



The Panther Remote Work Playbook v1.0

In this playbook, you'll learn how to build a remote dream team. A team that works, and lives, better than ever. From anywhere in the world.



Remote work is the future*

***You've heard it a thousand times, but it's true.**

The best talent is going remote:

- 40% of employees would quit before going back to the office
- The majority of people want to work from home at least 3 days per week.

And in this playbook, you'll learn how to build, hire, and manage a remote team.



WHY YOU SHOULD LISTEN TO US

We're not going to pretend to know all the answers about the future of work. Nobody does. So a few times each year, we'll update this playbook with new learnings.

But we walk the walk: The Panther team is fully-remote and distributed across the globe, from Macedonia to Kenya to the United States and more. And our day job is helping companies achieve the same for their business.

So, we've got some experience here. In the next six thousand or so words, you'll learn everything we know about building great teams, globally and remote.



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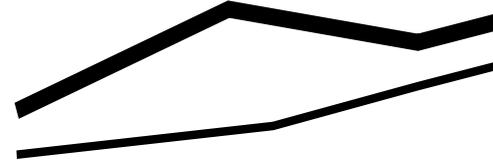


Recap and cheat sheet



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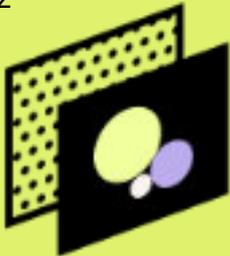


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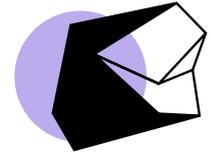
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Smart team building



PART I The pillars of a good remote organization

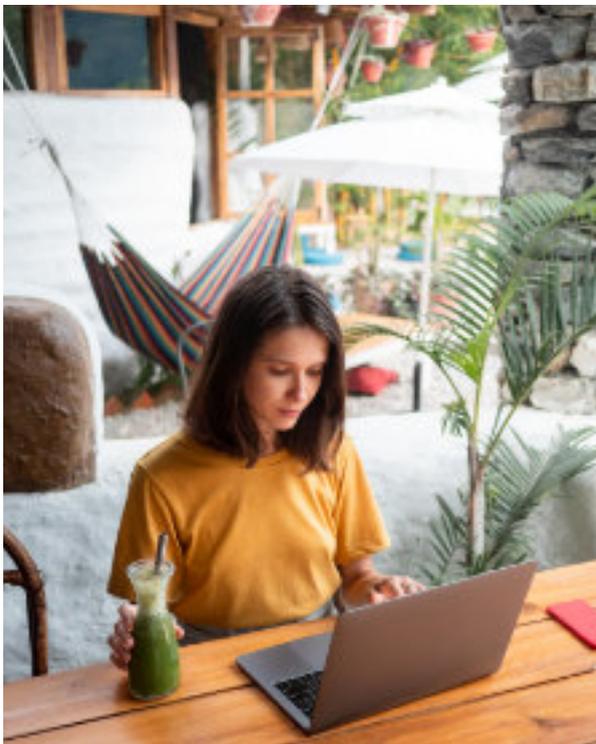


Asynchronous, output-focused work

Imagine this. You're hiring for a new position and your HR manager gives you two options:

1. You can distribute your job posting to 50 people.
2. You can distribute your job posting to 50,000 people.

It's a no-brainer. If you want better talent, you're going with the latter. Well, that's what remote hiring is: It's a framework that lets you hire anyone, anywhere. It breaks down the traditional barriers of hiring in one city and lets you access the global talent pool.



HERE'S WHERE MOST COMPANIES GO WRONG

If you approach work like it's a digital version of the office (and many companies do), you won't find the success you've been promised. In a traditional office model—or a poorly-run remote model—communication happens at a rapid, one-to-one pace. You ask something to your copywriter, they reply right away.

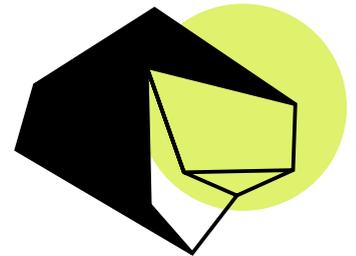
But asking your employees to be on edge all day, constantly in Zoom calls and checking Slack, is a surefire way to kill their productivity. Plus, it eliminates your chances to hire someone in a new time zone.

On the next page: The solution for remote communication.



PART I The pillars of a good remote organization

Asynchronous, output-focused work



Good remote teams use asynchronous communication. This means you work in a system where people aren't expected to answer messages immediately and impromptu calls usually don't happen. In an asynchronous system, you set expectations like:

- How quickly people are expected to reply to messages (for example, within 24 hours).
- Which types of messages are more urgent than others.
- When, if ever, people should be online to answer quickly.

If this still sounds awkward, take a minute to think about how much of the work you do truly needs to happen at the same time. For most teams, this answer is less than 1 hour per day—if at all. Breaking down this barrier is huge for remote success.

Once you've got asynchronous practices in place, it's also time to reframe expectations about output and input. In a traditional office model, people are expected to be working for a set number of hours per day: 9 to 5, for example.

But with remote work, it's smarter to focus on output. Set reasonable expectations about what needs to be delivered and when, and let your employees figure out their schedule. One of the major benefits of remote work is more flexibility and a better work-life balance: Telling everyone to be on their computers for 9 hours straight kills this benefit.



PART I The pillars of a good remote organization

Crystal-clear documentation

High-performing remote teams are made up of independent people. But your team can't be independent if you don't have the right documentation in place. To solve this, you'll need a crystal-clear system for organizing company documents. Clear enough that somebody new could learn everything they need to know on their own.



60% of employees rank clear guidelines about collaboration, hours, and documentation in their top five company policies.

40% of managers have low self-confidence in their ability to manage people remotely*.



