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Effective Remote Work

For Yourself, Your Team, and Your Company

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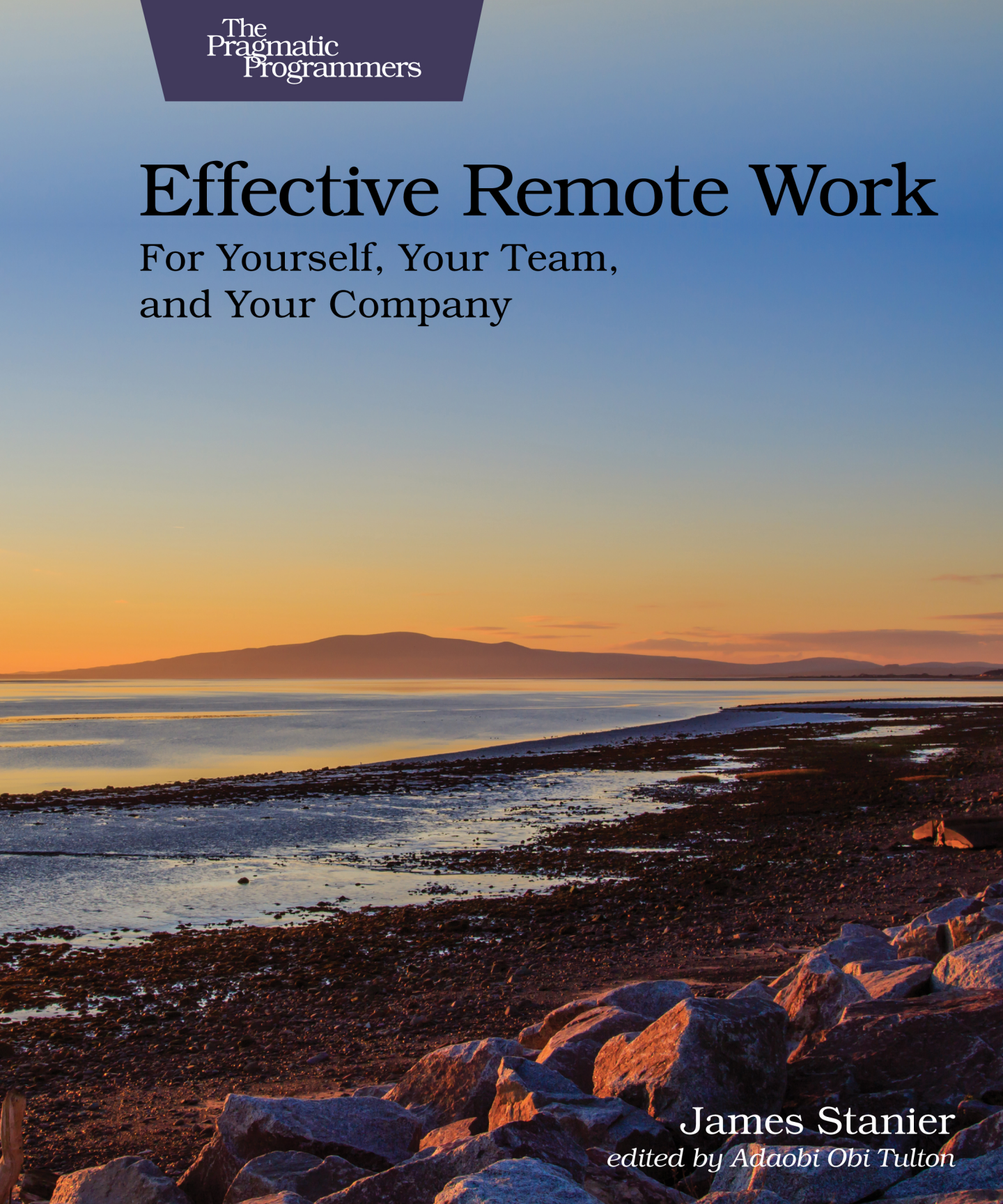
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Effective Remote Work

