



*The coronavirus pandemic has brought the global economy to its knees in a matter of weeks.*

*At such times of crisis and adversity, employees, clients, and customers are looking to leaders for reassurance, inspiration, and courage to guide <sup>1</sup> them through the storm.*

**Perspectives on the  
challenges of remote  
leadership.**

# Introduction

*Remote work is a learnt skill - Professor Tsedal Neeley, at Harvard Business School.*

Working with dispersed teams over the years, I found that it was not for everyone. It took a fair bit of experimentation to balance engagement, focus, accountability and ensure a sense of satisfaction. A few thrived, however, some fell into bad habits, distraction and worst case, let their drive and skills erode.

I have worked extensively with remote managers and salespeople, best described as territory managers, usually clear minded, well paid individuals - entrepreneurial types that could manage their time, travel, clients and channel partners spread across sometimes vast areas, or densely populated areas.

They were 1 in 100 people who thrived on the autonomy, independence and get-on-with-it lifestyle. Their office was usually their car.

Suddenly many people, who have never been able to, or never wanted to, are working from home to assist in stopping the spread of Covid-19.

HBR were estimating that with the Pandemic, at least 50% of professionals globally are working remotely. This sudden shift has shown that many of us were not ready.

It looks as though many Organisations were not well prepared to move workforce wholesale to remote work. This is despite global collaboration in many supply chains, many which requires remote work.

Some have thrived, many are still finding their way with supporting their teams and the impact of the sudden changes.

adam  
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# Key Issues

Last year a great report was produced which is very comprehensive. Buffer's state of Remote report 2019, listed the top 4 issues of working remotely as being:



**Community** › it so much harder to work together and communicate freely, no longer sitting within meters of our colleagues, relying on messaging or picking up the phone,



**Loneliness** › being disconnected from people that we normally spend much of our waking hours with are no longer supporting us, when we have tough time helping an irate client, or are feeling down due to personal challenges,

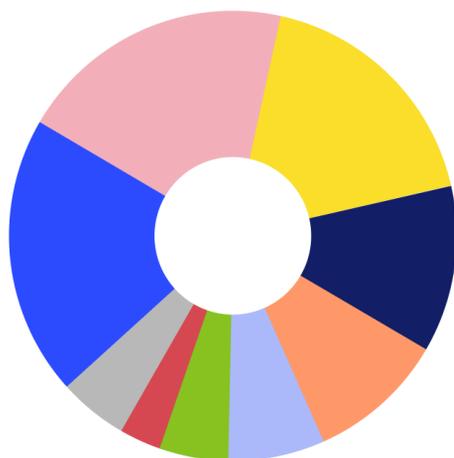


**Work/Life transition** › not being able to unplug, working into the night after a full and productive day, the commute used to be a great way to change state and move from our mindset into work, or out of work,



**Distractions at home** › with children needing assistance with their schooling, or preschool age children seeking our interest and involvement in their play and reading stories. Flatmates recording tracks in their bedroom and require silence from other members of the household (real anecdote).

# What's your biggest struggle with working remotely?



- 20% Collaboration and communication
- 20% Loneliness
- 18% Not being able to unplug
- 12% Distractions at home
- 10% Being in a different timezone than teammates
- 7% Staying motivated
- 5% Taking vacation time
- 3% Finding reliable wifi
- 5% Other

State of Remote Report 2020

[buffer.com/state-of-remote-2020](https://buffer.com/state-of-remote-2020)



## Productivity

- **Trust**, remembering that we hired and trained them, they need our trust, especially navigating life stuff,
- **Tools** - Having the right equipment, furniture, to avoid distraction and capitulation. Using techniques, to play our strengths, working in sprints, working hours appropriate to our situation,
- **Support** and communication, to be heard,
- **Training**, so far as the evidence of best practice so far as work from home and how to work in sprints.

# Challenges of Isolation

- Anxiety – from lack of support from those around us, the challenge of facing daily work alone,
- Socially disconnected from friendships
- Isolation, not everyone has a positive support family around them,
- Disengaged, often the rituals of getting ready and going to work engage us, work is a place we go to and participate in. We don't have the commute to unwind from work, so struggle from separating from it. Home is perhaps no longer that area of
- Behaviour change – is a sign of issues according to Professor Neeley.

