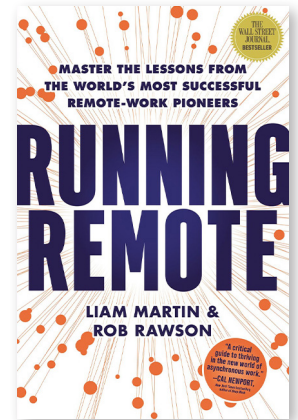


# Running Remote

Master the Lessons from the World's Most Successful Remote-Work Pioneers

by **Liam Martin & Rob Rawson**



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## THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

It's no secret that the world has gone remote in the steepest, fastest, most disruptive way imaginable. But where and when people work are not even half the story. That's why this book isn't merely about remote work. It's about a whole new way that any company can work. It unveils a philosophy and methodology first discovered and developed by organizations well before COVID-19 hit. These organizations were the first to embrace the remote challenge, posing a simple question: What if you could work with people all over the world, but you could never meet with anyone in person?

The answers they uncovered were groundbreaking, counterintuitive, and will likely transform the way we work—that is, the way everyone works—for all time. The accent has shifted toward the centrality of deep focus—the stuff that creates productivity, clarity, measurability, scalability, and yes, even human happiness. The rapid adoption of the Async Mindset is not just a trend, it's one of the major reboots in human history. In *Running Remote: Master the Lessons from the World's Most Successful Remote-Work Pioneers*, organizations will learn how to take this giant leap toward greater work sanity for everyone.

## IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- Three principles of the Async Mindset
- Why this time marks the end of cities
- How to hire and on ramp the remote worker
- How to transition from colocating to remote

## Part I: The Spaceless Office: Mastering the Fundamentals

### Lies We Learned in Silicon Valley

For the last decade or so, many organizations have operated under a few “soft” but not unhelpful myths that grew out of Silicon Valley. Here are just a few:

**The Myth: Workers are granted maximum freedom by instilling a culture of previously unheard-of perks like nap pods, snacks, self-focus time, and the like.**

The Truth: Perks aren’t culture or true freedom. Real autonomy recognizes the individual’s sovereign and unique needs and wants—no matter how personal or specific. There are as many different human situations as there are humans.

**The Myth: Interconnected Silicon Valley culture boosts creativity by affording workers more time to play and interact with one another outside the realm of actual work duties.**

The Truth: Water coolers don’t spark creativity, individuals do. Lounge culture is not only less effective than previously imagined, it can prove to be the undoing of an otherwise strong company by setting up a petri dish of uniform thinking and entrenched office politics.

**The Myth: Remote work means unhappy employees and deteriorating productivity.**

The Truth: Autonomous, asynchronous work delivers both quantifiable employee satisfaction and measurable growth.

It should go without saying that these Silicon Valley myths are no longer trendy news. They’ve become dangerously entrenched. But once you get the myths out of the way, it’s possible to understand just what makes the Async Mindset different.

Asynchronicity fosters a true culture of cooperation, respect, and self-respect. By cutting out long commutes and fast-food lunches, remote work has the power to bring greater health to everyone involved. It also grants each team member the time and space to put their life focus where they want it, when they want it. But most important, the Async Mindset encourages each person to explore, embrace, and reveal his or her truest self. That’s a perk beyond measure.

Remote-first founders and companies in transition have encountered every frustration there is. The remote pioneers discovered the hard way that remote work and on-premise

office work are not parallels.

*If you’re trying to recreate the office, you’ve already lost.*

To thrive in a contemporary, digital context, you need to throw out almost everything you know about what makes an on-premise office tick. You must make a mental shift to build a successful remote team.

This fresh mindset is rooted in three reliable, recurring, and overlapping principles: *deliberate, purposeful communication; democratized, open processes; and detailed metrics.*

### Deliberate Async Communication

As even first-graders now understand, all work communication can be divided into synchronous and asynchronous activity. However, even many sophisticated grown-ups can barely grasp the powerful but subtle differences between these two modes. Those steeped in the traditions of face-to-face, workplace communication are especially prone to get it wrong.

