Terminal

The Terminal guide to remote teams management

What's inside

Why you need a remote management strategy

As we speak, many leaders are managing remote teams for the very first time. Prior to the pandemic, more than two-thirds of leaders told Terminal in a new report that they've never managed a fully or partially remote team. Adding to the complexity is that fewer than one-in-three leaders have a remote strategy in place for the future.

The data paints a clear picture: Leaders will need to upskill quickly, developing and adapting a new set of methods and management strategies to succeed in this altered remote landscape.

If you feel like you're flying by the seat of your pants and inventing processes as you go through a patchwork of Zoom meetings, async communication, and behind-the-scenes direction setting — hear this: You are not alone. We're here to help you put together a strategic remote management strategy, one that takes into account all the different aspects of being remote.

This guide outlines tried-and-true tactics to create structure around collaboration, communication, and trust-building for distributed teams. It's divided into two sections: focus areas for engineering leaders, and action-oriented tips for engineering managers, and we encourage engineering leaders to share this guide with their managers to help them develop effective remote management strategies.

Ready to up-level your management skills? Let's get started.

What's the difference between a remote engineering manager and an engineering manager in an office?

A remote team depends more heavily on its leaders and managers than an in-person team to set tone and expectations. Employees can't get clues about work processes from office culture and they can't easily intuit how to collaborate with their colleagues. It's up to engineering leaders to work with managers to develop and implement the remote work processes that will be right for their company.

For engineering leaders

If you're an engineering leader at your organization, there's a lot you can do to empower your managers to succeed in a world of remote work. You can help set the tone for your entire engineering org by spearheading initiatives and practices that will have ripple effects throughout your company. Your leadership can help each individual engineer stay efficient and connected.

In this section, we outline ways that you as an engineering leader can help your managers and their direct reports.

Defining your engineering culture

Remote work is mindful work, and that means taking the time to establish your engineering team values. And while everyone at your organization contributes to the culture, executives do a lot to set the tone. The workflows and mechanisms you set up will translate into an overarching philosophy for how your engineers approach their work.

The process for defining your culture can vary depending on your team, but we like Asana's approach. They defined their engineering culture by asking themselves three questions: How do we excel as engineers? Where should we focus our feedback to each other on how to improve? What are we looking for when we evaluate engineering candidates? The **resulting values** were: Learn with curiosity, strive for simplicity, articulate your mental model, ship fast sustainably, fix problems even when they're not yours, and teach with compassion.

Once you have a set of values, you should give some thought as to how these values will influence how you operate. How will your values inform your internal communication, onboarding, team building activities, and beyond?

Take, for example, Asana's value: "Fix problems that aren't yours." The engineering teams at Asana manifest this value by refactoring code as they encounter it, having all hands on tech to tackle performance issues, using rotating on-call systems for things like their infrastructure, mobile apps, and testing systems.

Here are four ways to put your values to work on a remote team:

- **Use values in your hiring.** The best way to build culture is to make sure your remote hires will add to the values you've identified for your team. While hiring for culture may be obvious for your in-office employees, it's not always given the same weight for remote hires. Keep your values in mind when hiring, no matter where that employee will ultimately work.

- **Bring values into your reviews.** When it's time to do performance reviews, ask your employees and their peers to reflect on how well they exemplify key values. Managers can give examples of how their groups demonstrated values as a team.

- **Put it in your workflows.** Inject your culture directly into regular processes. For example, if your culture calls for shipping fast sustainably, you should build your processes around continuous deployment and carve out days with no meetings to allow for more work to get done.

- **Find ways to share culture digitally.** Use digital channels to share announcements, celebrate teammates, and have friendly conversations. While virtual events alone won't create culture, they can help contribute a sense of connection among the team.

The purpose of a leader

from Jennifer Farris, Terminal's Chief People Officer

There's an old saying that goes, "People don't work for leaders; leaders work for people." If that's to be true at your company, that tone needs to come from VPs and executives.

Leaders are there to remove barriers, connect people to purpose, and ensure managers are set up for success. Consider putting together a **leadership charter** with other VPs at your organization to codify how you want to lead.

What VPs can do to establish a productive remote work environment

Engineering managers at your company might be responsible for keeping their teams productive day to day, but there are some important things that you, as a leader, can do to help. Leaders can put intentional practices into place around building trust and ownership and set the stage for successful remote work for years to come.

Expert advice: The importance of empathy

from Kerri McKinney, Terminal's Global Director of Talent Acquisition

Empathy is a key skill that all remote engineering leaders must have. There may be outside factors to take into consideration that affect an employee's working hours, like having kids at home or taking care of an elderly parent. Each individual employee on the team will adjust and have their own routine for working most effectively in a remote environment, and it's important to be empathetic to each individual person's situation and way of working.

Connect people to purpose

A fundamental role of a leader is to ensure that everyone on the team understands what they do and how it impacts the company from a goals perspective. It's up to a leader to tie meaning in behind the work.

Break down barriers

Remote work can create silos inadvertently. It's up to VPs and executives to make sure people know how to navigate the organization and find out how to seek information. Introverted employees in particular might struggle with finding their way. Leaders can foster an environment of psychological safety -- one in which employees feel free to ask for help without concern.