*Good documentation helps solve this problem



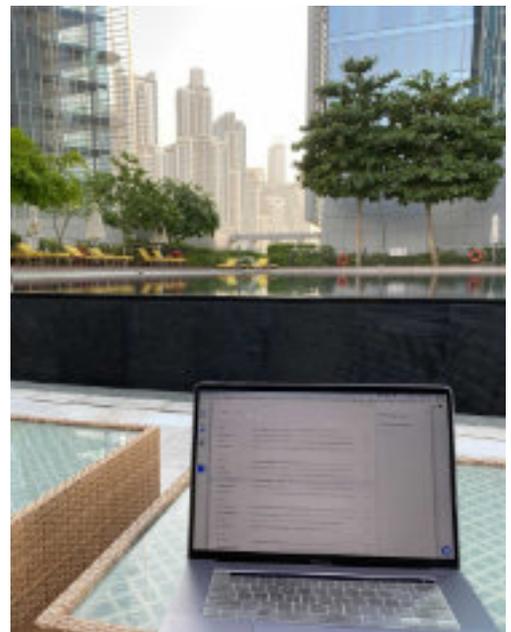
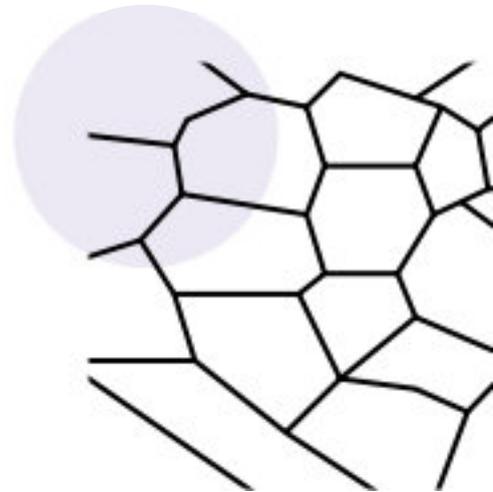
PART I The pillars of a good remote organization

Smart team building

One challenge with remote work is that employees can feel like they're working in a silo. It can be a lonely experience for some. To combat feelings of isolation and inequality:

- Hold in-person retreats for your team **once or twice** per year.
- When you onboard new employees, **assign** somebody more senior in the organization to check in with them each week.
- Occasionally, schedule all-hands or all-team meetings to check in.

We'll elaborate more on each of these pillars in the sections below. But, first: What type of remote team should you choose?

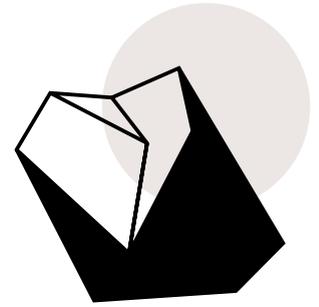


In the photo: A Panther employee working from Dubai.



PART 2

The remote vs. hybrid debate



How to choose a remote team structure

You might be making the wrong choice. Well, not you specifically—but the people at your company who are making the decisions about whether you should go back to the office, stay remote, or implement a Frankenstein-ish mix of the two.

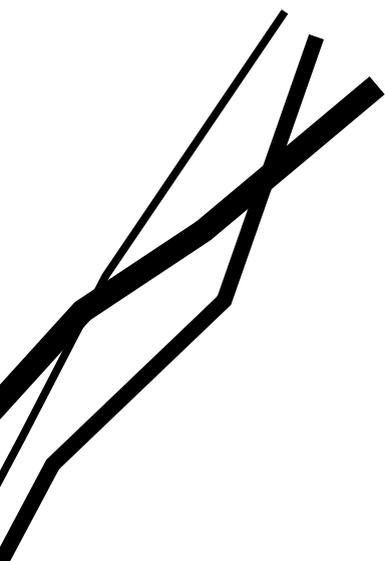
HERE'S THE PROBLEM:

We're writing this in 2021 and the conversation about remote work is as omnipresent as unnecessary Zoom meetings. But lots of businesses aren't ready to abandon the office. So, about 70% of companies are going hybrid.

In theory, going hybrid lets you keep the best of both worlds:

- Your employees keep the added happiness and flexibility from remote, most of the time.
- You get the assumed culture and togetherness benefits from being in the office.

But the above theory isn't really true. Next, we'll break down the differences between truly remote and hybrid—and explain why you might have to pick a lane.





PART 2 The remote vs hybrid debate

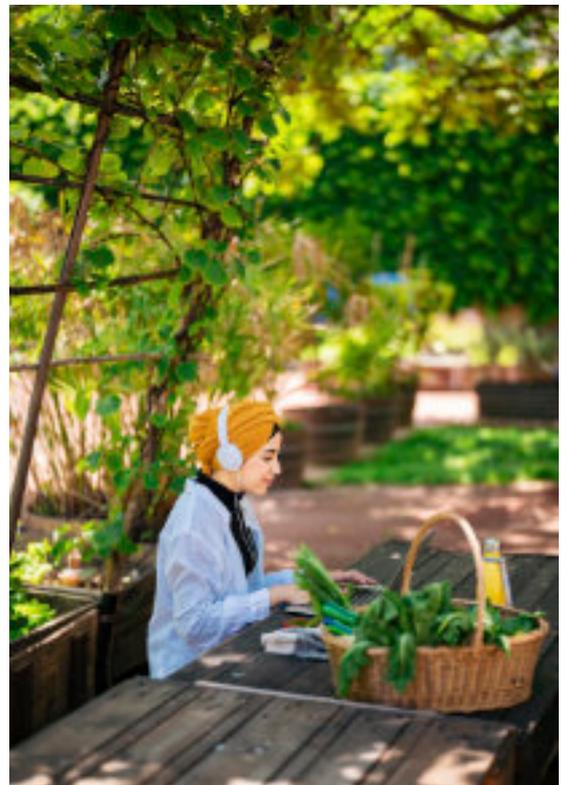
How to choose a remote team structure

Let's clear this up: Hybrid and fully-remote are completely different. Here are the differences between each:

Here's what a fully-remote team looks like:

- You don't have offices.
- Everybody on your team works remotely.
- You're either globally-distributed, or distributed across a single country or continent.

Fully-remote usually means you also operate asynchronously, meaning communication doesn't always happen in real-time.



