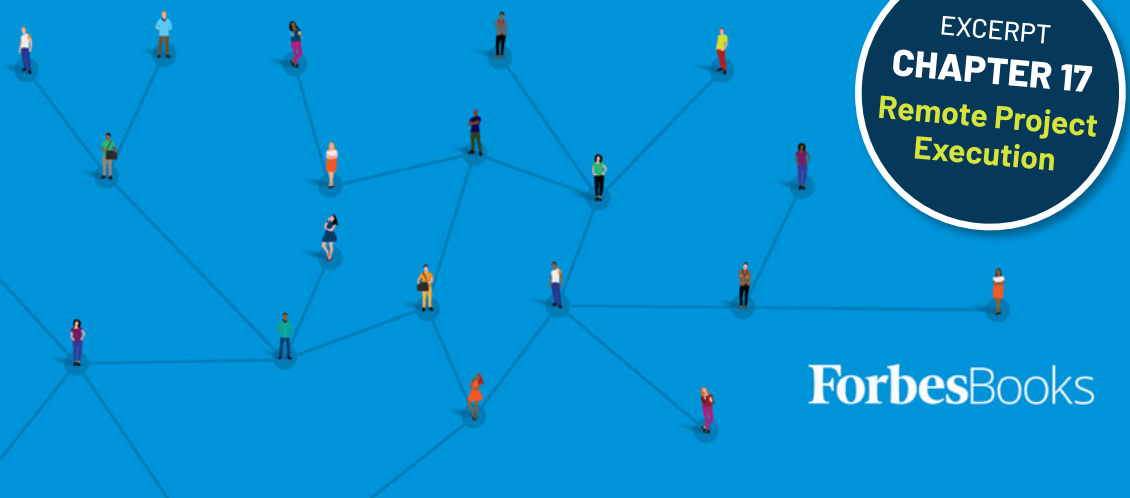CYNTHIA WATSON &
SHANE SPRAGGS

THE
POWER
OF
REMOTE

Building High-Performing
ORGANIZATIONS THAT THRIVE
in the Virtual Workplace

EXCERPT
CHAPTER 17
Remote Project
Execution

ForbesBooks

"Every business on planet earth was affected by the 2020 global pandemic, and the biggest paradigm shift in business was the displacement of people out of the communal office to their urgently created home offices. We were forced to reinvent, restructure, and rethink our traditional working approach. *The Power of Remote* will give you the tools to navigate this new territory and create, support, and manage a thriving remote team."

—Jason Vale, CEO, Juice Master Ltd.

"Managing remote work is one of the most important topics for businesses today. With so much misunderstanding around the shift from in-person to remote work, *The Power of Remote* comes at the perfect time—and with all the right information. A must-read!"

—Dr. Marshall Goldsmith, Thinkers50 #1 Executive Coach and New York Times best-selling author of The Earned Life *and other books*

"Remote work is neither new nor for everyone, but it is rapidly increasing and reshaping the future of where and how people will work. Drawing on rigorous research, relevant cases, and personal experiences, Cynthia and Shane offer insights, practices, and actions that enable remote work to work. Their thoughtful ideas will be useful for leaders who shape remote work, employees who work remotely, and consultants who guide remote work. What a delightful book!"

—Dave Ulrich, Rensis Likert Professor at Michigan's Ross School of Business and BusinessWeek's #1 Management Educator

"Companies all over the world are recognizing that virtual work is not a fad that will pass with time. People want the freedom to choose where to work depending on context and task. And with the right systems and work practices, companies can reap the benefits too. That's where *The Power of Remote* comes in. Cynthia Watson and Shane Spraggs provide a detailed road map for evolving into a high-performing virtual team so that, as a leader, you can take advantage of this new way of working."

—Lisette Sutherland, director of Collaboration Superpowers
and author of the award-winning Work Together Anywhere

"*The Power of Remote* provides valuable advice and insight on working and succeeding remotely. Maybe more important, it contains context for the changes we're going through, from people who've been there and done that."

—Wayne Turmel, cofounder of the Remote Leadership Institute
and coauthor of the bestseller The Long-Distance Leader

"*The Power of Remote* provides leaders with a much-needed road map to create remote workplaces where organizational objectives are met and employees feel a greater sense of connection to what they do and who they work with. From how to build a healthy organizational culture in remote work environments to changing how and what we communicate to foster greater employee ownership and collaboration, Watson and Spraggs offer tools and insights that will help expand your leadership toolkit to meet the changing needs and demands arising from this new world of work."

