The Remote Work Handbook

Tips, tools, best practices and resources for happier and more productive remote teams.
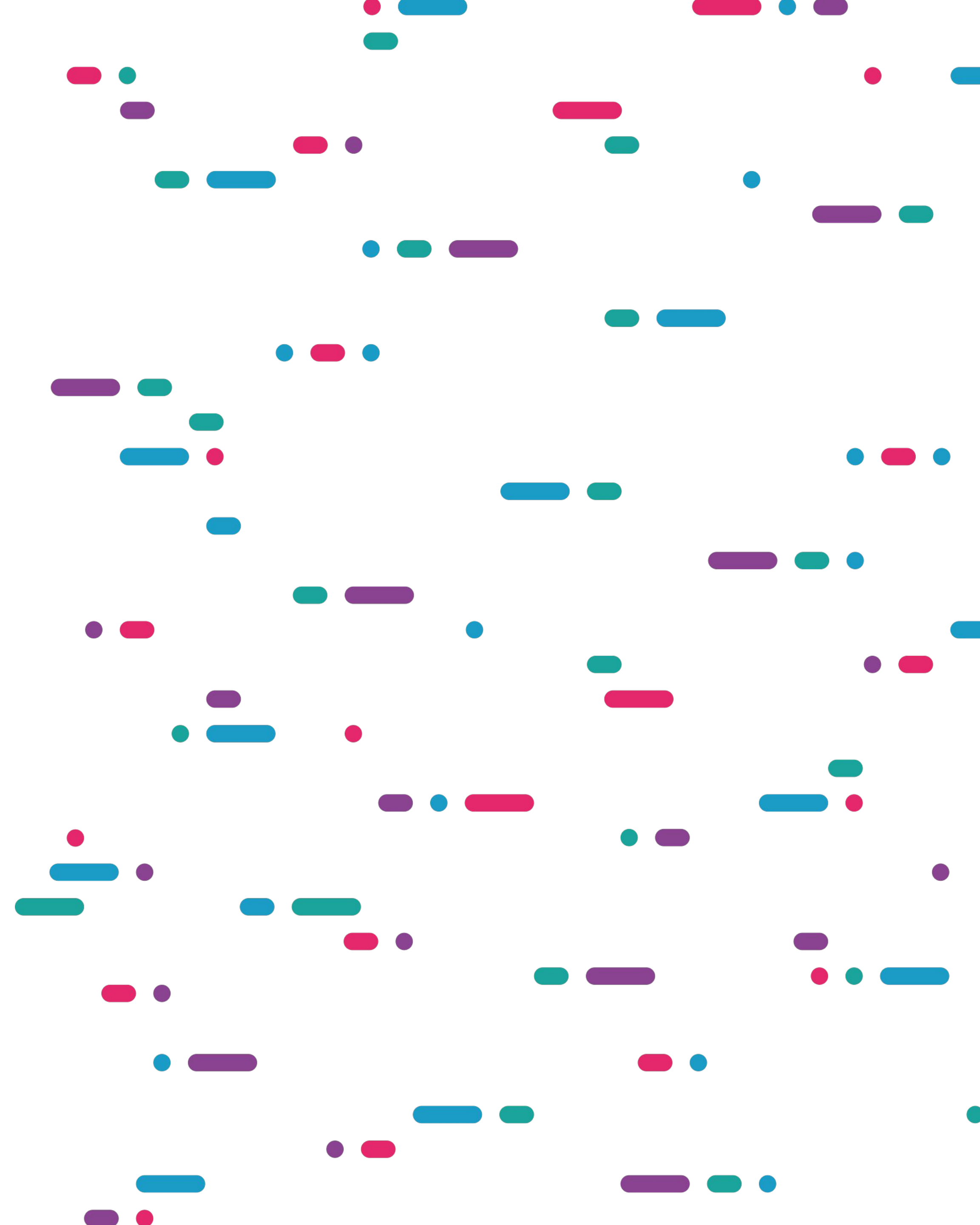
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What is remote work?

There are **various types of work** (see below). Remote work refers to **a job that is done outside of the office**. It is sometimes called telecommuting, teleworking or 'working from home'.

Please note: 'remote work' is not a synonym of 'smart work'. The first refers to a physical work location - **in any place other than a company's office.** The latter, to a goal-based system that aims to drive greater efficiency and effectiveness in achieving job outcomes through a combination of flexibility, autonomy and collaboration, in parallel with optimizing tools and working environments for employees.

