

BY CHERYL EATON

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# REMOTE WORK THRIVAL GUIDE

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IN AND BEYOND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC



A QUARTERLY SERIES  
FROM THE CREW  
AT GURU

SAUSALITO, CALIFORNIA  
BURLINGTON, VERMONT

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# So, You're Suddenly Working from Home...

Or you and your team are working from home and you suddenly need to manage people you aren't looking at. How do you do it? How do you maintain personal productivity? Communications, relationships, culture? And how do you make sure folks are being productive individually and together?

I bet you've been thinking about remote work as a strategic move sometime in the future. But thanks to a pandemic your timeline is suddenly now. So you need to answer these questions NOW.

We've been asked by our clients to get this guide out ASAP, because at Guru our norm is remote work. We've been through the transition and questions that change brings - and here we are on the other side letting you know it's great over here. We're going to help you fasttrack from frantic and shocked to solid and grounded.

**And - YES - productive.**

In fact, we've titled this a **THRIVAL GUIDE** instead of "survival" because we consider remote work an ethical imperative that helps our employees and company thrive. But we'll get to that after hitting the practical stuff spurred by our friend the coronavirus.

For now, let's look at the bright side: it is our hope that once this chapter closes, you'll emerge into a post-pandemic world with a whole new skill set and competency.

I would suggest you think of the COVID-19 imperative as not only a mandate from above. Not only a way to slow the spread. And not only a way to keep your business moving and ideally profitable.

But also as a humane way of helping your employees handle their own personal crises...

... with concern for their own health, the health of loved ones, and kids needing schooling at home. This widened perspective might help you understand why we consider remote-work a part of our conscious business blueprint. And we predict it will become a practice you maintain as a part of your “new normal” after the crisis.

# SETTING THE GROUNDWORK FOR SUCCESS



## MAKE SURE EVERYONE HAS WHAT THEY NEED TO BE SUCCESSFUL

Okay, obvious. But might as well start at the beginning. Jobs are different, bodies are different, and therefore needs are different. You might not be able to accommodate everything in the moment of crisis, but here's a helpful list:

### IMMEDIATELY

- **Hardware:** Needs vary. A laptop will suit some. Others might need larger or multiple screens, and an external keyboard.
- **Software:** Nothing worse than learning a remote employee doesn't have the basic business programs installed.
- **Telephone:** People will need to talk. Some companies have fleet cell phones and cell phone policies, but many don't. Employees might be happy to use their home phone, or their personal cell phone. Others won't be. What's your plan? See below for some ideas that might help.
- **Broadband Internet:** It's hard to quickly make sure all home offices have strong enough connectivity. Especially when kids are home straining the system. To start you'll make do, but over time you will want to establish a minimum Internet connection speed.

**PRO TIP:** Get savvy about deep and surface work. Since employees will be sitting in front of a screen more than ever, support them to avoid fractured attention that comes from notifications, multi-tasking, jockeying between communications tools, and multiple meetings. Turn off alerts, log out of programs and book the time necessary to do deep work as appropriate for different roles.