—Tanveer Naseer, Inc. 100 leadership speaker,
award-winning author, and coauthor of Leadership Vertigo

"*The Power of Remote* outlines all the problems employers are likely to face with hybrid and remote work and how to address them. The best guide yet for those moving to a more remote operating model."

—Peter Cappelli, George W. Taylor Professor of Management at the Wharton School
and best-selling author of The Future of the Office

"*The Power of Remote* is a valuable nuts and bolts review of the remote work revolution that could become essential reading as the remote work trend dominates the future of work."

—Derek Gallimore, best-selling author of Inside Outsourcing

CYNTHIA WATSON &
SHANE SPRAGGS

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in the Virtual Workplace

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Nobody on their deathbed has ever said, "I wish I had spent more time at the office."

—US SENATOR PAUL TSONGAS

To those managers and staffers postpandemic keen to embrace remote work via hybrid or completely offsite, this book was written to help you realize the unprecedented efficiencies that this work style affords.

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PART IV: EFFECTIVE VIRTUAL LEADERSHIP

PART V: TACKLING REMOTE BUSINESS PROJECTS

Acknowledgments

It just isn't possible in this small space to thank everyone whose influence, innovation, and outlier thinking led to the creation of this book. However, we'll do our best.

To the hundreds of people who have graced our company with their ideas and insight on how to achieve the most time efficient and flexible workstyles on the planet. Whether they've been chasing surf, extreme sports, or an extreme family barbeque, everyone on our team lives their life to the fullest while producing extraordinary results for our clients.

To our clients who have been open minded enough to try our methods and who have provided critical feedback to help us continuously improve our remote framework. Like us, they know that staff don't need to be on site or under constant scrutiny to fast-track revenue or productivity improvements.

To our families who have embraced and support our sometimes-hectic work-life integration, knowing that those times that we catch up on work in a quiet spot is a small price for that extra month staying in a great overseas location.

Finally, thanks to the ForbesBooks team, our amazing editor David Lepeska, and the Virtira team who contributed to the research and production of additional linked materials and kept the project on time and on track.

The New Remote Reality

Work is what we do, not where we are.

I n the opening moments of the fifth season of the CBS series *The Good Fight*, which depicts the inner workings of a Chicago law firm, the pandemic has just begun to wash over the Second City, and the world is slowly turning upside down. At one point, two of the firm's top partners explain to a room full of anxious associates how the office will cope with the new stay-at-home order. "We're setting up a teleconferencing infrastructure," says one. "So download a program called Zoom.com. Z-O-O-M."

"Get on your computers," the other chimes in. "Zoom.com."

It sounds ridiculous today, when so many are saddled with "Zoom fatigue," but in early 2020, that was our reality. While some of us had heard of or maybe even used Zoom, only a few could have imagined that within a matter of months, nearly the entire working

world would have logged some time in a Zoom meeting, with many doing so multiple times a day.

The sea change began, of course, with the arrival of COVID-19. As the case numbers ticked up, businesses scrambled to adapt to lockdowns and office closures. Long seen as a significant risk, the completely distributed workforce suddenly became a necessity. Yet for the vast majority of firms, this was uncharted territory. Would it lead to disaster?

Even in the "before times," most of us who worked in offices spent much of our workday tapping away at our computers in relative solitude. Occasionally, we'd log in from home to answer a few emails. But very few worked remotely full time or even dared consider such a possibility. Then, in a flash, companies shut their doors and told workers to stay home. Suddenly, poof! The impossible dream fell into our laps: working full time in the comfort of our softest pajamas.

The result has been a seismic shift in the way we view work. In the not-so-distant future, we might have only hazy memories of office life. COVID-19 proved, once and for all, the undeniable value of remote work. With a newly realized opportunity to work from home, as many as twenty-three million Americans planned to move in 2021, according to a survey of twenty thousand workers by the online freelancing platform Upwork.[1] That's more than three times the number of Americans who move in a normal year, and this was just in the first year after the pandemic's arrival. As of the writing of this book in mid-2022, millions more have likely realized that remote work enables them to live in places with a lower cost of living and a higher quality of life, while countless others are enjoying less time in the office thanks to hybrid work arrangements.

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1   "Economist Report: Remote Workers on the Move," Upwork, accessed June 11, 2022,
     https://www.upwork.com/press/releases/economist-report-remote-workers-on-the-move.