Deliberate communication is a whole lot more than just choosing to go sync or async. Being deliberate means infusing every form of communication with intentionality and purpose—and that requires deep focus.

Most people instinctively prefer synchronous communication or at least think it’s better. After all, humans are, at their core, synchronous beings. We move through space *in time* facing all the inevitable distractions that real life delivers by the second.

Paradoxically, though, it is this very unorthodox state of being that makes asynchronous activity so special and so useful from an organizational standpoint.

As author Cal Newport brilliantly argues in *Deep Work: Rules for Focused Success in a Distracted World*, the really meaningful work can only be done by working deeply—in a state of high concentration, without distractions, with all your energies hunkered down on a single task. For people to achieve the extended flow state of deep work, they’ll need an environment that subtracts as much “normal life” as humanly possible, while keeping present all the tools necessary to accomplish their task.

The great pity of it is that most synchronous communication between workers—in other words, the vast majority of interruptions—can and should be consumed asynchronously.

# Synchronous, on-premise work life is a distraction machine, a brutal chain of false starts that destroys the flow of every individual, all day long.

Metrics, presentations, updates, and even brief messages are all much better on your time, when you're ready. Synchronous, on-premise work life is a distraction machine, a brutal chain of false starts that destroys the flow of every individual, all day long.

Async demands maximum informational granularity, recorded for all time. Deliberate async communication is directly related to open, democratized processes, because it can allow multiple players to participate, edit, rethink, and spot-check one another's work, moving a process toward maximum accuracy.

It may be better—sometimes—for blue sky creativity and group problem-solving, but when productivity is at stake, synchronous communication is rarely preferable. Moreover, it often comes with a heavy price—power-mongering, micro-management, office politics, and snuffing out of valuable input. Here's the cold, hard truth: Communicating synchronously is mostly a big waste of time.

## Democratized Workflow—The Power of Process

The promise is this basic: the Async Mindset leads to nothing short of virtual, autonomous meritocracy. For this meritocracy to function, however, strong *process documentation* is required at every level. The term may sound dry, but it does not mean mere “rules” or musty “guidebooks” of the old-style office variety. Process documents are a living, growing thing, an all-hands-on-deck work-in-progress that opens channels of communication and makes way for healthy remote functionality...and serious growth.

In fact, one of the greatest remote pioneer discoveries is this: The more dialed in your process, the fewer emails and meetings you actually need.

By conceptualizing a company remote first, the trailblazers learned to streamline the chain of events that makes an organization most productive, eliminating everything that made office life wasteful, dreadful, and drudgeful along the way. It's important to note that process is itself a form of over-communication. But laying out the minutiae helps free each of us to use our processing power to focus on

more complex problems and get the work done right. In a nutshell, process is the ultimate “ounce of prevention that's worth a pound of cure.”

Processes free up the organization for creativity. Once you've thrown a lasso around everything that's repeatable, you're ready to grow. Process is not just about the lines of digital communication, it's about the way your company translates directives into real-life action. In remote-first organizations, all knowledge is recorded and categorized, so that any single individual can consume that information and perform any role in the organization, without synchronous explanations of any kind.

Building processes is a unique adventure for every department of every organization, but some basic principles guide the way.

- Discover: Ask questions, explore, observe, research
- Design: Do it once for yourself, write it down thinking of and for others
- Deploy: Test, apply, use, get feedback
- Debug: Refine, review, re-apply, re-discover

## Detailed Metrics—Multidimensional Proof

One die-hard principle the remote pioneers all agree on: Setting and measuring crystal-clear KPIs are at the heart of remote sustainability. In fact, remote work has changed the very definition of metrics, because—counterintuitively—it takes vivid and specific, quantitative directives to set workers free from their managers, so that they can perform at their best.