Here's what a hybrid team looks like:

- Concrete hybrid: In this model, everyone works in the office on specific days and is remote on certain days. The days in-office and remote might change by team, but everything is structured.
- Partially-flexible hybrid: Most employees work in the office on at least some days, but they can choose when they come in. There may be some remote-only employees.
- Fully-flexible hybrid: Offices exist, but employees can mostly choose when they want to work in them. There are many remote-only employees on the team.

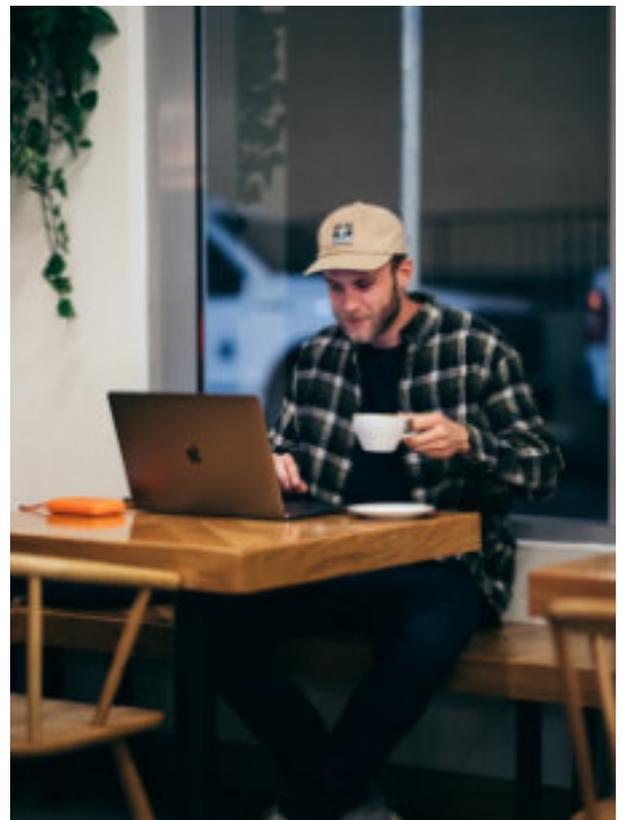


PART 2 The remote vs hybrid debate

Why hybrid shouldn't be the obvious choice

Large organizations are finding that it's easier to transition into hybrid work, at least for now, than it is to go fully-remote. This is fine: Hybrid work will be the easiest solution for many companies. But the truth is that hybrid kills many of the greatest things about remote work:

- Employees don't get to choose where they live (they're constricted within a ~30 mile radius of the office) .
- Employees don't get to be fully-flexible about when they work.
- If some employees are remote-only and some aren't, inequality quickly arises. This is very common.
- You're still mostly, or entirely, limited to hiring people from your area. You lose the biggest benefit of remote: The global talent pool.



THE BOTTOM LINE ABOUT HYBRID WORK

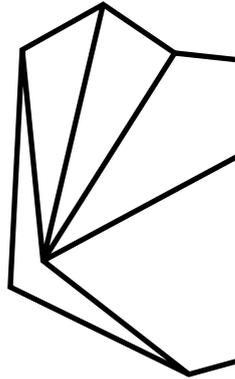
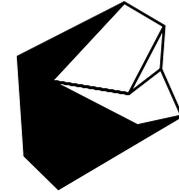
If you can go fully-remote from the start, it's the better choice. You'll unlock the great benefits of hiring remotely without worrying about the headache of hybrid work. If you're a big team (you have more than 50 or 100 people in your company), hybrid can still be a good choice as you start to transition to remote work.





PART 3

Here's how to hire remote (and globally)



Look back at this year's Tokyo Olympics.

Kazakhstan won a medal. So did Mongolia, Spain, Switzerland, China, the United States, Indonesia, Ukraine, Estonia, and a few dozen other countries.

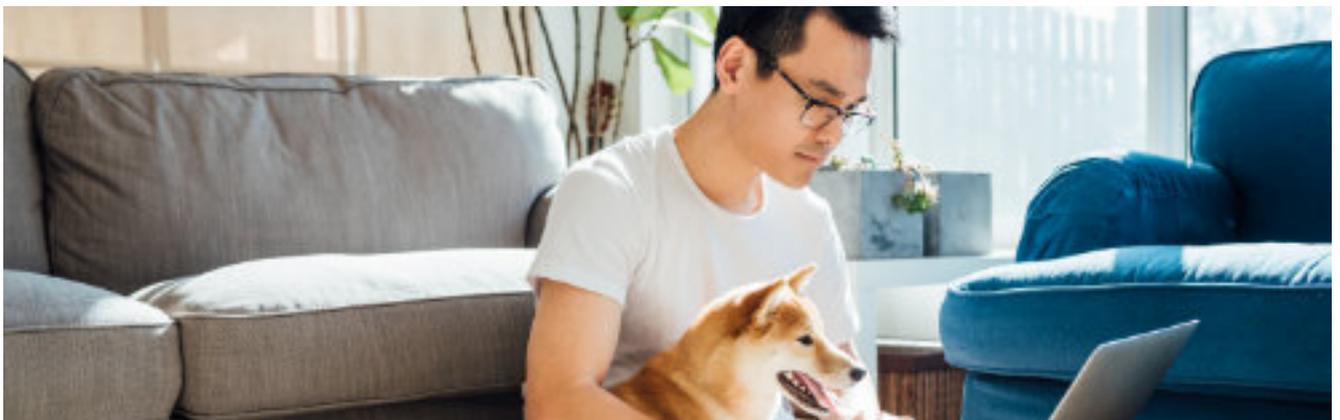
The Olympics are the best real-world example that the world's best talent is global. And going remote lets you hire that talent. But it's not always straightforward how to hire that talent, and there aren't many solid resources teaching you how to do it. Globally, bureaucracy has long prevented great talent from being hired.

We've got good news: It's easier than ever to find and hire remote talent—even globally.