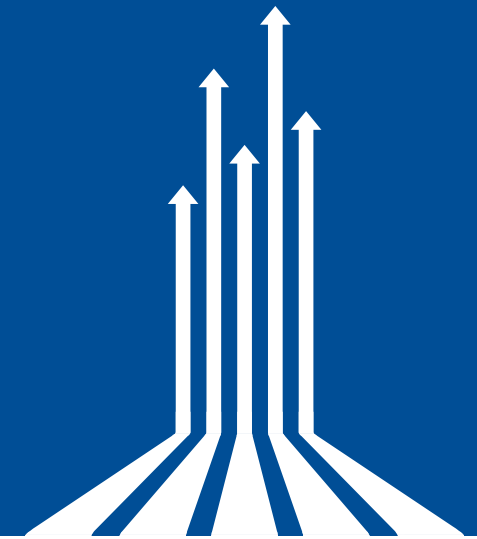
## LONGTERM

- **Remote-work Stipend:** It's only fair - if your employees are using their home infrastructure for work, some portion of it should be paid for by the company.
- **Set Minimum Standards for Connectivity:** In return for that stipend, be clear about what you expect - Internet speed is usually the biggest issue. At Guru, we strive for 15-25MBPS.
- **Ergonomics:** With people working from home, you lose control over ergonomics. Given this, we recommend responding quickly and supportively when people make requests. If someone needs an ergonomic chair because they sit for 8 hours at their home desk, by all means.
- **Collaboration Tools:** How do you approximate meetings? We use video conference tools Zoom and sometimes Google Hangouts for most meetings. It helps facilitate collaboration as well as personal connection. We also use Google Drive to develop and share documents of all types. The world of collaboration tools is vast and growing. We've tried many and are happy to give our perspective on any you may be thinking about trying. From experience, it's best to keep the options few, and the complexity low.
- **Communication Tools:** There are many beyond the telephone. You probably use some already in-office that will transition smoothly to remote work. Slack for quick questions and comms; Slack and Google Hangouts allow for in-app calls; email for longer-form information transfer that should be held; and - again - video conferencing.
- **Project Management Tools:** Again, you might already use a web-based tool. If you do not, you will probably need one to stay sane. There are many at many price points and which one works for you is largely a personal choice. We've used a few - Trello, Asana, InVision. We've settled into Asana for now, and you might take their free option out for a spin. Again our advice is simple and inexpensive. You don't want people having to churn through work hours updating or navigating the tool. You'll end up using less features than they offer.

### PRO TIP:

Establish protocol for what communication tool is used for what purpose. This will help you avoid both fractured attention by tending to multiple threads of notifications through the day, and lost productivity while digging back through Slack or email for notes or documents.

# FROM SURVIVAL TO THRIVAL



## MANAGING A REMOTE CREW

Here's the secret and the most important thing a manager must do: CHANGE YOUR PERSPECTIVE.

Your employees aren't lazy people just waiting to take advantage of you and your company, who need time cards, peer pressure and a watchful eye to be productive.

No - of course you don't believe that! Or do you.... centuries of entrenched management practices and attitudes lead most of us to act as if we do. Our challenge to you: if you believe your employees are professional and ethical, and they take pride in contributing, then embrace treating them like that.

Job one is to stop infantilizing your employees and to increase your respect. Decrease micromanagement and increase trust.

- **Define Roles & Responsibilities:** Make sure people feel secure and focused by clearly articulating their responsibilities and required outcomes. Ideally you have personal, departmental, and company plans, as well as job descriptions.
- **Maintain All Regular Staff Meeting:** If you have an existing cadence of regular meetings to check in on priorities, progress, and status, keep those and do them just as well virtually. You might need to add some quick check-ins to compensate for a lack of office pop-ins. We do a Monday morning all-hands meeting, and smaller "stand-ups" every morning.
- **Manage to Outcomes:** Come on... do you think anyone in a physical office actually works for 8 hours? They don't. So remove that concern. Manage responsibilities and outcomes. Who needs to get what done by what date or time? If they are not able to get that work done on time and to expected quality, how do you support them?

**PRO TIP:** Studies show you lose more time and productivity micromanaging your employees than you lose by helping to recover from the very occasional mistake someone makes. Plus, micromanaging kills motivation.

■ **Maintain an “Open Door”:** It’s an unintended hurdle that people tend to feel they need to get on your calendar for a formal meeting when you work remotely. Find a way to have an open door - accepting calls, Slack conversations, and spontaneous meetings as much as possible.

■ **Hire People You Can Trust:** Hiring is one of the hardest things to get right. Acknowledged. Still: if you can’t trust someone to do their work conscientiously without being micromanaged, you don’t want them on your team. Period. You don’t want those people on the team even if everyone is office-bound.

■ **Care For the Whole Human:** We’ve mentioned “productivity” a lot because it’s important and it’s the thing managers worry most about when thinking about remote work. But your employees aren’t just mechanical cogs in your profit machine. They are humans who spend most of their waking hours working for you. They want - and deserve - to feel appreciated, cared for, and cared about. When we’re not in

## Guru’s Whole Human Practices

At Guru we create practices to care for the whole human even when we’re not in the same office.