The remote difference is that metrics do not merely function as “grades” or “scores”—they are the signals for instantaneous understanding of the situation at hand. When your data is in order, you can act accordingly inside a week or even a day versus a month or a year, course correcting where necessary while becoming much more nimble than your competitors.

The outcome of all these hard measures is that old-school management metrics like yearly reviews and generalized

feedback are rendered even more redundant than we already knew they were. In the optimized remote environment, every activity is now its own review, and you know where you stand long before some middle manager tells you so.

Every individual contributor inside a company should know exactly what his or her performance is without having to talk to a manager. If someone is unclear about the target or unclear about how quickly to get to that target, both manager and employee have failed.

When you're asynchronous and remote, metrics are the only thing that can differentiate your performance from the performance of others. Charisma doesn't matter, looks don't matter, office politics don't matter. The only thing that matters is how well you perform on your metric—it's the ultimate meritocracy.

Traditional companies usually don't have actual metrics. They have tertiary data or conversations about metrics. Real metrics, when set properly, require no explanation. You can't talk your way out of bad numbers when you're facing remote-first metrics.

You must absolutely free yourself from explaining your metrics. If you have to extrapolate from them, then they are either not simple enough to understand, or, even worse, they're likely vanity metrics—useless puffery that you'd be wise to get rid of anyways. The way async works is different.

Every single person in the organization must have at least one metric that they report on weekly. Not biweekly or monthly or seasonally. It's got to be weekly. Every single one of those reported metrics must have an intended target with a significant chance of failure.

The most important job of a remote-first manager is finding the right metric. Once you find the right metric, you've got your instrumentation to get the company where it needs to go, and the meaning is nonnegotiable.

Which leads to another key dimension: Every metric is quantitative in measurement, not qualitative. "Write a book you feel will help people transition to an asynchronous work style" is not a strong metric. "Writing a book that consistently gets a 4.5 star rating or higher on Amazon" is better.

A metric in its purest form need never be discussed—it is simply reported. If you need to course correct going forward, so be it, but the data is the data.

Every team member in a department needs to be respon-

sible for presenting his or her own metrics and reading the relevant metrics of others each week. If there is a corollary issue that's stopping you from achieving your metric, you must bring up that issue, separately and preferably asynchronously, with a request for the help or resources you need to get your metric on track. In other words, let the metric stand alone, separate from excuses and reasons.

In addition to weekly reports, it's important for top brass to audit these metrics and ask themselves: *Is this really the most important thing we need to talk about inside this business, department, or team? Can two existing metrics be combined to produce a single, stronger indicator? Are there any vanity metrics measuring things we don't really care about?*

If you can't demarcate success or failure, then there is no point in having that metric. Good metrics don't happen by chance. This high-level clarity quickly divides the wheat from the chaff and bypasses the bad mix of vanity, charisma, and bruised feelings that make in-person work ambiguous.

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## Part II: The Timeless Team: Building Remote/Async Culture

### The End of Cities

To be sure, the Async Mindset is not just a technical matter, or even just a work matter. In a development that nobody could have predicted even twenty years ago, the network of collaboration and company culture has moved into a totally digital realm, and the implications for cities—especially tech hubs like Silicon Valley, New York, Toronto, and Austin—are enormous. Just why do we hang on to the primacy of the city office anyway?

In the world of business, the push for innovation is constant—in products, in services, in brands and styles... but ironically, *not in work itself*. For all its great strides and advances, Silicon Valley's business model is fundamentally flawed, in no small part because it is highly dependent upon a series of *homogenizations*: venture capital funding, uniform culture, top-down thinking, and the never-ending yearning for a big exit. This deadly combo sets the tone.

VCs would not invest in remote-first companies because they believed that the only way to build tech unicorns is to have the entire operation under one roof. Fast-forward ten years, and VCs are now tripping over themselves, investing in remote-first companies. They finally discovered that, yes, you really can build and scale a business *not* under one roof.