COVID-19 has remade the workplace, and for the vast majority of firms, some degree of remote work is here to stay. Many companies will likely embrace a hybrid model in which workers spend a few days at home and a few days at the office. In a May 2021 study by Mercer, 70 percent of more than five hundred companies surveyed said that they expected to go hybrid.[2] Two-thirds of the employers polled by Microsoft in March 2021 said that they were redesigning their workplaces to accommodate hybrid work.[3] In *The Nowhere Office*, British analyst Julia Hobsbawm's 2022 book on postpandemic work, she examined a future workplace that's both virtual and physical.[4] For the many workers who feel perfectly comfortable tapping away at their laptop in bed, at their desk, on the beach, or at a local café, a more apt label might be "the everywhere office."

The genie is out of the bottle—expectations about where and how we work have shifted dramatically and irrevocably. A March 2021 survey of three hundred thousand workers in more than thirty countries found that nearly three of four enjoy the flexibility of remote and hybrid work.[5] "The data is clear," the Microsoft study declared. "Extreme flexibility and hybrid work will define the postpandemic workplace."

Meanwhile, companies without flexible work options could face an exodus. A May 2021 survey of one thousand US adults revealed that

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2   Ryan Golden, "Most US Employers with Flexible Work Plans Choose Hybrid Work, Mercer Says," HRDive, July 14, 2021, https://www.hrdive.com/news/most-us-employers-with-flexible-work-plans-choose-hybrid-work-mercer-says/603304/.

3   "The Next Great Disruption Is Hybrid Work—Are We Ready?," Microsoft WorkLab, March 22, 2021, https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/worklab/work-trend-index/hybrid-work.

4   Julia Hobsbawm, *The Nowhere Office* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2022), https://www.publicaffairsbooks.com/titles/julia-hobsbawm/the-nowhere-office/9781541701946/.

5   Daniel Howley, "Microsoft Survey: 73% of Workers Want to Be Able to Work from Home after the Pandemic," Yahoo! Finance, March 22, 2021, https://finance.yahoo.com/news/microsoft-survey-73-percent-of-workers-want-to-work-from-home-after-pandemic-130029295.html.

39 percent would consider quitting if their employer offered no remote work options. Nearly half of millennial and Gen Z workers expressed this view, which suggests an even greater shift in the near future.[6] This helps explain why a record 4.3 million workers voluntarily left their jobs in August 2021, according to the US Department of Labor.[7]

We now know that remote work can cut costs and the daily commute while boosting productivity and morale. Still, without strong support from top executives, it has the potential to introduce vast uncertainty and erode the bottom line. Nearly one of five remote workers surveyed by OnePoll and Citrix in April 2020 said that their employers were either not very ready or not ready at all for the shift to remote work.[8]

There's clearly work to be done, and the challenges are already significant. Many companies are just at the starting line when it comes to figuring out how to best incorporate remote workers. They are aware that it will involve establishing new systems, hiring the right people, and keeping communication flowing and goals on track. But few understand the strategies and processes required to accomplish these objectives. In the near future, a wide variety of businesses will need to design and implement the systems, structure, and training that ensure and support results-driven autonomous work.

Crucial questions will include the following:

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6   Anders Melin and Misyrlena Egkolfopoulou, "Employees Are Quitting Instead of Giving Up Working from Home," Bloomberg, June 1, 2021, https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-06-01/return-to-office-employees-are-quitting-instead-of-giving-up-work-from-home.

7   Ben Casselman, "Workers Quitting Their Jobs Hit a Record in the U.S. in August," *New York Times*, October 12, 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/12/business/economy/workers-quitting-august.html.

8   Katie Clarey, "A Third of Workers Predict Employers Will Allow More Remote Work after Pandemic," HRDive, April 22, 2020, https://www.hrdive.com/news/a-third-of-workers-predict-employers-will-allow-more-remote-work-after-pand/576536/.

How do we hire people well suited to remote work and train them so that they're able to achieve as much outside the office as they did inside?

How can we ensure strong communication and goal-oriented collaboration among remote teams, especially when one team member might be in Alabama and another in Alicante?

How do we ensure that our managers are fully on board and that remote employees engage with their companies and their jobs?

How do we fully execute on projects across a distance?

Imagine an orchestra of musicians who have been rehearsing together in the same space for years. Suddenly, they're practicing separately in different locations, connected only by video link. They may still find a way to make beautiful music—as we learned from the many fine Zoom concerts performed in 2020 by orchestras around the world[9]—but without devising and implementing systems to ensure better long-distance rehearsals, they are unlikely to approach the brilliance of their live concerts.

