

# The Definitive Guide to Remote Mentoring

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# Introduction

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**The world is in a weird place right now.** Our normal lives have been upended and replaced with self-isolation and social distancing—terms we had never even taken a chance to consider previously.

While some people may see this change as a much-needed break from the daily grind, others may feel they're being punished with house arrest.

It's also a moment in which, for many, our personal and professional lives are conflating. For those who have never worked from home or remotely before, this is a curveball they weren't expecting and not necessarily prepared for. While the initial adjustment to working from home can be tough, especially given the current self-quarantine climate, it is possible to stay productive, continue making progress toward goals, and come out of this temporary situation—we want to underline that, temporary—feeling accomplished and ready to take on whatever comes next.

**We wrote this guide to help both you and your organisation—both during and after this crisis—learn how to function effectively and efficiently while remote.**

This means taking the current climate into consideration in order to understand employees' unique needs, and implementing best practices now that can be used when we're out of this mess. That's because, as we'll discuss in these pages, many organisations are already deciding to keep part, if not all of their workforce remote after restrictions have been lifted.

We hope both leaders looking to implement changes at an organisational level, as well as team members in mentoring relationships looking for continued growth, can take away something useful from this guide. Because no matter what level we're at in our respective businesses, we're all equally impacted by this shift to remote work.



# VUCA Characterizes our Current Climate; Here's How to Deal with It

## What the heck is VUCA, you might ask?

VUCA is an acronym that stands for Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity, combining four distinct challenges that have four respective responses. It's generally used as a catchall for "whoa, it's crazy out there!"—perfect for how we're feeling right now.

Let's explore all four aspects of VUCA as something your team members (and quite likely you) are experiencing right now, and how your business can respond to each.

### Volatility

Volatility occurs when something is unexpected and/or unstable and may last for an unknown duration (in other words, exactly what we're experiencing now!). Compared to other aspects of VUCA, volatile situations are not necessarily hard to understand as information is often readily available. As contributing writer to Forbes Jeroen Kraaijenbrink puts it, "The more volatile the world is, the more and faster things change."

So how can we deal with volatility? A lot depends on how prepared our organisations were before volatility struck, which means a proactive, as opposed to reactive response, is better when it comes to volatility. For example, if your organisation was already part-time or full-time remote—meaning you already had all the tools in place in order for your employees to work from home—then the volatility presented by the current circumstances would be easier to manage. For those having to take a reactive approach, however, now's the time to start preparing for the months to come. Since we don't know how long this situation could last, getting the tools, communication practices, remote work standards, etc. in place for your business now can help make the path ahead much smoother and less volatile.

## Uncertainty

This is probably one of the most challenging aspects of VUCA—at least it is for us! As [Harvard Business Review \(HBR\)](#) puts it, uncertainty can be characterized by the following: “Despite a lack of other information, the event’s basic cause and effect are known. Change is possible but not a given.”

In order to deal with uncertainty, companies can invest in information by collecting, interpreting, and sharing it. HBR notes that “this works best in conjunction with structural changes, such as adding information analysis networks, that can reduce ongoing uncertainty.” By obtaining as much information as possible regarding what this new change in circumstance will mean for your company, and sharing that information with your team members, your employees will have more clarity as to where your organisation—and where they themselves—stand.

## Complexity

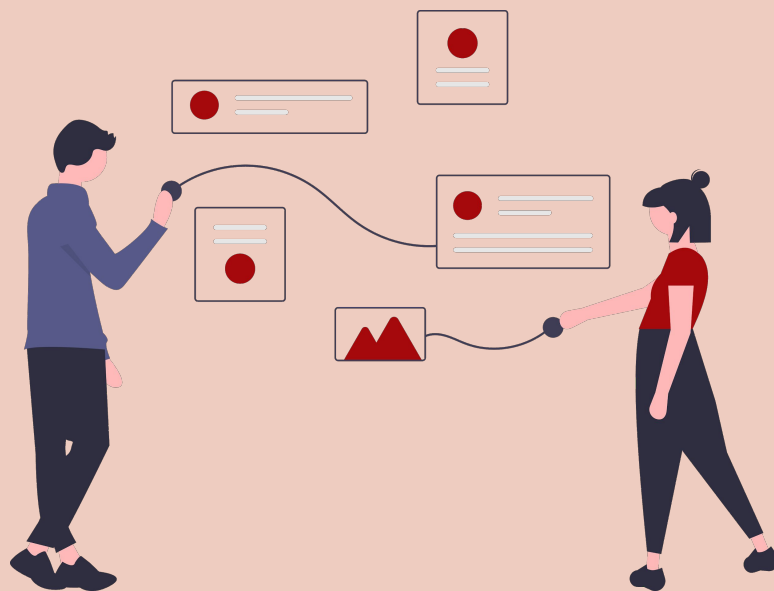
A complex situation is one in which the situation has many interconnected parts and variables. “Some information is available or can be predicted, but the volume or nature of it can be overwhelming to process.” Exactly.

The best way to handle complexity is to first build up resources that are adequate to address said complexity. What resources do you already have that can help you out? What do you need to go out and search for? Do you need to hire externally or develop a specialist in-house who can simplify your business’s specific complexity? Do parts of your organisation need to be restructured in this new climate?

## Ambiguity

Ambiguity is also a great way to describe the current situation, one in which “no precedents exist; you face ‘unknown unknowns.’”

So what can you do? Explore and experiment. Now is the perfect time to test out new ways of working together and collaborating as a team. After all, as HBR notes, “understanding cause and effect requires generating hypotheses and testing them.” However, make sure you design your experiments so that lessons learned can be broadly applied. What’s one exploration project you can run? Implementing a program that can bring your team closer together while creating a sense of solidarity during these tough times (\*cough, cough\* mentoring).



# The New Normal:

## Remote/Flexi Work and How it Differs from Working while Quarantined

Prior to the outbreak, many HR teams had been working to convince leadership to take on a bolder, more flexible working arrangement. The necessity for a remote work arrangement now, as part of a business continuity plan, may be a crucial trial or litmus test for a broader, longer-term policy.

