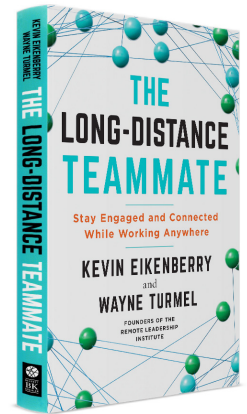


The Long-Distance Teammate

Stay Engaged and Connected While Working Anywhere

by **Kevin Eikenberry and Wayne Turmel**



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THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Even before the coronavirus hit, remote work was growing at nearly 30 percent per year, and now it's just a fact of life. There are many millions of people who once worked at a central location every day who now find themselves facing an entirely new way of working.

Written by the founders of the Remote Leadership Institute, *The Long-Distance Teammate* is the most authoritative single resource for helping remote workers get work done effectively, build relationships that are both productive and satisfying, and maintain a career trajectory when they are not in constant close contact with their leader, co-workers, or the organization in general.

The Long-Distance Teammate tackles three important issues: navigating the personal and interpersonal, growing the skills to be productive, and communicating effectively—all from a distance. In short, there is a big difference between working at home and being an effective member of a team. This practical guide describes that difference and allows you to be a great remote teammate.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- The 3 P Model for remote work success.
- Strategies for staying motivated when you work alone.
- The importance of ethical visibility.
- To lead great remote teammates.

Introduction

The trend toward remote work is undeniable and is happening in more and more types of jobs. Even after the initial COVID-19 response, you're likely facing new ways of working. If you return to the office, it may be only part time, or the person at the next desk who has been there for ages may not be there some or most of the time.

Being a teammate will look very different than it did not too long ago and will continue to evolve.

Working remotely isn't just a new normal—something we must learn to live with—it is an opportunity to work in ways that provide great operational and productivity results for the organization, as well as provide individual teammates with the opportunity to be a part of great results while finding great meaning for themselves, too.

Being a long-distance teammate covers a variety of situations. It could mean being part of a team that will never meet face-to-face, or a team that sees each other a few times a year. It includes hybrid teams, where some work in the same location, and others work elsewhere.

The mindsets, skill sets, and habit sets you need to succeed as a part of a team in any of these situations are more similar than different.

Three Key Words

Three words, teammate, connected, and engaged, are critical to successful, satisfying remote work.

There is a difference between a team member and a teammate. Anyone who shares a manager or works on the same project is a team member. A true teammate is something different and deeper than that. To be a teammate implies a social and emotional connection that goes beyond merely who you report to and work with.

Being connected as a long-distance teammate means connection to the work, your boss, the direction of the organization, and your fellow teammates; more than just technical connections, but interpersonal ones.

Engagement isn't something that is done to you—it is something you choose to do. Engagement is more than employee satisfaction. How much discretionary effort are you putting in? How much of your heart, soul, and effort are you putting into your work? Are you satisfied with just the bare minimum, or are you doing your best most of the time? It will take focus and work to achieve this picture.

PART I: YOU AS A REMOTE TEAMMATE

This part begins with a model that will help you with every part of your life as a remote worker. Then we'll look at the mindset it takes to be a great remote teammate. After that we will get super practical—addressing some of the challenges you face every day: how to stay motivated, manage your time and productivity, and build routines that will support your success.

The 3 P Model for Remote Work Success

When we begin working remotely, we are often energized. No commute! We can work in our Led Zeppelin T-shirt! We can take the kids to school and get so much more done when they're not there!

But after the honeymoon phase, you're left with the day-to-day reality of working without regular social interaction, knowing what is going on, or having access to the boss or your co-workers whenever you want it.

There are three factors that impact the overall quality of remote work. Three areas that, if you give them the attention they deserve, can greatly enhance the quality of your work, enhance your relationships with others, and help you create the kind of workplace and long-term success you desire, even when you don't work in the company's headquarters or right under your boss's nose.

Productivity. Getting tasks accomplished is not the same as being productive. By definition, productivity is the measure of work yielding results, benefits, or profits. It is about outcomes, not activity.

A team member focuses on their work and tasks. A teammate considers not only how to be personally productive to get the most and best work done in the time allotted but how to help the rest of the team and organization meet its goals. At the end of the day, real productivity is about getting more of the right or best things done—not how much time you spent doing it.

