

From the authors of the *New York Times* bestseller REWORK



REMOTE

**REMOTE
OFFICE NOT REQUIRED**

Jason Fried & David Heinemeier Hansson
FOUNDERS OF 37SIGNALS

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The Remote Toolbox

Acknowledgments

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About the Book

The most talented people in the world don't all live in one place.

The best place to live depends on who you are and what you like.

The modern office has become an interruption factory.

Going remote allows the most talented people to produce the best work regardless of their location.

Get on board.

About the Author

JASON FRIED and DAVID HEINEMEIER HANSSON are the founders of 37signals, a trailblazing software company and the makers of the world famous project management tool Basecamp. They have been profiled in such publications as *Time* and *Wired*.



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Jason Fried & David Heinemeier Hansson

Vermilion
LONDON

*To Jamie and Colt Heinemeier Hansson,
Working remotely has allowed the whole family to
spend more time together in more places.
Thank you both for your love and inspiration.*

—DAVID HEINEMEIER HANSSON

For all those sitting in traffic right now.

—JASON FRIED

AUTHORS' NOTE

When we started writing this book in 2013, the practice of working remotely—or telecommuting, as it's often referred to—had been silently on the rise for years. (From 2005 to 2011 remote work soared 73 percent in the United States—to 3 million workers total.^{[fn1](#)})

The silence was loudly broken at the end of February 2013, though, when Yahoo! announced that they were dismantling their remote-work program, just as we were finishing this book. All of a sudden, remote work moved from academic obscurity to a heated global conversation. Hundreds, if not thousands, of news articles were written, and controversy was in the air.

Of course, we would have appreciated Yahoo!'s CEO Marissa Mayer waiting another six months for our publication date. That said, her move provided a unique backdrop against which to test all of *Remote's* arguments. As it turned out, every single excuse you'll find in the essay titled "Dealing with excuses" got airtime during the Yahoo! firestorm.

Needless to say, we don't think Yahoo! made the right choice, but we thank them for the spotlight they've shone on remote work. It's our aim in this book to look at the phenomenon in a much more considered way. Beyond the sound bites, beyond all the grandstanding, what we've provided here is an in-the-trenches analysis of the pros and cons—a guide to the brave new world of remote work. Enjoy!

^{[fn1](#)} <http://www.globalworkplaceanalytics.com/telecommuting-statistics>

INTRODUCTION

The future is already here—it's just not evenly distributed.

—WILLIAM GIBSON

Millions of workers and thousands of companies have already discovered the joys and benefits of working remotely. In companies of all sizes, representing virtually every industry, remote work has seen steady growth year after year. Yet unlike, say, the rush to embrace the fax machine, adoption of remote work has not been nearly as universal or commonsensical as many would have thought.

The technology is here; it's never been easier to communicate and collaborate with people anywhere, any time. But that still leaves a fundamental people problem. The missing upgrade is for the human mind.

This book aims to provide that upgrade. We'll illuminate the many benefits of remote work, including access to the best talent, freedom from soul-crushing commutes, and increased productivity outside the traditional office. And we'll tackle all the excuses floating around—for example, that innovation only happens face-to-face, that people can't be trusted to be productive at home, that company culture would wither away.

Above all, this book will teach you how to become an expert in remote work. It will provide an overview of the tools and techniques that will help you get the most out of it, as well as the pitfalls and constraints that can bring you down. (Nothing is without trade-offs.)

Our discussion will be practical, because our knowledge comes from actually practicing remote work—not just theorizing about it. Over the past decade, we've grown a successful software company, 37signals, from the seeds of