Tie pieces together

It's your job as a leader to create cohesion. One way to do this is create your own team mission and connect quarterly goals to it. Then meet with your managers on a regular basis to look back on what you've accomplished and discuss what you want to do going forward. It's a way to promote transparency and demonstrate how their work matters.
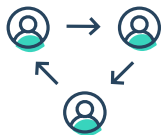
Hiring

Your work as a remote leader starts with how you hire your team. In Terminal's **Engineer 2020** report, 9 out of 10 developers said that the interview process is fundamentally broken. But as a leader, you have the opportunity to fix the interview process by **being intentional in how you approach it.** Here are some ways you can fix hiring at your company to find the right remote talent.

Put in place all hiring processes before recruiting begins

Before any hiring process kicks off, every step of the process should be outlined and locked into place. Figuring out hiring on the fly introduces friction into the process and means it will take longer to fill the role. Try creating a clear rating system from the get-go. Candidate rating systems force a team to outline the necessary strength areas and qualifications before a search begins.

Assemble a relevant team for each hiring process

Having the right team in place for every hiring process is critical. This means ensuring that your recruiters hold the right background and knowledge for the specific role they are interviewing for and can therefore ask the proper questions that will narrow in on the optimal candidate profile. Before kicking off your hiring process, create an **interviewer resource document** for each interviewer involved in the hiring process. This document should outline the questions and qualification areas that each individual interviewer should be examining as well as any expected SLAs to keep the hiring process moving.

Eliminate technical screening redundancies

Don't make candidates go through multiple redundant technical screens. Outline your technical screening process up front with very clear outcomes and make sure to assign it to the right team member to assess. If you're also planning to assign an at-home assignment or take-home test, be mindful of how many hours it will take. While assignments can certainly be effective for determining a candidate's qualifications, they can create a negative candidate experience if they're too time intensive.

Expert advice: Take-home assignments can be very effective

Doug Gaff, VP of Engineering at Zapier explains:

Take-home assignments will give you a good sense of how the person thinks, manages their time, and finds creative solutions.

Stick with a one-week interviewing timeframe

If you've done enough work to understand what you want from the candidate ahead of time, then a fast turnaround is doable. Aim to interview five potential candidates and keep your interviewing process to 1-2 weeks at maximum. This is how you can seize talented candidates who are being recruited for multiple roles simultaneously.

Make an offer that caters to a candidate's wants

Compensation isn't top of mind for every candidate. Remote work flexibility is becoming the number one job requirement for top candidates. Ask your candidate how they are feeling about the offer and listen to their thoughts and any concerns. Make sure they know this is an open conversation and make it clear that you'd like to help it be a perfect fit for both of you.

Adjusting salary for a remote engineer's location

Conversations around salary are sensitive no matter where your employees are located. But salary becomes a particularly thorny topic when you're hiring across different job markets. The average salary for a particular role will likely vary a lot between regions and it might be something you take into account when hiring. But what happens if one of your employees moves from one region to another? Do you adjust their salary, or keep it the same?

Here are four approaches to salary for remote employees:

Geography is king

The value of a dollar in the San Francisco Bay Area is not equivalent to the value of a dollar in Kansas, and one approach to remote salary is to let geography be the main factor in how you compensate. But if this is the approach you want to take, we advise proceeding with caution. You should probably look at salary on a case-by-case basis. As Jennifer Farris, Terminal's Chief People Officer puts it, "Are you really going to dock your best engineer's salary just because they're moving?" Another idea would be to tell an engineer who has moved to a less competitive region that their salary will remain the same, but they'll be ineligible for a raise for one year after moving.

The digital nomad

One character any distributed team will come across at some point is the digital nomad. This is someone who uses remote work as an opportunity to live in lots of different places. Some of the best remote engineers are digital nomads, since their lifestyle is so dependent on being good at remote work. But it can be hard to set a salary for someone who might live in three different regions over the course of a year. One solution is to have an open enrollment period for salary, in the same way that you would for benefits. The digital nomad would have to prove where they live once a year, and you would have an opportunity to adjust their salary accordingly.

Geography meets lifestyle

This hybrid approach to salary is, in our opinion, the best one to take. Employees would be given the whole value of their benefits package in the form of credits based on their location and those credits could be used as the employee saw fit. Perhaps, for example, a young and healthy engineer with no family would rather forgo the premium healthcare plan and take home more salary. The flexibility of this approach would make your benefits attractive and customizable regardless of where an employee lives.

One-size-fits-all

This approach involves the nationalizing salary data. Employees get paid the same no matter where they live. The theory behind is that employees can choose where they live and they don't need to be paid more or less purely based on location. It simplifies pay equity across your company, but it can be limiting for an employee who is forced to live in a more expensive region to be near, for example, their partner's job, their child's school, their ailing parents, or their family's community. It can ultimately put your company at a disadvantage at finding talent in certain higher cost markets.

Onboarding

The most important period of any employee's tenure at your company is their first few weeks. Organizations with a strong onboarding process improve new hire retention by **82% and productivity by over 70%,** and as a leader, you can advocate that your company establish a robust and **comprehensive onboarding program.** But even if you can't get a company-wide program in place, you can still implement certain practices to help new remote hires feel welcome and get them up to speed.

Start a buddy program

87 percent of organizations that assign an ambassador or buddy during the onboarding process say that it's an effective way to speed up new hire proficiency. Buddies should reach out to new hires twice a week during onboarding to make sure everything is going well and to give the new hire the opportunity to ask questions. They should also schedule check-ins to continue to share insights and help socialize new hires in the weeks after their onboarding is complete.