Proactivity. Research shows one word that both managers and workers agreed best describe a great remote teammate. That word is proactivity. Proactivity isn't just about tasks; it's also about your mindset.

When you have a question about your work, do you ask for

When we work away from others on our team, it can be hard to see a picture of our work that's beyond what we see right around us.

clarification immediately, or do you just try to work through it? In coaching conversations, do you accept that your manager isn't talking about your personal development plan, or do you raise the subject yourself? When that meeting is running long, do you speak up and try to get the team back on track, or do you sit back, roll your eyes, and go answer your email instead?

Both managers and team members say that the thing they look for most in a teammate is that kind of initiative. It requires bravery, trust, and engagement but may be the single most important component in your long-term success as a remote worker.

Potential. Finally, do you consider the long-term implications of your work and the choices you make? This is perhaps the most difficult thing about working remotely, and often contributes to feelings of isolation and disengagement over time.

What is your goal for this job in the short term? What do you want to accomplish here? How do you feel you can make the biggest contribution, and what are your goals long term? Does it help you build the skills and experience you desire? And how does this role fit into your vision for yourself?

You're already working away from others. If you consider productivity, proactivity, and potential, odds are you'll be more than a remote worker; you'll be a great teammate and member of the organization.

Getting Your Mindset Right

Every day matters. It doesn't matter how you got here. It doesn't matter what the current work or role is, whether this is just a short-term job or gig to help pay for college, or if you don't plan to do this kind of work for long. The work may not connect to the work you love or plan, but the way you think about this job today and the way you do the work will have an impact on your long-term success.

It's not just your job. It's about organizational success. You are a part of an organization. You have been hired, one

way or another, to help create great results for that entity. And so, it is in your best interest to think about your work (and it may be harder when you don't walk into an office with the organization's name on the door) from the perspective of the organization.

You're not just doing the daily work—to be most successful you must think about that daily work in the context of what you bring, not just what you take home every two weeks.

Likewise, it's not just your job; you're part of a team. When we work away from others on our team, it can be hard to see a picture of our work that's beyond what we see right around us. That's one reason why it is easy to forget that we're a part of a larger group.

A critical part of your ultimate success is recognizing your role on the team and making it part of your work every day.

Your job = your work + team work.

The teammate mindset starts with clearer expectations of yourself and from others. Until you see your work in this way, you can never have the kind of success and impact that is possible.

Getting and Staying Motivated When You Work Alone

The good news about working at a distance is that you can (within reason) set your own pace, work on what you need to work on when you are at your best, and not be interrupted by silly questions and unimportant conversations. When you're on your game, you are super-productive, and everyone knows it.

Then there are the other days. Maybe you look at your to-do list and think, "Ugh. Why bother? Nobody notices anyway." Maybe no matter how busy you are, your task list never seems to shrink. Or it seems you haven't spoken to another human being in days.

When you feel this way, it can be hard to do good work, and there's nobody around to help you get past those feelings.

The truth is you are not alone. Let's discuss some tools to snap out of it faster and be in that lull state for shorter periods of time.

Once we realize that a momentary feeling of ennui (which is a fancy way of saying restlessness) or dissatisfaction is normal, we also know that the reasons fall into a few easily identified categories. We feel like we're lacking energy, focus, purpose, and useful feedback.

For example, let's address a lack of energy. One way to keep your energy level up is to not drain yourself. Work with your manager to meet the requirements of the job. Set a realistic, and agreed to, start and stop time for your work, and then walk away. Shut down your computer or close your office door when it's quitting time. If you don't have a door, at least shut down that laptop.

Make sure you set boundaries on how much you will allow yourself to engage with work from your phone during non-working hours.

Here are some other tips for keeping your energy level high:

- Take a break.
- Eat healthier.
- Get physical.
- Talk to someone pleasant.

The Power of Establishing Routines

While a routine can become boring and uninspiring, developing certain habits and duplicating a successful process can have very real benefits.

According to Tracy Kennedy, the personal development expert at Life-hack.org, some of the benefits of establishing a morning and end-of-day routine include increasing productivity, reducing stress, starting the day on the right foot, controlling the day so the day doesn't control you, and balancing your personal and work life better.