- Watercooler Meetings
- #Personal and #Inspiration Slack Channels
- Live Your New Year’s Resolution Day Off
- Your Birthday, Your Holiday Day Off
- Dynamic Duo Peer Coaching Program
- De-Stress / Thank You Gift Certificates
- Video Holiday Parties, Baby Showers, Anniversary Celebrations
- Personal Check-ins / Check-outs at meetings
- No-Questions-Asked Flexibility
- Generous use of Emoji’s
- Pet and Kid Photo Sharing
- Transparency Encouraged around Kid / Family Needs

And the new Pandemic-inspired #Housearrest Slack Channel for those of us with kids home from school to share funny moments, hair-pulling frustrations, and seamless support.

the same office, we sometimes forget to do that. I, for example, am famous for forgetting to say good morning before jumping into work (I’m just excited!). We all have to double down on this intention. Say hello with no agenda. Schedule regular meetings just to check in. Send a pic or joke via Slack. Ask about their kids. Their dogs or cats. Thank them for completed work. Send them a gift certificate

for a local restaurant when they are stressed. Fight the “out of sight, out of mind” tendency. Be human and care. No, I’m not going to tie this back to motivation, loyalty, and productivity.



## BUILDING CULTURE

Each organization has a culture. It might be a consciously tended culture. Or it might be a de facto culture resulting from the lack of tending. Truth is, it can be easy to let culture fall fallow when everyone works remotely. It's important to double down.

- **Honor Personal Connection During Meetings:** Loosen up your old-school attitude of all-business meetings and adhering strictly to an agenda so no time is wasted. When you work remotely it's the 5 minutes of laughing and catching up that creates a culture of connectedness and investment.
- **Schedule Meetings to "Just" Connect:** And show up to them. We have a "water cooler" meeting on Monday mornings before status. We literally just chat about the weekend, our new favorite shows, our kids' escapades - whatever you would say around a water cooler. We also have virtual celebrations and parties, learning lunches, and company meetings - all on video.
- **Prioritize Video Communications:** Speaking of video... it's not always possible, but it's generally best. It gets us closer to connecting and communicating as whole humans.
- **Collectively Craft Cultural Norms:** These can be anything - and can be practical and business focused or spiritual, ethical, sensory and should include how conflict is handled. For example here are just a few of ours:
  - » Open book management;
  - » Shared leadership;
  - » People-first orientation;
  - » Balanced lifestyle (work and personal);
  - » and increasing joy in the world - starting with our employees.



Living by these takes repetition, alignment, and practical protocols and tools; we'll leave those to another Ebook.

**PRO TIP:** Get ahead of problems by setting standards for how employees show up on screen. This might sound draconian, but you want your employees to leave a professional impression. Distracting backgrounds are out, and professional settings are in. And ball caps and hoodies might be fine for some internal meetings, but what do you want to see for meetings with clients and important vendors?

## TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

Working remotely can be hard at first, but it should become a big win for you and your organization. Flexibility is a big advantage - use it to optimize your productivity. Boundaries are a big issue. Set yours to optimize your life.

### ■ **Shift Work Hours to Accommodate Family Needs.**

School closings have employees across the country working with kids at home. Consider working earlier in the morning and/or later in the evening to allow you to be present for work and for the kids. Many Guru employees have found that this helps ease children's anxiety and keep their young minds engaged.

### ■ **Designate a Space Specifically for Work.**

Laptops are a blessing and curse because they allow you to take work everywhere (i.e the dining room table, couch, bedroom, etc.). Try to dedicate a singular space for work and avoid co-mingling work into every area of your home – which is especially important if you are unable to leave the house.

### ■ **Set Clear Boundaries for Personal Time.**

Having clear guidelines for when you are planning to work and when you need to call it a day will help maintain work-life balance. Just because you are working at home, does not mean that your entire life at home needs to become work.

### ■ **Be Creative About When Your 8 Hours Occur.**

Unless 9-5 is a cultural agreement with your company, allow yourself to break out of the time-clock mindset. You know when you are most

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If it weren't for the remote structure at Guru, I would not have returned to work after my daughter was born. Being able to continue her regular feeding routine and even soothe midday meltdowns with quick mama cuddles was the truest blessing any employer could extend to a new parent. I am forever grateful for this company that supports the balance of work and home life.