HOW TO FIND, AND HIRE, THAT GREAT REMOTE TALENT

We've talked with hundreds of founders about hiring remotely and globally. And we've learned some of their smartest tactics to find really great talent. (Not to mention that we hire people all around the globe, too.)

On the next page, we'll teach you the best ways we know to find great remote workers.

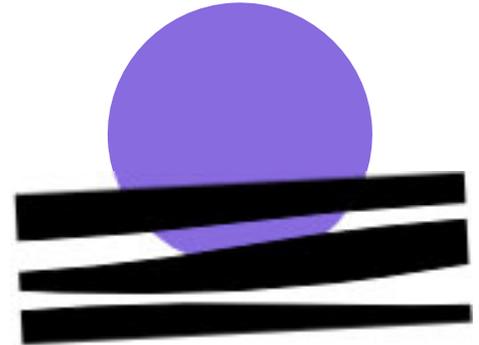




PART 3 How to hire a remote team

The best ways we know to find remote talent

Hiring remotely gives you access to a much bigger talent pool. It's a better pool, but it's much deeper and harder to swim in. Here are the best ways to find great talent, remote and global.



Method 1 : Post on high-quality remote job boards

People who work remotely are usually also some of the most tech-savvy people. They'll be keeping tabs on Twitter, communities, and job boards to find remote work. This is good: It means that if you post your job in the right places, there's a good chance you'll find somebody solid.

Our favorites:

- WeWorkRemotely
- AngelList

Really, these two will probably be enough to gauge if there's interest from talented people. You can also use online talent matching services like Tecla.



PART 3 How to hire a remote team

The best ways we know to find remote talent



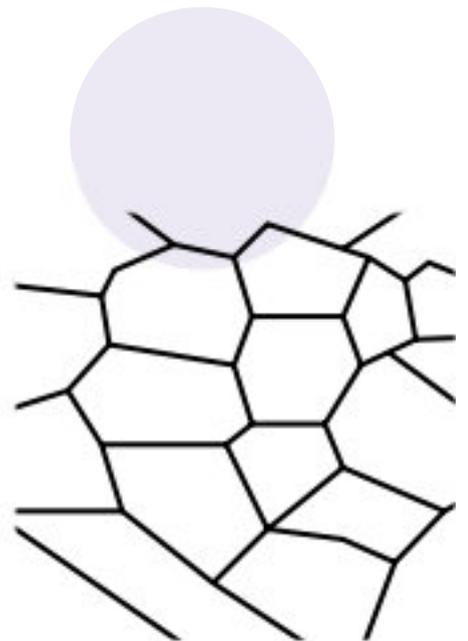
Method 2: Hire a local or international recruiter

There are two types of recruiters you can hire:

- **International recruiters:** People who specialize in helping companies find great talent all across the globe.
- **Local recruiters:** Normal recruiters local to an area you'd like to hire in.

Hiring an international recruiter is straightforward. But, some of the companies we work with prefer to hire local recruiters in markets they're interested in. **Here's the system we learned from them:**

- Pick a country or specific city you want to hire in.
- Look for a local recruiter in that place, but don't pick just anyone. Find someone who's been hired by another large international company—like Uber—and convince them to join your team, either full-time or on retainer (depending on your needs).
- Once they're on your team, work with that local recruiter to find amazing people.



So that's how to avoid getting stuck with a bad recruiter: Look at who they've worked with and what they've done in the past.



PART 3 How to hire a remote team

How to actually hire someone in a different country

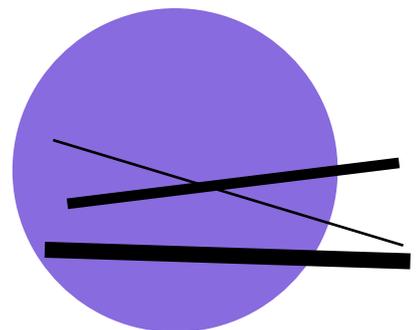
Hiring someone in the same country your business is located is almost the same process you'd go through if you hired somebody in-person. But hiring globally is where things get tricky.

IT'S ALL ABOUT COMPLIANCE LAWS

Each country has different compliance rules—the laws you'll have to follow to be a legal employer there. For example, Germany has strict rules about what defines an independent contractor, meaning that it's easier to misclassify independent contractors in Germany than it is in, say, the United States.

Typically, the process you'd go through to hire in another country involves:

- Heavy research on compliance and rules
- A lot of legwork to follow up with those rules, including things like:
 - Lawyers and accountants
 - Setting up a subsidiary
 - Opening bank accounts
 - Opening a physical office, if necessary
 - Going through dozens of other legal hoops before you can actually employ somebody in that country





PART 3 How to hire a remote team

How to actually hire someone in a different country

The process for hiring someone in a new country normally takes at least six months and costs at least \$80,000. But, it can take years and cost more. It depends on the place and the process. Of course, that process is ridiculously expensive and lengthy. Which is why until recently, most organizations have avoided hiring globally.

But things are different now. Let's hit pause for a second: You found this playbook, probably, on the Panther website. We wrote this playbook to share our knowledge about remote work. And we have that knowledge about remote work because our day job is making it easy for companies to hire globally.

You pick a country, pick a person to hire, click a couple of times, and you're done. Now, you need to onboard them. On the next page, we'll share what we know about onboarding remote hires.

If you want to hire somebody in a new country, you can expect to pay at least \$80,000 and go through a 6-months-plus process.*



*Unless you use something like Panther.