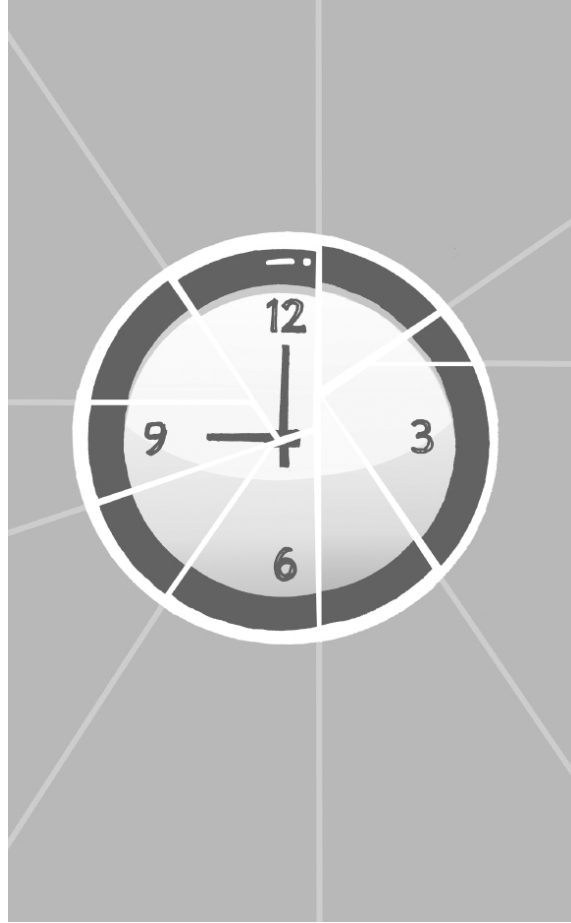
remote work. We got started with one partner in Copenhagen and the other in Chicago. Since then we've expanded to thirty-six people spread out all over the globe, serving millions of users in just about every country in the world.

We'll draw on this rich experience to show how remote work has opened the door to a new era of freedom and luxury. A brave new world beyond the industrial-age belief in *The Office*. A world where we leave behind the dusty old notion of outsourcing as a way to increase work output at the lowest cost and replace it with a new ideal—one in which remote work increases both quality of work and job satisfaction.

"Office not required" isn't just the future—it's the *present*. Now is your chance to catch up.

CHAPTER

**THE TIME IS RIGHT FOR
REMOTE WORK**



Why work doesn't happen at work

If you ask people where they go when they really need to get work done, very few will respond “the office.” If they do say the office, they'll include a qualifier such as “super early in the morning before anyone gets in” or “I stay late at night after everyone's left” or “I sneak in on the weekend.”

What they're trying to tell you is that they can't get work done at work. The office during the day has become the last place people want to be when they really want to get work done.

That's because offices have become interruption factories. A busy office is like a food processor—it chops your day into tiny bits. Fifteen minutes here, ten minutes there, twenty here, five there. Each segment is filled with a conference call, a meeting, another meeting, or some other institutionalized unnecessary interruption.

It's incredibly hard to get meaningful work done when your workday has been shredded into work moments.

Meaningful work, creative work, thoughtful work, important work—this type of effort takes stretches of uninterrupted time to get into the zone. But in the modern office such long stretches just can't be found. Instead, it's just one interruption after another.

The ability to be alone with your thoughts is, in fact, one of the key advantages of working remotely. When you work on your own, far away from the buzzing swarm at headquarters, you can settle into your own productive zone. You can actually get work done—the same work that you couldn't get done at work!

Yes, working outside the office has its own set of challenges. And interruptions can come from different places, multiple angles. If you're at home, maybe it's the TV. If you're at the local coffee shop, maybe it's someone talking loudly a few tables away. But here's the thing: those interruptions are things you can control. They're passive. They don't handcuff you. You can find a space that fits your work style. You can toss on some headphones and not be worried about a coworker loitering by your desk and tapping you on the shoulder. Neither do you have to be worried about being called into yet another unnecessary meeting. Your place, your zone, is yours alone.

Don't believe us? Ask around. Or ask yourself: Where do you go when you *really* have to get work done? Your answer won't be "the office in the afternoon."



Stop commuting your life away

Let's face it: nobody likes commuting. The alarm rings earlier, you arrive home that much later. You lose time, patience, possibly even your will to eat anything other than convenience food with plastic utensils. Maybe you skip the gym, miss your child's bedtime, feel too tired for a meaningful conversation with your significant other. The list goes on.

Even your weekends get truncated by that wretched commute. All those chores you don't have the will to complete after slugging it out with the highway collect into one mean list due on Saturday. By the time you've taken out the trash, picked up the dry cleaning, gone to the hardware store, and paid your bills, half the weekend is gone.

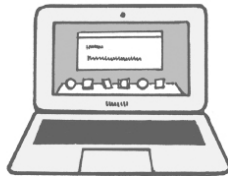
And the commute itself? Even the nicest car won't make driving in traffic enjoyable, and forget feeling fresh after a trip on most urban trains and buses. Breathe in the smell of exhaust and body odor, breathe out your health and sanity.