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Amanda Kauffman  
Project Manager

productive. You know when your kids are most needy. You know when you'd benefit from a nap. Don't fight it - flex with it. Everyone will benefit. Some of our Gurus are most productive from 6am to 9am and then again after 8pm. As long as work is great and deadlines are hit, it's all good.

### ■ **Break Up Your Day and Get Out of the House.**

Ironically, people who work from home tend to stay tethered to work and the laptop MUCH MORE than counterparts in offices. Carve out time to get outside during the day – even just a quick walk around the block. Fresh air and a bit of exercise can help keep you (and any kiddos at home) from going stir crazy!

- **Develop a Routine and Stick to a Schedule.** While flexibility will continue to be imperative in all aspects of life in the near future, routines can help to provide a sense of calm during this period of uncertainty. By setting a regular schedule, you are also more likely to enforce boundaries to prevent working around-the-clock.
- **Get Dressed as if you Were Going to an Office.** While we all love our pajamas, it is helpful to dress like you would if you were going into a workplace environment. And if you normally have to dress a bit fancier for your job, find joy in being able to wear your jeans and sneakers!
- **Set an Intention to Maintain Self-Focused Rituals.** Self-care is as important as ever, so be sure you are taking time to get outside, exercise, and eat a real meal! Set the intention now as you begin your work-from-home journey as it will be harder to re-establish it later.

**PRO TIP:** It's not like people in offices work a full and productive 8 hours. They might be present but they are not productive. Studies show people are productive for only 3 hours a day at work with water cooler chatter, stop ins, snacks, and natural rhythms at play. There is no question in my mind that productivity increases - all else being equal - at home.

**PRO TIP:** Fight a culture of multitasking as much as possible! It's an easy slide from meeting remotely to concurrently checking emails... Slacking... texting... working on another project. Though you'll all be staring at screens, set a cultural norm that you will act as if you aren't and **BE PRESENT** and undistracted!

- **Take a Screen Break.** Some of the above tips support this, but it's worth stating clearly - look away from the screen and get out of your chair! Trust us. Before you know it you will have sat on your tush and stared at the screen for 8 hours (just like I did today!).
- **Take Breaks.** And even though we stated above that video is king, identify people who you can do phone calls with instead for the sole purpose of giving your eyes and body a break.
- **Close Down All E-Communication Channels.** Yes, we love the flexibility of remote work. But you need boundaries or your home-life will become all work. Or multitasking between work and personal - which is fracturing and stressful. When you are done for the day, close the laptop, close down Slack, silence all the alerts. Remember, other people might be working, but that doesn't mean you need to be.

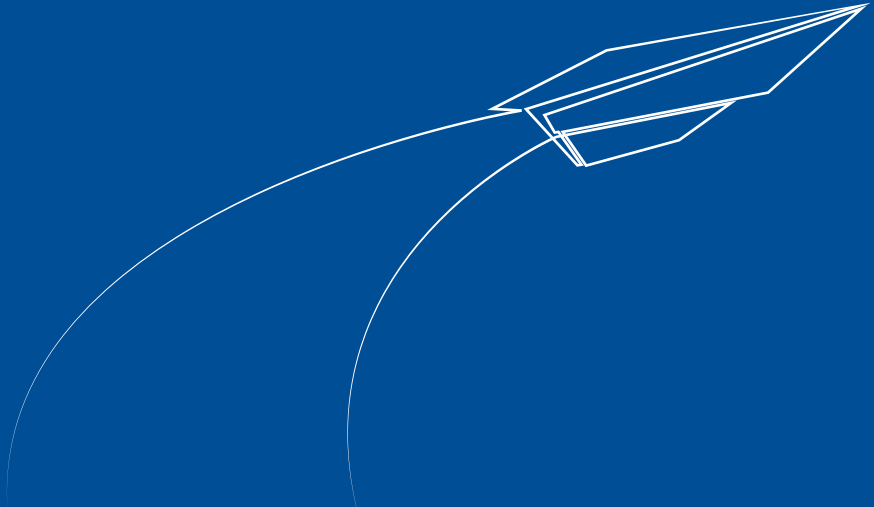
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Life happens. At Guru, our people have weathered 5 moves across state lines, 2 marriages, 2 divorces, 1 newborn, 3 family deaths, 2 beloved pet deaths, 1,000 kid sicknesses, 3,000 school events, and 1 pandemic. Thanks largely to remote work, we haven't lost one employee because of a life event.