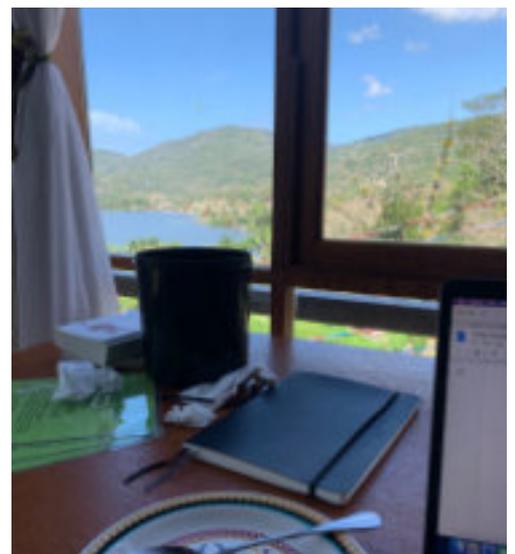
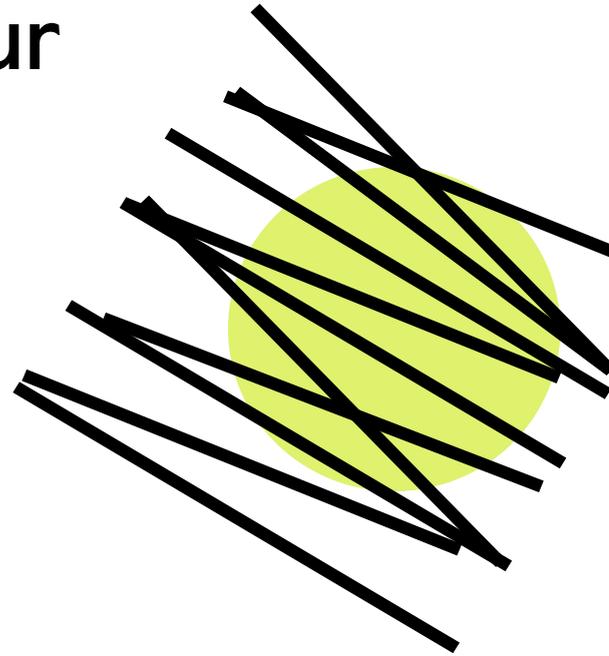
PART 3 How to hire a remote team

How to onboard your remote employees

Bringing a new employee onto your team is an entirely different experience remotely than it is in-person. And if you don't structure it right, your new hire can feel isolated and confused. Here's how to avoid that.

- **Rely on great documentation.** Set up your company documentationso that a new hirecan spend an afternoon briefing themselves on how company communication works, vacation policies, what other teams are working on, and other things that might be too much to cover with an intro call. This is very importantfor remote teams.
- **Overcommunicate about expectations and policy.** With remotework,there are no subtle contextclues over lunch. Before your new hire starts,clarify:
 - Expected output
 - Degree of flexibility with working hours and meeting
 - Vacation policy
 - Clear expectations for the first few months of work—make sure people know what they'll be doing past
 - the first week and how it fits into the bigger picture

We'll continue this on the next page.



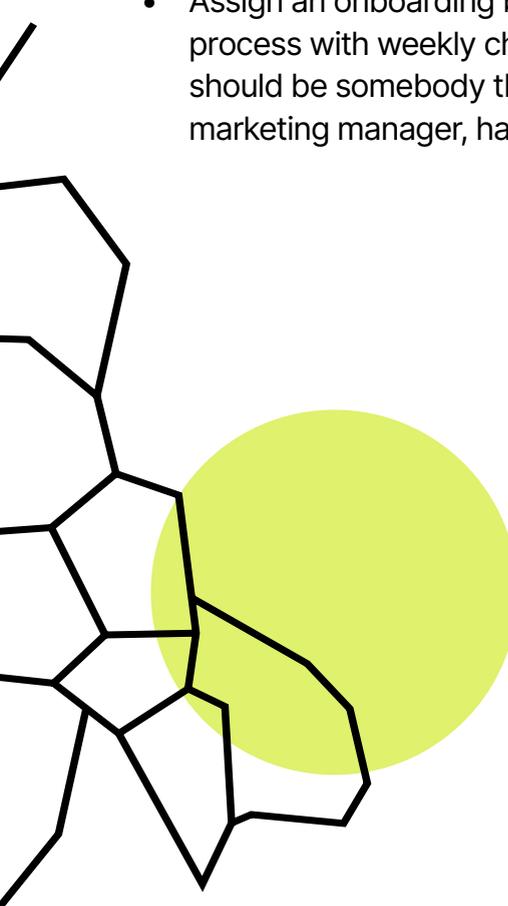
In the photo: A Panther employee working from Brazil.



PART 3 How to hire a remote team

How to onboard your remote employees

- Set up emails and accounts beforehand. Going back and forth on stuff like account access is painful, so do it in advance. This will help your onboarding process go smoothly.
- Frontload calls and meetings. In their first week, your new hire should have a video chat with the CEO and any relevant managers they'll be working with. Your goal should be to reduce these meetings to a minimum over time: But at the beginning, establishing human connection is important.
- Assign an onboarding buddy. Have somebody in your team guide a new hire through the process with weekly check-ins over Slack or whatever messaging system you use. This should be somebody they are familiar with. For example, if you've just hired a content marketing manager, have the marketing director check in with them weekly.



IN GENERAL, YOU HAVE TWO GOALS WITH ONBOARDING REMOTE HIRES:

One: Streamlining the process via automation: With good documentation, onboarding can be mostly autonomous for new hires. Constant meetings will simply hurt productivity.

Two: Making human connection early: The sooner you can establish a connection with your new hire and chat with them about the bigger picture, the better.