1. **Office based**

2. **Office based with work from home option**

3. **Remote team in one timezone**

4. **Remote in many timezones (distributed)**

5. **Distributed team with nomads**

Source: Buffer Open Blog

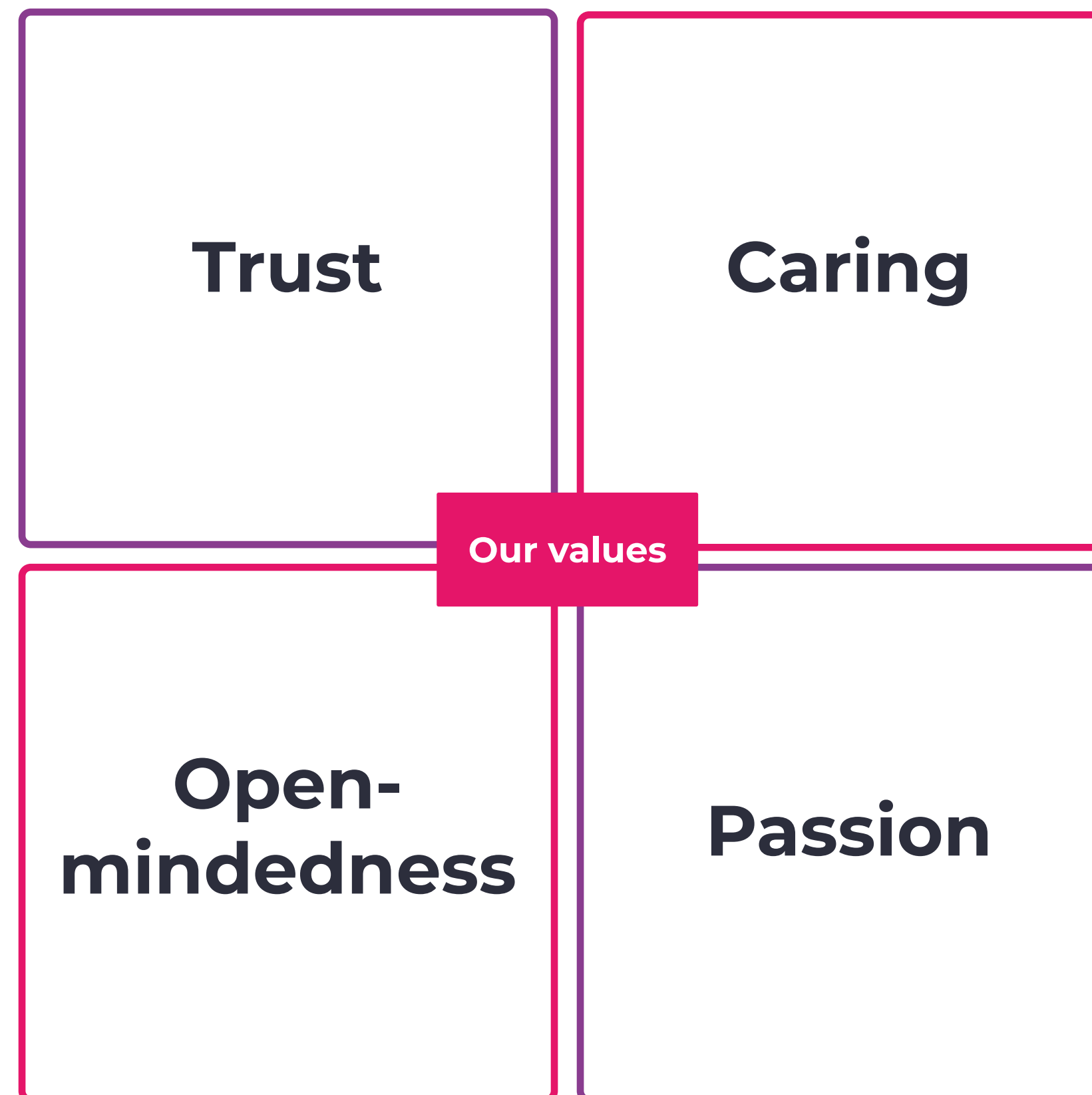# How does remote work fit in MailUp Group's corporate culture?

Trust is the foundation of remote work.

- **We believe** in empowering people's independence in carrying out their work.
- **We trust** each other's judgement and are not afraid to be held accountable.
- **We don't believe** that micromanaging, hyper-controlling or hovering can bring the results we want.

Putting health & safety first.

- In delicate times such as these, **we put the wellbeing** of our people ahead of everything else.
- **We care** for our co-workers, their families, and the community.
- **We do all in our power** to help and support personal and collective safety.

Out of the office, out of the box.

The times of one-model-fits-all are over.
Remote work opens the door to creative ways of doing what we do.
- **We embrace** the change and find our own dimension, habits, routine.
- **We explore** new ways of balancing personal and work life.
- **We get creative** in liaising with remote co-workers.

Levelling up our work practice.

Working remotely can pose new challenges.
- To overcome them, **we need to pour in** our work all the passion we can summon.
- Remotely, **we aren't lazy** or complacent.
- **We go the extra mile** to solve new problems.
- **We keep** friendly & helpful relations with our team and other co-workers.
- **We use** the extra time to learn and update our skills.

Trust

Caring

Our values

Open-mindedness

Passion

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General best practices for remote work

Do's

- Be safe, first and foremost

- Maintain your regular work schedule and engagements as far as possible

- Promptly notify your manager if you are unable to perform any scheduled activity

- Work toward your goals normally

- Over-communicate, ask questions and interact frequently

Don'ts

- Ignore any symptoms or health alerts

- Postpone or neglect any activities unless absolutely unfeasible

- Isolate yourself from your team and manager

- Bury yourself in work

Creating the right setting

Clear desk, clear mind

Having **a dedicated room or desk** for your work is the ideal scenario. If that's not possible, make sure to clean out a **small but tidy corner** that favors concentration.

Here is **the minimum equipment** you'll need to work efficiently and comfortably. Remember to look after your **eyes, neck and back**, in order to prevent headaches and stiffness.

