercase sans-serif font below it. The text is surrounded by a circular arrangement of small yellow dots.

nudge
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A woman with long dark hair, wearing a grey button-down shirt and a blue headset, is sitting at a desk. She is looking down at a black pen she is holding in her right hand. In front of her is a silver laptop and a white spiral notebook. The background is a blurred office or home workspace.

Remote Working

Lesley Hardy

Creating Effective Remote Teams

Creating Effective Remote Teams

Working from home is nothing new, but it is now our new norm. Change, as they say is the only constant in our lives and the world has changed many times due to massive events. September 11 2001 changed how we travel, how we communicate, work and more. In essence it changed the world. Something massive happened, and the world was never the same.

Change happens when the imperative is strong and if the case is compelling, everyone seems to just fall in. China was completely transformed as people were confined to their homes. Italy closed down the entire nation and sent people home to work. Other countries are rapidly following suit and remote working is in the spotlight.

In 2020 the world is once again groaning around to another massive change. Health concerns have left people reluctant to be in social places, in some countries they have been totally isolated and working from home has become a big focus for many businesses and needs to be factored into the workforce strategy for many businesses.

Remote working will change the landscape in which we work. For some, temporarily and for others,



permanently as businesses adopt technology more fervently in the pursuit of having effective teamwork in a remote office.

Traditionally people have valued connection in the office. Informal chats in the tea room. Impromptu and informal meetings and camaraderie have been the way we get things done on a daily basis. Now more and more are being sent

home to work and for many, changing the way things get done is a big challenge to be faced.

Creating Effective Remote Teams

For some, this is an opportunity to really focus and get things done without interruption. For others, it changes the very nature of our working relationships and can be a daunting prospect.

This has the potential to promote isolation, a decrease in motivation and some are at a loss as to how to work as a collaborative team as a result! While some people will thrive in isolation, others will lose motivation. So how do you keep the wheels moving?

Collaborative working

Collaboration without connection can be challenging. Humans are naturally social animals. Even working from home, we need to know there is someone somewhere we can chat to. How do we even be effective when we are not talking on a daily basis?

Over the past 2-5 years I have been working with a start up project with a team passionate about the pursuit of people transformation and providing the tools for people to help others. The idea of making information, previously only provided by “Guru’s” available at an affordable price for the purpose of social impact floated my boat, so I got my boots in.

Leading with Purpose

In the beginning, while involvement was voluntary, the opportunity to grow something unique in the world was the compelling drive that attracted the original project team. They were very connected to the Purpose of the project, and worked tirelessly on their own projects, aimed at doing stuff in that direction.

If the team understood why the business existed intrinsically, and they were connected to the bigger purpose they worked tirelessly regardless of where they work from. We can see this easily whenever we have disasters. Everyone comes together easily, and work, without having to be pushed, directed or cajoled. Money and working conditions do not come into it. It becomes an imperative as the Purpose overshadows the tasks and working conditions.

Creating Effective Remote Teams

Over time, it seemed that the sense of purpose had given way to agendas. Personalities got in the way, meetings became combative, and given they were conducted online, were often unfocussed and wholly unsatisfying as the stronger personalities vied for competition.

Developing an Effective Geographically Dispersed Team

Working collaboratively as a remote team was the challenge to be mastered. We quickly identified a number of elements that are absolute musts if a remote team is to be successful, particularly if that team is situated all over the world but a lot of the same elements apply for those working from home.