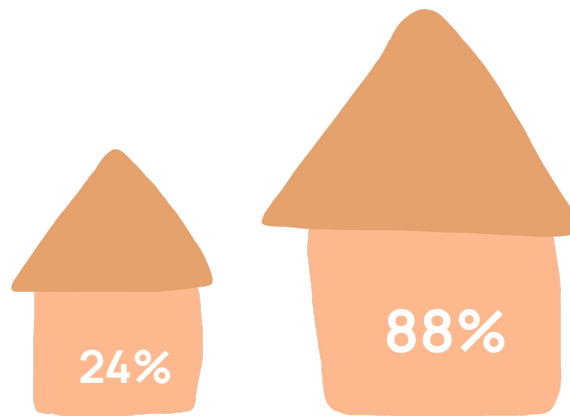
Naturally, leaders, even in high-tech companies, may be afraid of flexi-work. But the question now is, how do you create a business continuity plan without it? Because, given the current circumstances, it's now an underlying need.

### The Remote Work Litmus Test

The latest telework statistics available from the [Australian Bureau of Statistics](#) indicate that, prior to the COVID-19 crisis, around one-quarter of Australian workers (24%) worked at least part of their time from home, even if only informally.

Additionally, as recently as 2018—despite the fact that remote workers are happier than those who work on-site in an office—44% of global companies didn't allow any remote work at all.

However, in the current climate, a [Gartner, Inc.](#) survey of 800 global HR executives on March 17, 2020 found that 88% of organisations have encouraged or required employees to work from home due to coronavirus.



“As the COVID-19 crisis disrupts organisations across the globe, HR leaders must respond quickly and comprehensively, considering both immediate and long-term talent consequences,” said Brian Kropp, chief of research for the Gartner HR practice. “Our research shows that only a minority of employers plan to downsize or ask employees to take unpaid leave. Instead, most organisations are focusing on measures such as more effective use of technology and freezing new hiring to cut costs.”

The COVID-19 situation has also forced our leaders to work remotely. For many HR managers this is helpful because after this episode is over, they can go back to the leaders and ask them: ‘How did it work out?’; ‘Did your fear of flexi-work manifest or were they baseless fears?’

This could potentially help you further your flexi-work arrangement policy. In fact, another [Gartner survey](#) found that 74% of CFOs say they expect to move at least 5% of their previously on-site workforce to permanently remote positions post-COVID-19.



## Remote Work vs. Working While Quarantined

However, it's important to remember that general flexi- or remote work is different from working while being quarantined—and the effects on employees can be huge.

That's because the psychological differences between the two are vast. One of the main contributing stressors? The lack of choice in the matter.

Whereas “working from home” is a phrase typically given to a temporary action of working from your home—rather than the office—due to extraordinary circumstances such as natural disasters, illness, and the like, “working remotely” is usually more of a permanent circumstance. Some people work remotely by choice, and conversely, some don't.

Working remotely seems to be something millennials want because it represents freedom—freedom to work from somewhere that may specifically not be home, nor an office. While this, of course, applies to non-millennials too, it's common to say you're “working remotely” if it's from a cafe, a place you're travelling or living abroad, or even a coworking space.

When you're working from home or working remotely due to being quarantined, however, this element of freedom is taken from you, which may lead some team members to panic.

This is another one of the many reasons why we've decided to write this guide: To help your team, leaders, and organisation as a whole learn how to ensure everyone is connected and that both our individual and collective wellbeing is preserved during these trying times.

Let's get started.

# Part 1: For Leaders

The COVID-19 situation is not something permanent—it will go away. The economy will rebound, businesses will recover, and eventually, our lives will return to the way they were before, even if they look a little different.

But until then, every leader has a role to play. It's important to first note what your team members (and most likely you yourself) are feeling right now. Those feelings of VUCA—volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity—are to be expected.

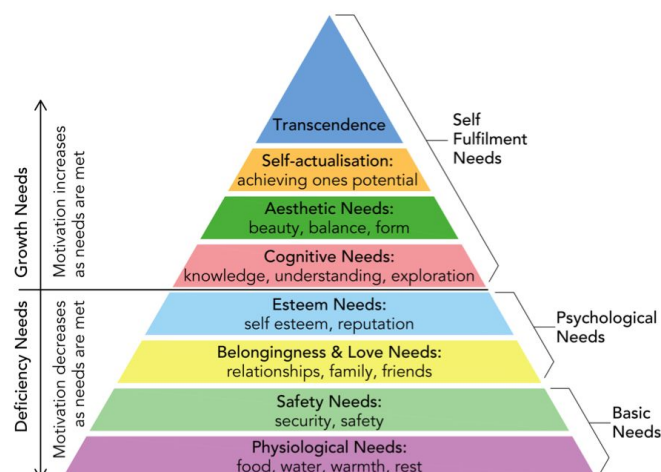
Therefore the “immediate part” of dealing with these feelings, especially uncertainty, is to support employees—whether they be on the frontlines or working corporate jobs from home. When it comes to your business continuity planning, you might be implementing a HR-led split-team and/or flexible work arrangements for team members.

For the mid-to-long-term, when the economy rebounds, the organisations that will get back on their feet the fastest are thinking about what they can do now to prepare for the coming rebound. This way, they'll come out ahead of the competition when the storm has finally passed.

## Leading with Empathy

Going beyond just policy to support employees will be a major part of these efforts being successful. In this time of need, people are afraid, and addressing that concern is now a basic necessity.

In Maslow's hierarchy of needs, safety is basic.



After physiological needs like food, water, warmth, and rest, safety needs *need* to be met. Only then can people begin to focus on other concerns, which is why tackling and talking about your team members' immediate worries head-on is necessary.

If leaders don't address these concerns, other facets of employees' work lives, like attention-span, communication, and productivity, will fall through the cracks.

According to [Forbes](#), one of the best approaches you can take is to first put yourself in your employees' shoes. Given all the recent layoffs, it's reasonable for your team members to feel on-edge; how would you be feeling about your and your family's economic well-being if you thought being laid off was a possibility?

Next, lead with empathy and deliver the compassionate leadership your employees expect during these times.

*“People don't want good intentions from their leaders during times of uncertainty; they want their leaders to be not only strong, confident and decisive, but transparent and vulnerable enough in their leadership role to express a sense of genuine care and concern.”*

One component of compassionate leadership is continuous communication. By communicating often, leaders are not only able to neutralise uncertainty, they provide their employees with knowledge, reassurance, and unique perspectives.

This communication from the organisation's leaders can also bolster employee engagement, as team members are empowered by continuous insight and clarity into the situation at hand while being given as much "direction, certainty, and involvement as possible." Why does this type of information empower employees and increase their engagement? Because it shows that leadership respects and values their team members.