Create a standardized experience

One of the biggest onboarding challenges is providing a consistent experience no matter what team a new hire joins. If your company is big enough, you can group new hires to have the same start date and host structured workshops during their first week to help them ramp up. Have leaders from across your organization give workshops on different aspects of the business, and make space for collaboration. The ultimate goal is to get new hires to work with each other early on.

Be available for meet & greets

Meet & greet meetings are informal opportunities for new hires to connect with the people they will work with the most. And while most of these early meetings should be with colleagues who they'll be working with on a daily basis, it's also an opportunity for them to connect with leaders from the beginning. Make yourself accessible to new hires to help them get to know their place on the team.

Managing team communication

When it comes to remote work, clear communication is everything. That's why one of the top responsibilities for remote leaders is to build an environment of seamless collaboration among their teams.

Communication goes beyond whether you use Jira or Slack. It's about how you approach the problems your teams face. How do your employees work together? Where do they communicate? Being intentional about these types of problems will help manage the flow of information, keep employees feeling supported, and even **boost employee retention.**
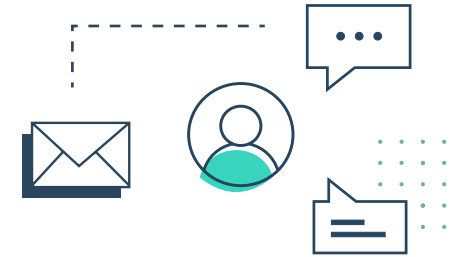
Here are some things to keep in mind as you construct your communication processes for remote workers:

Tools only go so far

The landscape of collaboration tools has never been more favorable for remote work. Tools like Slack, Jira, and Zoom have broken down many barriers, but they also have the potential to put up new ones. Communication within remote teams is all about putting the right structures in place, not just setting up tools and walking away.

Be intentional with your channels

When is a messenger tool like Slack appropriate? What about email? How do you do code review? Setting standards and expectations will keep your employees from spending cycles deciding on the proper medium for their messages and tasks. It will also help your team stay organized.

Embrace asynchronous comms

Concurrent collaboration is ideal when it's possible, but different time zones or working schedules often make this difficult. **'Asynchronous communication'** seeks to solve this. The term simply means communication that happens at different times, and it's a remote team's best friend. Be sure to include context, deadlines, and actions needed in all async communications.

Maintain a company handbook

A company handbook is a great way to document everything about your company and its work processes. And we mean everything -- organizational structure, stand-up schedules, code review processes -- it should all go into a company handbook. It creates a powerful reference tool for new employees to navigate their jobs. Give everyone edit rights to the handbook to make it into a living, breathing document. Gitlab is the **world's largest all-remote company** and they **made their handbook public**, which allows new employees to understand what to expect even before they accept a job offer.

Asynchronous communication

from Russ Greenspan, CTO at PresenceLearning

We do our daily standup via Slack, and use channels and threads to keep conversations organized. But it's important to watch for the moment when an async conversation has run its course and there isn't clear alignment and to call a quick huddle.
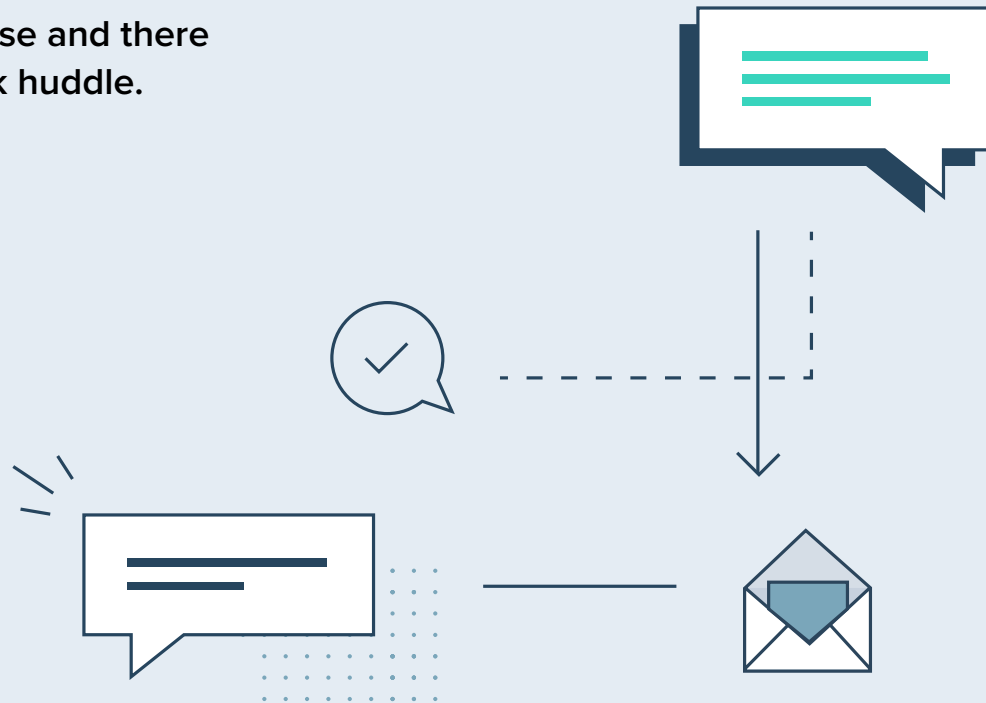
Working across time zones

According to Terminal's **Engineer 2020** report, 88% of engineers prefer to have time zone alignment with their remote teammates and be within one to two hours of their coworkers. Working across time zones can make collaboration more challenging, but it's often an inevitable part of remote work. Luckily, there are some ways you can overcome those hurdles:

- **Encourage employees to block their calendars.** An employee's location may not be obvious to their colleagues. Have employees block off their non-working hours from their calendars to make it easier for coworkers to suggest meeting times.