Chair

Ideally padded, comfortable, with armrests and good back/neck support.

Lighting

Choose a corner with plenty of natural lighting (while avoiding to face windows directly). Add a desk lamp for the dim hours.

Laptop stand

A stand will help keeping the monitor at eye level and prevent neck stiffness.

Headphones

Unless you live alone, earphones or headphones with a mic are a must-have for calls & online meetings.

Webcam

Online meetings are just like in-person meetings: showing your face creates rapport and makes communication easier.

Technical requirements

In today's world, working at one's laptop is possible **almost anywhere**.

There are a few technical requirements, though, you should consider carefully in order to **guarantee connection stability**, prevent disruptions and data loss, safeguard information security and maintain yourself and the company accessible from outside.

Cable connection

It offers maximum stability for video calls and internet activity. Always to be preferred.
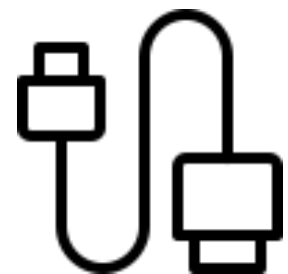
...or strong Wi-Fi

Avoid rooms with weak Wi-Fi reception. If working from your terrace or garden, consider connecting to your mobile hotspot.

VPN access

Some companies protect their virtual spaces by allowing access only to certain IP addresses. If this is your case, you'll need a VPN.

Phone redirection

If customers, suppliers or other parties often reach you via landline, consider setting up a redirection to a different number.

Minimize distractions

Home is where Netflix is. And yet, when it comes to working productively, you should **turn off or minimize any potential distractions** to your concentration.

Close the door

Switch off TV

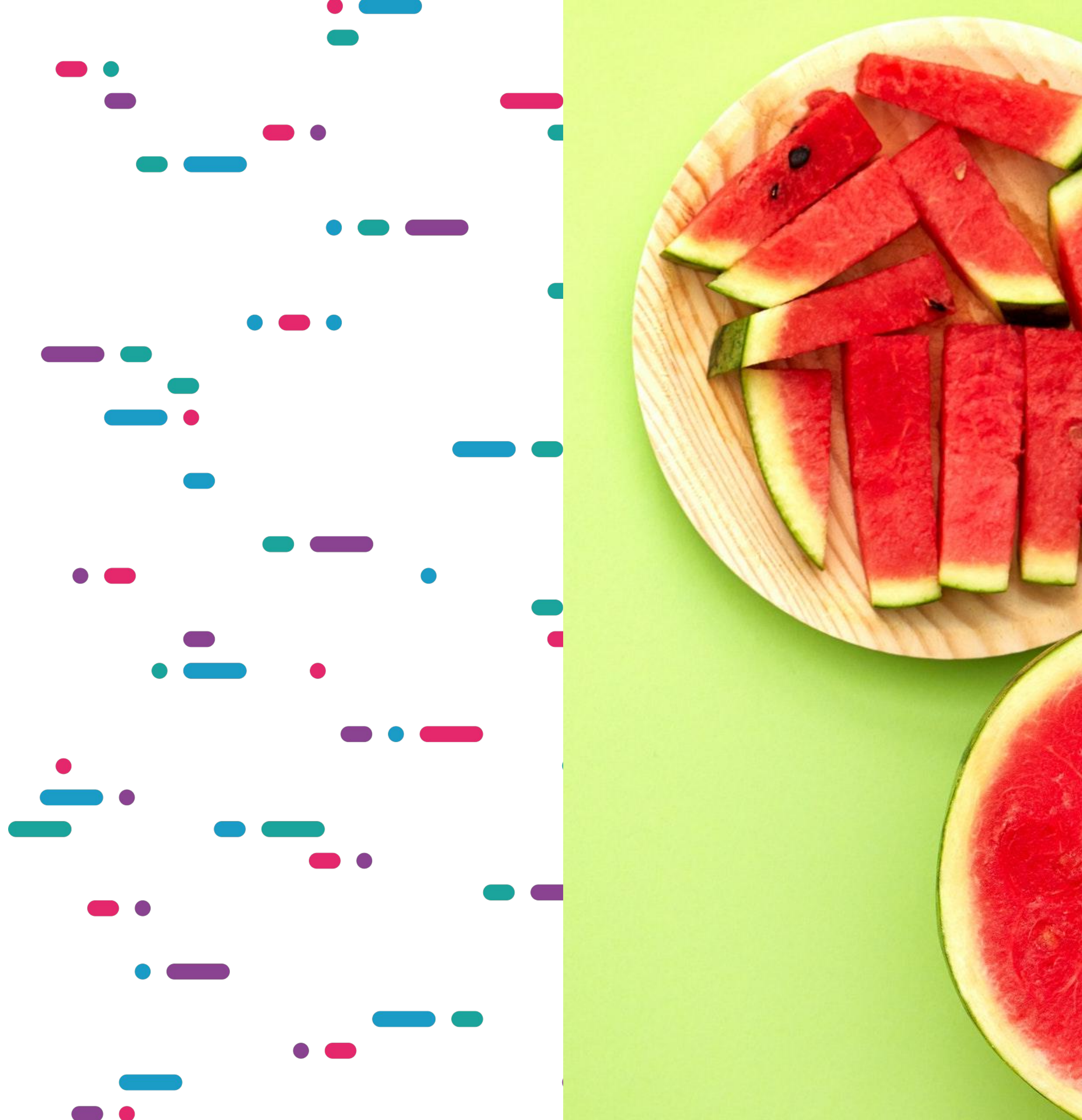**Switch off radio**

Mute mobile phone

Turn off unnecessary desktop notifications

Ask your family or flatmates to respect your concentration

Keeping a healthy mind & body

Establish a healthy routine

Staying indoors can prove a real challenge for active people.