And no, this type of leading with empathy approach *will not* diminish your authority; in fact, this approach will strengthen your executive presence while earning your employees' respect.

When people believe and trust that you're showing them genuine care and concern, they will support other initiatives you roll out. Before focusing on the future and how your organisation will recover once this storm has passed, start with immediate needs and give your employees the support they need.



# Combating Loneliness & Isolation

It probably comes as no surprise that loneliness is one of the biggest struggles when working remotely.

According to Buffer's [2018 State of Remote Work](#), remote workers have some unique struggles to work through. Loneliness (21%), collaborating and/or communicating (21%) and distractions at home (16%) are the biggest struggles for remote workers.

Although being alone is not the only cause of loneliness, it can be a significant contributor. It's also a [dangerous and growing epidemic](#) that scientists are taking seriously. In fact, Cigna, an American insurance company, reported in 2019 that [61% of Americans over the age of 18 are lonely](#) and that loneliness had increased since its [2018 study](#).

When it comes to loneliness, [Gallup](#) research states it's important that managers first know the difference between loneliness and isolation. Whereas loneliness is an emotional response to a lack of connection, isolation is structural and related to access—or lack thereof. For example, a lonely person can feel just as lonely in a crowd or alone at home, whereas an isolated person “can't get the materials or information they need, they think their achievements or development are ignored, they feel cut off from the business”. Loneliness can contribute to isolation and isolation can contribute to loneliness.

And there can be a doubling down of these feelings—both loneliness and isolation—during times of social distancing and quarantine.

In fact, a paper for the Lancet entitled “The psychological impact of quarantine and how to reduce it: rapid review of the evidence”, found that one of the main stressors during quarantine was, indeed, frustration and isolation:

**Confinement, loss of usual routine, and reduced social and physical contact with others were frequently shown to cause boredom, frustration, and a sense of isolation from the rest of the world, which was distressing to participants. This frustration was exacerbated by not being able to take part in usual day-to-day activities, such as shopping for basic necessities or taking part in social networking activities.**

So what can you do as a team leader and/or program coordinator to help your employees stay sane and mitigate the consequences of quarantine? How can you address both loneliness and isolation? The researchers offered a few solutions.

## **1. Stave off Boredom**

In order to reduce feelings of loneliness and isolation, you should give team members practical advice on coping and stress management techniques, as well as some things they can do in order to stave off boredom. Maybe your company can create an in-house or community-sourced living document (think Google Docs) of great online classes, free reading resources, podcasts, and other things employees can access at any time.

## **2. Focus on Altruism**

Researchers pointed out that social distancing, self-isolation, and/or choosing to work from home during times like these can lead to feelings of altruism, “feeling that others will benefit from one’s situation can make stressful situations easier to bear and it seems likely that this is also true for home-based quarantine”. Therefore, if team members are continuously reminded that working from home is in service to the greater good (read: not putting the at-risk at higher risk nor overloading the health care system), they may feel more at peace with the need to do so.

### 3. Connect, Connect, Connect!

Ensuring that your team members are connected to one another via online communication platforms, video conferencing tools, and mentoring programs can help your company create a strong social network that supports employees both professionally *and* personally. This is especially important seeing as researchers found that an inability to activate one's social network during times like these, albeit remotely, "is associated not just with immediate anxiety, but longer-term distress".

Begin by pairing up remote workers to help combat loneliness while improving collaboration and communication between team members. Creating and encouraging employees to become involved with a community and build new relationships is essential in times like these.

*There is evidence to suggest that support groups specifically for people who were quarantined at home during disease outbreaks can be helpful. One study found that having such a group and feeling connected to others who had been through the same situation could be a validating, empowering experience and can provide people with the support they might find they are not receiving from other people.*

- The Lancet





Here are some creative ways to keep your people connected.

### 3a. Encourage Online Event Attendance

One of the positives that have come out of this crisis is the proliferation of online seminars and workshops...most of which are free! Ranging from mindfulness and meditation to navigating relationships during quarantine and how to be creative in isolation, there are truly a plethora of options. Here are some of our favourites:

- **Creative Mornings** (“field trips” include everything from deep work to writing a book)
- **Second Home** (weekly masterclass sessions on creativity, money management, etc.)
- **Virtual Museum Tours** (including The British Museum, Guggenheim, The Broad, etc.)
- **Heights “Working In” Series** (live masterclasses on brain health, mental wellness, mindset, and more)
- **Glow Up Gang** (seminars on resumes, relationships, cooking, and more!)

Encourage your team members to attend these online events in pairs or small groups, and then have them schedule a 15-30 minute chat afterwards to share what they learned, what they liked about the seminar, what surprised them, etc. By participating in these educational workshops together, your people will feel more connected, that they have someone to keep them accountable to implement new skills learned, and that they’re putting their time to good use!

### 3b. Create a Challenge

Whether you use a TikTok dance challenge to spur some healthy interdepartmental competition, a workout challenge to keep your team fit, a **mindfulness and meditation** challenge to keep them centred, or an arts and crafts-related challenge to keep them creative;;, having fun, lighthearted challenges offered to everyone can not only bring people a sense of community, it can encourage them to try new things, together!

### 3c. Have a Virtual Happy Hour

Winding down is just as important as getting our work done during this time. Encourage teams to interact in not just a professional, but in a personal manner as well by suggesting weekly virtual happy hours where individuals can destress and share what they're doing when they're not logged on. You can also incorporate online games like [trivia](#), [Jackbox](#) or [Codenames](#) into your virtual happy hours to mix things up!

### 3d. Sign Up for Virtual Mentoring

Seeing as work is no longer a place, but a state of mind, leaders can ensure they're supporting their people to reduce loneliness while encouraging collaboration, productivity and purpose with a [virtual mentoring program](#). Your people will be paired with a fine-tuned algorithm, communicate, upload tasks and events, set goals, access resources, and keep track of their progress directly in one easy-to-access platform. This ensures your team remains supported while building a sense of belonging and continuity that brings the watercooler to the remote office.

In general, a mentoring program can not only help keep people connected in uncertain times, but they also provide new opportunities for relationships beyond employees' family units or immediate teams. This access to others who may be experiencing similar challenges when it comes to this new way of working can allow team members to then go back and share insights with their own teams. It can also provide people with a sense of purpose, goal-setting opportunities, a healthy dose of team spirit, and a feeling of progression in times where it might not feel that way.