# No longer can you attract top talent through expensive lunches and swankier offices. The Silicon Valley Epoch has served its historic purpose.

Keep in mind—the VCs didn't embrace the Async Mindset because it finally seemed fun to them. They learned that it is very quickly becoming the only viable model for what they love most—hyper-growth.

It might have once been true that you'd find the best people in San Francisco or New York, but no more. As the very highest-level talent leaves big cities, the new concentration of labor is in a place less easily defined—anywhere and everywhere. Several studies of the Silicon Valley exodus demonstrate the idea that no city is safe from labor loss, but consider the following: Remote work never loses labor due to migration.

What we're experiencing is not merely a seasonal variance. It's the transformation of a generation of workers who are willing to exchange less pay for greater sanity. With that in mind, employers will have to wake up to the changes or find themselves adrift. No longer can you attract top talent through expensive lunches and swankier offices. The Silicon Valley Epoch has served its historic purpose.

The word *global* might sound grandiose, but stepping outside Silicon Valley and putting your business in the cloud is simply the most obvious step a company can take to prepare for hyper-growth. If you need to hire fast, if you need to scale horizontally, if you need 5x or 10x on processes that are already in place, you need to “go out of town”—the planet will always have a talent capacity advantage over your home base.

## On-ramping the Remote Worker

Among the many challenges of building and sustaining a remote work environment, none is more pressing than mastering hiring, on-ramping, and nurturing the new employee. Finding new employees and getting them on-board is no longer a job that an entrepreneur can leave in someone else's hands—old-school human resource models have proven ineffective for the kinds of organizations the remote pioneers built.

To draw in the best people, the remote manager or team leader must go past the usual criteria and understand each

potential employee's unique life challenges, including time management issues, work-life split, higher goals, and more. Paradoxically, it's a process that's a lot more personal than the traditional hiring practice.

Obviously there's no single path to hiring remote, but the following are a couple of indispensable advantages to deploying the Async Mindset when you get down to business.

- **Remote allows you to search for the *most precise fit imaginable*.** Looking for somebody who has had exactly thirteen months of experience counting chickens and is also an expert juggler and a pescatarian? That person is likely out there and remote allows you to find and bring that person on board. Be demanding. You don't have to settle for “close enough” anymore.
- **Gazing at the employee's curriculum vitae won't give you even half the story.** Google them, figure out what they're really about, identify proof of work. Good work leaves evidence, and that evidence is almost always easy to find.
- **People are no longer looking for jobs, they're looking for projects.** Smart managers and workers alike know that projects can turn into jobs and even careers, but remote allows all involved to let the relationship grow at its own pace. Don't cling. Let the talent enter and exit your company as easily as possible.
- **Actively seek out self-starters who are ready to act independently without direction.** Employees who are dependent upon synchronous collaboration to complete their jobs generally won't survive in an async organization. It's a self-starter's game and the industrially needy are often weeded out quicker than they would be in an office.

To find remote workers and help them onboard, do the following:

1. **Build a pipeline.** Utilize job boards as well as your internal customers and friends of employees
2. **Implement an asynchronous job interview.** Al-

ways ask for a CV, but focus on the applicant's proof of work rather than explanations of previous roles.

### 3. Invite your second round to a video interview.

Keep these video interviews brief as you should already know if the person you're interviewing can do the job before the interview starts. Synchronous meetings are where you try to find out who they are.

### 4. Bring in a second interviewer to collaborate.

Don't discuss the candidates until you've both completed the process, so that you can separate signal from noise. If you both have the same conclusions, great. If you don't, you may need another round of interviews.

### 5. Whenever possible, hire on a trial basis.

Hiring remote allows you to actually work with someone right away, before you really start to *work* with them. A few months in, have a "speak now or forever hold your peace" meeting with managers, stakeholders, coworkers and even subordinates to decide if someone is a good fit.

