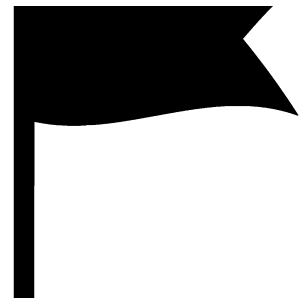# Working Well on the Web: The Ups and Downs of Remote Work

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Wondering which challenges the participants on this call face working remotely?** 5 challenges were shared, challenges other than what was shown in the State of Remote Report 2020.

- **Want to know how to navigate some of these challenges?** 15 easy-to-implement, tried and true best practices were offered.

- **Interested in various tools to help remote workers?** 8 different tools were discussed, along with a list of 5 recommended headphone manufacturers.

- **Feeling disconnected from your co-workers?** 4 points were discussed to help you feel more connected, whether your whole team is remote or if some work in the office and some work from home (which presents another set of challenges!)

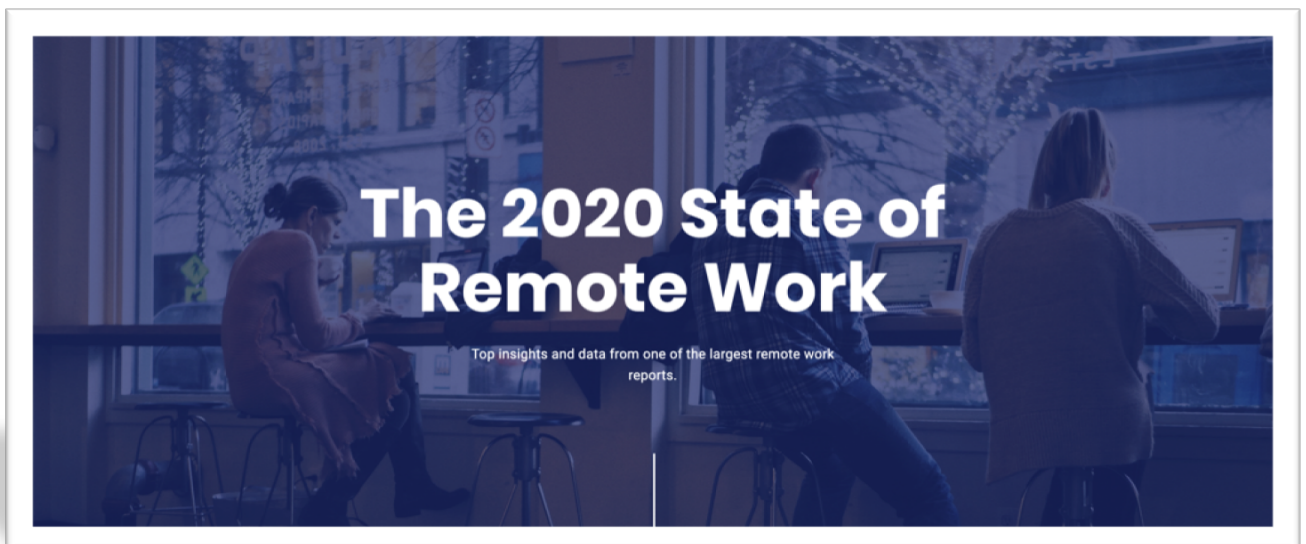**SPEAKERS**
Kelly Schott (TheCR)

COMPETENCIES
Culture

MATURITY PHASES
CMM1, CMM2, CMM3, CMM4

THECR NETWORK

OVERVIEW

- **State of Remote Report 2020.** To lay the foundation for the call, Kelly quoted statistics from this Report focusing on the benefits and challenges of working remotely:

  - *Benefits:* Roughly 60% of respondents stated that the key benefits are the ability to work from anywhere and maintain a flexible schedule. This helps participants to have a greater work/life balance.

    - One participant added that she took the time to convince her executives of the benefits of working remotely. They used to only allow it 1-2 times per week, but this participant pointed out that her 2-hour commute was now time dedicated to work, Furthermore, she is more focused working from home because there are less distractions than what she experienced in the office. In other words, increased productivity is a huge benefit.

    - Fewer meetings is also a strong productivity benefit.

The 2020 State of Remote Work

Top insights and data from one of the largest remote work reports.

OVERVIEW

- **_Challenges:_** The biggest struggle was split between 3 different responses. Approximately 20% said that collaboration and communication is a big struggle. Loneliness is a top challenge, as well as the inability to "unplug." It goes without saying for this group of participants that community can be a solution to the collaboration and communication struggle.