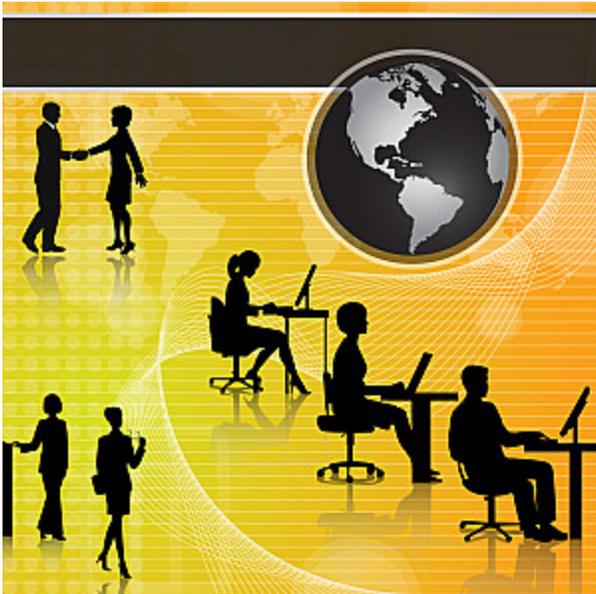
Challenges faced by remote teams may include:

- Timezones
- Cultures
- Personalities
- Meeting management
- Communication
- Roles, responsibilities
- Getting agreement at meetings



Creating Effective Remote Teams

When Hosting an online meeting it is so important to be present to everyone at the meeting. You need to pay close attention to the faces of the people you are addressing. If you are going to deliver a presentation, have a co host watch the attendees. Facial movements, eyes, body language are still present on an online meeting. When people agree with what you say, you notice they tend to sit forward a little more and maybe nod or smile. If someone doesn't like what is laid out in the meeting, or feel some sort of negative charge, they will sit very still and stare at the screen, or you might catch an eye roll, or you will see them fold their arms. Being



present to these little changes gives you the opportunity to address the disturbance in a respectful way and directly invite that person to give you their perspective.

This is the perfect way to encourage diversity of thought.

Personally, I think online meetings are better for this than face to face in some cases as you don't always get to see people's faces around a table.

Language Barriers may be an issue for some teams. Short of using a translator, ensure everyone has a chance to review material ahead of the meeting (something you should be

doing anyway).

Check before you move on to each point that everyone understands and has had their say. If you need to, take it offline into another 1-1 meeting for further discussion as it may halt the flow of the meeting if it is a big problem.

Creating Effective Remote Teams

A good Rule of thumb for online meetings is to ask the quietest people at the meeting to give their opinion first. They are generally the deepest thinkers and being quiet, often don't get included. We all know the loudest will get heard, so have them wait for their turn to talk so they hear other perspectives first.

This is another benefit from meeting online since you can't manage that so well in person. Online you always get to control the mute button.

Developing an Effective Geographically Dispersed Team

Addressing challenges quickly is essential to business success and in particular startup success. As a team we went through the usual Forming, Storming, Norming and now we are definitely Performing. What makes the difference is building a team by setting a strong process.

Im proud to say I am a member now of an effective high performing Global team. Sharing these lessons hopefully will bring you some structure to create one for yourself.

Lessons from a Remote Team

Being able to be effective while not being in an office is a bit of a journey and sadly it isn't for everyone. Here are some of the key lessons we learned and I hope they help you



with your business.

Creating Effective Remote Teams

Make sure you have the right people with the right motivation.

The right people with the wrong motivation can derail your business. The wrong people with the right motivation will take longer to achieve anything and it will not necessarily go well.

Be clear

As you can see in Italy, when people are connected to the outcome, they just naturally want to go and make it happen and will work well to do so, otherwise locking down an entire Nation would be impossible. Now the rest of the world is following suit with minimal noise even though they are fully aware the economy is going into freefall because of their actions.

When we know what's at stake and we understand the value we are contributing, we humans will just about do anything to make it so. Lead all communication, initiatives and meetings with purpose and people will actually move mountains. Its very plain to see.

It won't be enough to just have job descriptions. When you have a matrix of accountabilities, you have clarity about who is delivering what. Being clear about outcomes and being able to manage the accountability to deliver gives people ownership of what they deliver. You hired them because they know what to do. Clear accountability management gives you line of sight and the ability to manage with clarity in a world where you can not necessarily see everything. It also gives your people ownership of what they deliver. As I mentioned before, where there is strong purpose, and clarity on expectations, no one needs to be told what to do.

Ensure you have strong leadership and that there is constant communication.