Businesses today face the same problem. When everyone is working in the office, it's easy to call a quick meeting to keep the team focused. With workers in different locations, however, momentum can easily slow. This is because companies have yet to install the tools and strategies to ensure that remote workers remain as effective as they had been in the office. Despite the impressive productivity we saw from remote workers in the pandemic's early days, a gap remains—one that could threaten productivity as well as employee engagement, well-being, and trust.

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9   Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra, "From Us, for You: Beethoven Symphony no. 9," YouTube, May 20, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3eXT60rbBVk&ab_channel=RotterdamPhilharmonicOrchestra.

We, the authors of this book, have a profound appreciation for that gap because we've been helping clients achieve better results over distance for decades. Cynthia Watson knew about telecommuting before the term even existed. At ten years old, in the late 1960s, she watched spellbound as her older brother linked his home terminal in Palo Alto via telephone coupler to the legendary CDC 6600 at Stanford, just up the road. In the 1980s, as a systems analyst, she often worked from home by connecting TI's Silent 700 to IBM's 370 mainframe. Cynthia then switched gears to escape the office even more, pursuing a career in enterprise IT sales. In 1993, she wrote her master's thesis on telecommuting and left office work behind for good. Over the past three decades, she's consulted for and led several companies while pursuing a life without boundaries. She's run large global projects and led high-performing teams while on the path to Machu Picchu, at Mount Everest base camp, and in a hut in Patagonia, as well as in countless cafés, conference rooms, and even, on occasion, her home office. Today, as Executive Chair of Virtira, a company dedicated to elevating remote team performance, she oversees the company's training division and contributes to the evolving remote landscape through research and consulting. Long dedicated to never stepping foot in a traditional office, Cynthia endeavors to leverage remote work to expand career opportunities for women in large and small communities and promote sustainable green solutions.

Virtira CEO Shane Spraggs's unparalleled expertise in organizational planning and project management is the perfect complement to Cynthia's experience and vision. For more than a quarter century, Shane has been driving successful projects for some of the world's leading brands, including Disney. An industry leader in shaping innovative project management strategies, he has brought his insights to a variety of top media and software start-ups. Shane's leadership extends beyond

the boardroom to postsecondary classrooms, where he continues to teach these methods to aspiring project managers. Often praised by colleagues and clients for his ability to evaluate complex organizational challenges and implement project-based solutions that ensure sustainable success with continuous oversight and improvement, Shane constantly challenges himself and the team to identify remote productivity improvements for Virtira's clients, enlisting the same ambition he uses every morning to hike up Knox Mountain, his favorite trail in his hometown of Kelowna, British Columbia.

Remote work may be new and unfamiliar to countless workers, managers, and executives, but it's our comfort zone, our wheelhouse. For more than a decade, we have been running a completely virtual and highly successful professional services firm. Ensuring the optimal performance of remote workers and teams—which, for many of today's businesses, is suddenly a top priority—is our area of expertise.

> *The more remote your workforce, the more structure you need to replace office walls with virtual ones.*

Our mission is to transform new hires into top-performing members of top-performing remote teams, able to work cross-functionally with other top performers to complete projects, continuing the cycle. Achieving this requires moving away from traditional brick-and-mortar oversight and surveillance and embracing results-driven and flexible work models. Businesses can no longer rely on office-based processes. Managers must implement and support policies, processes, and tools that support flexible, autonomous work while keeping virtual teams aligned and accountable. One refrain you'll find throughout this book is that working on a "remote island" necessitates more attentive management, from ensuring productivity to establish-

ing strong communication and instilling culture and purpose. This is because it bears repeating that the more remote your workforce, the more structure you need to replace office walls with virtual ones.

You'll find that once you install the systems we outline in this book, productivity will be a snap—perhaps even easier than in the office. With our model, workers are no longer forced to guess which task to tackle next. They are instead eminently familiar with their deadlines and their deliverables. This certainty instills a confidence that ensures less stress for all those involved. Eliminating uncertainty makes remote workers and teams more productive and results oriented. And that's just the tip of the iceberg.

If you're part of a company with remote or hybrid staffers or that connects across a number of offices, this book will show you how to optimize remote work to ensure the best results. If you're a newly remote worker looking to up your game, this book will provide a great deal of insight on enhancing your experience and boosting your performance. This book is not about working from home, per se—although it will help you do that better as well. It is, rather, about getting work done—and working better with others—over a distance. Even more, it aims to help business leaders adapt to our new workplace reality and ensure that all employees, whether down the block or Down Under, remain as productive as possible.