To keep your brain sharp, your energy level high and your body happy, pay extra attention to creating a healthy routine that includes plenty of fresh food, water, exercise, and regular timetables.

Have breakfast

Be it sweet or savory, studies show that a good breakfast can be key to kick-starting a day.
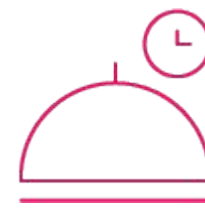
Plan & prep meals

Ensure nutrients balance and variety by planning meals, and reduce stress by prepping them in advance.

Keep hydrated

Drink plenty of water throughout the day. Beware of sodas or other sugary soft drinks.
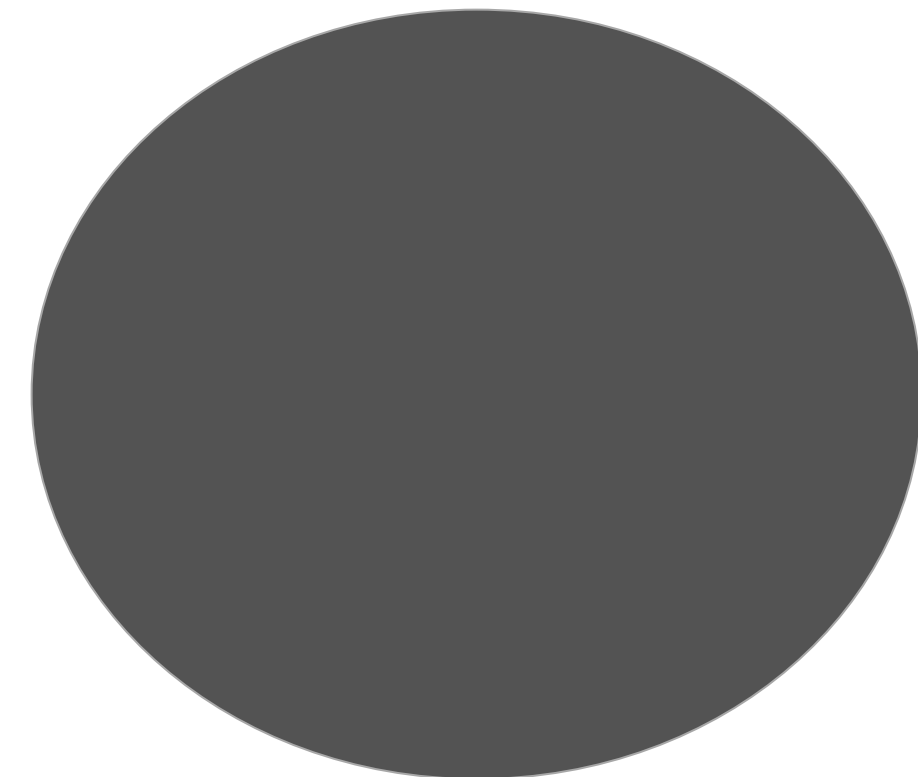
Stand up every two hours

Help muscle tone and blood flow by standing up at least 15' every two hours and taking a few steps around the house.

Get sweatin'

Exercise will keep your mind sane and your body strong. Allow for a daily dose of lifting, yoga, sit-ups, or treadmill running.

Useful links & resources

Yoga, Pilates & Meditation

Down Dog app

Yoga With Adriene

Blogilates

Corepower Yoga

Calm, Headspace, Aura apps

Workouts

Les Mills free workouts

Nike Training Club app

Kayla Itsines app

Pamela Reif YouTube workouts

Cardio Peloton workouts

Daily Burn workouts

Several suggestions by Goop

Cooking

San Francisco Cooking School on IG: tell them what's in your fridge, they'll provide recipes

Ideas for cooking with kids by BBC

Jamie Oliver recipes

Cucina Botanica blog (in Italian)

Smartfood recipes (in Italian, in cooperation with IEO)

Managing your time

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Get in control of your time

When working from home, some people find it hard to **schedule their tasks** and get constantly distracted. Others end up **working non-stop** and feeling overwhelmed.

It's important that you are **always in control of your time**, so that you can work productively, efficiently, for the right amount of hours.

Find a balance

Between flexibility and availability to others. Our Group smart working policy requires that you work at least 50% of your time during regular office hours.

Be on time

Check your calendar invites first thing in the morning. Respect your co-workers' schedule by showing up on time at online meetings and giving them your full attention.

Plan your breaks

Take a 15 min break every two hours. Get a full lunch break and distract yourself with a book or TV. Make your available slots clear to family or kids.

Unplug (for real)

Decide ahead at what time you'll finish work, and respect that plan (except for emergencies). Disconnect your laptop and mobile notifications, and go do something else.

