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Effective Remote Work

For Yourself, Your Team, and Your Company

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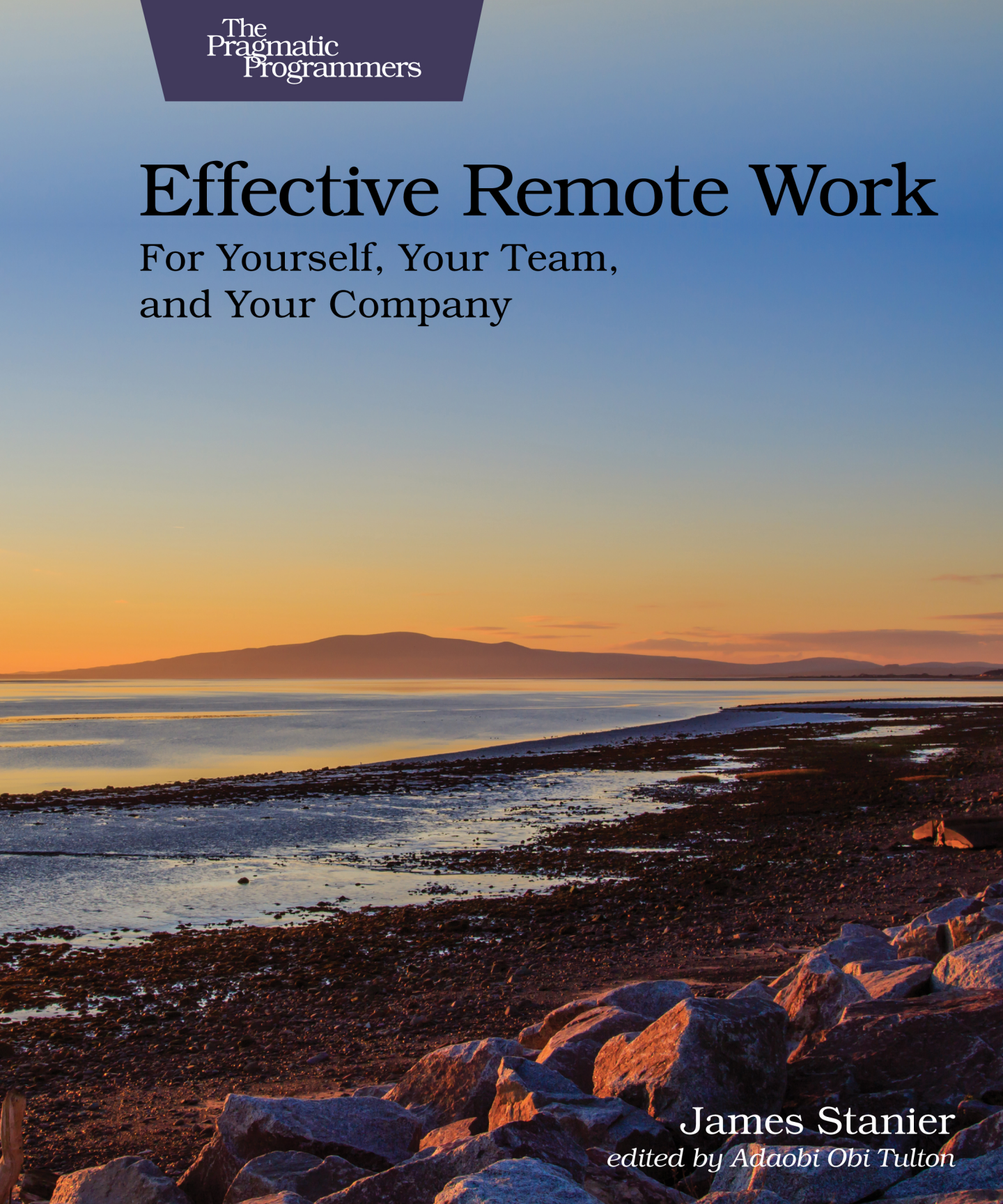
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Effective Remote Work

For Yourself, Your Team,
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Even though the future seems far away, it is actually beginning right now.