How to Get the Most out of This Book

This work has been divided into five parts. Each begins with an overview, followed by chapters on specific aspects of that part's focus that conclude with a "pro tip" of practical advice.

Part I offers a broad overview of the past and present of remote work, with a quick glimpse into the future. The first chapter details the

history of telecommuting from its beginnings to its near dominance today, while the second highlights the primary virtues and challenges of working remotely—laying the foundation for what follows.

Part II is your guide to building a team of remote stars, taking you all the way from finding them (chapter 3) and bringing them safely aboard (chapter 4) to ensuring the efficacy of their workplace (chapter 5) and, last but certainly not least, instilling within them a strong sense of company culture (chapter 6).

Part III provides a wealth of insight on achieving optimal remote performance, with chapters 7–10 focused on, respectively, the value of first impressions, strengthening communication and collaboration, making meetings more impactful, and the importance of accountability for your remote staff.

Part IV, the heart of the book, examines the elements of strong virtual leadership. Chapter 11 explains how virtual management diverges from traditional management and provides specific instructions, while chapter 12 examines the crucial nature of purpose and lays out how to align your team with core values. The next three chapters detail how to build ownership to increase engagement and even, in the best of circumstances, instill passion.

Part V lays out the tools we've developed at Virtira to ensure optimal performance and productivity for remote teams tackling remote business projects and to complete that often endless "last mile" in complex sales.

Feel free to read sequentially, from here straight through to the end, or use the book as a reference guide to deliver the insights you need when you need them. Whichever route you choose, we wish you happy reading and virtual success!

Additional Content

Throughout the book, QR codes and links provide access to additional Virtira content, training manuals, and guidelines that have proved extremely helpful in our work.

OPTIMAL REMOTE PERFORMANCE

Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I may remember. Involve me and I learn.

—BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

I n recent years, the corporate world has been "projectized." A product pivot, a strategic shift, layoffs, new additions, or new sponsors seem to emerge every few weeks as part of constant churn and change, spurring projects that seek to keep the business ahead of the game. Firms might reorganize as often as once a year with big layoffs, dozens of hires, and new management.

When project management first emerged in the 1950s, it was mainly applied to construction, engineering, and defense projects. Within a few decades, the concept had migrated to the broader business world, largely because its practices and guidelines tended to boost efficiency and results for nearly any group of people working side by side. Lately, managers the world over have been doing their darnedest to apply traditional management tools to remote projects, only to discover that it's like trying to jam a square peg into a round hole. They've plugged in PMP, Six Sigma, Agile, Scrum, and more, with limited success.

We're certified in all of these, and although they work great for colocated teams, each faces serious hurdles when it comes to virtual work. Today's business projects and budgets are smaller, most projects lack a dedicated project manager, teams can be spread across the world, and organizational shifts mean that the team can change in an instant. To top it off, the emergence of ad hoc cross-functional project teams has added another set of challenges. Now, instead of the IT development team sprinting to complete the latest software

update, a client-facing project might require a team that includes staffers from finance, marketing, and sales working alongside two specialized external contractors.

Back in 2015, before the spike in remote work made things even more complicated, *Harvard Business Review* reported that nearly 75 percent of cross-functional teams were dysfunctional.[242] Thanks in part to the rise of remote work, the situation has not improved in the interim. In this section, we address that crisis head on, laying out key steps and best practices to ensure optimal efficiency and productivity for complex teams, even if they're spread across the globe.

Left: A 1960s project meeting. Right: A 1990s project meeting.

Today's project meeting.

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242   Behnam Tabrizi, "75% of Cross-Functional Teams Are Dysfunctional," *Harvard Business Review*, June 23, 2015, https://hbr.org/2015/06/75-of-cross-functional-teams-are-dysfunctional.

Remote Project Execution

The only way we succeed as a group is not simply following directions but in keeping each other accountable for our actions.

— A. J. DARKHOLME

Keeping cross-functional teams accountable is the focus of a methodology we developed called Days of the Week ©, which enables greater control and better ensures project execution. Days of the Week involves a set of daily activities designed to keep remote project teams on track to deliver the best possible results with minimal stress. It organizes team members' action items to make sure that everything gets done. If something is unclear, we follow up. If something isn't getting done, we flag it and escalate.