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Cheryl Eaton  
Managing Director

# REMOTE WORK AS AN ETHICAL IMPERATIVE



We know you're probably not in the mood right now to plan beyond the next six weeks. We get it. But here's a seed to consider... we are convinced that organizations will exit our time of social distancing with a new attitude about remote work. This forced experiment will create a new normal for both companies and employees. Those who have been reluctant to try, will have a new comfort level. And employees who have experienced more autonomy, maybe even more balance despite COVID-19, will be reluctant to roll things back completely.

At that point, we will come back around and urge you all not to revert back to the old way. Why? **Because we believe accommodating remote work is an ethical imperative in a new world of work.**

At Guru, we use a **compass-based decision making model**. It's part of our culture to use our values and purpose in the world (our ethical compass) to make management and leadership decisions. In the universe of conscious companies and purpose-driven organizations, it can be typical to make decisions based on environmental impact or the impact on far-away areas and people. This is all good.

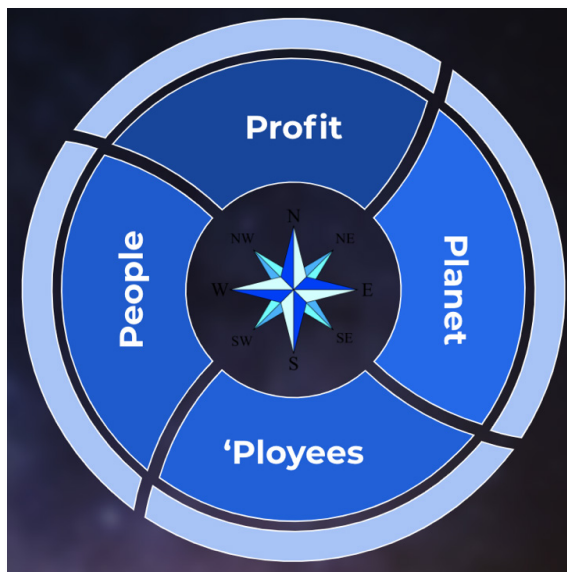
But our challenge to you is:

**Do you take your impact on the well-being of your employees (and their nearby communities) seriously and with as much care as you take your impact on far-away communities?**

Sadly, the answer after some soul searching is typically, “no.” Not because of evil-intent, but because of blinders and centuries of bad management philosophies and styles.

Making internal decisions, we often hold up this goal as a compass: “We want to create a company where even a single mother can thrive.” Enter a pandemic, and we can all understand even more clearly why this is a powerful bar.

And that’s why we are such advocates of remote work, adding a fourth “P” to the typical sustainability checklist: Planet, People, Profit... and ‘Ployees.



Building and maintaining a successful remote crew takes attention, and the tips above will help. We consider ourselves both advocates and pioneers in this space. With eyes wide open, we are actively tending to both the positive and negative impacts of remote work, and exploring creative solutions to the five areas we believe are crucial to creating a remote business as healthy and strong as any IRL (in real life) organization.

When you’re ready to take the leap and fully-embrace a 100% remote workforce, don’t forget the following crucial areas for consideration:

- Trust-based Hiring
- Outcomes-based Management
- Conscious Culture Creation
- Virtual Creativity
- Open-looped Learning

Guru is a full-service marketing agency on a mission to increase joy and reduce suffering in the world.

If you are looking for support on how to turn this global pandemic into positive change for your institution, we’re here to help. We’ve been through the bumps of transition and are proud to be THRIVING on the other side!

