

Covid-19: A Psychologist's 1-10 for leading a productive and healthy work-from-home team

Through our work conversations and coaching practice since social distancing began we've caught more than a whiff of mistrust and micromanagement in the air. Our founder, coaching psychologist Jessica Chivers, shares her 10 psychology-based tips to help people managers be productive and healthy, and facilitate the same in their teams.



1. Regular 1:1s

Continue to have regular 1:1s. It's important team members know they have individual focus time with you. Some research from the 80s suggests a fortnightly cadence is optimal but you might want to switch to weekly and make them shorter. If you're not getting them with your leader, send her/him a nudge with calendar invites.

2. 2 minutes talk time

Have a daily team call. Each team member, including you, has 2 minutes talk time: 1 minute to reflect on what went well yesterday and 1 minute to outline today's priorities.

3. 3 key things

Develop a habit of identifying 3 significant tasks/outcomes to focus on each day. At the end of the day reflect on, and write down, 3 key things that went well and whyⁱ. The first helps you know when to stop for the day. The second helps you draw a line under the working day and go into 'home time' feeling relaxed and positive.

4. The 4 quadrants of the Johari Window

The Johari Windowⁱⁱ is a simple and useful tool for illustrating and improving self-awareness and mutual understanding between individuals in a group. Now more than ever your team are likely to be encouraged by you widening your 'hidden pane' and disclosing things about yourself you haven't shared before. Why? By telling others how we feel and other information about ourselves we reduce the hidden pane, and increase the open pane, which enables better understanding, cooperation, trust, team-working effectiveness and productivity.

5. 5:1 praise v criticism

Individuals in the highest performing teamsⁱⁱⁱ receive a ratio of at least 5:1 positive to critical commentary. Simple 'thank you, [name]' and 'I agree with you' comments make it easy to create that ratio. This ratio also applies to marriage maintenance^{iv}.

6. 6 Thinking Hats

Psychologist Edward De Bono's 6 thinking hats is a way to make better decisions^v either as an individual or as a group. A particularly useful tool when you're working remotely and looking for ways to increase engagement and feelings of team cohesion.

7. People (not work) 7 days a week

Like a parent, you'll no doubt think of your team 7 days a week. But that doesn't mean *working* 7 days a week. A brilliant boss creates an atmosphere where the team knows they can be open about work worries and personal problems and be in touch with you whatever the day should they need to. Be a role model for your team and step away from the job on days off.

8. 8 hours work day maximum

6-7.5 hours in 4 or 5 x 90 minute blocks with recovery time in between is actually better than 8. That's based on the ultradian rhythm^{vi} our bodies go through day and night. The first 3 of the 90 minute blocks should go on your 3 key things and the remaining 1 or 2 on other work tasks or reviewing and finalising the 3 key things.

9. 9pm phone cut-off and 9 hours rest

Note 'rest' not 'sleep.' Most adults need 7-8 hours sleep to start the next day refreshed. Having at least another hour of quiet, calm downtime (think meditation, yoga, talking with partner or stroking the dog whilst stretching gently in front of your nightly 9pm Netflix hour – mine is currently Billions) aids sleep. Smartphones after 9pm are an absolute non-no.^{vii}

10. 10am daily team call

One whole team call a day (more than that whiffs of mistrust) early enough to have a full day ahead and late enough to have had a wholesome start (Joe Wickes 9am PE lesson and porridge with berries, nuts and seeds?). Rotate the Chairing (Edward De Bono's Blue Hat) and remember to give each person 2 minutes of talk time sharing their 3 things that went well yesterday and 3 areas of focus for today.

The Talent Keeper Specialists blend psychology research, work-place best practices and knowledge about how people learn and change to create interventions that help people do their best work. We're known for our work with employees preparing for and returning from extended leave – whether that's after maternity or shared parental leave, sickness, sabbatical and now whole teams after Covid-19. Find out more www.talentkeepers.co.uk and chat with us @TalentKeepersUK on insta and twitter.

ⁱ Research by positive psychology scholars such as Martin Seligman, Sonja Lyubomirsky and Robert Biswas-Diener have found active reflection on things that are going well and why leads to greater wellbeing. In a two-week study where participants were asked to write down three good things that happened during their day and why, the researchers found an uplift in self-reports of happiness and positive effects were still being observed up to 6 months later. It's important to **write down** what went well and not just to think it because this brings structure to your thinking and causes you to linger longer on the positive experience. It's important to consider the **why** as well as the **what**, because this increases your sense of perceived control and agency. In her book *The How of Happiness: A Scientific Approach to Getting the Life You Want*, Sonja Lyubomirsky discusses eight ways gratitude boosts happiness.

ⁱⁱ Devised by American psychologists Joseph Luft and Harry Ingham (Johari is a contraction of their names) in 1955. The Johari Window represents information - feelings, experience, views, attitudes, skills, intentions, motivation, etc - within or about a person in relation to their group, from four perspectives:

Open quadrant: what is known by the person about him/herself and is also known by others

Blind quadrant: what is unknown by the person about him/herself but which others know

Hidden quadrant: what the person knows about him/herself that others do not know

Unknown quadrant: what is unknown by the person about him/herself and is also unknown by others

[Find out more about the practical application of the Johari Window here.](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ See <https://hbr.org/2013/03/the-ideal-praise-to-criticism>

^{iv} See the work of psychologist Professor John Gottman: <https://www.gottman.com/blog/the-magic-relationship-ratio-according-science/>

^v Six Thinking Hats was created by Edward de Bono, and published in his [1985 book](#) of the same name. It forces you or the team to move outside your habitual thinking style, and to look at things from a number of different perspectives. The hats are white (look at the facts); yellow (where you probe for the positives); black (devil's advocate/consider the downsides); red (feelings, hunches and intuition); green (focuses on creativity and new possibilities) and blue (used to manage the thinking process). This technique facilitates team cohesion because everyone 'wears' the same hat at the same time. Mindtools.com is a resource we often signpost to clients and coachees and they give a good overview: https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTED_07.htm

^{vi} The pioneering sleep researcher [Nathaniel Kleitman](#) discovered something he named the "basic rest-activity cycle" — the [90 minute periods at night](#) during which we move progressively through five stages of sleep, from light to deep, and then out again. While it's much less well known, Kleitman also observed that our bodies operate by the same 90 minute rhythm during the day. When we're awake, we move from higher to lower alertness every 90 minutes. Other researchers have called this our "[ultradian rhythm](#)." Read more by the founder of The Energy Project, Tony Schwartz, here: <https://hbr.org/2010/05/for-real-productivity-less-is>

^{vii} 9pm cut-off for smartphones: <https://hbr.org/2018/09/sleep-well-lead-better> and how sleep affects anxiety: <https://digest.bps.org.uk/2019/11/21/a-lack-of-sleep-causes-anxiety-but-dont-worry-about-it/>