Prioritize with the Eisenhower Matrix

The Eisenhower Matrix, also referred to as Urgent-Important Matrix, helps you decide on and **prioritize tasks by urgency and importance**, sorting out less urgent and important tasks which you should either delegate or not do at all.

Dwight D. Eisenhower was the 34th President of the United States from 1953 until 1961. He had to **make tough decisions continuously** about which of the many tasks he should focus on each day. This finally led him to invent the world-famous Eisenhower principle.

You can access a **free online matrix tool** [here](#).

	Urgent	Non urgent
Important	DO	PLAN
Non important	DELEGATE	ELIMINATE
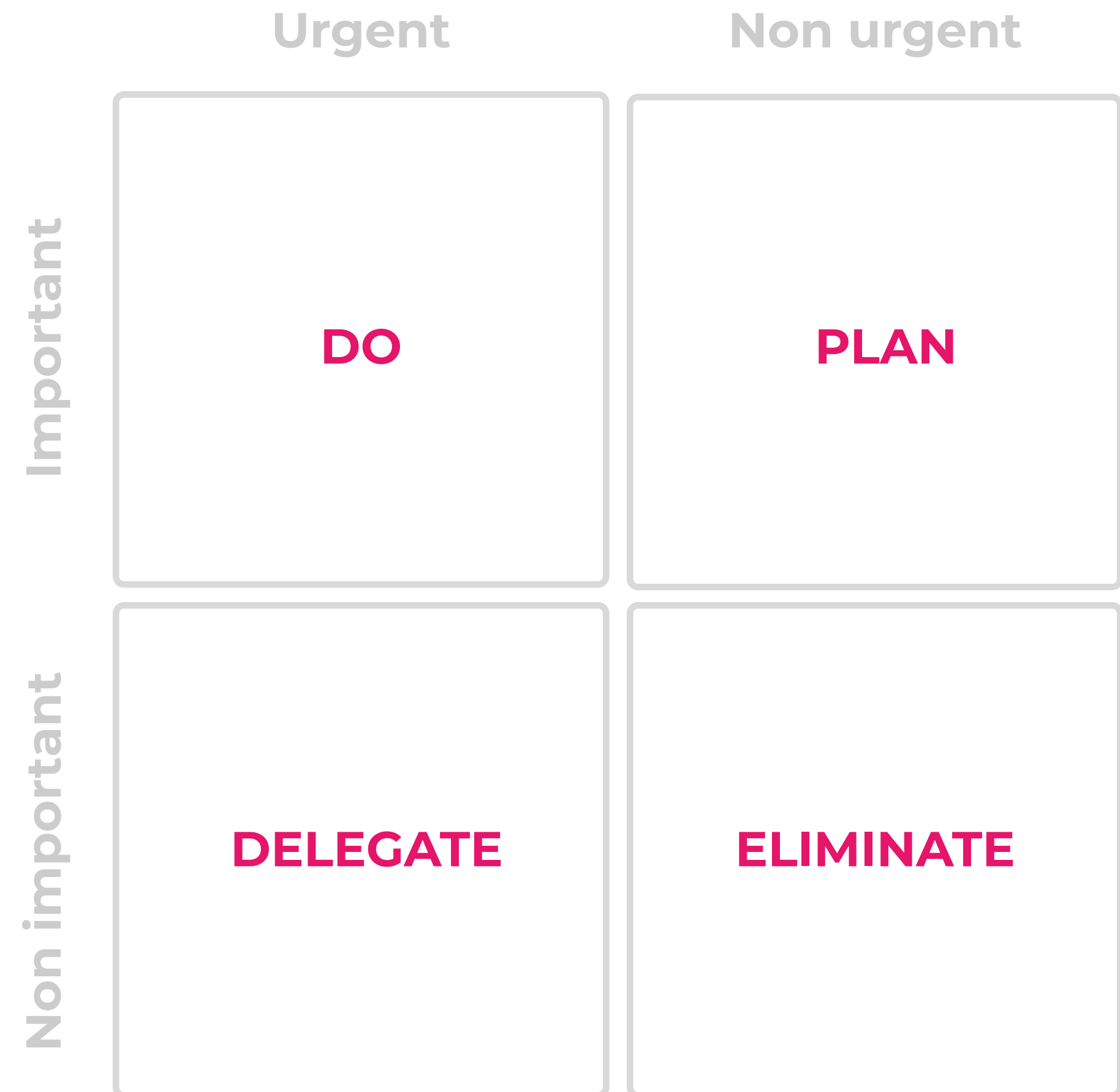
Timebox with the Pomodoro Technique

The Pomodoro Technique is a **time management method** developed by Francesco Cirillo in the late 1980s. It is named after a tomato-shaped kitchen timer ('pomodoro' in Italian).

The technique uses a timer to **break down work into intervals**, traditionally 25 minutes in length, separated by 5-minute breaks.
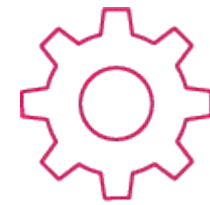
This technique helps in **fighting procrastination**, keeping the focus and improving productivity.
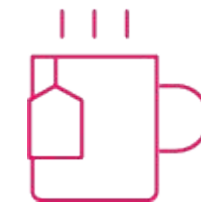
Identify a task or activity

Set a timer for 25 minutes

Work for the duration of the timer

Take a 5-minute break

After the 4th break, take a longer break (15-30 mins)

Boost productivity with task management tools

Keeping track of tasks, deadlines and activities may get harder when you're not at your usual desk with the usual people.

