Remote Life: Staying positive and productive in a distributed model

While remote life provides us with greater flexibility and authorship over our lives, it does require new and unique ways of operating that rely on:

- Expert communication
- Self-discipline to be productive
- Asking for what you need, when you need it
- Tuning in and taking care of yourself

As one of the largest fully remote teams, InVision has developed its own ecosystem of tools, ways of working, and best practices that influence how we communicate, stay productive, care for ourselves, and stay connected to one another. The guidelines that follow aim to outline those norms and make what's implicitly and individually learned over time, explicitly available to all.

Communication

Thoughtful, proactive, and clear communication helps us stay connected to our teams, work, and company goals. It's how we convey information, ideas, and messages to one another, and in a remote environment, we have to use different techniques and tools to communicate effectively.

Best Practices for Remote Communication

General

- Don't make assumptions. If something isn't clear—ask.
- Thoughtfully over-communicate and get comfortable with being more forward
  - Ask for what you need and note when you need it.
  - Be specific with regard to the desired outcome and the time by which you need it. This sets you and the person you're communicating with up for success.

- Start by believing in positive intent, as both a giver and receiver of information.
- Don't be afraid to switch methods in the middle of a conversation. Do what's right to make sure your message is appropriately delivered to your audience.

Video conferencing

- Conveying nonverbals in your communication, and receiving them from others, can be a challenge in our remote environment. This is why having your video on (when you can), making eye contact with your camera, and using hand gestures while using video conferencing software is so important.
- Leverage visual communication to support your written communication. We are a Slack heavy culture at InVision, but we also use emojis and gifs frequently to make up for some of the nonverbal communication that's lost in a written message. Get your gif game on!
- Highly-sensitive laptop microphones pick up background noise and keystrokes on video conference calls. Do everyone a favor and use a headset when in public places, and mute your audio before typing.
- Light the front of your head, not the back! If your lighting is behind you, people will only see a silhouette.
- Keep your surroundings top-of-mind—they reflect you and if you're talking to customers, they represent the company.

Messaging (G chat, Teams, Slack, etc.)

- Keep your status up-to-date to let your teammates know when you're available real-time or will respond later.
- Most messages are answered within a day unless you're out of the office (which should be noted in your status 😉).
- Emojis and gifs are communication, too. You'll commonly see emojis used in lieu of a response like:
  - 👀 for "taking a look"
  - ✅ for "got it" or "understood"
  - 🎉 or 👏 for "congratulations"
- Be transparent. Not sure if you should send a message to one or two people, or your full team? If you're questioning it, send it to everyone who may need the info.
- Replying in a group DM or channel? Use a thread. This makes it easy to follow the conversation, keeps the main message space clean, and is more easily searched later.

  Email
- Start with a greeting and end with a salutation when sending an initial email. This is less important when replying.
- Be thoughtful about using reply to all.

- Get organized with folders and rules.
- Reply in a timely manner—this is usually within a week, depending on the subject matter.

Productivity & Self-Care

At InVision, our work is ever-present in our life—right in our home, most of the time—and our life bleeds into our work—who hasn't had a pet/kid/roommate crash their Zoom call? Staying productive and focused, while setting appropriate limits for yourself can be a challenge, but we have some handy tips to help you strike the right balance.

While [studies have shown](#) that remote workers are more productive than those working in traditional office environments, they've also shown that remote workers can struggle with:

- working too much
- getting distracted
- feeling lonely
- battling impostor syndrome
- ...and more

Get comfortable with the challenges of working remotely. You will experience them—and that's totally normal. Here are some handy ways for you to stay ahead of them and make the most of your remote life:

- **Exercise**, while being an important part of everyone's life, is especially important when you work remotely. It's easy to find yourself sitting for hours at a time, and not moving at all. There are no walks from your car to the office, and no hallways or stairs to use between meetings (at least not like there are in office buildings). Exercise releases endorphins that make us feel good and is a great way of relieving stress. It's also really healthy 😊

- **Invest in your environment**. It's easy to find yourself sitting for hours at a time so it's important to have a comfortable setup. Better than sitting for hours—try standing while working whenever possible. Standing is apparently much healthier than sitting. Personally, I use a Standstand, which works for me, but here are some other nice options. Bonus: Stand on a mat. It allows you to stand for longer and more comfortably.

  In addition to your desk, chair, and other equipment, create an inspiring and comfortable work environment in other ways that are unique to you. Maybe that includes houseplants

or photos of your loved ones or even your favorite art or musical instruments. You do you!

- **Delineate between work and the rest of your life**. In the book "Remote" by Jason Fried & David Hanson, they suggest that even simple things can help with this delineation—one example is working in regular shoes and changing into slippers for walking around the house when you are not working. Some people find that getting dressed, instead of staying in pajamas all day, helps them get in the right mindset for their work.

- **Create a morning routine**. My morning routine has three parts, and admittedly, I sometimes only get to one of them before my first meeting. Still, having three things that I can do, and doing at least one of them, gives my day the feeling of a starting line. My three things are: make tea, meditate, take a shower.

- **Take breaks**. If you aren't careful, your breaks become doing laundry or washing the dishes, which are still working, just in a different way. To brace against this reality, I define breaks as having "no screen and including movement". My favorite is a dance party. Sitting for the past 3 hours? Blast your favorite song (no one is around to hear it) and throw around your best/worst dance moves (no one is around to see it). Try not to be happy after doing that.

- **We are social creatures**, and we all need human contact. Set up time each day, or at least a few times a week, to get together with friends—even if you don't feel like it. You can also work from almost anywhere that has wifi, so take advantage of that. Whether it's the library, a Starbucks, or on your porch, a change of atmosphere can be a wonderful thing.