- **Be considerate.** Make sure your managers are considerate when suggesting meetings. Let them know that they should avoid scheduling meetings that will be too early or late for their teammates.

- **Alternate meeting times.** If you have to pick an early or late time to get all your employees together at once, try to alternate the meeting times to avoid asking the same person to always work outside of their normal hours.

- **Record meetings, centralize notes.** Foster a company culture where meetings are recorded and meeting notes are publicly posted to allow people to play catch up if they can't attend a meeting live.

- **Set expectations.** Let your engineers know that, if they get a message before or after their work hours, they can wait until they're back online in the working hours of their choice to answer it.

TOOLS THAT CAN HELP WITH ASYNC COMMUNICATION

Slack, Basecamp, Twist
Internal comms

Google Docs
Spec, design

Trello, Jira, Basecamp, Asana, Airtable
Project management

Tettra, Confluence, Notion
Knowledge-sharing

Github, Confluence, Coda, Slite
Documentation & Code Review

Git
Source code management

Loom
Video updates

Miro
Design

Coaching

Your team may be remote, but the desire for career growth transcends physical location. In Terminal's **Engineer 2020** report, we learned that learning and development (L&D) opportunities are among the top five criteria engineers look for in a new job opportunity. As a result, it's important to build a culture of career growth to keep your employees motivated and moving forward. Employees who feel like their career goals are being listened to are **more likely to stick around.**

The best engineering leaders think hard about their coaching philosophy and put effort into building programs to support it. Here are a some elements to consider as you design and document your **remote L&D program:**

Invest in professional development

Learning the needs of your teams is worth its weight in gold. The best tactic here is compassion. Put yourself in their shoes. If you were an engineer on your DevOps team, for example, what would be the next step in your career? Would you have access to the resources you need to get there? If the answer is no, consider developing learning programs with subject matter experts in those areas, or investing in online learning content who specialize in the areas that would be most beneficial.

Remote Work 101

Working effectively as a remote employee is a skill in itself. Although the pandemic has pushed most people into remote work of some kind, never assume employees or new hires are remote work pros. Be instructive about remote work best practices, and fold them into onboarding sessions to ensure everyone is on the same page. Even long-time employees probably have different comfort levels with remote work, so consider inviting them to Remote Work 101 workshops as well.

Mint managers from individual contributors

Managing others is a difficult skill to master, and for many people it doesn't come naturally. Consider offering resources to train your individual contributors on management skills, and providing opportunities for them to practice in low-impact settings. If you have interns, see if your engineers would like to flex their management muscles and take on an underling.

Build a mentoring program for engineers

One of the best resources for junior engineers is the wisdom of their more experienced peers. Orgs that develop mentorship programs systematize this principle, benefiting both mentor and mentee. And getting started is simple. It's as easy as connecting every junior engineer with a more senior engineer (voluntarily, of course) and encouraging them to meet regularly to discuss career development, work growth, and how to navigate sticky work issues.

Connecting your team

Your team might feel distanced from each other because they're, well, distanced from each other. But as a leader, you can combat feelings of isolation and loneliness and help your team build connections that run deeper than physical interaction.

Everyone has their own way of connecting – with each other, with their careers, or with a mission-driven cause. If done properly, remote work can afford your team opportunities for deeper connections than in-office work.

Expert advice: Staying connecting
from Demian Entrekin, Founder and CTO, Bluescape

With remote engineering, there needs to be a more explicit focus on calling people to talk one-on-one. Call people without an agenda, just to check in and listen. Push your team out of email and chat wars and into a call. Remote work is an opportunity for leaders and managers to put more focus on active listening techniques.

Here are some creative ways to keep a distributed team connected:

- **Listen to what your team wants.** Perhaps the best way to get started with connecting your team? Ask them what they want. Many companies are trying new tactics to connect remote teams, but may not have stopped to consider how their engineers would like to engage. Put a meeting on the calendar and have an honest conversation around what your team feels is working, what they feel is lacking, and what ideas they have to strengthen personal and professional connections.

- **Connect socially.** Your employees may not share a lunch room, but you can still replicate the experience of casually dining with coworkers. Put a recurring meeting on the calendar where employees can join a virtual conference room and eat lunch together. Or use an app like Donut to create random pairings and get team members to spend some time together.

- **Connect professionally.** Peer reviews and code reviews provide a way for employees to connect with each other by providing support in each other's professional development. Not only does it make them feel supported, but it's also a learning opportunity that will help them feel empowered and on an upward trajectory.

- **Connect with customers.** Encouraging your team to regularly talk with customers can be hugely beneficial as well. Not only does it give employees something tangible to refer back to when making decisions; it also helps employees see the impact of their hard work.