Project & task management tools are there to help you make lists, tick items off, create Gantt charts, keep track of progress and much more. These are the **official ones** used by MailUp Group.

Confluence

Confluence is your team workspace where knowledge and collaboration meet to achieve great things.

atlassian.com/software/confluence

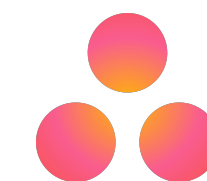## Jira

Jira Software is built to help you plan, track, and deliver great work.

atlassian.com/software/jira

Asana

The work management platform teams use to stay focused on the goals, projects, and daily tasks that grow business.

asana.com

Trello

Trello's boards, lists, and cards enable you to organize and prioritize your projects in a fun, flexible, and rewarding way.

trello.com

Useful links & resources

How to work remotely

8 Proven Strategies for Better Remote Work by Buffer

Why Great Teams Embrace Remote Work by Trello

How to transition to remote work in a hurry by Zapier

How to collaborate across time zones by Zapier

The manager's manual for remote work by Slack

The ultimate guide to remote work by Miro

6 templates to help you transition to (effective!) remote meetings by Miro

Time & Task Management

Eisenhower Matrix app

Remember The Milk app

Confluence & Jira by Atlassian

Asana

Trello

Bullet Journaling

Todoist

Productivity

Save links with Pocket

Save links with Evernote

Make lists with Google Keep

Working
with kids

Remember what happens to him?

If not, [click here](#) or type 'BBC news kids walk in' in the YouTube search bar.

With schools closed in many countries, parents get added complexity when working from home.

While there is no magical trick to be productive, entertain the kids and not be exhausted at the same time, we have gathered **precious tips & pieces of advice** coming from experienced parents within our company.

BBC NEWS

0:16 / 0:43

Tips from MailUp Group parents

**Tips by Stefanie G.
Mother of two
The Netherlands**

- **Make clear agreements** between parents - who does what and when.

- If you can, **rotate duties** with your partner or spouse, so there is time to work effectively.

- When it's your turn to spend time with the kids, **be there 100%**.

- **Play in the garden**, be sporty (if possible), laugh together. Make sure they'll remember this situation in the future as a fun - albeit bizarre - one.

**Tips by Andrea R.
Father of two
Italy**

- **Don't lock yourself in a bubble**, but listen your children.

- During the day **open some child windows** to play, talk or do something fun together.

- If you are working on something important and **your kids claim you**, pause, keep calm and reassure them that you will come and play in a matter of minutes.

- **Use TV**, YouTube or other media **responsibly**.

- **Involve your kids** in your work: explain things and let them think they really are helping you.

Tips from MailUp Group parents

Tips by Massimo A.
**Father of four**
California

- **Be clear**: "When the door is closed, Mommy/Daddy really is busy and you cannot come in".

- **Be predictable**: "Mommy/Daddy will be done at 6 (or whatever works) to make dinner together!"

- **Be up-front** with colleagues / customers: "You may see a little one running around in the background of this call".

- **Be flexible** with yourself: block out on the calendar the times you need to help the kids with homework or have tea together.

Tips by Patrizia B.
Mother of two
Italy

- **Before starting to work**, explain that the door will be shortly shut because Mommy has to work.

- ***Always*** shut the door.

- If they peek in... **a kiss** (no rebukes) and out :)

- Lunch for 4 every single day isn't easy: **plan and prep ahead.**

- Before switching from work to Mom duties, save at least 15 minutes for well-deserved **self care**.

