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A FREE PLAYBOOK FROM ACTIONORDER

The Async Manager's Playbook

How to lead a remote team without chasing it

Seven chapters, a 30-day plan and nine templates

ACTIONORDERHQ.COM 2026 EDITION

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Seven chapters.
One habit at a time.

Working apart hides the work. This playbook replaces the check-ins and status questions most remote teams run on with a few written habits that let the work show itself. Read chapter 1, then follow the 30-day plan in chapter 7, one habit a week. Each chapter ends with three things to try, and the templates at the back are ready to copy.

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Why async teams need a different model

Working apart hides the work. The fix isn't more check-ins. It's a few written habits that let the work show itself.



IN THIS CHAPTER

- Why asking for updates makes the visibility problem worse
- The three things that break when a team spreads across time zones
- Four principles behind every habit in this playbook

The visibility gap

In Microsoft's 2022 Work Trend Index survey of 20,006 people, 85% of leaders said the shift to hybrid work had made it hard to be confident their people were productive, while 87% of employees said they were. Both groups are describing the same week from different seats. The work is happening. The manager can't see it.

The natural response is to ask: a standup, a check-in, a quick "any update?" Each one feels small. Together they interrupt the people doing the work, and they still tell you less than a glance at the work itself would.

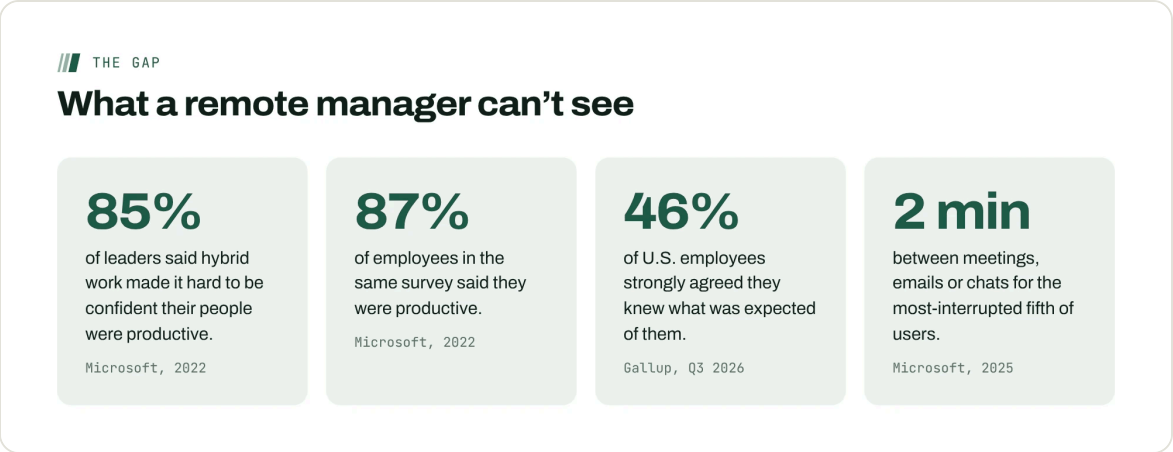


FIGURE 1 The work is happening. The manager can’t see it, and asking adds to the noise.

Three things break when a team spreads out

Priorities scatter. In Gallup’s Q3 2026 survey, 46% of U.S. employees strongly agreed that they knew what was expected of them at work. Gallup also found that from 2020 to 2023, the drop in knowing what’s expected was about twice as large for hybrid and fully remote workers as for on-site workers whose jobs could be done remotely.

Status has to be chased. Microsoft’s 2025 analysis of Microsoft 365 data found that the most-interrupted fifth of users already get a meeting, email or chat every two minutes during core hours. Every status question adds to that stream, often for the person you most need to be focused.

Time gets hard to account for. Two studies that measure different things show how much of a paid day slips. A field study in Harvard Business Review found people spent roughly 9% of their time at work reorienting after switching apps. Economists using American Time Use Survey diaries found nearly 7% of time at the workplace went to not working at all. Added together, that’s about 16% of the day. It’s an estimate, not a measurement, but it’s a useful sense of scale.