- **Connect with the company mission.** Employees who connect with a company's mission are **54 percent more likely** to stay for five years. Create opportunities for connecting employees to mission by holding executive office hours. Keep in mind that talking the talk only goes so far. Tying virtual outings to your mission can show you walk the walk. For example, if your company works in med tech, why not ditch Whiskey Wednesdays and set aside that time to write letters together to kids at a local children's hospital instead?

Empowering your engineering managers

One of the hallmarks of a great leader is a knack for delegating. If you manage managers, this is especially true; individual tasks stack up faster the higher on the ladder you climb, and you can't do it all yourself. Put more plainly, no one likes you if you're a bottleneck.

This is where the art of empowerment comes into play. Successful engineering executives are always thinking about how to create an environment of ownership among their managers. In the world of remote work, the fundamentals of delegation hold true, but with a slight twist: be prepared to build deep levels of trust with your engineering managers and lean into the autonomy that comes with remote work.

Expert advice: Let managers be managers
from Jennifer Farris, Terminal's Chief People Officer

Managers are the most important people at your company when it comes to ensuring success. They'll struggle if you expect them to occupy a hybrid role. Expecting managers to have their own deliverables in addition to managing might ultimately be bad for your business.

Treat managers like mini-CEOs

The job of a CEO is to manage the operations of the company, direction-set major initiatives, and act as a liaison between outside stakeholders and the exec team. Managers are no different, just within a narrower scope. If you set expectations with your managers that they're ultimately in charge of their little corner of the company, it will foster a sense of ownership, autonomy, and power to take measured risks. It will help groom them to move up in the company as well.

Consider hiring an on-the-ground manager

If you have a high concentration of remote engineers in one region, it may make sense to hire a local manager to work with them, or to promote one of your existing engineers in the region to a manager. This will empower your engineering managers to foster collaboration within their pods of engineers. It also makes meetings more feasible for the entire team, who can default to synchronous, rather than asynchronous, collaboration more often.

Managers ≠ individual contributors

The flip side is also true. Managing is a full-time job, and managers are most useful when managing their teams, rather than becoming individual contributors themselves.

Remote teams require trust

By definition, you'll have less face-to-face time with your remote managers compared to their in-office counterparts. This means the principles that underpin delegation -- like trust, autonomy, transparency, and accountability -- are especially important for remote leaders.

For engineering managers

The day-to-day of managing a remote engineering team will look different than managing an in-person team, and for many engineering managers, there will be some key hurdles to overcome.

In this section, we outline some ways that remote managers can ensure they set their engineers up for success.
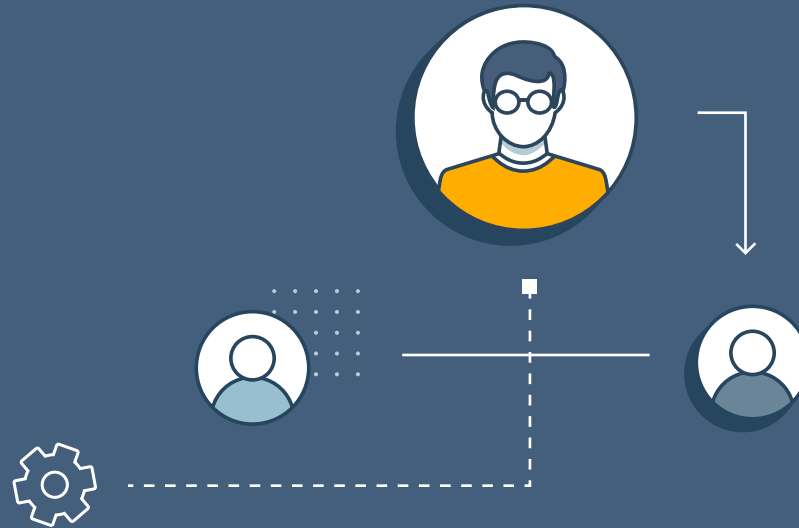
Getting work done over distances

Many engineering managers are used to collaborating in the same room as their team. You might default to walking up to someone's desk to ask them about an issue or update. When transitioning to managing a remote engineering team, you'll need to get comfortable managing in other ways. It's your job as a manager to execute practices and rituals for building a team around remote work.

- **Leverage project management tools.** Collaborative tools like Asana and Trello can help you stay informed and up to do date on key projects and KPIs. Make sure your team keeps tasks updated so that the whole team can understand what's going on at a glance. It's critical to have strong discipline around how you manage software delivery.

- **Implement daily stand ups.** If you aren't already doing daily stand ups, now is the time to start. Communication is not always fluid in a remote environment; if your colleagues need to discuss something, they'll have to start a Slack or email conversation. Daily stand ups can be a great way to foster collaboration and get conversations started.

- **Get your team to be proactive.** Emphasize the importance of proactive communication with your team. Help your engineers understand the types of information you need and when, and don't be afraid to alert them if they're not being proactive enough. Engineers shouldn't wait to share critical information that may be needed.

- **Practice good channel hygiene.** It's up to your engineering leader to set rules around how communication channels should be used, but it's important to make sure your team follows them. Communication channel usage should be intentional and clearly defined.

- **Set clear expectations.** Let your employees know what is expected of them at your company. After all, if individual goals aren't clear and well-defined, how can an employee hope to meet them? You should work with your team to help them understand what goals they should hit, how you want them to communicate with you and with each other, what work hours they're expected to keep, and what business objectives your organization is working towards.