Remember, when it comes to connection, it's not the method you choose to implement, but the simple act of ensuring your people are connected that counts. Now is a more important time than ever to bring people closer while still keeping them at least 1.5 metres apart.

[Discover how you can build a virtual mentoring program with Mentorloop.](#)

# Maintaining and Measuring Productivity

This new flexi/remote work situation can not only be incredibly uncomfortable for those who have never worked in this way, it can make leaders uncertain if it will impact productivity.

According to [Harvard Business Review](#) (HBR), productivity “can be maintained, even enhanced, because commutes and office distractions are gone.”

In order to maintain—and hopefully enhance—that productivity, first we’d like to offer a few suggestions for both you and your team members on how to deal with common work-from-home distractions, especially if partners and/or children are at home too, and then we’ll discuss how to measure your employees’ productivity and support them in their work during these times

## Dealing with Distractions

Even if they’re well-versed at working from home, having a partner and/or children at home with team members *all day* can present new struggles. Here are some of our recommendations for these truly unprecedented times that you can offer to employees.

### 1. Create a Routine

It doesn’t have to be traditional, it just has to be theirs. Ensure that employees are baking their families and/or partners into their routines so that everyone in their household is on the same schedule! For example, let’s say Sue starts her day at 8:00am, eats breakfast with her family from 8:30-9:00, buckles down to work from 9:00-12:30, takes an hour break to eat lunch and play with her kids or does a fun activity with her partner, and then continues to work from 1:30-5/5:30. Establishing a daily routine like this will not only help team members stick to their working hours, but will help their families respect those hours that they have to put in..

## 2. Designate a Work Space

This is essential, especially if other people are at home with employees. Whether it's a designated home office or their kitchen table, make sure they designate an area—or areas—as their workspace. For example, I start my day at the kitchen table, move to the counter a.k.a. my “standing desk”, and then make my way outside to the patio to finish up my workday. By having your team members let those at home know what areas they'll be working from and when, roommates or family members will be able to better respect their “work zone” and steer clear when they need to focus

## 3. Take Breaks

Breaks are essential to our mental health and productivity, so make sure you have your employees take them when they need them! Whether it's to stretch their legs by walking around the house or doing a quick 15-minute yoga session, have them do what they need to do to make mental space. Literally give them a break during these times—it's necessary!

## Measuring Productivity

HBR reminds us that first and foremost, it's important that we trust our employees.

*“The best way to find out if you can trust somebody is to trust them.”*

*- Ernest Hemingway*

As managers and team leaders won't be able to see what their team members are doing at this time, they'll have to trust that by equipping them in the right ways and with the right tools, employees will be able to not only survive—but thrive.

Continue to give your employees tasks and check-in with them as you've always done, with hopes that they'll continue to produce in the ways you want them to; as HBR reminds us, "There's no reason to believe that, in this new environment, people won't do the work that they've been assigned."

When it comes time to review team members on their work, since you won't be able to monitor the process, remember that your review will have to be outcome-based.

Remember, remote work has been around for a long time and will continue to be practised even after self-quarantine has ended. Thankfully, today we have the technology to get our work done all while communicating and collaborating effectively and in real-time. Implement the tools you need to share best practices, learn from new people, store and capture data, continue important work conversations, and **connect with one another** to make the most of your time physically apart.



# Achieving Business Continuity and Agility

Seeing as everything seems to be changing on a daily basis, and there's no real knowing what's coming next or how our businesses—and therefore our people—will have to adjust, focusing on business continuity and keeping our organisations agile is incredibly important now more than ever.

## Business Continuity

Keeping our businesses running while governments and employers have been scrambling to contain the spread of COVID-19 and keep things operational is a challenge, to say the least.

Companies worldwide are doing their best to stay operational, considering the uncertain impact of the outbreak. When it comes to your organisation, your HR and finance departments will play key roles.

HR should be quite involved in setting up all of your business's new operations, including the business continuity plan. They will also play a very big role in the emergency response team, such as guidelines being implemented for new split-team initiatives.

Your HR department should support flexible working hours and working from home where possible during this public health emergency, while also complying with legal requirements to ensure the health and safety of staff.

Tasked with a different but equally important mandate, finance departments will need to revise budgets for 2020, at least the first half of the year, depending on industry, while still needing to meet operational costs.

## Business Agility

As you may already know, the term business agility refers to the capability of an organisation to be flexible, adaptive, and creative when in a changing environment. Agile companies can respond quickly to both threats and opportunities when they arise. Especially given the reaction to COVID-19, organisations have had to employ greater agility on very short notice.

According to Workable, agile businesses are customer-centric, nurture a growth mindset, and reinforce stable team dynamics.

What does that look like during this current crisis?

- **Customer-centricity:** Realising your customers are just as uneasy and uncertain as you are at this time, and therefore communicating in a way that leads with compassion, understanding, and transparency.
- **Growth mindset:** Remembering that failure is a part of the learning process; it doesn't hinder progress, it helps teams operate more efficiently in the long run.
- **Stable team dynamics:** Coordinating teams in order to respond collectively to this crisis and all the changes that come with it. This means that there is a greater need now more than ever for stable internal processes and systems, as well as clarity when it comes to task division and who is the point person for which responsibilities.

While working to make your business more agile during this time, Workable suggests you focus on the following three areas: Employee needs, customer expectations, and economic uncertainty.

## 1. Employee Needs

Right now, your organisation needs to adapt to employee needs, namely: staying healthy, feeling safe, and being close to their loved ones (if they can). This might mean your business needs to start crafting policies specific to COVID-19 or creating a crisis management team with members representing different departments. You may have already built or **adapted work-from-home policies**, or **expanded your virtual tools** to transition to a fully remote workplace. Because regulations and precautions are changing day-to-day, management needs to be available to listen as employees continue to identify new needs, and then act as quickly as possible to meet them.

## 2. Customer Expectations

Because consumer behaviour has been affected, businesses need to adapt. Whether that means offering digital solutions instead of physical goods, or adapting your services to meet people where they are now—online. Maybe you can expand delivery services or offer one of your solutions as a free service in order to help people adapt to this new way of living and working. Whatever course of action your organisation decides to take, make sure to listen to customers first, then fix inefficiencies and adjust solutions or services second. From there, continue to stay in touch with your customer base and build those crucial relationships.