In a dispersed workforce, all working from home, intentions can easily be misread (refer to right people, right motivation). A strong leader is a clear communicator and can be ahead of any potential issues. The team need to agree to follow that leader, so strong communication, collaboration and coordination skills are essential.

Creating Effective Remote Teams

Have Reliable Technology

In the Global business in which I'm involved we use Zoom to conduct our meetings. Also each of us has taken steps to ensure we have good sound and WIFI. So important! In the corporate world, many are moving to a range of communication tools. When used well, they are incredibly efficient and effective.

During online meetings, ensure there is a process for listening, for discussing and to execute agreed actions and ensure this is well documented.

This goes back to Accountabilities. Meetings should be for outcomes, not for time wasting, platform hogging or pontificating.

I collaborate with a few organisations to deliver outcome focussed workplace solutions and assessing job fit. To do so, I am a big user of Slack. As a remote worker, I find it invaluable for keeping up with what's going on without having tonnes of emails.

Tips for Running Effective Online Team meetings



Running meetings online is not new to many businesses. However for some, it may be the first time you don't fly or travel to make meetings.

Online meetings can be very disjointed as everyone scrambles to have a say. Technology can hang and discussions can sometimes seem awkward.

It is important when conducting an online meeting that everyone gets a say so you will need a good facilitator.

The rules of the meeting are important online. Being aware and strictly adhering to rules helps the meeting run smoothly and allows you to get insight from all participants.

Structure your meetings so no one gets to hog the meeting.

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1. Everyone mute your mic when not speaking
2. Always have a co host to manage technical issues
3. No one speaks over each other. Give the speaker time and put your hand up and wait to be chosen to speak. There may be a lag in your video feed, so give it time before you speak.
4. Focus on the outcome, not the emotion. Issues are much more likely to be misconstrued online
5. Be wary of privacy rules: i.e. only record a meeting when you have agreement

Make sure everyone is clear about what they are accountable to deliver

Create focus at the beginning of the meeting by starting with Purpose and focused outcomes

Set strong boundaries, rules and expectations for managing remote meetings

Do not tolerate poor behavior. You have a mute button for a reason

Create a clear roadmap for direction, but be flexible as to how that is executed

As a member of a Global remote team, I have experienced what its like to be part of a close knit, supportive group who know how to innovate, collaborate and support each other. Some of the benefits of being remote are, less opportunity for wasting time, more flexibility to work and get things done without having to be "seen to be" at my desk, and focused collaboration and support when I want to think of new ideas.

Working remotely will not work for everyone. It will require flexibility, commitment, ability to adapt to change, and a leadership style that is more collaborative, rather than authoritative. For some, the thought of giving up their "corner" and working from home will be daunting. They need the right equipment, environment and to set conditions to be able to work from home and for some it will be sad not seeing everyone in the office so much.

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However, with the right purpose, and clear accountability you can absolutely create a highly effective remote team, so start planning on now if it makes sense for your business.

Communicating Remotely

An issue which will likely become elevated while working in a remote situation is how well (or how poorly) you communicate. It will become glaringly obvious who can get things done through effective communication, and who can't.



When communicating remotely, it is so important to give people space to be heard. Its very easy to speak over the top of someone who takes their time, but when you do so, you miss the experience, insight and diversity of thought you would otherwise be able to use to help you solve problems and come up with ideas.

You might think people should just know how to communicate effectively, but there are always those who still need training in this area.

When communicating remotely the following should apply.

For Leaders

Set and maintain high standards for engagement. This is imperative or it can be tempting for your people to get demotivated because they are at home. This is not a time for relaxing during work hours and communicating that often and appropriately lets your people remember that there is a professional standard to be maintained regardless.

Less Talking more listening.

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Your team know what to do. When you come up with all the ideas, it becomes more of a Master/Servant relationship. Ask searching questions and then zip it. See what happens. Try not to be tempted to answer your own question.

Ensure the quietest person is heard.