- **Document your meetings.** Make sure every important meeting is followed up with a written summary. It will keep everyone on your team on the same page, whether they attended the meeting or not.

Daily standups

One of the best ways to keep everyone on your team engaged and motivated is through the ritual of daily standups. Standups are short status meetings that last for about 15 minutes to bring engineers together so they can share what they're working on and discuss any project blockers hindering development.

Put in face time. It's impossible to replace face-to-face communication. Luckily, you don't have to! A check-in every morning ensures that everyone on your team is getting their daily dose of face time with one another. It's a great way for your team to build rapport, stay connected, and track what people are working on.

Make it structured. It's best to give daily standups some structure: Start off with some kind of icebreaker, like asking everyone to answer a fun question, taking turns doing a "show and tell" of a favorite internet meme, or doing trivia. Then go around and briefly talk about what you're each working on that day.

Keep it short. The whole standup shouldn't take longer than 15 minutes. If topics turn into conversations between two or three people, consider discussing it in a separate meeting.

Building rapport

Loneliness is a big threat to remote work. **20% of remote employees** say they struggle with feelings of isolation. You can help with that by building rapport with every member of your team. And don't leave anyone out: Be sure to build rapport equally with each engineer. Doing so will not only make you a better manager, it will also help your engineers do their jobs better. **Leaders from all industries agree** that demonstrating genuine interest and care for your employees will motivate them, as well as make them more loyal and more receptive to feedback.

- **Don't scrimp on the small talk.** Employees who feel that they can talk to their managers about non-work issues **report being significantly more engaged** than employees that don't. The same holds true for employees that feel that they can approach their manager with any type of question.

- **You won't know unless you ask.** Ask your employees about their families, what they're doing with their free time, and how they're feeling about their workload. Demonstrate that you care about their mental health and about what they have going on in their lives. If your engineers only come to you with problems when they're ready to quit, you're too late.

- **"Out of sight" is not "out of mind.** Remote employees can sometimes feel forgotten or neglected, especially if some of their colleagues work together in an office. It's crucial to make sure your remote engineers don't feel like second-class team members. Just because you're not seeing your remote employees in person every day doesn't mean you aren't thinking about them.

Expert advice: Socialization
from Caroline Coble, Director, Business Development at Terminal

We've had to replace the opportunities that are organically created by a shared office space: spontaneous conversations, social interactions.

Some of our teams meet once a week remotely for a social activity, which helps everyone keep in touch with other team members, and helps build culture. We've also established several forums for conversations as a company and as individuals, including DEI-related talks, leadership skill workshops, and personal health support. Slack channels like #parenting, #book-club, and #boardgames, help us support each other and connect on topics beyond the scope of our business.

Tips for new remote managers

Managers are often thrust into management without any formal training, leaving them to figure out how to be a good manager on the fly. If you're new to management, then you need to learn a new routine and new behaviors. You'll need proper support and ramp-up time because you're going to be learning a lot very quickly. The learning curve might feel steeper for remote managers, but the same core principles apply to management regardless of whether your team is in-office or remote. The difference is simply that remote management requires more intentionality.

Here are the basics:

- **What is an engineering manager anyway?** There's no one-size-fits-all definition of the engineering manager role. It varies from org to org, and even from person to person within a single org. That's why it's crucial that your definition closely matches your leader's. Get crystal-clear about what outcomes you're responsible for and what you're expected to do.

- **Part 1: Remote.** In a remote environment, you need to ask yourself certain questions a lot: Do my direct reports know what they need to do, how it needs to be achieved, and who to work with? In an office environment, you have the luxury of casually checking in with your employees in person. When you're remote, you have to be much more thoughtful in your communications. Remote work takes more time and effort than working in an office, but once you've built your remote work muscles, you'll be a better manager for life.

- **Part 2: Engineering.** It's no coincidence that some of the best sports coaches have backgrounds as prodigious players in their own right. In the same way, the best engineering managers tend to be superb engineers. In a management role, however, it's less about writing code, and more about setting a strategic vision, accomplishing company-wide goals, and unblocking your direct reports. To keep with the analogy, football coaches decide which plays to run, but they never throw the ball themselves, no matter how good their spiral is.

- **Part 3: Manager.** The best engineering managers have a feel for fostering talent, equipping engineers with the tools they need to succeed, and building a team that's better than the sum of its parts. Of course, these skills aren't in-born, however. It's your job to cultivate these skills in yourself. Your leader can be an invaluable resource in helping you develop these skills, as can your direct reports. Be transparent with both that their input is welcome regarding your ability to manage effectively.

The manager 1:1

Employees who have regular 1:1 check-ins with their managers are **3x more likely** to be engaged, so be sure to make time for them with everyone on your team at a regular cadence. Use 1:1s to set expectations around work and check in on key projects. As a remote manager, you should be more concerned with outcomes than with hours worked, and you can use 1:1s to set that tone.

Expert advice: Active listening

from Terminal's Global Director of Talent Acquisition Kerri McKinney

Active listening is a key skill that any effective remote engineering manager should have. It's very easy to get distracted by an email or ping while in a 1:1 with an employee and miss an important part of the conversation. While in meetings, leaders will need to practice active listening to make sure everyone feels as though they have a voice and know when the time is right to offer up opinions.