PART 4

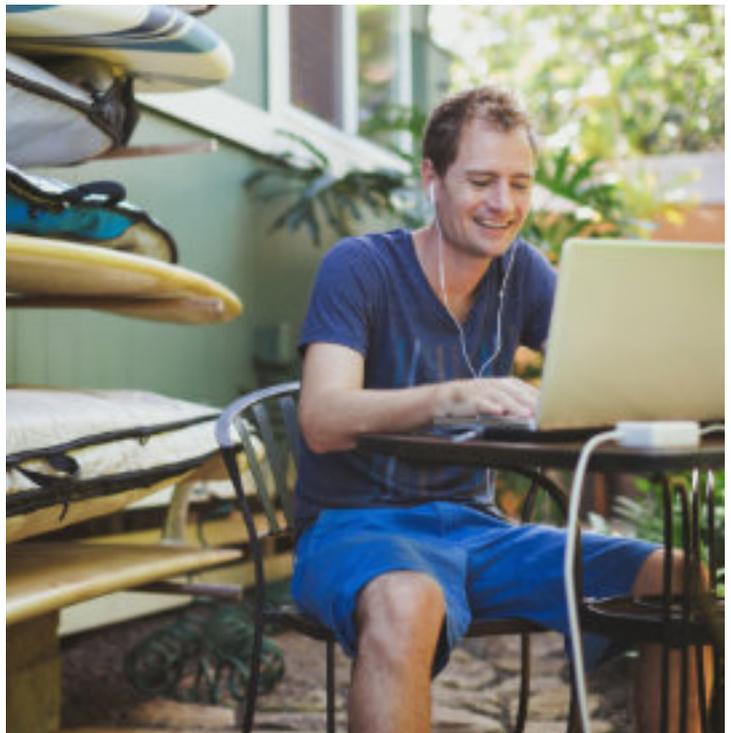
How to manage your remote team

(and avoid endless Zoom calls)

This is probably the most important part of this playbook. There's a misconception that remote companies have a lack of culture and employee happiness. But the opposite is true:

- **People who work remotely** are more productive than their counterparts in the office. And they're 22% more likely to say they're happy in their jobs.

Remote companies can have amazing culture. But it involves an understanding of what, exactly, "culture" really means.



GOOD COMPANY CULTURE IS THE RESULT OF BETTER SYSTEMS

Good culture isn't a unicorn. It's a result of having great systems in place. There are three pillars that, when working together, result in happier employees and better culture:

1. Good work-life balance, better mental health, and output-focused expectations.
2. Productive, unintrusive management.
3. Overcommunication and great documentation.

We'll walk through each pillar below.



PART 4 How to manage your remote team (and avoid endless Zoom calls)

Work-life balance, mental health, and a focus on output



Most people view work-life balance as a binary choice: You can pick work or you can pick life. With remote work, this is changing: But remote still isn't a magic pill for happier employees. Currently, remote workers have problems with:

- Flipping the switch between working and life.
- Working too many hours—remote workers are more likely to work more than 40 hours a week.
- Anxiety about checking messages (this is fixed with asynchronous communication).
- Spending too much time in meetings.

These are all common, and they're side effects of a poorly-run remote organization. To help employees have a healthier work-life balance, you may need to give them a push—that's because people are biased towards acclimation.

To reap the benefits of remote, you need to put good systems in place that encourage healthy lifestyles. Here's how to do it. On the next pages, you'll find guidance on how to put these systems in place.



PART 4 How to manage your remote team (and avoid endless Zoom calls)

Work-life balance, mental health, and a focus on output

1. Personally check in with your team, and do it frequently.

Mentioning something in an all-hands meeting is nice, but it doesn't imply urgency for individuals. Instead, message team members personally and ask them about:

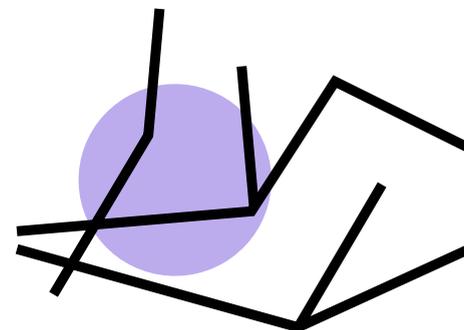
- Vacation plans
- Work-life balance
- Stress levels
- What's been bugging them
- What they like

A great time to do this is after a project's been finished or before another one starts. This can be a task for the CEO with small teams; otherwise, HR and project managers are great for this.

2. Require your employees to take time off (kind of)

Unlimited PTO sounds nice, but it's rarely used as intended. To improve, recommend specific guidelines for employees and create a culture where it's weird not to take vacations and breaks.

And, look: You can't force Todd from engineering to take a vacation to Capri. But if you're creating a culture of healthy vacations and senior people in the company model this behavior, there's a better chance he'll feel comfortable doing it.





PART 4 How to manage your remote team (and avoid endless Zoom calls)

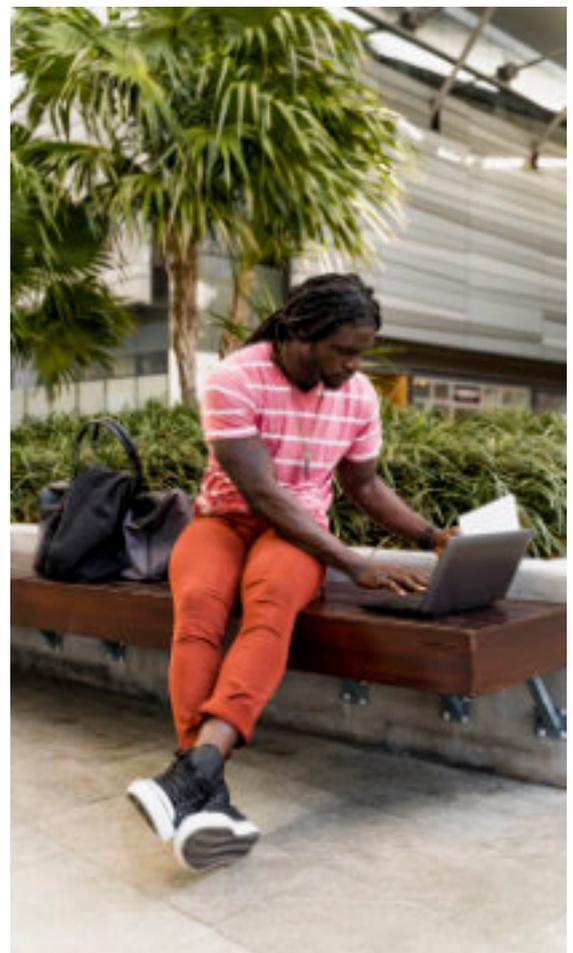
Work-life balance, mental health, and a focus on output

3. It's life-work balance, not the other way around

Make sure employees know that life comes before work. The world will keep spinning if they take off for a bit. This is more important than you think: More than half of employees in the United States feel uncomfortable with taking time off for mental health.