Replace asking with writing

Office teams run on information that floats around the room: who’s busy, what the boss cares about this week, which client is upset. Remote teams don’t get that for free. They have to write it down, once, where the work lives, so anyone can find it on their own schedule.

This playbook turns that into five habits, one chapter each: a ranked priority post, status that comes from the work, handoffs that carry their own context, protected focus, and accountability built on signals from the work rather than on watching people. The last chapter puts them into a 30-day plan, and the templates give you every document you need to start.

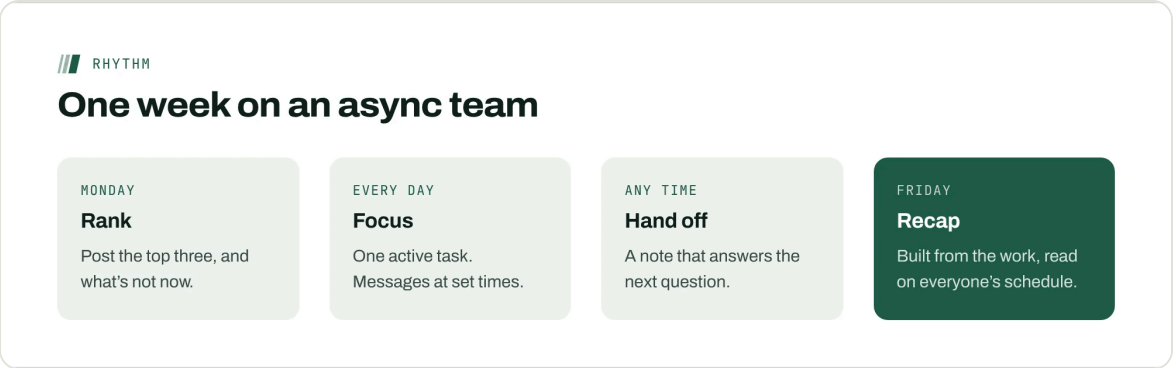


FIGURE 2 Four written habits replace most of the meetings and messages a remote team runs on.

Four principles behind every chapter

- **Write it once, where the work lives.** A decision in a direct message is lost by Wednesday. A decision on the task is found by whoever picks it up next.
- **Make the default clear.** Silence should move work forward, not stall it. Say what happens if nobody replies.
- **Look at the work, not the people.** How long a task has waited tells you where to help. How active someone looks tells you very little.
- **Change one habit at a time.** Run each change as a short experiment, measure it, and keep what works.

TRY IT THIS WEEK

- [ ] Ask two people in different time zones to name this week's top priority without looking. Note whether the answers match.
- [ ] Count how many times you ask someone for a status update this week.
- [ ] Pick the chapter that would have saved you the most time last week, and start there.

GO DEEPER ON THE ACTIONORDER BLOG

How to Stop Chasing Status Updates on a Remote Team · Accountability Without Surveillance on a Remote Team

SOURCES

1. Hybrid Work Is Just Work. Are We Doing It Wrong? (September 22, 2022), Microsoft Work Trend Index (Microsoft sells Microsoft 365 and Teams)
2. U.S. Employee Engagement Below 30% for First Time in 15 Years (October 28, 2026), Gallup
3. In New Workplace, U.S. Employee Engagement Stagnates (January 22, 2024), Gallup
4. Breaking down the infinite workday (June 17, 2025), Microsoft WorkLab
5. How Much Time and Energy Do We Waste Toggling Between Applications? (August 29, 2022), Harvard Business Review
6. Not Working at Work: Loafing, Unemployment and Labor Productivity (NBER Working Paper 21923, 2016), Burda, Genadek and Hamermesh

Set priorities people can find

Rank the work, post it once a week, and say what isn't happening. Tags inflate. Ranks decide.



IN THIS CHAPTER

- Why ranked lists beat priority labels
- A weekly priority post your team can copy
- How to break ties and settle disagreements

Rank, don't tag

When everything is marked high priority, nothing is. Labels drift upward because each one feels urgent to whoever set it, and nobody has to choose. A rank forces the trade-off: only one thing can be first.