## Delight with WFH

- No commuting, no wasted time travelling,
- Spending more time with our loved ones, seeing how they work,
- Comfort – life at home can be quite comfortable,
- Exercise, we can walk at lunchtime, I have been on the pushbike every day, feeling as fit as ever,
- Cooking our preferred meals and put dinner in the slow cooker,
- Zip up to the local supermarket before work starts.
- Play with our pets frequently, for which, we can help but feel good, sharing the enthusiasm with a pair of puppies.

I found remote workers needed me to communicate more, as every interaction had to be deliberate and they were always worried about over burdening me. There was never going to be incidental interaction, bumping into each other in the cafeteria, for instance.

Especially for people relatively new to their roles, the team or organisation, their need for connection was greater. Even more so because they were remote or working differently to others in the organisation in their area.

Working for a plumbing merchant, the territory manager was running a different agenda sometimes to what was happening in the local centre and with different reporting lines, there was often a need for finding common ground and clarifying mutual goals.

*Separated physically from their colleagues, customers, and normal workplace, they find themselves alone with their computers, sporadically touching base remotely with those they used to see regularly. Many feel lost.* Gino & Cable

*Encourage employees to reflect on opportunities to recraft their jobs. Leaders should go out of their way to talk with employees about their strengths and how they can use them in their new way of working.* Gino & Cable

# The Need to Lead

Speaking with managers and emerging leaders, waiting for their SBU leader to communicate, rather than deferring to the group head, to be met by silence.

With members being physically collocated, aloofness by leaders may be tolerated, however, this is not well received, when members are scattered.

Leadership needs to be visible and engaging, helping members with their clarity in actions and decision that they take daily on behalf of the organisation. Indeed when they are making decisions where to work and how they fit with the organisation, much rests with the tangibility of the leadership.

## How remote leaders are perceived

### Flexing

Coaching and communicating and with humility and empathy, decisive, ensuring strengths focus and job crafting.



**Rapid adaptation**

### Facilitating

Communicating extensively, asking for feedback and ensuring successes are shared and the team help each other.



**Relying**

### Figuring

Slowly developing solutions to the situation, recognising progressively what is going on, putting policies in place.



**Rebuilding**

### Fluffing

Provides inconsistent instructions. Sporadic communication, indecisive and unclear, deferring to policy.



**Replaying**

### Failing

Never recognising or encouraging. Fighting the need to be flexible and empathetic, distrustful



**Rejecting**

# Things to do to help remote work

The essential elements including the furniture and equipment, together with adjusting the style of leadership, getting members to still feel part of a team and keep the benefits of office work.

1. Equipment – Nothing is more debilitating when things are not working right. Tools, furniture, lights, desks, laptops, screens, chairs, phones, broadband, cables and software. Taking the time to understand individually if each person is able to successfully operate from their home.

2. Be seen and heard – I have always felt visible leadership has been crucial, for team members, never more so than now, daily checkins, some fun sessions to maintain community, like Friday afternoon drinks, sharing the stories of the week, but don't drag it out, no one likes marathon sessions glued to their chairs.

3. Select the tools appropriate for the conversation, visual is important to create and maintain connection. Redundant communication, can ensure information comes across clearly, making sure that members don't miss something important if they are absent or busy with something else.

4. Talk it through – Set the scene for success, exploring the new way of operating, asking for input and preferences. What does success look like? further delving into group coaching and facilitating remotely. Keep everyone informed, what is happening in the organisation.

5. Trust – be flexible – negotiating what hours will work best, with children needing assistance with their schooling, or preschool age children seeking our interest and involvement in their play and reading stories.

6. How do we recreate the unplanned interactions, where great ideas can occur, impromptu collaborations, feeling present, connecting members through checking in – how are we feeling, what is happening in our lives, what are we seeing, how are we feeling?