Days of the Week was expressly developed to handle the insta-bility of remote projects, which is why it shines a daily spotlight on action items, status reports, and risk escalation. With this approach,

no team members, steps, or hurdles will be ignored or left behind. At Virtira, we employ Days of the Week at the outset of any project, as soon as the team is set. It's essential to establish the cadence of follow-up and status reporting early so that team members accept and embrace it. Once we've captured all the team deliverables in a project plan and know exactly what everyone should do, we follow it to create a weekly cadence and a regular, set schedule.

In essence, Days of the Week lays out what to do and when to do it. You and your firm can choose the approach that works best for you and adapt the methodology. But at heart, it is all about following up, early and often.

The Weekly Cadence

Here's what we do on all of our projects, whether they are internal or for clients. This is what works for us, but another cadence may work for you and your business.

📅 **Monday:**

- Send individual reminders to the people responsible for deliverables this week and next.
- Make contact, and confirm with anyone responsible for any high-risk or overdue deliverables.

📅 **Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday:**

- Hold a team status meeting on one of these days, depending on client wishes.
- Update the project plan after the meeting has concluded.
- Prepare and send out meeting notes.

- Follow up on high-risk deliverables using an agreed-upon escalation process.

📅 **Friday:**

- Send out a summary of the status of all deliverables to the entire project team.
- Prepare and send out a weekly status report to executives.
- Update project documentation, including any changes, as needed.

This simple weekly cadence makes it easy to remember. People know what to expect on Monday, and they will learn that they will be called out publicly on Friday if they fail to deliver. As primitive as this sounds, in our experience, it is the best way to ensure that people pay attention and respond.

A great way to think of Days of the Week is to imagine that you have to design and introduce a new car. Regardless of how well designed or inventive the car is, the project will not move forward without any momentum, without something to propel it toward fruition. With no driving force, your gorgeous project will forever remain an idea, a project, rather than an actual car. If RPM is the engine that makes a project run, Days of the Week is the gas pedal that propels it forward.

For many business projects, the project team members have never reported to your project sponsor or worked together, and they often work in different departments. They might be scattered across the globe and will likely work on other projects while also doing their darnedest to fulfill the responsibilities of their regular day job. Days of the Week was built with these constraints, as well as the possibility of remote distractions, in mind, and it aims to keep the team laser focused. We teach new hires and clients not to simply assume that

team members will find time to fulfill their responsibilities. Rather, everyone learns that people need reminders to ensure that everything is done on time and up to par.

Sponsors and management will expect regular status reports. What you include on your reports and how they are delivered depend on the personal preferences of the executives involved. Ask them early about what sort of information they would like to receive regularly and how. It's worth knowing whether your vice president will read your report on Saturday morning on their cell phone instead of at their desk Monday morning. Take the additional step of asking them why they need a report and what value they hope to get out of it. It's not uncommon for a director to have to generate a report for their superior as well. Reduce the time they'll need to repackage your report by understanding what they plan to do with the information.

Status reports could be anything from a Smartsheet dashboard update or a Google Sheet to a detailed email or virtual presentation. Whatever it is, it's crucial that the process is standardized so that every week, at the same time, the higher-ups receive their status report in the same format and platform. Don't overload them with information and platform shifts. Just highlight key steps and examples of progress, and call out potential risks and roadblocks so that management is ready if escalation is required later.

Establish an Escalation Strategy

Because objectives and trajectories change so quickly nowadays, Days of the Week includes a robust escalation strategy, which means coaching the team to be comfortable sharing issues upward.

Let's say that Julie, the business development lead communicating with the client to ensure the utility of the new software your

project is developing, learns that she may need to leave the project soon to care for her ailing mother. She holds off on telling the project lead because she's uncertain about whether she will need to leave—after all, she can't predict her mother's future health. The worst-case scenario, of course, is that Julie's mother takes a turn for the worse at a crucial moment in the project, and Julie is forced to quickly walk away. The result is likely to be an extended delay as the team looks for a replacement who also knows the client.