## 3. Economic Uncertainty

When it comes to your company's economic status right now, it's important to continue to be active, competitive and—most importantly—resilient. How will your cash flow change? Are your offerings useful to consumers right now? If not, can you transform them in some way to make them more relevant? How will you proceed after this crazy time has passed? What are your competitors doing? Can you stay ahead of the innovation curve? This experience will help bring your organisation's pros and cons to light, illuminating all areas you can improve upon in the future.



# Remote Work Tools for Business

As the Gartner survey previously cited made mention, effective use of technology can cut costs, but it can also help your team be more productive and connected. Here are a few tools we use and recommend.

## Team Communication

Messaging platforms like [Slack](#) can help streamline team communication pertaining to everything from department-specific projects to organisation-wide check-ins. Not only can Slack help you create and maintain focused conversations, but it can also reduce the endless stream of emails clogging up your inbox.

## Video Conferencing

Video conferencing applications like [Google Hangouts Meet](#), [Google Hangouts](#), [Skype](#), and [Zoom](#) can help your team collaborate in real-time and have conversations virtually face-to-face. The former is even offering its premium paid features free for a limited time to help businesses keep operating remotely as they're impacted by the coronavirus. Mentorloop's video conferencing integration, makes it even easier to stay in touch.

## Project Management

Project management tools like [Trello](#) and [Asana](#) can make keeping projects moving forward intuitive and hassle-free. Use them to see exactly where your initiatives are at in real-time, assign people to certain tasks, and keep everyone on schedule and making progress.

## Mentoring

With no face time in the office, employees should be encouraged to maintain regular, intentional, peer-to-peer interactions—both personal and professional. [Virtual mentoring programs](#) can help with this task, providing additional virtual check-ins and creating new ways of working together and learning from one another. It can also help ensure all of your people are connected, engaged, setting goals, and achieving them.

One great way to build this type of community is with a digital mentoring program. If you've been on the fence about implementing one at your company up to this point, now's the time to start! Given the current circumstances, a virtual mentoring program like [Mentorloop](#) can not only help team members learn from one another and grow together, it can connect them at a time when social interaction is at a minimum.

Virtual mentoring programs offer a plethora of benefits. Your business will be able to provide mentoring access to anyone, anytime, even if a team member lives in a remote location—someone who might not otherwise have access to a mentor. There's also the flexibility that digital mentoring programs provide; there's no travel time associated with meeting up, and mentor and mentee can keep in touch even when away and/or no longer in their usual workplace (like now!). What's more, both mentoring partners can come to one another when they're willing, ready, and able to engage in a meaningful, productive conversation.

## Ready to build a culture of mentoring in your organisation?

[Get in touch](#)

# Wrapping Up

Ultimately, when it comes to leading remotely or at a distance, it's important that as a business leader you:

## 1. Over-communicate

When in doubt, over-communicate! As it is between the government and the public, communication is essential between your company and its employees now more than ever. During times of uncertainty, seeds of doubt are easily planted, so it's important to keep lines of communication wide open in order to quell those doubts and put minds at ease.

It's critical to communicate what's happening at an organisational level too, including what's happening at the company, with clients, and with your common objective. Communication surrounding this is extremely important, so share more about what's going on in all departments—not just the one your team members are a part of—to ensure that employees constantly and consistently feel like they know what's going on, where they stand, and what's expected of them.

## 2. Be accessible

Ensure that no team member feels like they have less access to you than others; be accessible and available to everyone equally. You have a unique opportunity to lead by example and connect to your team in a new, meaningful way. So take advantage of this opportunity and, when starting out on this (new) remote work adventure, check in with your team members on a regular basis to see how they're managing this new way of working—and living.

### 3. Connect team members to each other

Ensure that employees feel connected to their peers. This can be accomplished via virtual team happy hours, an organized schedule of one-on-one catch-ups, and/or a peer-to-peer mentoring program. The latter not only encourages meaningful and constructive conversation, it creates shared goals, provides learning opportunities, and builds a network of support everyone can rely on.

### 4. Make everyone feel heard

When you run your group meetings, aim for inclusion and balance the airtime so everyone feels seen and heard. In your agenda, include time for everyone's feedback and input regarding the most pressing topics. This will allow every one of your team members to feel like their opinion is valued by you and valuable to the company overall.



Leading in a new way in times like these can feel overwhelming, but you should know that there's a lot of support in terms of available resources and people who've been there and done that that can help! Tap into these rich in-house wells of knowledge and help your team members come out of this transitional period shining stars!



Part 2:  
**For Mentors  
& Mentees**

Unprecedented times like these are when we need to plug into our support systems more than ever.

When it comes to our professional lives, things have been upended—you may have started **working from home** for the first time or have had to learn how to bring every aspect of your job online. These unexpected shifts may have thrown off career goals mentees had planned with their mentors, or at least put them on hold.

It's not uncommon to feel uncertain about what the future of your career holds given this recent upheaval of norms. That's where a mentoring partner comes in.

Mentoring relationships have two main functions: career and psychosocial. Here's how mentoring partners can help with both during this time.

## Career Focus

If you're a mentee, you'll want to get together with your mentor to discuss how the adaptation to remote work—whether it be just-for-now or will be more long-term—affects the career map you created together. How does this affect your goals, if at all? Do you need to adapt them or change your timeline given the current climate? Will this mean you will have to pivot your overall strategy, or simply make adjustments in the short-term?

Your mentor can help walk you through these challenges and any other unexpected hiccups. It's more likely than not that they too have had to pivot and change course at some point in their own careers—that firsthand experience will come in handy especially now as they help you navigate this shift.

## Psychosocial Focus

As Harvard Business Review (HBR) notes, in ordinary circumstances, many mentors focus more on the career functions of mentoring, and while those remain important, psychosocial functions of mentorship are especially valuable in uncertain times. Psychosocial functions of mentoring include a focus on emotional support, affirmation, acceptance, reassurance and friendship; they “tap into empathy and compassion and involve deliberate expressions of care”.

How can mentoring partners demonstrate psychosocial support to one another?

### 1. Listening

In order to demonstrate emotional and social support, it's important that both parties begin by offering to listen generously. After all, it's only when we listen that we are able to hear and really understand our mentoring partner's unique struggles and concerns.

### 2. Acknowledgement & Validation

Once we've heard these struggles and concerns, it's paramount that we next acknowledge the distress our partner is feeling and validate the changes they are facing and will need to make. Be a sounding board and support their decisions in order to help them move forward.