Understand that remote 1:1s might take longer

Communication takes more energy in a remote environment. Stay patient and budget in enough time to get through everything you need to cover. It'll be worth it the extra time in the long run.

Create an agenda

Your 1:1s are critical to your employees' success, and they're not the time to improvise. Prepare an agenda about what you'd like to cover to make sure that nothing falls through the cracks. Use a shared cloud-hosted document like a Google Doc for each individual's ongoing 1:1 meetings. It will give them a chance to add their own discussion topics, as well as make it easy to follow up on action items from previous 1:1s.

Add a recurring meeting to the calendar

Don't hold 1:1s on an ad hoc basis. Just because you don't have anything to meet about doesn't mean your employee feels the same way. Manager 1:1s should happen at a regular cadence, and adding a recurring meeting to the calendar is a great way to reserve space for employee conversations.

Leave with action items

Don't end your 1:1s without discussing next steps. Make sure that your employee understands what you expect them to do next about the topics you discussed and take the time to ensure they have what they need to get those action items done.

Tracking performance

A common question new remote managers ask themselves is, "How will I know that my employees are working?" Remote engineering requires trust, and micromanaging your employees will only frustrate them. Plus, it will create additional work for you. Try to come up with a hands-off system for tracking performance.

Expert advice: A catchy way to communicate goals
from Pathlight, Terminal customer and source-of-truth platform for managing day-to-day team performance

At **Pathlight**, the team comes up with something quick and memorable to communicate goals. For one quarter, the goals structure was *HAMS: Hiring, Announcement, Make Money, Ship*. It helps to start each team meeting with a quick recap of your quarterly priorities so everyone knows how they contribute to those targets.

Focus on output, not hours

Don't get hung up on the amount of time spent working. Instead, look at what your employees are actually producing. Are you advancing towards your team goals? When employees talk about what they're working on for the day during stand ups, does that work get completed?

Set achievable milestones

Break big projects into smaller milestones to keep track of progress. Be supportive and encouraging as your engineers hit those milestones to help them feel like they're like they're making headway.

Set goals and KPIs at an individual and organizational level

It's much easier to be accountable when every team member has clear marching orders. Each team member should understand the broader company priorities and how their individual and team OKRs directly advance those company priorities.

Measure progress

OKRs are important, but to track day-to-day performance, you should be paying attention to the KPIs that will help you achieve those OKRs. Whether it's "X commits a day" or "X% of releases that are bug-free," codify these KPIs, then track and measure them in real-time.

Evaluating success

from Caroline Coble, Director, Business Development at Terminal

We develop quarterly OKRs as an Engineering organization, then let our teams develop their own OKRs in alignment with the org. Finally, individuals define their own OKRs, combining both team commitments and goals for personal development. We make sure to use this system to keep high levels of alignment and efficiency, and to encourage growth. We do not use it to drive personal performance reviews, so it remains highly self-driven and anxiety-free.

Also, we measure our agile performance, roadmap delivery rate and success rate, and our platform's performance. We review all the above on a regular basis.
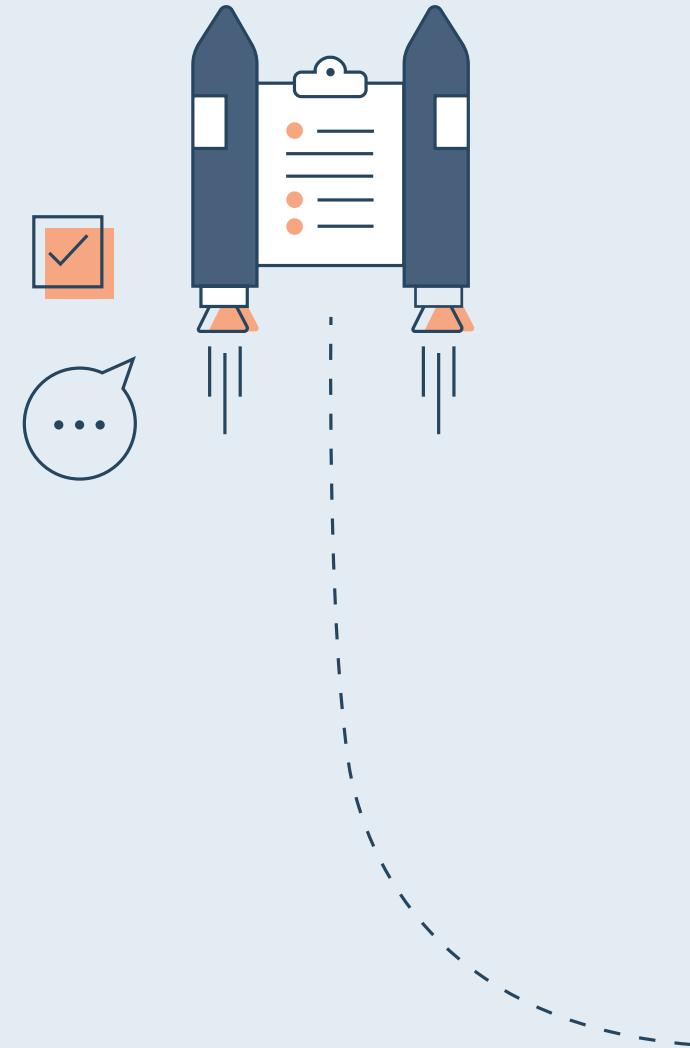
Handling burnout

Many new remote managers worry their direct reports will work too little in an 'unsupervised' setting. But <u>data shows</u> managers should be more worried about employees working too much. In fact, 63% of leaders say their plans address productivity; however, less than a third of plans address employee burnout (21%) or loneliness (32%).