On a remote team, the cost of an unclear order lands on the person doing the work, usually when you're asleep. In Slingshot's survey of 305 U.S. employees, 34% said they guess at what matters most when they aren't given priorities. In a Reclaim.ai survey of more than 2,000 professionals, people reported spending 10.8% of their week recovering and catching up after having to reprioritize. Both surveys come from software vendors and are self-reported, but the pattern matches what most remote managers see.

PRIORITIES

Tags inflate. Ranks decide.

	Tagged (P1, P2…)	Ranked (1, 2, 3)
After a month	Half the work is P1	Still one first priority
Two tasks collide	Someone asks the manager	The lower number wins
Something new arrives	Another P1	It takes a slot; the rest move down
When blocked	Pick any other P1	Move down the list

FIGURE 1 A rank makes the trade-off visible. A label only says that something matters.

Post the order once a week

The fix is a short written post, published at the same time every week, at the start of the earliest time zone's day. It answers the same five questions in the same order:

- **Ranked priorities.** Three at most, in order. If two are tied, you haven't decided yet.
- **Not now.** The work people will be tempted to start, named so they don't have to ask.
- **What changed.** One line on anything that moved since last week, and why.
- **The exception rule.** What can jump the order before the next post. Keep it narrow: marked urgent by a manager, or due today.
- **How to push back.** A deadline and a place to disagree in writing.

Pin it where the work lives, not in a chat thread that scrolls away by Wednesday.

TEMPLATE

The weekly priority post

Every Monday

- ☑ Rank three priorities
- ☑ Name what's not now
- ☑ Say what changed and why

The rules

- ☑ Only marked-urgent or due-today items jump the order
- ☑ Push back in writing by Tuesday

Check it landed

- ☑ Priority one has an owner and a next step
- ☑ Two people can name it without looking

FIGURE 2 The weekly post in one view. The full template is on the templates page.

Break ties with the cost of waiting

When two priorities feel equal, ask which one gets more expensive the longer it waits. A renewal that lapses in three weeks costs more each day it slips. A help-center redesign costs about the same whether it starts this month or next. Rank the one with the rising cost first, and say so in the post. People can check that reasoning for themselves, so fewer questions come back to you midweek.

One person, one ranked list

On remote teams, people often report to one manager and take work from another. If both publish a ranked list, the person is back to guessing. Settle it with one rule: each person has one ranked list, owned by one manager. Other managers request work through that list, and its owner decides where it lands.

Check that it landed

Writing priorities down isn't the same as people knowing them. Two quick tests: the top priority has a named owner and a written next step, and two people in different time zones can name it without looking. If either test fails, the post is too long or too hard to find.

TRY IT THIS WEEK

- [ ] Publish your first ranked post on Monday, with a "not now" list.
- [ ] On Wednesday, ask two people to name priority one without looking.
- [ ] Write down the one rule for what can jump the order, and pin it next to the post.

GO DEEPER ON THE ACTIONORDER BLOG

How to Set Priorities for a Remote Team Without a Weekly Meeting · Stop Being the Router for Your Remote Team

SOURCES

1. 2023 Digital Work Trends Report, Part 2, Slingshot (sells work-management software)
2. Task Management Trends Report (March 29, 2022), Reclaim.ai (sells scheduling software)
3. U.S. Employee Engagement Below 30% for First Time in 15 Years (October 28, 2026), Gallup

Make status come from the work

Stop asking for updates. Agree on four states, a stuck rule and a Friday recap, and status shows up on its own.



IN THIS CHAPTER

- The three facts every piece of work should carry
- A stuck rule that makes silence mean something
- A Friday recap that replaces the standup

Give every piece of work three facts

Status should be something the work produces as it moves, not something a person writes on request. That takes three facts on every task, visible to the whole team at any time:

- **One owner.** Not a team, not “we.” One person whose name is on it.
- **A state.** Done, in progress, waiting or stuck. Four states are enough, and fewer arguments start about what they mean.
- **Time.** How long it waited before anyone started, and how long it has been in progress against its estimate.

When those facts are current, most status questions answer themselves. “Is QA moving?” becomes a glance: in progress, Jordan, two hours past the estimate. That last detail tells you where to look before anyone says there’s a problem.