### 3. Acknowledgement & Validation

Being vulnerable is one of the most important ways we can show up for each other right now. Authentically sharing our own experiences during this shutdown of normal work processes and procedures can help create an environment of mutual understanding. As HBR suggests, “Discuss how the break in physical routines, the restricted access to others, and the bombardment of information can feel overwhelming and isolating.”

## 4. Support + Affirmation

If you're a mentor, ensure your mentee knows that you're there to provide support. Be clear about which ways you can help and which ways you can't, and affirm their need to take breaks from work routines, news consumption, etc. in order to engage in self-care.

## 5. Humour

Last but not least, humour can go far in tense circumstances like these. While you will be discussing heavy topics with your mentoring partner in the coming weeks and months, try to always end your conversations on a light, happy note. After all, this situation is temporary.

## Helping Others Helps Ourselves

The cherry-on-top of being there for your mentoring partner during this time is that it's **scientifically proven** that the people who cope best during a crisis are those who help others.

Having a sense of purpose, being generous, and giving support to others can have a significant impact on our well-being, including reduced anxiety. This **"helper's high"** consists of positive emotions following selfless service to others, leading to greater health and increased longevity for the giver.

Ultimately, participating in a mentoring relationship during times like these can lower anxiety about future prospects, and help partners share hopeful visions of not only making it through these tough times, but continuing to thrive in their careers once the storm has passed.



# That Uncomfortableness You're Feeling, is Grief

If you and/or your mentoring partner have had a weird feeling lately—one you can't quite place—in which you're saddened, and maybe even at times distraught, anxious and uneasy, and sometimes simply overcome, you're not alone.

That discomfort you're feeling is most likely grief. And if we can name it, maybe we can manage it.

It's important to remember that what you and your team are doing now is **not simply remote work**, it's finding ways to cope in an unprecedented global emergency.

In a recent interview David Kessler did with the **Harvard Business Review**, the grief expert shared that “we are not used to this kind of collective grief in the air.” This collective grief is for a changing world—something temporary that doesn't quite feel temporary while we're in it—a realization that things will be different, a grief for a loss of normalcy and a loss of connection, accompanied by a fear of economic turmoil.

We're also feeling anticipatory grief, “that feeling we get about what the future holds when we're uncertain”, and unhealthy anticipatory grief can really just be another form of anxiety:

**Our primitive mind knows something bad is happening, but you can't see it. This breaks our sense of safety. We're feeling that loss of safety. I don't think we've collectively lost our sense of general safety like this. Individually or as smaller groups, people have felt this. But all together, this is new. We are grieving on a micro and a macro level.**

That's a lot.

In order to help manage it, it's important to first understand the stages of grief (remember these aren't linear and may not happen in order). In relation to our current situation, these include:

- **Denial:** "This virus won't affect me."
- **Anger:** "Why do I have to stay home and can't live my normal life?!"
- **Bargaining:** "If I social distance for two weeks then I can get back to my life, right?"
- **Sadness:** "I have no idea when this will end."
- **Acceptance:** "This is happening; I have to figure out how to proceed."

Acceptance is where we find power; it's when we make this crappy situation work for us, instead of giving it all the power and say-so. When we accept, we can control—we can make the most out of present circumstances, finally get to the tasks we've had on hold, learn how to work remotely, find creative outlets, and more.

## Finding Acceptance

At times, acceptance can feel illusory. But there are things we can do in order to find it.

First and foremost, let go of what you can't control—the policies your government is putting into place and how your neighbors are dealing with this—and focus on what you *can* control.

Next, focus on how this is *temporary*; no, it won't last forever. We've lived through pandemics before and we'll live through this one.

And when we're feeling particularly overwhelmed by anticipatory grief, it's important to come back to the present. As you're probably familiar with if you've ever practised meditation, coming back into the body, focusing on our breath and all the things in your immediate presence can help put the mind at ease. None of the worst-case-scenarios you've imagined have happened here in the present moment.

# How to Support Your Mentoring Partner



## Be Understanding

Understand that your mentoring partner will react to this situation in their own way. While some people will want to share more personal aspects of their lives now more than ever, others may come across as short-tempered and irritable. Don't take either personally, simply accept that that is their way of dealing with this unexpected grief that's been thrust onto all of us.

## Look for Meaning

Another way you can be of service to your mentoring partner is to help them look for meaning in this current situation. We all look for meaning even in the toughest of times, and even though that meaning may not make itself immediately known, the conscious quest for it can help us put matters into perspective and make the time we have more meaningful itself. This won't last forever, so let's make the most out of these quiet hours we have to ourselves now.

## Encourage Reflection

Firstly, recognise together that this is a difficult time. Share your experiences, as we all have been impacted in some form. Maybe your mentee wasn't clear on what path they wanted their career to take, or if their current role was fulfilling them. Now is the perfect time to practice introspection and reflect on where we are, where we were going, if that's what we really want—and if not—how we can change our path to get to where we truly desire to be. If we need to put in a little more effort to get there, now's the time to do it! Encourage your mentees to take that online class or finish that certification in order to get themselves ahead when the storm dies down. Encourage your mentoring partner to think about what “coming out the other end” might look like. When things finally settle down again, what would they have hoped to achieve? Could this be an opportunity to work on something they have been putting off that they now may have time to focus on?

## Focus on What They Can Control or Influence

A lack of control can contribute to fear and anxiety. And in times like these, uncertainty can really take its toll. This is why you should work with your mentee to list all of the things they can and do control. Whether it be their environment, their relationships, their career or even something as small as the fuel they put into their body. This exercise is one of confidence. Once they've thought good and hard about a path they want to take, it's time your mentee harnesses their confidence to do all they can in their power to walk that path! Taking the initiative means controlling their path—but also their day-to-day. Once a goal is established, try breaking it down to actionable items month by month, week by week, and even day by day so that mentees have something concrete to work towards and accomplish on a daily basis, something they can control. Be sure to add these to your 'goals' on Mentorloop.

## Narrow in on What They Have, not What They Don't

What is your mentee already doing that allows them to manage as well as they are? What steps have they taken to look after their health and well-being so far through this difficult time? What has helped them cope with uncertainty and difficult times in the past that might help them now? Similar to control, by helping your mentee focus on what they have—not what they don't—you'll be able to shine a light on all the tools they already have in their toolbox.