For the project to stay on track, Julie needs to be comfortable letting the project lead know about the situation with her mother as soon as it emerges. This will give the team time to prepare for a possible change in advance. We like to post online dashboard updates of risks and roadblocks, as we have found that public exposure increases the pressure on the key figures, making it more of a priority and leading to greater accountability. Risks and roadblocks can range in level of concern from nearly nothing to absolutely massive, and they can also quickly escalate from one to the other. These escalations might involve the following:

- Computer failures, internet connectivity, blocked access
- Lack of IT knowledge or ability regarding software, apps, and/ or other tech tools
- Team member or management departures
- Sponsor redefining success or target
- New government restrictions or regulations

If a roadblock forces a change to project scope, this should be immediately communicated to the sponsor to discuss the redeployment of resources or a shift in objectives. This underscores why scheduling relatively easily achievable "wins" throughout the course of the project is so valuable. For lesser risks and roadblocks, each team member should

be prepared to make their own decisions with regard to how and when to escalate. If it's another team member who's being a laggard and slowing progress (again), this can be escalated to the project lead, who is ultimately responsible for keeping the team on track.

Keep in mind, however, that escalating in this way is a delicate business; you're essentially going behind someone's back to tattle on them, and they're unlikely to be terribly pleased about it. So first, be absolutely 100 percent positive that it's that team member who is holding up progress. Second, consider all other avenues before escalating to the project manager because you might well be losing an ally, even as you help put the project back on track. Maybe you could talk to the laggard directly and explain how he is falling short and how the issue might be overcome. Or maybe you and the laggard have a colleague friend in common, and you could explain the situation to the friend, who could then speak to the laggard. Or you might be able to word your next status report in a way that subtly points the project lead in the direction of the laggard, without mentioning him or her by name or role. That might be your best option. If all these options either fail or are unavailable, however, then it's time to escalate.

The exception is if the laggard team member is your superior. Not your boss, of course, but a manager or executive a few steps above you on the totem pole. Do you really want to call out someone who in a snap could have you fired or dispatched to corporate Siberia? Unless you have strong executive support above the rank of the laggard, it's wise to mull your options and investigate other avenues before escalating the failures of a superior. The sad reality is that such a decision can ultimately be career limiting, even if it is in the best interests of the project and overall productivity. All that often goes out the window when pride and ego have been hurt.

Here's an example of an escalation gone sideways. The new vice president needed a win, a signature accomplishment to cap off a stellar CV. In this case, he hoped to develop a new reporting function within Salesforce.com that would enable sales leaders to easily identify new business opportunities. Sounds like a worthwhile goal. The team consisted of fifteen representatives from IT, training, operations, partners, and customer satisfaction departments, all senior-level managers, all working sixty-hour weeks because of their involvement in other business-critical projects. Each week, the team would meet for an hour and discuss the project before everyone presented a status report, which was usually much the same as the previous week.[249] Mostly, the vice president would excitedly relate all the benefits this deliverable would have for the company, would encourage everyone to be excited, and almost as an aside would ask about the status in terms of progress. Each week, IT would say that they were at capacity and could not add resources to the project, while operations would make clear that there had been no approval for the budget. The vice president would shrug all this off: "Well, hopefully things will change by next week."

After five weeks of this, one of the leads from Europe suggested, "If there's no budget and no people to do the work, I'm wondering if we should put this project on hold." Basically, why are we wasting our time on this? Everyone held their breath as the vice president weighed his options. He reluctantly concurred; we all breathed a sigh of relief, and all upcoming meetings were canceled. The vice president called the boss of the European lead who had piped up and asked that he be fired. Word got around, and when the vice president's project later resurfaced, those assigned to the team did their best to work on other things during the calls, hoping that it would all be over soon.

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249   With an average compensation package of $150,000, these calls were costing more than $1,000 per hour (average of seventy-eight dollars per hour times fifteen).

Check In for Course Corrections

Be sure to check in on how your team is doing and how their individual work and collaborations are going, not just how the project is progressing. The software development industry has long known the benefit of reviewing team functionality and making course corrections as needed. Software teams commonly hold biweekly retrospectives to work on collaborations and productivity. This, of course, assumes a dedicated team that benefits from fine-tuning. In a complex business project, with people split all over the globe and dedicated to other responsibilities and projects, it's often unreasonable to get together every two weeks for an afternoon of "Stop, Start, and Continue."

Furthermore, Jim from London is much less likely to be open about his concerns with Fran from Toronto when they both know that there's a strong likelihood they will never work together again after this project. Yet there are still benefits to be had from fine-tuning your project team. Better to know sooner rather than later, for instance, that a simple workflow adjustment will reduce the time it takes for your outsourced graphic design to return from Brazil.