Collaborating
with others
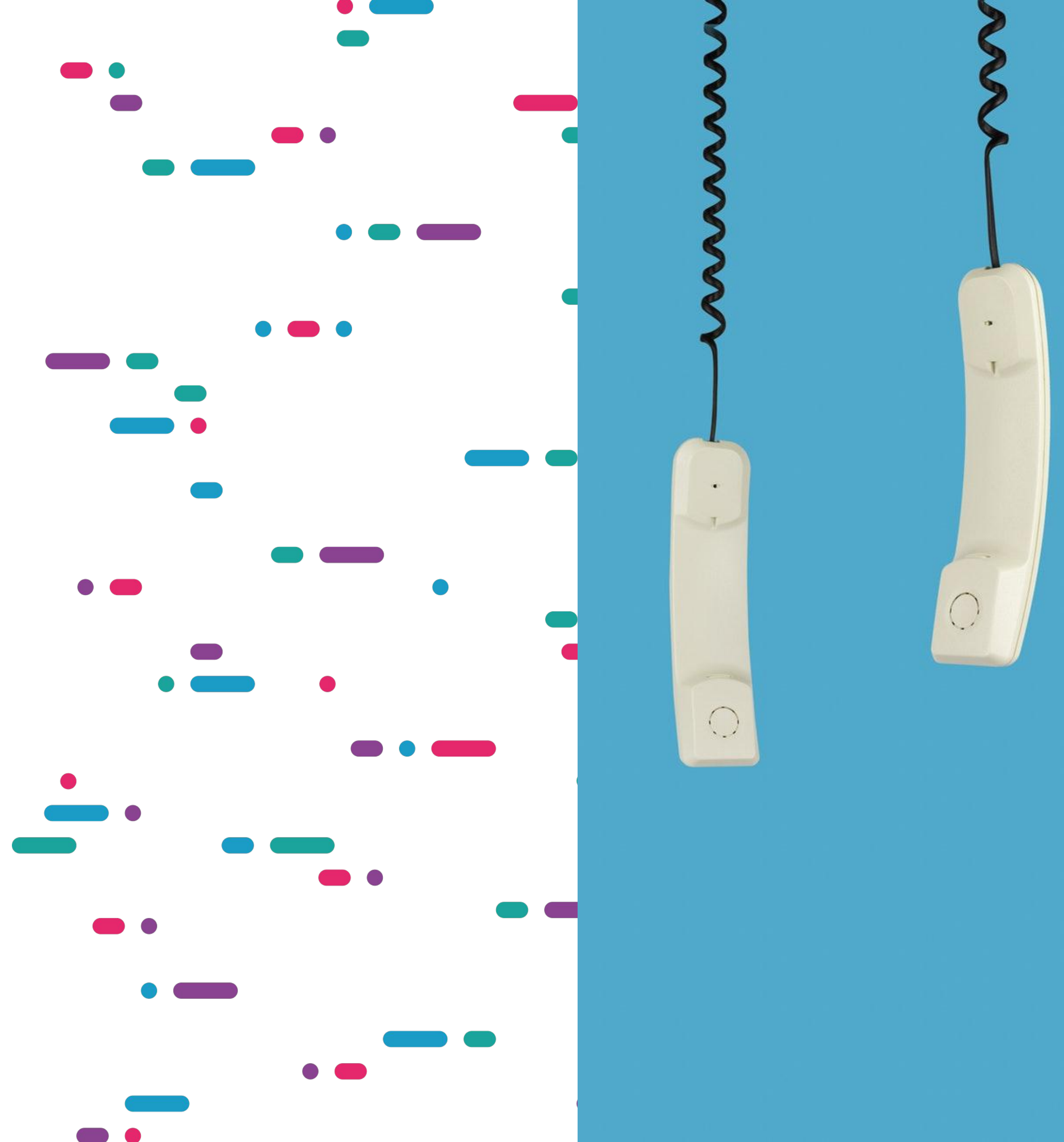
Ask, explain, create context

When working remotely, **communication is of crucial importance**, because you're missing most—if not all—of the context of each person's situation.

People can only understand what's been explicitly said or written, having no way of picking up on moods, non-verbal gestures, small talk, and so on. So prepare to **prevent misunderstandings and reworks** by over-communicating.

Compensate the lack of context

No one can know what goes on in a different room, in a different city, in someone else's mind. Unless you tell them. In details.

Ask, ask, ask

Don't be shy if something is not clear or you're missing a step. Just ask until you're 100% sure of the direction you should take. This reduces reworks due to misunderstandings.

Assert yourself when needed

Explicitly reinforce concepts or needs if they go unnoticed or undetected. This speeds processes up and cuts down excuses.

Assume ignorance before malice

If someone does something wrong, don't assume they purposely meant to hurt you. It's just as likely (perhaps more so) that they simply made a mistake.

Pick the right communication channel

How do you reach co-workers when you can't simply walk up to their desk? **Not all communication channels are the same** - some work for urgent matters, others for quick questions, others for lengthy matters that require discussion.

As a rule of thumb, **prioritize clarity,** provide context and necessary details, make your message short and actionable, and minimize distractions.

Email

Email is great for **non time-sensitive matters**, lengthy explanations, or discussion items that must be thought over. Many times, it can replace a conf call for simpler or less urgent matters.

Telephone

Phone provides the greatest disruption in people's concentration. Use it only for **super-urgent matters** that can't incur in any possible misunderstandings.

Slack

Instant messaging is great for **quick exchanges**, chit-chat, and group discussions. For urgent notifications, make sure to tag your channel or specific people (not everyone has general desktop notifications switched on).

Conf call

Get in a remote meeting whenever a **complex decision process** is at stake and/or something important must be agreed upon swiftly. Replace with email wherever possible. **Stick to 25-30 mins max** (1 hour for extraordinary matters).

Best practices for remote meetings

It's hard to get people to pay attention in any meeting, but when people aren't in the same room, it can be especially difficult. You must therefore pay extra attention to **the way you plan and conduct** the meeting.

Avoid monologues, **engage participants** by actively asking questions and opinions, and always concentrate on what's on screen (Instagram scrolling not allowed).

Send out the right invite

When inviting people to online meetings, make sure to:
- Be plenty in advance
- **Give a detailed agenda**, so that everyone can prepare
- Add a link to the chosen online meeting tool

Limit the number of participants

The more crowded the online room, the more likely people are to be disengaged. **Handpick the people you are inviting** and stick to the ones that absolutely need to be in that meeting.

Moderate & guide the conversation

Left unchecked, people will switch to their second monitor and/or start checking their social media. **Keep participants focused** by guiding their interactions and asking questions.