How to Build a Healthy, Productive Morning Routine

There is no such thing as a standard, one-size-fits-all way to face the day. But there are some best practices and rules of thumb to establish habits to start your day as a remote worker:

- Give yourself time to breathe and open your eyes before reaching for your phone.

- Be mindful of answering messages before you start work. If you absolutely must respond to an email or a message at the start of the day, make sure it's only that one, and return to your morning.
- Eat a healthy breakfast. Build your dietary habits into your routine, or you'll find yourself grabbing whatever is handy or fastest, and it's seldom the best for you.
- End your day as mindfully as you begin it. If you don't do something to signify you're off duty, your brain will nag at you to keep working. Turn off the lights in your home office. Close your laptop entirely.

PART II: SKILLS TO HELP YOU SUCCEED

This part outlines the skills that take you far beyond technical expertise. In fact, these are the skills that will allow you to work successfully with others—especially in a remote or virtual setting. Being able to build trust, communicate more effectively, set clear expectations, and more will keep you from tearing your hair out. But you can set a higher bar for yourself than that.

This is about helping you engage and connect in new and more profound ways with your work and your teammates. To do that requires you to build and hone a new set of skills.

Getting Clear Expectations for Your Work

While it might seem obvious, when we don't know what is expected of us, it is nearly impossible to succeed. Unfortunately, unclear expectations are the rule more than the exception, especially for remote workers.

This gets directly at "Productivity" from the model: Without clear expectations, how can you even measure your productivity in a meaningful way?

What should be included in "clear expectations"? When you have clarity from your leader (or others) in each of these areas, you can be sure that you are both on the same page: the work itself, the quality of the work, why the work is being done, the timeliness of the work, communication about the work, and how the work is done.

How to Make Expectations Clear

Remember that the responsibility for having clear expectations rests with both parties—whether between you and

your leader, your teammates, or customers. If you aren't clear, you can—and should—do something about it.

If you are ready to be clearer and be kind as you do it, here are a series of steps you can take to create clearer expectations for yourself (and the other person too):

- Ask for time to have the conversation.
- Create a series of questions.
- Be clear on what you need.
- Have an open conversation.
- Write the expectations and metrics down.
- Agree and commit.

Ethical Visibility is about making sure that your work is recognized in the context of the team's work and results.

Creating Great Remote Communication

Communication is inherently harder at a distance. It is hard enough across the desk from each other—and everything that distance adds makes it more challenging. If you want better communication in your work situation, you must recognize that creating better remote communication starts with you.

The main difference between working in a central location and working remotely is that we rely much more heavily on technology to connect us to our teammates when we're apart.

What are the types of tools that all good remote and hybrid teams need to have at their disposal? Key categories include telephony, asynchronous written and text-based communication, synchronous unified communication and collaboration, video conferencing, web meeting and screen sharing tools, project management tools, cloud file-sharing services, and cloud-based customer relationship management (CRM) and enterprise platforms.

Picking the Right Tool

Since you have a seemingly endless array of technology, that means you can choose the right tool from those options. Here are four questions to ask yourself when you are ready to be more intentional about which communication tool to use.

What is the purpose? What am I trying to accomplish with this communication?

What is the timing? Do people need this information right away? What tool gets people's attention fastest? How urgent is it?

What am I communicating? In every case, try to think about what you are actually communicating and how that tool will help.

Who is my audience? If you know that people have a preference, then you might bow to that preference a little bit as long as it still makes sense with the other factors.

Creating Ethical Visibility

One of the unintended consequences of working apart from your manager and your teammates is that you are often out of sight and out of mind. On your best days, this means you're not being interrupted all the time, and you're not being micromanaged or overloaded with tasks.

The flip side of that is you often feel ignored. Are you being considered for that promotion or that special project? Did you get asked for your input on that question? Why were you the last person to hear about that problem? It can feel like you are invisible.

How do you make yourself visible in a positive way to your manager and your teammates without seeming to make everything about you or coming across as vain or egotistical? This balancing act is called "Ethical Visibility."