## Recognise and Value Hard Work & Resilience

Using positive reinforcement can empower mentees to feel resourceful in times that are tough. Encourage your mentee to keep a list of all the things they're accomplishing each week. The size of these achievements is not the focus here, in fact, the 'smaller' the better. By taking a look at this list come week's end, they'll feel they're indeed getting through or putting this social-distancing time to good use! If you want to up the ante, ask your mentee to create a list of things they'd like to reward themselves with when they reach a certain milestone or complete a certain number of tasks. Once their goal has been met, they're allowed to #treatthemselves and choose an item off that list.

## Identify Next Steps

By highlighting all the positive actions they have taken so far, mentees will be able to identify coping mechanisms and small steps they can take immediately to make further progress. The hardest part of any journey is the first few steps, so once your mentee realizes the most difficult part is behind them and now they only have to keep going in the direction they've already set out on, they'll be more motivated to keep it up! Furthermore, sharing, highlighting, and/or reflecting on all the resources they have available to them will help mentees know that they're not alone on this journey.

# Leveraging Existing Mentoring Relationships to Be More Connected

If you've already been in a mentoring relationship for some time now, you're in luck. You've already put the initial groundwork into the relationship, know one another, know what it's like to grow together, and are ready to take on whatever is thrown at you next.

It's quite lucky you're already familiar and comfortable with your mentoring partner or partners given our current circumstances. When tough times hit, it's nice to have people that know you available to provide support.

As [Harvard Business Review](#) writes:

*Although social distancing is necessary during the pandemic, it doesn't mean you can't maintain close emotional and relational proximity with your mentees. Use this moment in time to explore new ways of staying connected, show that you care, validate feelings of distress, develop talent, and challenge yourself to get out of your mentoring comfort zone.*

## The Perks of an Iso-Buddy

At Mentorloop, we are now referring to some of our mentoring partners lovingly as iso-buddies, or isolation buddies. We have found that these relationships are more meaningful now than ever. While we continue to leverage existing relationships to be more connected during this time, we've also found value in expanding our peer-to-peer network.

That's because mentoring allows companies to build new relationships across departmental silos, connecting people some might not traditionally consider an option as a mentor.

During this pandemic, its social distancing mandate, and the new challenges of fully remote teams and processes, assigning team members iso-buddies creates a sort of match-making program for businesses, allowing new connections to be made, new expertises to mingle, and new ideas to be born.

That's because iso-buddies provide a new way of mentorship.

The traditional view of a mentor is commonly perceived as a “future you”. An older, wiser you that is able to pass on the wisdom gained from experience, unlocking secret doors to your future success.

Mentoring in its more modern incarnation, on the other hand, can mean pairing you with someone that doesn't look like you—or even have the same professional background—in order to encounter new ways of thinking and expose you to the ways in which others move about in their personal and professional lives.

This is especially useful in this modern world given that the pace of work is changing, technology is evolving rapidly, and a significant number of jobs held in the past—and even today—will simply bear little to no resemblance to the jobs of the future.

In other words, in order to achieve future success, it's no longer enough to look back and simply follow the same path. Innovation and cross-departmental dialogue is more important now than ever.

## Not One, but Many Mentors

Another approach we recommend is to have not one mentor, but many. We like to call this your **Personal Advisory Board**. While one member may resemble that traditional mentor we described, another may be your iso-buddy, and still another may be someone junior to you.

The benefit of having multiple mentoring partners is that you have access to a range of people with different perspectives, skill sets, and areas of expertise. Together, they create a support network that you can turn to and lean on, especially when challenged with a problem or decision that would best be served by various points of view.

As we've mentioned before, the best mentors **share their experiences** rather than simply provide prescriptive solutions and advice. By having access to multiple people's lived experiences, you'll be better able to filter out the lessons, apply them to your own situation, and gain the clarity you need to define your way.

Ultimately, a mix of different types of mentoring buddies can mean a more empowered and educated you, that's ready to apply the best ideas to move forward in your career.



# Tools for Mentors and Mentees

Through adversity comes opportunity.

During the current situation, holding a professional relationship in the online space is something we've all had to adopt. We believe that going forward, it's something we should maintain as another effective way to communicate with others.

Not only do we now regularly communicate virtually with family, friends, colleagues, and bosses, we can also apply this new form of communication to our mentoring partners as well—in fact, this might be one of the most important relationships we foster during this time.

Thankfully for technology, there are myriad ways we can stay connected and communicate. Here are a few recommendations we think can keep your mentoring partnerships on track—even while they're conducted virtually.

## Collaboration Tools

When it comes to collaborating with one another, you can use virtual tools like [Doodle](#) to find a good meeting time and [Google Docs](#) to collaborate in real time. If you as a mentor are helping your mentee reach a specific goal, you might want to recommend that they try out a project management tool like [Trello](#) that can help them create a virtual progress board and move items from 'to do' all the way to 'complete', providing complete transparency into the process as they move through it.

## Face-to-Face Meetings

Virtual, face-to-face meetings will be of the utmost import during these times of social distancing! Thankfully, Mentorloop has launched a new video conferencing integration so you can speak to your mentoring partner without having to leave the platform! We're hoping that this new feature encourages you to not only continue, but progress in your mentoring relationships via this new, virtual way.

You'll be able to share documents, emails, meeting minutes, and any other pertinent information via the screen-sharing feature, whilst talking and walking your mentoring partner through any particular matter. Just be sure to focus on the camera when you're listening to your mentoring partner—or any person you're holding a conversation with, for that matter—as it will come across to the other person that you're actually interested in what they have to say. By not letting anything distract you and simply looking right back at them when they speak, you'll show the other person that you value what they have to share with you.

Moving to an online setting is already proving to be beneficial for many groups of friends, families, teams, and mentoring partners. As long as you're intentional and present—even if remote—you'll be able to continue to foster these most meaningful of relationships.

## The Takeaway

Mentoring during tough times like these provides both mentors and mentees with a unique opportunity to really make a difference in the lives of the other.

By being a guiding light and a source of encouragement and reinforcement, you can truly help your mentoring partner come out of this uncertainty stronger than ever.

# Part 3: Conclusion

## Conclusion

As we mentioned in a [previous post](#), [74%](#) of CFOs say they expect to move at least 5% of their previously on-site workforce to permanently remote positions post-COVID-19. And we're already starting to see those plans being rolled out.