For Yourself, Your Team,
and Your Company



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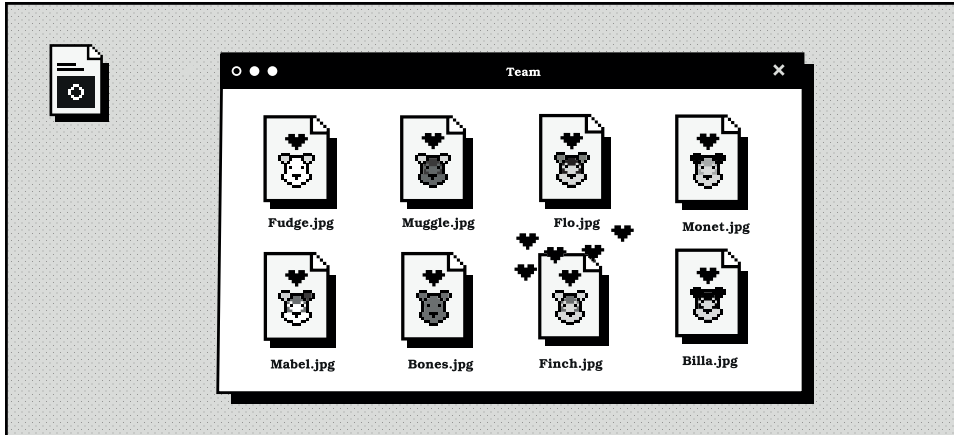
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A Principle for Cultural Change



If you want to create permanent change, you have to start by changing the culture.

The only way to offer a first-class, remote-working experience is to change the culture of your team, department, or company to treat every worker as if they're remote, regardless of whether they're working in an office or not. It requires a mindset shift in every individual in the entire company.

Without a change in culture, you have little more than arbitrary rules for people to follow. "Oh, we have to do that every time we have a meeting? That's annoying." "When we're designing a feature, we have to do *what* now? How bureaucratic of leadership to give us all of these arbitrary procedures!"

Without cultural change, you just have checklists to enforce behavior. People don't follow arbitrary rules without a good reason. The cultural change provides that reason.

Treat everyone as remote.

And what's more, if you can create cultural change, you won't even need to write those checklists for best practice. Instead, better behavior will follow naturally as people will understand how to act in accordance to the new culture within your team, department, or company.

We repeatedly witness real-world examples of rules implemented without a neighboring cultural change have a diminished effect:

- Despite many countries having laws in place to make discrimination based on gender, race, and socioeconomic background illegal, we see the effect of a culture that allows this discrimination to still happen. The Black

Lives Matter social movement is a protest against racially motivated violence against Black people, which is a systemic cultural problem worldwide.⁸

- Even though most companies are committed to championing diversity and inclusivity, by only allowing employees to work from flagship offices in global cities such as London and New York, they close the door on talent who can't afford to relocate to these locations or can't commute long hours away from their families each day.
- Many companies will cite equal opportunities for progression, but, conversely, their upper echelons of the org chart are predominantly white males who live within a short commute of the headquarters or are deemed so valuable that the rules of working in the office don't apply to them.

There has to be real cultural change to get the results that you want. Otherwise, the rules don't matter.

To properly facilitate remote workers, treating everyone as remote is the cultural change that's required. It's fundamentally about treating everyone equally by giving everyone access to the same information, people, tools, and opportunities to succeed, regardless of whether they're sitting in an office in Berlin or doing their work from a coffee shop in Jakarta or a bedroom in Tokyo. Treating everyone as remote declares that the headquarters of a company is the Internet and everyone works there.

For example, when a meeting happens, treating everyone as remote dictates that each participant should join a video call, each with an individual microphone and video camera, even if only one of the participants isn't in the office. It also suggests that using video calls to communicate naturally leads to creating a recording of the meeting and archiving it for watching later. It dictates that the drawing of the new software architecture should probably be done digitally using software that allows for screen sharing and real-time remote collaboration, rather than on a whiteboard in an office with a webcam pointed at it.

Keeping the principle of *treat everyone as remote* in mind is similar to being reminded to check your posture. Are you sitting straight? A simple sentence can snap you out of your default mode, reminding you to pay attention to the periphery, making adjustments if necessary.

8. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Lives_Matter

Although consisting of only four words, the principle paves the way for real change and democratization of the workplace. Gone are terms such as *satellite office* and *remote workers*. There's no need to categorize anyone as such anymore. They're just *workers*, regardless of where they're sitting with their computers and Internet connections. Gone are the days of wanting to be transferred to the head office to be closer to the company executives. All of them are just a video call or email away.

Treat everyone as remote is the mantra that changes the culture of your company for the better. And the best part is that you can do it regardless of your seniority in your company. It's truly a grassroots movement.

Taking Practical Action

So far, we've explored how the development of office design and company culture has made remote workers feel increasingly excluded and that cultural change is required to redress the balance. Now we're going to introduce practical actions that you can take to make that cultural change happen.

This section was written with the assumption that you currently don't run a team, department, or company. If you do, that's even better because you'll have more power to create an immediate impact. However, anyone can be a force for bottom-up change by championing the principle, following through with actions in their own work, leading discussions within their team or area of influence, and getting others onboard to repeat the same process.

You just treat everyone as remote. It's that simple. The rest will follow.