  - Kelly asked if participants could see themselves reflected in these statistics or if something was missing on the list:

    - For one participant, she misses the spontaneity of conversations that she would have when in an office environment. These types of conversations contribute to relationship building.

      - Another participant agreed, stating that she sometimes intentionally goes into the office just for the elevator and hallway conversations.

    - Rachel added that you have to plan for the spontaneity, which can be difficult if some people are remote and some are still in the office. People in the office don't have to be explicit about that type of interaction. If everyone works remotely, you can do what TheCR does, which is to plan Happy Hours, AMAs, or just make the time to chat. This is probably the biggest challenge of having office staff that are split between a remote and office workforce.

    - Another challenge raised by another participant was the sideline chats that occur before or after the meeting, particularly when executives are involved. Oftentimes, that's when the most important conversations happen.

    - The idea of a flexible schedule is both a blessing and a curse. Yes, it's great that you can step out in the middle of the afternoon, but for a company that is 24/7, the expectation becomes 24/7 availability.

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BEST PRACTICES

- **Navigating the challenges.** Kelly used a virtual white board to jot down some of the navigation ideas.
    - Address the virtual people in the meeting the same way that you would address people in an in-person meeting.
    - Advocate for yourself as a virtual employee. If the company is allowing you to work from home remotely, then the company sanctions it. It's okay to advocate for your way of working and contributing.
    - One person uses Zoom all the time now. She doesn't call anymore, she Zooms!
    - Having a dedicated workspace has its obvious benefits, but it also helps you to unplug. Once you leave that dedicated work space, you are on your own time. The mental designation is very important.
    - Lighting is important in your workspace, particularly if you use your webcam.
    - In an office, you can go to someone else's office to get answers. Remotely, be prepared to follow-up several times through chat or private messaging. Use gifs to make your message more personable.
    - Find those allies to help you navigate how to get things done virtually.

- Virtual lunches
- Noting when people are virtual
- Use camera, identify people in a meeting/call
- Advocate!!
- Designate explicit time to check in with team/peers
- Have a sanctioned space for your work
- Think about light and background
- Get up, get dressed, create a regular schedule
- Communicate to anyone who shares your space that you're working (set expectations)
- Open up channels for personal sharing
- Find allies on mixed teams (online/in-person) to ask about how to reach/communicate with specific people
- Be willing to follow up several times
- Prioritize building relationships when you travel to the office (breakfast, lunch, dinner), shift to focus work at home
- Think about relationships with colleagues like building community programming (make notes, create collisions with team members)
- Pay attention to yourself/your wellbeing

BEST PRACTICES

- When and if you travel to the office, Rachel advocates for booking breakfast, lunch and dinner with colleagues. It makes for a crazy day, but it is so productive. In a dining situation, you get a much more relaxed perspective of what's going on in a way that you can understand sub-text. As much as you may be an introvert and maybe not want to do this, it's critical that you make the effort to do it.

- One participant shared that she keeps a book with the names of her co-worker's kids, life events, etc. as it acts as a trigger to follow-up with them and to keep the relationship strong even though she may not see them very often.

  - Rachel added to think of your co-workers the same way you think about community programming. TheCR does a secret Santa every December where each team member is given $200 and for the whole month of December, they are sent gifts. Finding programmatic ways to create those collisions with team members that are lighter interactions is very helpful and it works wonders towards team building

- Remember to take care of yourself, too. It's so easy to become chained to your computer when working from home. Consciously put triggers in place to avoid this natural occurrence. TheCR has a FitBit challenge, for example.

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- Noting when people are virtual
- Use camera, identify people in a meeting/call
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BEST PRACTICES

- **Work-from-home must-have tools.** Participants discussed which tools they recommend for working remotely. Again, Kelly jotted them down on a virtual white board:

  - Trello records your completed tasks, which is very helpful at the end of the year when you need to discuss your achievements relative to a performance review, or proving your remotely accomplished work, etc. Outlook and Tasks-in-a-Box offer the same feature.

  - One participant believes that Slack is the best for instant messaging. It integrates well with Zoom, Google Drive and G-Suite.

  - Rachel uses Clever Fox Planner. There is a great thread in the Network for planner recommendations.

  - One participant recommends G-Suite as a great platform for collaboration.

Headphones
- Apple Airpods
- B530 Logitech
- Edifier
- Sony WH-1000XM3
- LSTN

Tools
- Trello (personal org., productivity, accountability)
- Clever Fox Planner
- Outlook & Tasks in a Box
- Planner Pad
- Rocketbook
- Slack
- G Suite
- O365

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LESSONS LEARNED

- For those who feel isolated working from home, one participant suggested "virtual lunches." This was her answer to that feeling of isolation.