And because people feel uncomfortable about the topic of vacation and time off, it's not easy to know when they really need it. So follow the two steps above to make sure your team feels comfortable and understands expectations.

27% of remote employees say their biggest struggle is not being able to unplug when it's time to stop working.*



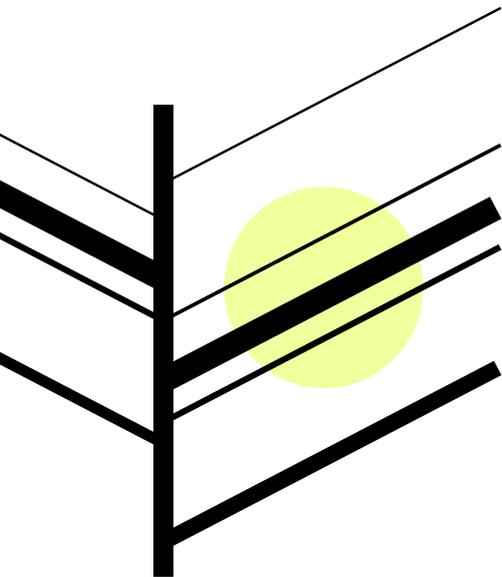
*You can help your employees by making it easy for them to take vacations, unplug from messages for the day, and make the switch from work to life.



PART 4 How to manage your remote team (and avoid endless Zoom calls)

Work-life balance, mental health, and a focus on output

4. Output > input



During the pandemic, companies began to install tracking software to monitor their employees' every move throughout the day. This is a terrible idea: While the intentions are logical, helicopter parenting your remote employees only exacerbates the problems with remote work—it doesn't solve them. It's not productive for your employees, and it's not productive for you.

The solution? Successful remote teams optimize for output over input.

- Instead of tracking specific hours and employee actions, a good remote strategy sets reasonable output expectations and measures productivity that way.
- This is important because of the way goals work: Hours worked is meaningless—it's a vanity metric. But output is the result. It's what really matters.

Successful remote organizations forget vanity metrics and optimize for output.



PART 4 How to manage your remote team (and avoid endless Zoom calls)

Unintrusive, asynchronous management

Most people have no idea how to manage remote workers. This applies to most managers and directors. What this leads to, inevitably, is unhappy workers and far too many meetings. We said it at the beginning of this playbook: Good remote teams do not function the same way in-office teams do. You've got two options:

1. You can spend all day in meetings.
2. You can have systems in place that eliminate the need for a large chunk of those meetings.

Remember, endless meetings are a symptom of bad systems for remote work, not a sign of productivity.

THE MAIN GOAL:

Eliminate as many synchronous meetings as you can. If you're finding it's hard to do, there may be problems elsewhere. Now, we can't sit you down and tell you which meetings you should be having. That depends on your business. But, we can recommend that you follow these principles for meetings and management:

- Always ask yourself if it could be a written message, a voice message, or a Loom-style video. Most meetings truly don't need to be meetings, and they don't need to be synchronous.
- Opt for hands-off over hands-on. With remote work, hands-off management is more productive. This may affect the way you hire people: Choose those who are capable of doing work relatively unmonitored.





PART 4 How to manage your remote team (and avoid endless Zoom calls)

Great documentation and communication



We've been beating the documentation drum throughout this entire playbook. There's a reason for that: Documentation is a key part of remote success.

Why: Remote work means you're not having chats around the water cooler. Your boss isn't popping around the corner and there's no small talk between cubicles. So, instead, you need to have crystal-clear documentation about everything going on in the company. This can all sound confusing. So here's an example:

You've just hired two people: A frontend developer and a copywriter. They work with different teams and may—as it goes with remote—never talk to each other until they meet at an in-person retreat.

But within a few hours, both the developer and the copywriter can open a Notion or Almanac-style document and learn everything they need to know about:

- The company's values and story.
- How work gets done—and best practices for doing so.
- What other teams are working on.
- How the marketing strategy and tech stack are structured.
- Policies on vacation, company retreats, work-life balance, and mental health.

We'll continue this on the next page.



PART 4 How to manage your remote team (and avoid endless Zoom calls)

Great documentation and communication

Write more documentation than is intuitive

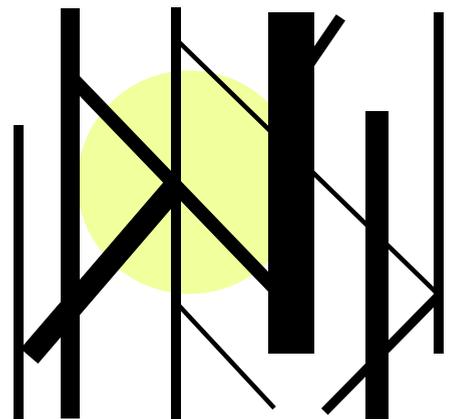
The more, the better—as long as it's concise. For example, try creating a handbook for written communication within the company.

Why: Most of your communication remotely will be written, but most people aren't good writers. Creating a document that shows best practices for internal company communication can make your team more efficient. Your company handbook on writing could have:

- A framework for what good emails look like.
- Guidelines for communicating within different Slack channels.
- Tips on how to make writing more concise.
- Breakdowns of helpful vs. unhelpful language (e.g. stop using apologetic phrases like no worries if not and no problem and instead use affirmative phrases like I appreciate your help here and you got it).

Most people are bad with the written word, but the way we use it—especially in a remote organization—is more important than you think. It influences the opinions we form about teammates and the way we perceive other people. Good written communication can make a team much more productive and happy.

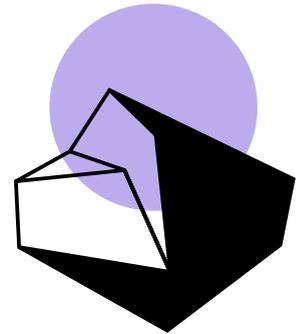
This is one example of documentation that'll help your team run like a well-oiled machine.