► *Mattie Stepanek*

Introduction

Ah, it's you! I'm so glad you're here. We're about to go on a wonderful journey together. But before we get started, I'd like you to think about why you picked up this book. Maybe you are already a remote worker and you're looking to refine and improve your skills. Perhaps your role is now allowing you more flexibility in where you work and you're curious as to how to set yourself up for success. Maybe you're even dreaming of making a big move out of the city and into the country and you want to get an idea of what remote working might mean for you. Whatever your situation, this book is here to show you the way.

There's a considerable cultural shift that's continuing to unfold in the technology industry. Open-plan offices and daily commutes used to be seen as an accepted part of our work lives, with changes in our careers sometimes requiring us to move our homes and our families to faraway cities, or even other countries. However, the times are changing. Technology companies and workers are now seeing the many benefits of allowing remote work to be the norm, not the exception. You, too, can be part of this movement.

But here's the snag: we haven't had much guidance in how to *effectively* work remotely. We have spent decades operating in our offices, interacting predominantly synchronously and face to face with our colleagues. We have gotten used to the amenities of the office, from meeting rooms and whiteboards to communal areas and free coffee. Working remotely isn't just doing your work away from the office. The way in which we work needs to significantly adapt for us to be happy, healthy, and effective while remote. But don't worry: this book will take you on that journey, and *you can do it*.

The Biggest Remote-Working Experiment in History

One of the most significant global events of the twenty-first century so far has been the coronavirus pandemic.¹ The outbreak of the highly infectious

1. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/COVID-19>

respiratory disease, which began at the end of 2019 and spread worldwide through 2020, caused governments to put whole countries into lockdown, with citizens only allowed to leave their homes to perform essential tasks, such as buying groceries and exercising. If you could work from home, you had to do so. Those who did took part in the biggest remote-working experiment in history, with millions of workers stationed at home for many months.

Few companies were prepared for the reality of their entire workforce working from home. Workers struggled with isolation. They tussled with the difficulty of balancing their home lives and their work lives; the lack of physical space and equipment for a comfortable and ergonomic work space; and the shift from impromptu, synchronous, in-person interactions to scheduled video calls and asynchronous messages. It was a lot to adjust to in such a short space of time.

People experienced Zoom fatigue from spending all day in front of their computers on video calls and then struggled to get their work done effectively in the space in-between. Many people, from individual contributors to CEOs, based on this initial experience, deemed that remote working was impossible to sustain for long periods of time or that it was a fad that would never catch on. The most skeptical even viewed working from home as a way for workers to slack off in private, away from the prying eyes of their managers.

However, despite all of the initial struggle, some workers and companies embraced the change. They recognized that people could be more effective by working flexible hours that suited their home lives. They saw the value in not needing to spend several hours of each day commuting to and from the office. They understood that working remotely created more time that they could spend with family, friends, and loved ones. Those who welcomed a new way of working could begin to see a future where they could have more choices in *where* they wanted to live and *how* they wanted to live their lives.

As the pandemic eased, many companies were changing—or had already changed—to support remote work permanently. To succeed, these companies understood that there had to be adaptations made in the way that people worked together when they were distributed and also that remote culture had to be established from the top down. It couldn't be one rule for the executives and another rule for everyone else.

These companies that embraced remote work spent more time writing to each other and less time on video calls. They allowed people to have more autonomy over when they began and ended their days. They focused on the output of employees rather than the time spent at the computer. These companies

realized that you can't work remotely the same way that you did in the office. You had to work differently. You had to adapt. This adaptation process is what this book is about.

Where You're Headed

You may be at different stages on your journey. You might be interested in seeing whether remote working is for you and what it might entail if you were to do it. You may already be a remote worker and are curious about how you can better formalize your remote-working practice to be happier and more effective. You may be a company CEO who is researching whether you should allow your company to be remote and what that might mean for existing and new employees. Regardless of where you are—from individual contributor, to manager, to executive—we've got you covered.