- Rachel shared a story of a half and half meeting that she attended (half office workers, half remote workers). She was in the boardroom while others were dialing-in remotely. She became aware of some things that she wasn't conscious of doing:

  - It's helpful to get the people in the boardroom on Zoom or a similar application so that people can identify themselves, as well, and see others as they identify themselves on the call. This way, all can feel included.

    - Everyone in the room tried to say their name before they talked, which was very helpful. However, it didn't happen 100% of the time and that's difficult on both sides.

  - Another participant punctuated this point saying that if the office is not on the same platform as the remote workers in the meeting, they also could be missing valuable information. Sometimes, there are individual chats shooting back and forth during the meeting that the office staff will not be privy to seeing if they are not on the platform.

- If you are going to dial into meetings remotely, get a quality speaker phone.

THECR NETWORK

LESSONS LEARNED

- There was discussion on how to engage all members of a team when some team members work remotely and some do not, particularly in terms of getting to know each other as people vs. just co-workers. It's much easier to ask a favor of someone when you have a relationship established first.

  - If it's a meeting type of culture, allow extra time for a non-work type of meeting. Or, if this won't happen due to the culture (making time for non-work), try scheduling 10 or 15 minutes at the end or beginning of a scheduled meeting.

  - Rachel added that working remotely forces you to be very explicit. Work cultures are in denial about a lot of things. They may think they are data-driven, yet many decisions truly are made emotionally. Forcing that explicitness is painful in the short-term, but really healthy in the long-term as it creates transparency and accountability.

  - Rachel also stated that it's okay to ask for the microphone to be left on after the meeting in order to be a part of the chit chat. Let it be known that you want to get to know your colleagues on a personal level, as well. Furthermore, explain the benefits to productivity.

  - One participant shared that her team all works remotely and when a new team member joined, they dedicated a call to meet and greet her, but then also scheduled ½ hour meetings for her to speak individually with team members to get to know them better and vice versa. The feedback was that this time was very well spent. Being deliberate about getting to know your team when you work remotely is very important.

    - Kelly echoed this last contribution. When she first started at TheCR, she had the time to meet each team member to get to know them better and understand what they do within TheCR. Now each team member has a face and a voice to help further build the relationship.

RESOURCES

- To set the stage for the call, Kelly asked participants to share their work-from-home status:

  - One participant has worked remotely for 13 years.

  - Another participant has worked remotely for about 3 years.

  - 100% remotely for 6 months and prior to that when needed. This participant's team is made up of all remote workers.

  - On and off remotely for 20 years. Full-time remote for the last 5 years. This participant's team is also mostly remote.

  - Predominantly work in the office, but work-from-home 1-2 days per week.

  - Remote when want to be or need to be.

  - Self-employed and working on her own remotely for almost 2 years. This participant's previous role was entirely remote. The challenge is the lack of a sense of belonging.

  - Supports remote workers and with that can be either in or out of the office.

  - 8 year in field sales, then worked in the office for 5 years and now remotely for 1 year.

  - One participant works remotely once or twice a week, but is faced with helping to quickly rollout MS Teams globally to employees across several countries, including China.

  - Rachel has done both her entire career. She remembers working from home when dial-up for Internet use was the norm. The last 10 years working with TheCR has been all remote work.

  - For Heather, this is her first experience working remotely. It has been a dramatic shifting of gears; she has found it more complicated than she thought it would be. She's looking forward to learning from others who have experience in this area.

RESOURCES

- **As mentioned on the call:** https://cleverfoxplanner.com/
- **As mentioned on the call:** https://www.amazon.com/QIAYA-Selfie-Photography-Lighting-Rechargeable/dp/B01HXTHPXU/ref=sr_1_4?keywords=selfie+light&qid=1583859269&sr=8-4
- **As mentioned on the call:** https://www.amazon.com/Logitech-C930e-1080P-VideoWebcam/dp/B00CRJWW2G/ref=sr_1_6?keywords=computer+external+camera&qid=1583859328&sr=8-6
- **Planner Conversation:** https://network.communityroundtable.com/groups/community-home/digestviewer/viewthread?MessageKey=c414203b-a0f1-415a-b7fb-e0932a417757&CommunityKey=0255980d-fa00-4268-96ed
- **Remote Work Guides:** https://about.gitlab.com/company/culture/all-remote/guide/