7. Keep a Routine - Professor Neeley talks about the need for rituals, getting up on time, eating breakfast, getting dressed for work. Find and negotiate your workspace and hours for work, balancing the need to home school etc. Get moving, working in 45-minute sprints is important, but mind what you eat, going for

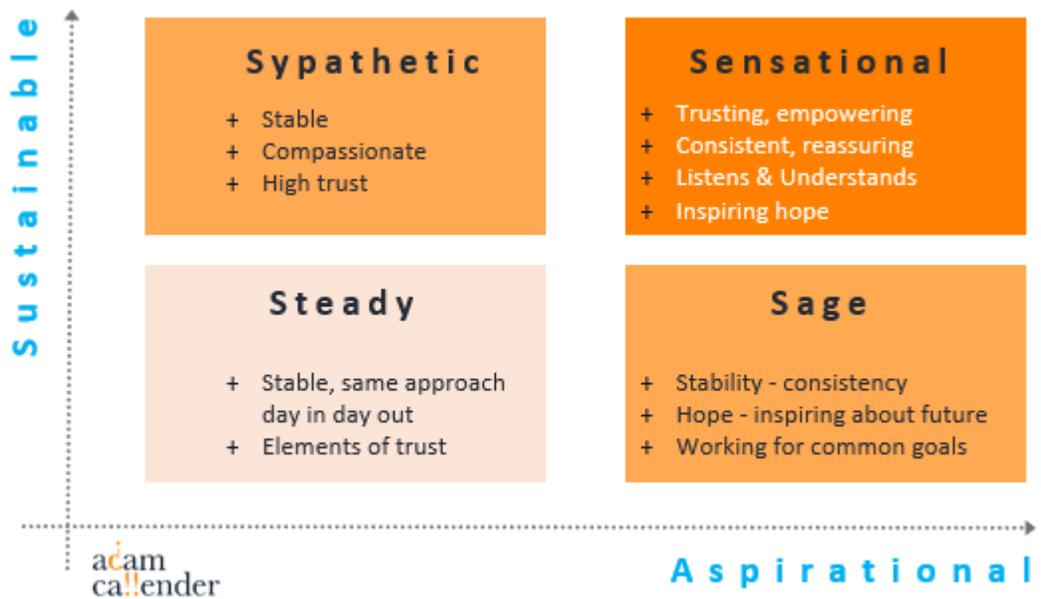
healthy snacks and avoiding eating rubbish,

8. Strengths – during this time where we're all feeling uncomfortable, it is a great time to understand our Strengths, as a Strengths Coach, it has never been more apparent to delve into our lens on the world and our pathways for success.

9. Empathy – at times, people will really struggle with the distancing and dealing with what we have at home. I suspect WFM is humanising some workplaces, especially with the need adjust work expectations.

## Four types of positive leadership

Research from Gallup suggests that Leaders need to trust, compassion, stability and hope, it is no coincidence that the best person I ever reported to ensured that I was heard and understood, they saw me as capable and trust worthy, I enjoyed clarity of their perspective and approach, we were working towards a better future and I was inspired.



Positive leaders are seen at 3 levels of positive impact, seen in the diagram, the deeper the orange, the greater the positive impact.

1. The Steady, those that appreciate continuity and following the process with a boss who is easy to read so far as decision making.
2. Sympathetic - compassionate, and trusting, providing flexibility and empowerment. The Sage who brings everyone together, uniting around group goals and a better future.
3. Sensational leaders, ones who can provide every quality sought by members, bringing a humble, yet clear and articulate presence that is well liked and understood. Sensational leaders are those that inspire members to go above and beyond, to commit themselves to long lasting working relationships.

# Prospective questions for remote workers

1. What has been easier than expected?
2. What has been harder than expected?
3. What have the needs of those that you live with been during this time?
4. Have you had to change your routine to suit working from home with the rest of your family?
5. What have you resolved to change once there is some normality?
6. In a perfect world, would you seek to return to the office full time?
7. What is the best thing about working from home?

8. What is the best thing about working from the office?
9. For many it has been a sudden and difficult transition to WFH. How have you managed the ups and downs?
10. How have you maintained connection with your colleagues?
11. Follow on - Do you feel that this has been effective?
12. What has surprised you about work from home?
13. Looking back, what would have helped you with this move to WFH?

Using a coaching approach can be helpful, asking them to clarify and expand on their statements, without our opinions being stamped all over it.

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