STATUS

Status by asking vs status from the work

	Asking for updates	Status from the work
Who does the work	The person, on request	Nobody extra; it updates as work moves
When you learn	When you ask, or at the standup	Whenever you look
What you learn	“On track”	Owner, state, time against estimate
Early warning	Rare	Skips, waits and overruns show first
Cost to the team	An interruption per question	None

FIGURE 1 Status from the work is current, specific and costs the team nothing to produce.

Agree that silence means on track

Make silence meaningful: no news means the work is on track. In return, agree on exactly when someone must raise a hand. Good triggers are specific and early:

- Blocked for more than half a working day.
- Past the estimate by half again, and not close.
- The same task put aside twice in favor of something else.
- Anything that changes the deadline, even if they think they can recover.

The third trigger is the one most teams miss. Repeatedly skipping a task is usually the first sign it’s stuck, long before anyone says so.

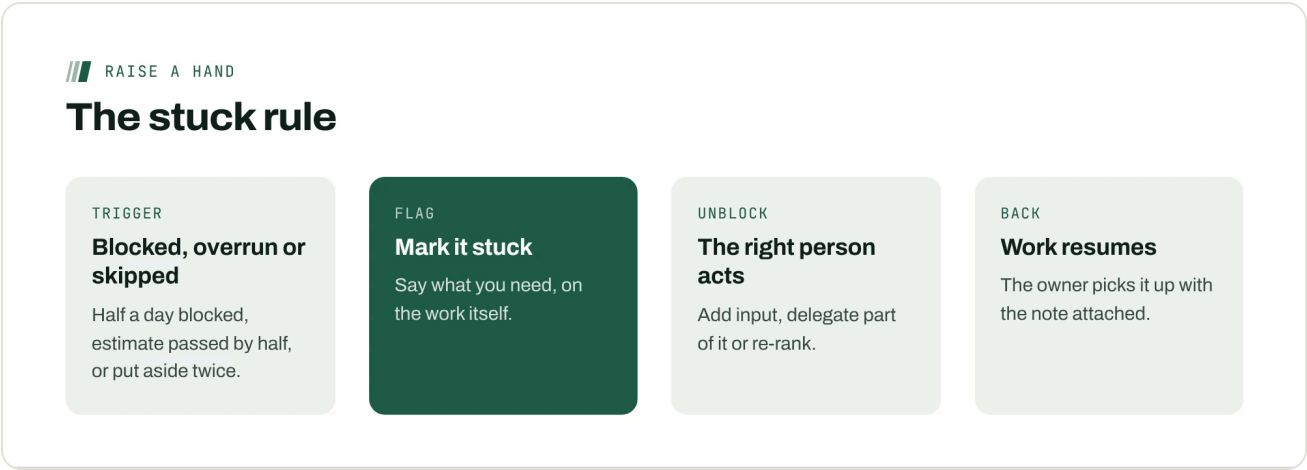


FIGURE 2 Agree on the triggers once. Then silence means on track, and a flag means act.

Swap the standup for a Friday recap

A written recap replaces the standup only if it's quick to write and quick to read. Keep it to four parts, built from the work rather than from memory: what moved, what's stuck and since when, decisions needed with a date, and next week's top three, copied from the priority post. If it takes more than fifteen minutes to write, status isn't living on the work yet.

Run the change as an experiment. Researchers who studied 76 companies that introduced meeting-free days, writing in MIT Sloan Management Review, found that a single meeting-free day a week improved autonomy, communication, engagement and satisfaction, and reduced micromanagement and stress. Cancel one standup for a week, say you'll bring it back if things slip, and see what happens.

Track one number

If you measure only one thing, make it how long work sits stuck before the person who can unblock it hears about it. On teams that chase status, it's often days. When status comes from the work and people flag early, it should be hours. When a task was stuck for two days before you heard, don't ask why nobody said anything. Ask which trigger should have fired, and whether it was clear enough.

TRY IT THIS WEEK

- [ ] Agree on the four states and the stuck triggers in writing.
- [ ] Send the first Friday recap, and cancel one standup the following week.
- [ ] Note how long the last stuck task waited before you heard about it.