Follow up

Make the meeting actionable. In a **follow-up note**, include:
- Next steps (with dates and deadlines)
- Ownerships
- Links to documentation

Useful links & resources

Remote meetings

How to Get People to Actually Participate in Virtual Meetings
by the Harvard Business Review

Complete Guide to Remote Team Meetings by Miro

Hangouts Meet

GoToWebinar and GoToMeeting

Zoom

Skype

Collaboration tools

Slack

Miro for collaborative whiteboarding

MailUp's Collaboration tool for email co-creation

Supporting
team morale &
social bonds

Make meetings more frequent

Make up for the **lack of in-person engagement** by making meetings more frequent. This applies both to team meetings and individual catch-ups.

This will prevent relations from loosening up, **boost team spirit and morale**, help people keep on track with projects and deadlines, and fight isolation.

Daily stand-ups

Many software development teams get together as **first thing in the morning** to catch up and start the day on the same page. Here some ground rules.

Weekly team progress

If daily sounds a bit too much, you can get your team together weekly for a **roundtable update on ongoing projects** and next goals to achieve.

One-to-one's

Make time for frequent one-to-one's with individual people **inside and outside your team**. You'll get a real pulse of people's mood and granular projects progression.

Project sync-ups

When multiple people work together at the same project, frequent check-ins are essential to **ensure smooth delivery**. Plan scheduled sync-ups to help people stay on track.

How about a virtual coffee? ☕

There is **so much that goes on spontaneously** in an office that is not regulated or business-related, and is critically important for people's morale and confidence.

Social relationships with co-workers are typically built over chit-chat at the coffee station, during lunch breaks or over an after-work pint at the local pub. But what if you are stuck in a room alone?

You can **re-create these situations online**: get your teammates together for 15-min-long virtual coffee breaks. Send out a Calendar invite and remember - non-business-related banter only!

Other team building experiments

Get creative and **find new ways to connect** with your co-workers, also from other teams. It will help create togetherness and fight loneliness.

Share a playlist

Arrange virtual Friday drinks

Pair up for randomized video calls

Host video tours of home offices

Create hobby-themed chat groups (football, book lovers, foodies)

Get together for online gaming sessions

Tips for
people managers

How to lead a remote team

If you are a People Manager, you will likely have to **adjust your leadership model and work processes** to support your suddenly dispersed team.

Everything grows a bit more complicated when dealt with remotely. Bottom line - **your people will need you more than ever**. They may feel lonely, disconnected, confused, unsure - and it's your job to guide them through this delicate situation.

#1 Be positive

In times of global uncertainty, people need **reassurance from those who lead them**.

This doesn't translate into hollow promises nor means you should downplay their worries. **Combine a positive attitude with an honest evaluation of the challenges you may meet** ([here](#) more on becoming a *realistic optimist*).

Take extra care in **filtering the way you pass on sensitive information**, to prevent unnecessary panic and ensure smooth continuance of operations.

#2 Share & communicate

This follows the previous point. **Controlling the narrative** is the best weapon against misinformation, confusion and panic.

So schedule regular update meetings with your team, **promptly share any major updates**, let your people feel active part of what's going on instead of passive bystanders.

Make yourself seen and heard. **Use video as much as you can.**

#3 Tighten the bonds

Social and team relationships tend to **loosen with isolation.**

It's your job to tighten those bonds, **boost team morale** and create a sense of togetherness.

You usually hold a weekly progress? **Make it bi-weekly.** Schedule weekly one-to-one's, take part to your team's virtual coffee breaks, check in often with other People Managers to keep goals aligned.
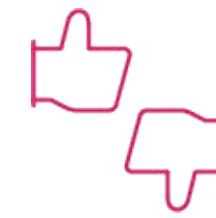
#4 Give frequent feedback

A critical part of your role is to ensure that everybody is **working towards the goals** you have set as a team and as individuals.

If used to closely-knit teamworking and suddenly isolated, people can **lose their sense of direction.**

Help people get there and achieve their goals by **providing feedback more often than usual.** You will prevent misunderstandings, reworks and failure to reach objectives.

#5 Plan ahead

The global situation is so volatile that things may change from one day to the next. In this sort of scenario, who has the **best chance to succeed** is that who plans ahead.

Schedule activities and projects with an eye to the long term, and draft plans B and C should the circumstances evolve.

The more you prepare, the better chances you have to **be ahead of whatever comes next**.
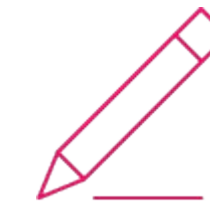
#6 Write it down

Verba volant, scripta manent - so the Latins used to say. Spoken words fly away, **written words remain**.

In adapting to a new way of working, many a delivery problem can be prevented by **keeping clear written track of activities**, deadlines and ownerships.

To know which **project management tools** you could use, go back to page 21 👆.

#7 Ensure delivery

As a People Manager, your role is to make sure that your team **delivers effectively and on time** with respect to the goals previously agreed upon.

Unless stated otherwise, **goals and objectives remain in place** for all teams even during delicate times.

It is your job to prevent remote work from becoming an excuse for sloppy, slow or poorly executed outputs.

#8 Show up

Bottom line: **be there for your people**. Now more than ever.

Check in, ask questions, chat often. Make sure that people are heard and seen.

By giving clear guidance you will soothe their worries and keep the team on track toward their goals.

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