And even if you never work remotely yourself, it's highly likely that you already have colleagues who are remote to you. They may be at home, or they may be in different offices. All of the tools and techniques in this book will give you a better understanding of the challenges that they face when interacting across geographies and time zones. You will learn about many habits, techniques, and tools that may just make you rethink the way in which you currently do things, for the benefit of yourself and others. If you bring a little curiosity, we're sure that the journey we're going to take together will be compelling and worthwhile for you and those you work with.

This book is split into three parts, starting small and specific and then expanding outward into broader and deeper topics. It begins with the basics in a prescriptive manner, such as setting up your home space and managing your workload. Then, as the book progresses, you'll notice that the topics become more abstract and nuanced, where there is no definitive right answer or process. However, we'll always explore topics in such a way that you will have a lot to mull over with regard to how something affects you, your team, and your company.

There's no need to read the book from beginning to end, although we do build upon topics from previous chapters as we progress. And once you're done, we hope that this book can become a reference guide that you dip in and out of long after you've reached the final page.

The Outline of This Book

In the first part of the book, *Getting Oriented for Remote Work*, you're going to start out with the fundamentals. In *A Remote Future*, we're going to explore

the possibilities that remote work can offer for you both in your work life and your personal life. Then, in [Getting Set Up](#), we'll get hands-on by building your work space, both physical and mental. You'll finish this chapter ready to get your routine and habits in order.

We'll then move on to the second part of the book, [Building Effective Remote Teams](#). This is packed full of tools and techniques for how both you and your team can function effectively remotely. This begins with [Treat Everyone as Remote](#), an important mantra that will be present throughout the whole book. With this in mind, we'll explore the many facets of synchronous and asynchronous communication in [The Spectrum of Synchronousness](#), so you know what to use and when. Then, using the previous two chapters, we'll see how a typical day plays out in the office and see how that compares to successful—and unsuccessful—days spent remotely in [The Same but Different](#).

The key to remote communication is the production of documents, diagrams, designs, and video recordings. We'll explore how you can use these to your advantage in [Artifacts for a Better Future](#). Building up a library of these artifacts allows you to be prepared for [Onboarding and Orientation](#), which needs careful consideration in the remote world. We'll follow this by learning [Effective Communication Techniques](#) for yourself and your team. Then we'll finish this part of the book by exploring management. This covers both [Managing Yourself](#) and [Managing Teams](#) remotely. You'll learn a whole host of ways in which you'll need to adapt your style to be effective.

The third part of the book considers the wider picture: [Creating a World-Class Remote Culture](#). We'll consider what factors make a company's remote-working experience great in [The Remote Working Test](#). You can apply these to your own company to see what needs improvement or use them if you are interviewing elsewhere. Then, we'll consider [Creating a Handbook](#), which can be the central repository of information for your department. In [Becoming Fully Remote](#), we'll explore what it means to make remote work the norm for workers rather than the exception, and what effect that has on culture and day-to-day life.

We'll conclude with two chapters focusing on our health and on society. First, we'll focus inward in [The Hard Parts](#). Remote working is not all roses; many experience isolation, burnout, and other mental-health issues. We'll explore these so you can look out for yourself and others. Then we'll conclude by taking a forward-thinking look at how we might be able to tackle some of our industry's deep systemic problems in [The Path to Equality Is Remote](#).

What's Next?

Before we get going, I'd just like to thank you for picking up this book and embarking on this journey with me. This book is for everyone in the technology industry. No matter your experience or your position, we are all in this together. Remote working is always going to be a part of our work lives from this point onward, so we should treat it as another skill that we all need to continually hone, much like our writing and our programming.

This book contains everything that I wish I knew when I began working remotely, and I hope that it has a positive impact on your life. Maybe you'll find working with others who are not in your office that much easier and more enjoyable after you finish reading it. Perhaps you'll start working from home for a few days a week to spend more time with your family. Maybe you'll even be looking to relocate to a simpler and quieter life while still being able to do the work you love. *So much more* is possible now that we can work remotely. We can all embrace it together. And this is just the beginning. Think about how much innovation we have seen in the last thirty years. Remote working is only going to get better and better.

Now it's time to get started. Let's consider a remote future.