Smart people in white coats have extensively studied commuting—this supposedly necessary part of our days—and the verdict is in: long commutes make you fat, stressed, and miserable. Even short commutes stab at your happiness.

According to the research,^{[fn1](#)} commuting is associated with an increased risk of obesity, insomnia, stress, neck and back pain, high blood pressure, and other stress-related ills such as heart attacks and depression, and even divorce.

But let's say we ignore the overwhelming evidence that commuting doesn't do a body good. Pretend it isn't bad for

the environment either. Let's just do the maths. Say you spend thirty minutes driving in rush hour every morning and another fifteen getting to your car and into the office. That's 1.5 hours a day, 7.5 hours per week, or somewhere between 300 and 400 hours per year, give or take holidays and vacation. Four hundred hours is exactly the amount of programmer time we spent building Basecamp, our most popular product. Imagine what you could do with 400 extra hours a year. Commuting isn't just bad for you, your relationships, and the environment—it's bad for business. And it doesn't have to be that way.



It's the technology, stupid

If working remotely is such a great idea, why haven't progressive companies been practising it all along? It's simple: they couldn't. The technology just wasn't there. Good luck trying to collaborate with people in different cities, let alone halfway around the world, using a fax machine and FedEx.

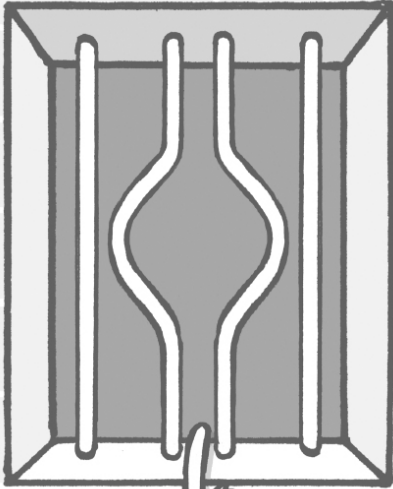
Technology snuck up on us and made working remotely an obvious possibility. In particular, the Internet happened. Screen sharing using WebEx, coordinating to-do lists using Basecamp, real-time chatting using instant messages, downloading the latest files using Dropbox—these activities all flow from innovations pioneered in the last fifteen years. No wonder we're still learning what's possible.

But past generations have been bred on the idea that good work happens from 9am to 5pm, in offices and cubicles in tall buildings around the city. It's no wonder that most who are employed inside that model haven't considered other options, or resist the idea that it could be any different. But it can.

The future, quite literally, belongs to those who get it. Do you think today's teenagers, raised on Facebook and texting, will be sentimental about the old days of all-hands-on-deck, Monday morning meetings? Ha!

The great thing about technology, and even working remotely, is that it's all up to you. It's not rocket science, and learning the tools that make it possible won't take that long either. But it *will* take willpower to let go of nostalgia and get on board. Can you do that?

CELLBLOCK
9 to 5



Escaping 9am-5pm

The big transition with a distributed workforce is going from synchronous to asynchronous collaboration. Not only do we not have to be in the same spot to work together, we also don't have to work at the same time to work together.

This is one of those things that's born out of necessity when collaborating with people in multiple time zones, but it benefits *everyone*, even those in the same city. Once you've structured your work technique and expectations to deal with someone seven hours ahead in Copenhagen, the rest of the home office in Chicago might as well work from 11am to 7pm or 7am to 3pm—it's all the same.

The beauty of relaxing workday hours is that the policy accommodates everyone—from the early birds to the night owls to the family folks with kids who need to be picked up in the middle of the day. At 37signals, we try to keep a roughly forty-hour workweek, but how our employees distribute those hours across the clock and days just isn't important.

A company that is efficiently built around remote work doesn't even have to have a set schedule. This is especially important when it comes to creative work. If you can't get into the zone, there's rarely much that can force you into it. When face time isn't a requirement, the best strategy is often to take some time away and get back to work when your brain is firing on all cylinders.

At the IT Collective, a film production and video marketing firm based in Colorado (but with people in New York and Sydney too), the team of editors will occasionally switch to nocturnal mode when working on a new film. It's