And, of course, our remote structure means that we are always open for business. Email [connect@weareguru.com](mailto:connect@weareguru.com) to learn how we can support you today.

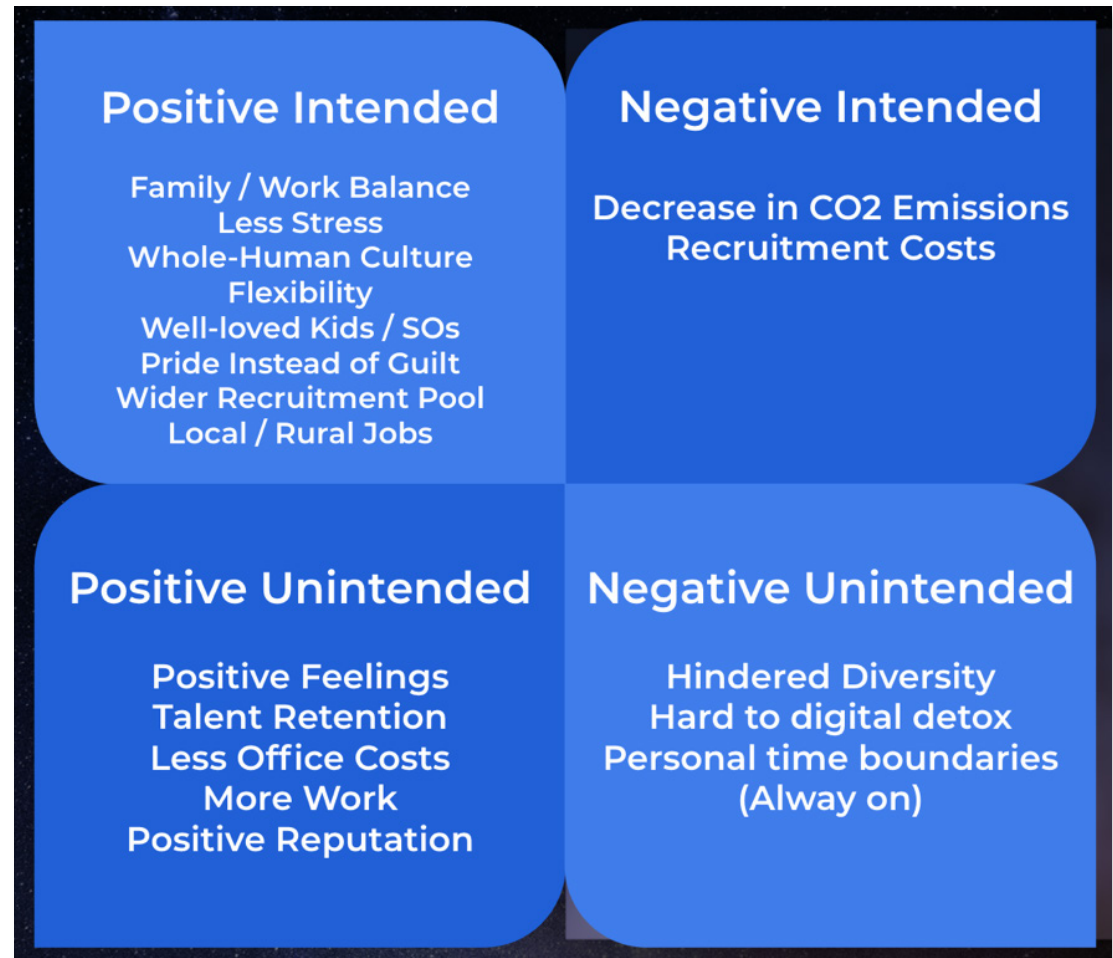
## SYSTEMS IMPACT OF REMOTE WORK

In the spirit of transparency, we would be remiss to not recognize that major organizational transitions have implications, both positive and negative, intended and unintended. To that end, remote work is no different.

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Don't be afraid to ask questions.  
Don't be afraid to ask for help  
when you need it. I do that every  
day. Asking for help isn't a sign of  
weakness; it's a sign of strength.  
It shows you have the courage to  
admit when you don't know something,  
and to learn something new.

“ — Barack Obama



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