If you have a core group of team members on your project, run the occasional retrospective. As described in chapter 12, retrospectives are ideal for remote project teams and provide an excellent forum for a diverse group of people to provide feedback and work through issues. Keep the frequency of retrospectives to once every three months, and align them with the delivery of major milestones. Focus the retrospective on how the team is performing, and avoid getting into feedback on what the project is delivering and why. This is crucial, as a retrospective can easily be sidetracked by unnecessary griping or legitimate issues that would better be delivered via back channels and escalated as needed.

If your team is more diverse, or time zones make a group call impractical, use an anonymous survey to gather feedback. Include qualitative and quantitative questions on your survey, multiple-choice questions, and open-ended queries such as "What one thing would you change to improve project communications?" Keep a portion of your questions standard for every survey to be able to see improvement over time. Finally, using the same survey across multiple projects will help you identify team issues early on.

PRO TIP: CELEBRATE SMALL WINS

In one European survey, eight of ten respondents reported that the review and evaluation of their completed projects had been inadequate.[250] Project management folks like to say that about 60 percent of projects fail. But without thorough evaluation and review—a comparison of forecasted outcomes, benefits, and losses—it's all but impossible to gauge the level of success or failure. The project might be completed, sure, but how do we know that it has been a success?

Keep your scope front and center so that everyone uses the same yardstick. Every time you deliver a milestone, allow for a little celebration. Particularly when there are challenges along the way—the project takes longer or is more expensive than expected, or the outcomes are disappointing—it's crucial to recognize the team's hard work and accomplish-

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250   John Ward, Elizabeth Daniel, and Joe Peppard, "Building Better Business Cases for IT Investments," *MIS Quarterly Executive* 7, no. 1 (March 2008): 3, https://aisel.aisnet.org/misqe/vol7/iss1/3/.

ments. In fact, an integral part of remote project success is ongoing evaluations—not just at the project's close but at regular intervals throughout.

The more challenging and difficult the project, the more frequently you should gauge progress. After these evaluations, reward the team for staying ahead of schedule and delivering, if warranted. Regular evaluation helps prove and celebrate successes while continually reinforcing and documenting the project's value. In essence, midproject evaluations take the typical process of the project's close and build it into the project itself, incorporating the inevitable shifting of goalposts. It's an opportunity to do a sanity check on whether the project still makes sense in light of market shifts, corporate pivots, and funding issues.

By gauging progress every few months, you create a history of project success that boosts morale and offers something for sponsors and executives. What's more, the data might help you advocate for more funding or show diminishing returns.

With increased demand for hybrid and fully remote work styles, most firms understand that some form of distance work is here to stay – and have put some remote protocols in place. But are they the right ones? Do they reflect best practices when it comes to the hiring, training, and onboarding of new remote hires? Are policies and workflows in place that enable remote workers to be as productive as possible? Does management know how to keep remote teams engaged while keeping an eye out for burnout and other wellness issues?

Often, the answer is "we're not quite there yet." Many companies either see the shift to remote work as a threat to their culture and management style, or they just don't know how to make the transition.

It's time to take advantage of the many opportunities remote work presents. Stop saying "we're not there yet," and start saying "we've arrived!" This book will show you how.

CYNTHIA WATSON understood remote work long before it was hip. She wrote her 1993 master's thesis on telecommuting, then went on to build a career around the concept — running and advising a variety of companies while traveling the world. Today, as Executive Chair at Virtira, she continues to research remote best practices and develop training to make sure that everyone, whether working a few days from home or full time across the world, is thriving and productive.

SHANE SPRAGGS, Virtira's CEO, is an industry leader in implementing project-based solutions that ensure sustainable success. He has brought his insights to a variety of Fortune 500 firms and top media and software startups. Shane leads a team of consultants who implement remote productivity services, reporting and workflows so companies can drive performance and revenue.

LEARN TO LEAD IN THE NEW REMOTE REALITY

The Power of Remote provides a comprehensive roadmap for the countless companies and managers out there looking to take advantage of this workplace evolution, rather than lose out and fall behind. After reading this book, you'll know how to:

- hire, train, and onboard a top-notch remote workforce
- develop high-functioning remote employees who excel individually and in teams
- empower remote staffers to work cross-functionally with other teams and organizations
- ensure clear and effective communications within remote teams and across your company
- efficiently and productively manage remote projects.

Working virtually can boost productivity, cut costs, expand your talent pool, protect your business against disruption from natural disasters, improve employee morale, and lower the environmental impact of doing business. Once you learn how advantageous remote work can be, and how simple and effective the relevant changes, you'll never look back.

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