What we're going to work through in the following sections is just the beginning, and the upcoming chapters of the book dive deeper into the theory and practice as we start to unpack the core concepts. But let's get started right away. You'll leave this chapter with a plethora of techniques to try.

Start Subtle

Every journey begins with a single step. So let's take it. To begin with, you're going to be subtle. Sneaky. Like a small mouse in a trench coat with sunglasses on.

You're going to start embodying the principle of treating everyone as remote without telling anyone that you're doing it:

- *Write down the principle somewhere that you can see it.* A sticky note on your laptop or monitor works pretty well, or you could set it as your desktop background, or you could scrawl it across your wall with a

marker, although that may make for an interesting conversation with whomever you share your living space with. Just tell yourself that you're now doing this, and make sure that you're able to continually remind yourself about it. Remember: it's like checking your posture.

- *Go about your day and be mindful of how your work unfolds.* Do you find that your team operates by private, individual conversations, or does the whole team have visibility into what's going on at any given time? Do you tend to send direct messages rather than use the group chat? Is information written on whiteboards as a reference point rather than in a shared document? How does this compare to the principle we want to follow?
- *Make small shifts.* If you have regular meetings, start a shared document with rolling minutes and ask people to contribute to the agenda. Have everyone join with individual microphones and webcams. Have them mute when not talking to avoid feedback. Take a picture of the whiteboard diagram and share it in the group chat; or even better, transcribe it to a shared document format that allows for remote collaboration. Fundamentally, look at each piece of work and every interaction that you do and question whether it contributes toward treating everyone as remote. If it actually inhibits remote workers from getting involved, make a subtle change.
- *See how others react.* As you continue to make small shifts to the way you work, what subsequent changes do you notice in other people you work with? Do you encounter any resistance, and, if so, why? Are others actually following your lead?

The side effect of making many subtle improvements is that humans have a natural tendency to mirror the behavior of others when they like what they see. And we guarantee that they will. So even though you're a proverbial mouse in a trench coat, it might just turn out that this simple step begins to start a whole movement within your team.

Audit Your Tools

In the survey we referenced earlier, one of the common reasons that remote workers felt that there was a barrier between them and the rest of the company was because of the poor quality of the tools that they had available. Your own situation may vary here. But just remember that if you're able to use the latest and greatest in chat apps, videoconferencing, office suites, and integrated development environments (IDEs), all with functionality that supports real-time remote collaboration, count yourself lucky; you're in a much better situation than many. Some organizations are slower moving, more old-fashioned, or simply lacking in the technical literacy to be on the cutting edge.

Regardless of the situation you're in, you can audit the tools that you're using in your team. What tools are you using for the following activities?

- *Chatting* to each other throughout the day via the Internet, for both work-related and fun reasons
- *Writing software*, from typing lines of code, to testing it, to reviewing changes and deploying to production
- *Having meetings*, both one to one and as a group
- *Writing and collaborating*, such as for documents, presentations, and spreadsheets?

Given that you have to treat everyone as remote, how well do your current tools serve this need? Are people able to collaborate together natively in these applications, or do you have to send email with attachments to work with people outside of the office?

You may be able to suggest to your team that there are better alternatives, depending on the amount of red tape at your organization. The Google Workspace suite,⁹ which includes the usual office applications, also provides excellent collaborative functionality. Chat applications such as Slack¹⁰ and Discord¹¹ have free tiers. Microsoft Visual Studio Code¹² is an IDE that has remote pair programming built in. Figma¹³ and Miro¹⁴ offer multiuser collaborative design and diagramming.

9. <https://workspace.google.com/>

10. <https://www.slack.com>

11. <https://discord.com/>

12. <https://code.visualstudio.com/>

13. <https://www.figma.com/>

14. <https://miro.com/>

Your Turn: Build Your Dream Tool Stack

There's a world of tools out there that can help you do your job better as well as support remote workers as a first-class citizens. Many of these tools are free or have free trials, so you should give them a go and see whether they would be helpful for you or your team to better embrace the principle:

- Spend some time putting together suggestions of what your dream tool stack would be for you to work on. Do you wish you could be using Slack, Microsoft Teams, or Discord? What about moving your codebase to GitHub and doing your reviews via pull requests and your continuous integration via Actions?
- For each of your tools in your dream stack, how many are free, or at least have free trials?
- If your workplace allows it, start subtly and begin using these tools for your own work. Write that new design in Google Docs and invite others in for commenting. Create that diagram in Miro. Give others a taste of what your dream tool stack is like, and see whether they'll want to join you on this adventure.
- If some of the tools in your dream stack start getting traction, talk to your manager to work out whether you could find some budget to start using them within your team for real.