Ethical Visibility is about making sure that your work is recognized in the context of the team's work and results. Ethical Visibility is,

About the team's/organization's goals, not you.

Make sure that you're using words like "we" and "us." When making suggestions, put them in the context of what the group is trying to achieve, not how smart you are.

Appropriate to the team culture. Being ethically visible means that you stand your ground and contribute

but don't do it in a way that creates unnecessary tension or conflict within the team.

Supportive and positive. Be aware of others and their feelings—and how you might be impacting them.

Judged by behavior, not intent. This is hard to hear, but just because you didn't mean to be rude to Alice might not mean she doesn't think you were rude. Take feedback from others on how they want to be communicated with.

Remember this is harder when you work remotely from your teammates. Realize that being visible to your teammates is critical, and resolve to continually work at this.

Building and Maintaining Relationships

Just because you are by yourself while you work in your home office, at the dining room table, or somewhere else doesn't mean that you are working alone. You are part of at least one team, even if you don't see people except on their profile photo or occasionally on the webcam. And since we are humans and not robots, we will (and must) interact.

Since that is true, whether we are introverts or extroverts, relationships matter in getting your work done.

Let's talk about how to build and maintain relationships when we are remote and not in the next cubicle or down the hall.

Make it a priority. You're busy. If you want to build and maintain relationships, though, you've got to make the effort.

Use multiple communication channels. If you want to invest in and build working relationships, you need to recognize that you need to use more of the tech at your disposal than just what you're used to. You will build relationships faster and more effectively with richer tools—more webcam and less email is a good starting point.

Listen. If you want to improve any relationship, improve your listening skills. If you are only sending emails, you aren't listening in ways that build relationships, so be thinking about your communication options.

Build interaction, not transaction. Ask yourself, "How do I make sure that at the end of our conversations, people feel it was worth their time and they feel valued?"

Let them into your world. Some people have tight bound-

aries, and other people have wide boundaries in relation to what they care to share about themselves (and know about others). Find the right boundaries for yourself and for them.

Giving and Receiving Feedback

Feedback wasn't always plentiful when Norma worked in the office, but occasionally there was some simple acknowledgment from her teammates in the hallway. Now that she is working from home? Nothing. She is deafened by the silence, and without feedback she is left wondering about how she is doing. She is operating under the "no news is good news" theory but is unsure if that is accurate, and she'd really like to know.

The goal of feedback is to provide people with information, data, or observations that will influence them to change their thinking and behavior for mutual benefit. For that to happen, feedback must be heard, understood, accepted, and applied.

How to Give Feedback as a Teammate

Since you don't have the position of boss, how you give feedback to your teammates is exceptionally important. Start with a question that asks permission to share your observations. For example, "Hey, can we talk about how meetings are going? I have some observations." Or "Would you be open to some feedback on X?"

Once you have agreement, here are a few tips to make the feedback you give more effective:

- Make it a two-way conversation.
- Use the phone or the webcam.
- Slow down.
- Stick to the facts.
- Make it meaningful.
- Be specific.
- Be kind.
- Be timely.

PART III: YOU AND YOUR FUTURE

In this section, you'll read about taking care of yourself and planning for your future in a mindful, ethically responsible way. You might feel uncomfortable thinking this way, but

Spend some time on your own spiritual, mental, and social development. What are you doing to help center your own being?

who cares about your work as much as you do? Who is most invested in your future?

Remember that it's okay to balance your work and your personal life in a way that works for you and your family. It's okay to plan now for the next step of your working life, whatever that is. In fact, if you don't, who will?

Taking Care of Yourself

Being a great teammate sounds like a selfless act; we help our managers, we look out for and coach our teammates, and everything is for our customers. What about you? If you're not healthy, motivated, engaged, and relatively sane, it's difficult to be productive, be proactive, or think about the potential of your work.

There are two big areas you need to consider when thinking about self-care: your physical comfort and well-being and work and home life balance.

Your Physical Comfort and Well-Being

Here are some things you can do to make working remotely better for you physically:

- Get enough sleep.
- Stop checking your phone a half hour before bedtime.
- Set a natural rhythm. Find a bedtime and wakeup time that work for your body, and stick to that schedule as much as possible.
- Limit caffeine, alcohol, and sugars before bed.
- Schedule breaks.
- Get outside.
- Eat healthy.