The very act of implementing remote work creates a bellwether within organizations. If you have somebody who's not doing the job, you'll find out far sooner that you would in a traditional office. That speed is doubled in the remote hiring process, where weak links can often be spotted before the person is even seriously considered.

## The Perils of Going Remote...for Companies in Transition

Transitioning companies—those that have previously existed for some time in a colocation office—often find that going remote will be scary. Allow your organization and yourself to evolve into an Async Mindset, and you will see creativity, productivity, and profits grow faster than you ever imagined possible.

Often, the problem is that companies in transition focus on the wrong elements at the beginning. Their line of inquiry tends to reflect a basic misunderstanding about the nature of remote work and, by extension, asynchronous work.

Things like:

- What kind of tools are best for remote?
- How do you deal with conflict in a remote meeting?
- How do you make sure employees stay engaged?

- How do you build company culture in a remote team?

The uncomfortable fact is that these are the wrong questions to ask. When the pandemic pivot happened, there were three giant mistakes many made right out of the gate, all of them interconnected.

The first was not understanding how differently you must communicate in a remote organization. The second was continuing to manage by presence. The third was failing to recognize that the old-school manager has no place in a proper remote-first organization.

As so many of the remote pioneers agree, these companies have put the cart before the horse. A deep Async Mindset and methodology are the first things to work on.

If you don't get a handle on how it's done, you're probably going to get blown right out of the twenty-first century marketplace. From a helicopter view, here are the broad elements you'll need to master for a sound, remote-work transition:

1. **Build an asynchronous communication model before you get started.** How can you annoy your team less so they can do more? It's a question you should be asking yourself ten times a day.
2. **Poll and align your entire team, front-loading them for working in an asynchronous model.** Get everyone on the boat by showing them the real value of the process.
3. **Build and digitize all of your company's processes.** This is tedious at the onset but is the only way to achieve scalability in an office or not.
4. **Develop a reporting structure that allows all workers to report their core numbers to everyone in the organization.** Empower employees with all the data at their fingertips so they can all think like an owner.
5. **Heavily reduce or cancel all meetings about metrics.** Meetings should discuss issues that come out of the numbers, not a place to discuss the numbers.
6. **Measure the rate at which your employees embrace all the adjustments that async work entails.** Provide course corrections as quickly as possible.

The autonomous organization is intertwined through communication, process, and measurement. Regardless of role,

every party is connected to the whole. By being radically transparent and measuring everything inside the organization, and then giving back those measures to everyone, every party is empowered to make independent decisions that move the operation forward.

Going forward, every job that can be made remote will be. It's an operational technological inevitability. It's cheaper, faster, clearer, and smarter.

What this means for the future of work cannot yet be known, but at the very least, it must be accepted that the global landscape is changing, very fast. The old office is just that—old—and it's slated for extinction. The world and its myriad companies are going remote, without a doubt.

Will you be on the winning side or the losing side? That all depends on your willingness to let go of the old ways.

Work is no longer a place—it's something you can take with you, wherever you go. Top-tier talent are becoming digital nomads en masse. They will no longer be set up in one city, state, country, continent, or hemisphere. The sooner you get used to it, the better.



Liam Martin is Chief Marketing Officer at Time Doctor. As the mouthpiece for Time Doctor, Liam has become a remote work ambassador of sorts, featured in Forbes, Inc., Entrepreneur, Business Insider, and Fortune. He speaks at conferences around the world, including SXSW, SaaS Stock, Nomad City, HR of Tomorrow, and The Digital Workplace, and he's consulted with more remote first-founders and operators than probably anyone on the planet. Rob Rawson is Chief Executive Officer of Time Doctor, a workplace solutions firm focused on allowing customers to build distributed teams that can work wherever and whenever they want, so the business can focus on allocating their office-running costs elsewhere.



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