Your most valued employees are probably the least likely to raise their hand when they feel overwhelmed, so be on lookout for **signs of burnout** to keep your team fresh, happy, and motivated.

Be proactive

For employees, broaching the topic of burnout with a manager can be daunting. As a result, many employees simply avoid bringing it up. So be proactive, be direct, and be consistent. In 1:1 meetings, start by asking about the softer side of work. How are they feeling? Are they motivated? Do they dread certain aspects of their job? But remember, employees will likely be slow to admit they're overworked, so phrasing is everything.

Lead with compassion

Working remotely can lead to a lot of stress. It can be isolating at times, especially when coupled with the pressures of caring for children or other family members at home. A little acknowledgement goes a long way to make sure they feel appreciated.

Learn the signs of burnout

One of the biggest indicators of burnout is a change in employee behavior. The signs of burnout can be subtle, but once you learn to recognize them, they're undeniable. Inability to concentrate, recurring sickness, and lack of motivation are some of the most common. Watch out for self-deprecating jokes about depression, hopelessness, or being overworked as well. There's often more truth in these types of comments than you may realize.

### Establish work/life balance

A good start for this is creating rules around not using email/Slack after hours, but it's essential to lead by example. If you work after hours, then your employees will feel obligated to do so as well. Setting aside a few minutes for socializing at the beginning of meetings can act as a pressure release valve during the day as well. Paying for a coworking space for your employees can also be helpful in drawing a boundary between work and life. It can also help with feelings of isolation and boost collaboration.

The six c's of effective management

Jennifer Farris, Terminal's Chief People Officer, recommends the six C's framework to instill great management practices:

1   **Clear purpose:** Does everyone understand the Vision for the company and "why" the work they are doing is important? This is a hugely motivating factor for many people, and if you're seeing a lack of focus or drive, it may be that they feel disconnected from the overall purpose.

2   **Cascading goals:** What are we doing this month/quarter/year and how does it align with the purpose of the company overall?

3   **Clarity of role:** Does everyone know their roles and expectations?

4   **Continuous feedback:** Have you created mechanisms to give and receive feedback?

5   **Coaching:** Do you have effective one-to-one communication and recognition with your team?

6   **Career journey:** Does each person on your team have career goals they are personally motivated by that you check in on and actively support?
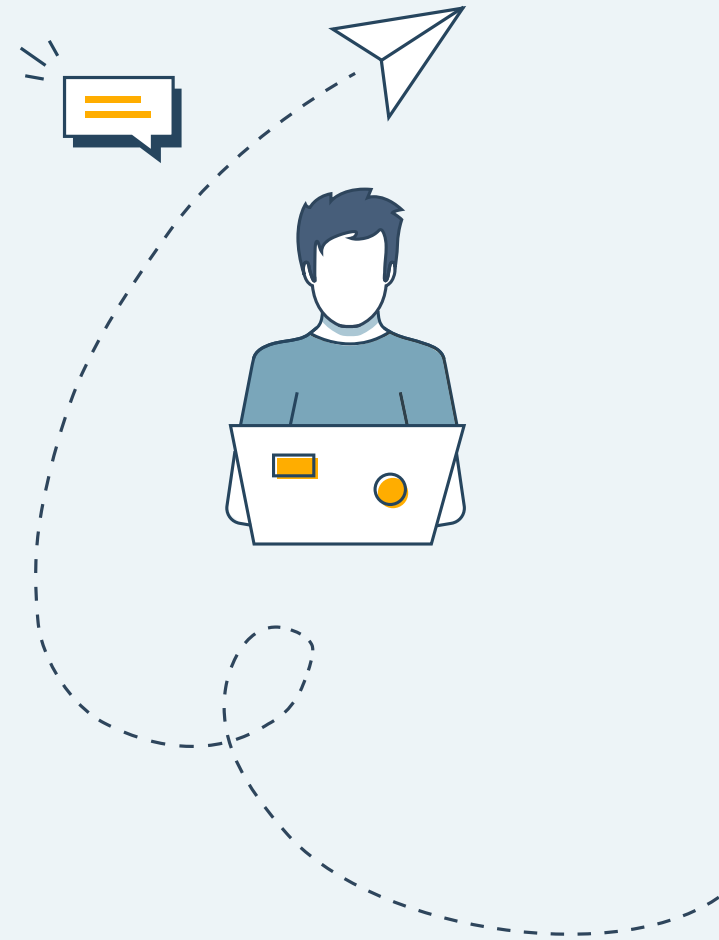
Conclusion

Becoming an expert at leading and managing a remote engineering team might involve more time and effort than managing an in-person team, but that extra energy comes with significant rewards. Not only will a happy remote team be more productive and loyal than a team in an office, but the skills you develop in setting your team up for success will make you a more effective leader, remote or in-office, for the rest of your career.

Want to learn more about leading a remote team? Join our community of engineering leaders over at **terminal.io** — we're always sharing content, education, events and other opportunities for you to grow your remote management skills.

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