Work and Home Life Balance

Balance isn't some arbitrary formula or perfect destination. Don't get fooled into thinking work-life balance is some magical formula. It's what works so that you are meeting your commitments to your employer, yourself, and those close to you.

Build physical distance between your work and personal space. If you are lucky enough to have a separate work room or home office, make sure that your hobby doesn't also take place in that same space. If you work out of your bedroom, make sure that when you are not working, the laptop is closed and the monitor shut down so that you will be less likely to dive back into work.

Share your passions and outside interests with your teammates and your manager. Do you know what your teammates care about? It gives you something to talk about other than tasks and numbers, and often helps build personal relationships and connections.

Spend some time on your own spiritual, mental, and social development. What are you doing to help center your own being? This isn't some new-age question. It's vital to people that we learn new things and challenge ourselves beyond work.

Managing Your Learning and Growth

You are responsible for your own career development and upgrading your skills. That's true whether you work in an office or from home, miles away from world headquarters. What is unique about working remotely is you may have more control and responsibility for making it happen whether it's part of your "individual development plan" or not.

Many of us have relied on the structure of the workplace and the organization to help us grow our skills. HR sends out notifications about upcoming classes. Your manager works with you on that individual development plan.

You want to grow your skills and become more productive. That requires being proactive and thinking about the potential impact on your work and goals. Learning, developing skills, and growing as a worker and as a human being is how you make the 3 P Model a real, living part of your professional life.

Self-directed learning can take many forms:

Traditional training and learning through your organization. Most organizations have training available in many different forms: traditional classrooms, virtual sessions, e-learning, and more. Talk to your manager and people in your organization about your goals. Go directly to the people in your organization to talk about funding.

Investing in yourself. Just because the organization doesn't have the right course or program or the budget for you doesn't mean that needs to stop you. Break the elephant into bite-sized chunks. While it might be nice to take a whole series of interrelated classes on Excel, start with the introduction, or cherry-pick the specific modules that will most interest or benefit you.

Seek less-expensive alternatives. There is no shortage of content outside your company, from a Harvard MBA to free webinars. While to some extent you get what you pay for, take advantage of low-cost and even free training to begin with. Udemy and LinkedIn Learning are just a couple of places to start.

PART IV: IF YOU LEAD OTHERS

Leading Great Remote Teammates

Many people aren't just leading remote teams; they work remotely themselves. This part is especially for you.

Every leader wears at least three hats, even if they don't think about it, even if some of the hats are gathering dust in the closet: the leader hat, the team member hat, and the communicator hat.

As the leader of a remote team, when you give them oppor-

tunities to step up, especially when they are working remotely, they will. Give them more tangible and meaningful ways to contribute, and they will thrill you with their results.

As a remote team member, think about how your team would grade you as a teammate. And what about the team of your peers? How are you doing in your relationships and trust building with them? How effective are those virtual meetings?

You must take your role as a communication conduit from your team upward and from management downward more seriously, and work at it harder. Make sure you know what is going on with your team, not just with the work but also with their emotions and stress. Hone your communication skills for sharing organizational messages, too.

The world of work has changed and is changing constantly. Working remotely using technology is part of that change. When you help people engage and connect, everyone wins. At an individual level, work becomes more meaningful and purposeful. As a team, you will be more successful and perhaps have some fun.

The organization and the people they serve win, too.

IF YOU LIKED THIS SUMMARY, YOU MIGHT ALSO LIKE:

- *The Long-Distance Leader: Rules for Remarkable Remote Leadership* by Kevin Eikenberry, Wayne Turmel
- *The Power of Presence: Unlock Your Potential to Influence and Engage Others* by Kristi Hedges



Kevin Eikenberry is a recognized world expert on leadership development and learning and is the Chief Potential Officer of The Kevin Eikenberry Group. He has been named twice by Inc.com as one of the Top 100 Leadership and Management Experts in the World and has been included in many other similar lists. He is the author, the co-author, or a contributing author of nearly 20 books. Wayne Turmel has had many careers, including standup comic, car salesman, and co-founder of the Remote Leadership Institute. He's the author or co-author of over a dozen books.

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