Recently, Zillow approved a remote work policy for the rest of 2020. As [GeekWire](#) reports, "The policy reflects rapidly-shifting office culture expectations for tech companies as the COVID-19 pandemic changes how we work and live."

That's because due to this work-from-home (WFH) experiment many organisations have had to conduct, many CEOs are starting to see that remote work *is* feasible and offers perks they previously hadn't considered. As Zillow CEO [Rich Barton](#) expressed, "My personal opinions about WFH have been turned upside down over the past 2 months. I expect this will have a lasting influence on the future of work."

## Set Up Now for Future Success

Since this shift, Zillow has even rolled out a new [virtual onboarding program](#) for employees hired during the COVID-19 crisis. So far more than 100 new hires have completed virtual onboarding and another 200 will do so over the next few months.

Since the program began in early March, Zillow onboarding project manager Sarah McLamb and Zillow human resources operations have gathered mostly positive feedback. They've also made some tweaks to the program, implementing monthly "Virtual New Hire Open Houses," and a new Slack channel that all new hires are invited to join so they can support one another.

## Future Planning

There's no sign Zillow will completely cut work from home from their tool belt once this pandemic has passed.

"We've been forced to make Work From Home work. Which means we know we can make it work in the future," Barton said. A Zillow spokesperson echoed that sentiment, saying "We've learned a lot over the past two months and have watched our teams pull together from their homes to keep the company moving forward. This situation has dramatically changed how we envision our future of work and we expect this experience will influence our decisions going forward."

Global Workplace Analytics president Kate Lister said the COVID-19 crisis will be a tipping point for WFH programs. In the US, she expects over 75 million employees to be working from home before the crisis is over, and more than 25 percent of employees to continue working from home multiple days a week once the pandemic has passed—that's up from less than 4 percent who did so before the pandemic. That means 25-to-30 million employees in the US alone will regularly work from home within the next two years, up from just 5 million who do so half-time or more now.

Pat Turnbull, President of Workplace IQX, a consultancy focused on helping businesses grow through strategic, organisational, and workplace transformation, said that "from the employer side, there is greater recognition of the overall business benefits of having robust work-from-home capability and readiness." Similarly, Lister noted that "from the employee side, the genie is out of the bottle. Having tasted the experience, most will not want to give it up."

Lister believes that other accelerants of the adoption of WFH policies will include:

- Reduced fear and resistance from managers once they've had the chance to work from home themselves.
- Greater awareness amongst leadership of the WFH potential for reducing real estate and travel costs, particularly given the threat of another recession.
- Increased scrutiny around disaster preparedness from investors/shareholders.
- Greater societal awareness of the environmental benefits of reduced commuter and business travel on sustainability once they've seen the actual impact WFH can have.

## Making Work from Home Work

To make WFH a lasting way to work, however, companies must provide adequate technical infrastructure.

For example, working from home with children who are out of school can be a challenging situation. Thankfully, some organisations have already figured out a solution.

When HubSpot set out to create an effective WFH culture before the pandemic even hit, they quickly realised that they needed to offer online educational activities and entertainment for employees' children via videoconferencing. "We have programming for kids ages zero to four, and four to eight," remote work and inclusion manager Meaghan Williams told [The Boston Globe](#). "There are singalongs, art classes, tons of different programming," all taught by a mix of outside contractors and company volunteers.

# Conclusion

Other initiatives HubSpot has implemented to help their remote workforce thrive include weekly AMAs (ask me anything sessions) with company executives like the CFO, online yoga and meditation classes, remote 5K challenges, remote office visits, digital interviewing and hiring processes, Zoom onboarding, a Slack “question of the day”, virtual happy hours, online concerts, and more.

You can start making work from home work for your organisation today by implementing some of these practices. What’s more, including your team in the preparations for and development of processes regarding remote work is one of the best ways to reduce any anxiety this shift to remote work can create.

## The Best Ways to Invest in Your People

Now that the majority of the workforce is working from home, 70% of organizations report that the main cost-cutting measure they plan to use is more effective use of technology.

So how can you invest in more effective use of technology while also investing in what matters most to your organisation: your people?

Here are some ways you can ensure that your team members come out on top when this crisis is over.

### Start a Bank of Educational Resources

Investing in your team’s personal and professional development can have a huge impact on both the short- and long-term for your organisation. In fact, it can increase income per employee, profit margin, engagement, retention, and even productivity.



# Conclusion

A cost-cutting way to make training and education accessible to your team is to start an internal web page that hosts a bank of educational resources. Here, you can amass both in-house and external resources, organising them by topic or department. Include an array of free training courses and materials, and commit to paying X amount—or have a cap of one or two per person—for advanced courses for the people who show interest in their continued education and do, in fact, begin working through the resources you provide diligently.

Given the fact that many of your team members most likely have more free time now than before, this may be the perfect opportunity for them to finally sit down and commit to learning a new skill or deepening their learning in a certain field.

Are your people not sure what they want to dive into next or what specific learning tools can help them progress further down their career path? An Individual Development Plan, or IDP, is a great tool that implores employees to ask themselves, “Where am I now, where do I want to be, and how will I get there?” and then set and reach both short- and long-term goals.

These are also great tools for mentoring relationships, as mentees can take the initiative in thinking through what they really want to get out of their mentoring partnerships, careers—and even their lives—and then bring those goals to their mentors in order to hatch an effective action plan to reach them.

## Start a Mentorship Program

If you haven't already, now is an excellent time to start a virtual mentorship program at your organisation. If you do already have one in place, a time of crisis is when great mentors will show up and engage with mentees. Now more than ever, mentors can play a pivotal role in building organisational commitment and safeguarding retention. In fact, research has found that mentors actively engaged with their charges help those mentees perceive greater support from the organisation broadly, form stronger emotional bonds to the organisation, and ultimately report higher job satisfaction.

At Mentorloop, we provide quality mentoring, at scale. Even when unusual circumstances call for a mentorship program to be more creative and adaptable, Mentorloop provides a proven way to keep your people connected, focused, engaged, and supported to continue achieving their goals as they share knowledge and experience.

Our peer-to-peer mentoring programs will not only help your organisation retain high-potential junior talent, it can also help you start thinking about strong, post-pandemic succession planning.

Help your leaders ensure they're supporting their people to reduce loneliness while encouraging collaboration, productivity, and purpose.

Start by sharing this **Definitive Guide to Remote Mentoring** with your HR team.

## Ready to build a culture of mentoring in your organisation?

[Get in touch](#)



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