PART 5

How to scale your remote team



Is it difficult to scale a remote company?

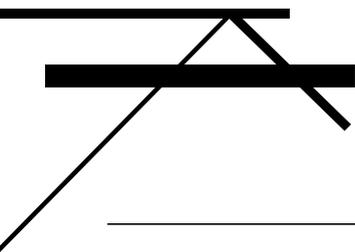
Well, yes. It's difficult to scale anything. But, remote organizations are the easiest types of organizations to scale.

It sounds counterintuitive, but it's true. When you scale in an office model, you'll run into massive problems as you grow:

- Different office buildings or floors, teams get too spread out.
- Communication across different locations becomes tough.
- Misunderstandings and flaws get exacerbated.

With remote work, it's just the opposite. The benefits become more apparent as you scale. Here's why:

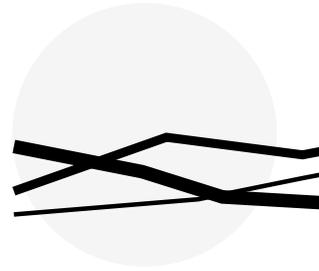
- You're building on tech tools that have (mostly) unlimited potential to scale. There's no practical difference between 10 and 1,000 people viewing your documentation on Notion.
- The same is true globally, with tools like Panther that let you keep payroll all in one place: Even when you're hiring people from dozens of different countries.
- If you have great documentation, like we've discussed above, the onboarding and workflow process can remain the same—even if you're bringing on multiple new team members per week.





PART 4 How to scale your remote team

Is it difficult to scale a remote company?



If you're not quite convinced, [check out this video](#) of GitLab CEO Sid Sijbrandij talking about how scaling remotely at GitLab has been a major success.

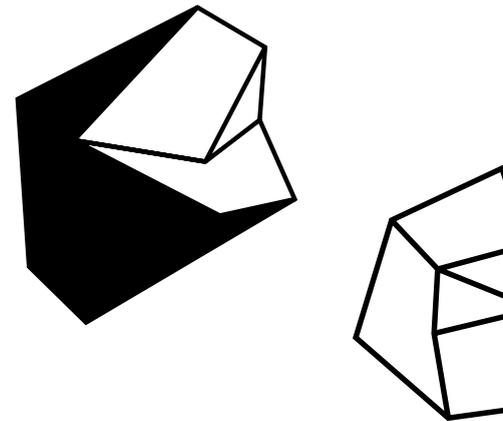
Your ability to scale depends on one key factor

Whether or not you'll be successful scaling a remote team leans on your skill to identify the causes of problems within your organizations.

- **For example:** Endless meetings aren't sustainable for big teams. They're not productive. But simply saying "we should have less meetings" doesn't work, because too many meetings are a symptom of a bigger problem—not always the problem themselves. In this case, it may be that your systems are so inefficient that they are requiring constant meetings.

But that's it: Scaling your remote organization is logical, if not simple, with the right framework.





The End: Let's recap

Let's recap

Successful remote work means reframing the way we think about work. **Here's your cheat sheet for this entire playbook:**

- **Focus on output:** Focusing on output is a key part of success for every single great remote team. To do this, don't track how many hours your employees are working—track how much work they're getting done.

- **Use asynchronous communication:** Ruthlessly cut scheduled video calls and let people respond to messages when they're able. Using audio messages is one novel way to do this that most companies don't try.

- **Hire globally:** One of the biggest advantages of remote work is that you have access to the global talent pool. But so many businesses ignore this. To get the best talent on your team, expand your net outside of your backyard.

- **Write documentation about everything:** Make it easy for a new hire to understand everything that's going on within an afternoon of reading documentation. Set expectations upfront and things will be much easier down the road.

- **Create mini-handbooks for seemingly basic things:** Write documents about how to write, how to manage notifications, and how to organize files, and more. Most people don't intuitively know how to maximize their productivity while remote, so you should help them.



That's all for now

You've made it all the way to the end.

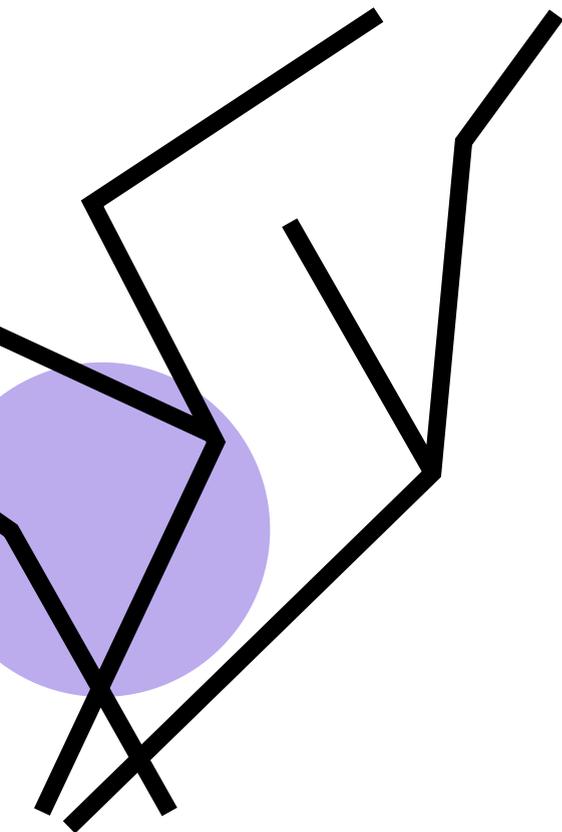
Congratulations: That was almost 6,000 words. And while you may not have read all of them, if you're here, we hope you got a few insights about how to run a more efficient remote team.

And whether you liked it or not (we truly hope you're in the former category), we'll be updating this frequently as we learn more insights about remote work.

In the meantime, you can read new insights we post on our blog.

Or, you can follow us on Twitter, where we post threads about remote work damn near every week.

SEE YOU SOON





the panther remote work playbook

www.panther.co