Ask your quietest person what they think first before the more eloquent of people dive in. Ask them again later, when they have had time to think. At meetings, don't stop asking till you feel you have everything they have to offer. This will have huge benefits in both ideas' generation, and in building that person's confidence and engagement.

Keep a 10 minute rule for feedback.

Some of us love the sound of our own voice. Meetings are better when the facts are laid out without all the fluff.

Thank everyone for their input.

Everyone is doing their imperfect best to give what they have, and in some cases, what you think you want. Be kind to those who get it wrong. Never leave them kicking themselves. Always leave them with something to learn and something to strive for while not breaking down their spirit.

Hold people accountable for not doing what they say they are doing to do.

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Accountability is key in communicating. Instead of getting mad, take a breath and ask questions so you can understand what went on when something doesn't go right. You don't have to yell at people to make them accountable but you do need to be very clear about your expectations and what is likely to happen going forward.

Give people two chances to resolve the issue, and then have consequences. Even during this time, we need to know our managers boundaries.

Have your say last after everyone has spoken.

When you wait for everyone to speak before you, then you are harnessing the power of diverse thought.

Listen to all points of view and then add yours. That way you have all the information in order for you to make the final decisions and drive the activity.

For Employees

Communicating with your leader and your team is more important now than it ever was. Right now you may have family to communicate with, as well as work. Here's some communication tips that may help.

You may be feeling emotional and vulnerable right now. A lot of us are. Definitely reach out to colleagues to share your experiences and how you are all feeling. Get that Elephant on to the table so you can all support each other. This is no time for Hero's

Focus less on what you think someone has said and ask searching questions. You are working remotely with people who have a number of issues they are dealing with. Take time to ask what someone means, and then probe deeper. It is so easy to make our own meaning up and get upset when all we have is a computer or an email for information. Sometimes your manager, a colleague or a client may appear to bark at you through email, when it may be that one of their kids is killing the other one and they banged out a quickie before dealing with the issue.

Practice kindness.

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Do not suppose you know what someone is thinking. You might feel someone is off, but you have no idea why. You might have decided to write someone off as an idiot but if you ask questions you can accept fully or reject an idea that is well tested than one that is accepted at face value. Just reach out and ask two questions

Are you ok?

What do you need?

Then just listen. That's all

Get clarification.

Sometimes technology can hang, and you might miss some words. If you think you didn't quite understand don't pretend you did. Send a message through your group chat, whether you use Facebook workplaces, slack, Teams or something else. Make sure you are crystal clear about what you didn't understand. You don't have the informal conversations now, so pay extra attention.

In meetings, allow the quietest person to speak first. If they want to pass, that's ok, but they often have a lot to offer. If you are the loud one (trust me you are not the only one), this is your time to pull back. We loud people get all the attention, but we are not the only people with perspective and much as we may think we know a lot, we stand to learn something when we listen to our quieter colleagues also.

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Paraphrase Back

Paraphrasing back is the process of repeating back what you heard. Not in exactly the same words, but repeat what you understand. This has at least three outcomes

The person that just spoke feels heard

You get to confirm your understanding

You build massive rapport

Put Family first

As parents we struggle to juggle work and family. In this environment more than ever that is glaringly obvious. Kids will distract you in meetings. Let your manager and team know when you need to go. These are unusual times and your manager should be human enough to understand.

Try to avoid yelling at your kids for upsetting your workday. It's not easy for them. Explain what you need before you meet with work people. If you don't get it, leave the meeting, explain again what you are trying to achieve and ASK the child how they can help you. It won't always work, so be prepared to put the meeting off if you need to.



Being Remote can be Fun

Accountability is a way of being in the workplace. It moves beyond tasks and skills and into how your people take responsibility for outcomes, and organise themselves to deliver effectively.

Managing accountability is more about being clear on what needs to happen, than how to make it happen. A good accountability model is clear, concise, measurable and linked to outcomes.

Understanding the power of your workforce is about knowing how to leverage strengths, support growth in a way that does so and hold people accountable for what they agree to. We can all work effectively to keep New Zealand running, no matter what.

For information on how to create a high performing accountable team contact us:

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