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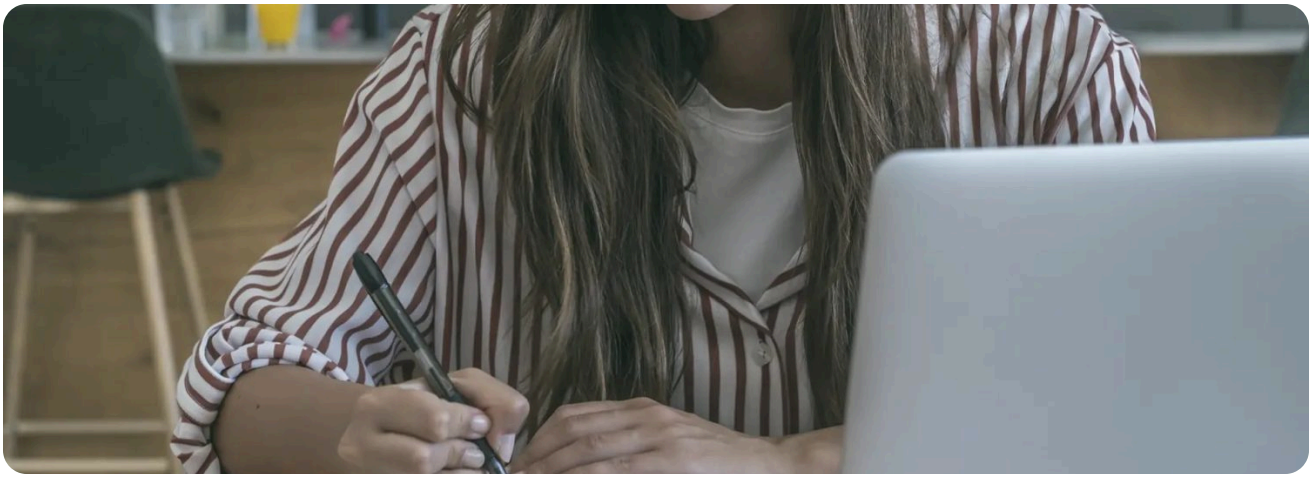
How to Stop Chasing Status Updates on a Remote Team · Key-Person Risk on Remote Teams: When One Person Holds the Context

SOURCES

1. The Surprising Impact of Meeting-Free Days (2022), MIT Sloan Management Review
2. Breaking down the infinite workday (June 17, 2025), Microsoft WorkLab

Hand off work, and get out of the middle

A handoff note that answers the next question, decision limits in writing, and a second owner for everything that matters.



IN THIS CHAPTER

- The handoff note that survives a time-zone gap
- Which decisions to give away, and how to write the limits
- How to find and fix key-person risk

Write for someone who can’t ask you anything

The test for an async handoff is simple: could the person finish the work if you were unreachable for a day? If not, the note is missing something. Structured handoffs pay off well beyond software teams. When the pediatric residency programs of nine hospitals adopted one structured handoff program, I-PASS, medical errors fell 23% and preventable adverse events fell 30%, and the handoffs took no longer.

A good async handoff note answers three sets of questions before they’re asked:

- **Before they start:** what done looks like, in one sentence; links to the thread, files and last version; your hunch about the first step.
- **Room to decide:** what they can decide alone, what stays with you, and “proceed unless I object by your morning.”
- **The loop:** the most likely way it goes wrong, one checkpoint tied to the work, and a written close-out.

TEMPLATE

The async handoff note

Before they start

- What done looks like, in one sentence
- Links to the thread, files and last version
- Your hunch about the first step

Room to decide

- Decisions they can make alone
- Proceed unless I object by your morning
- Decisions that stay with you

Loop

- If this comes back, it's because...
- One checkpoint tied to the work
- A written close-out

FIGURE 1 A handoff note usually fits in one short message. The full template is on the templates page.

Write the limits down, not just the permission

In a Reclaim.ai survey, managers reported spending about five hours a week assigning, prioritizing and re-prioritizing their team's work. Much of that is questions people could answer themselves if they knew where your limits were. "Use your judgment" isn't delegation. It's a guess about what you'll accept.

Write limits for the four or five decisions that reach you most: a client scope request, spending, task order, a complaint. For each, say when to decide alone and when to check with you. Most of what reaches a remote manager is easy to reverse. Give those decisions away with a default to proceed, and keep the ones that are costly and hard to undo.

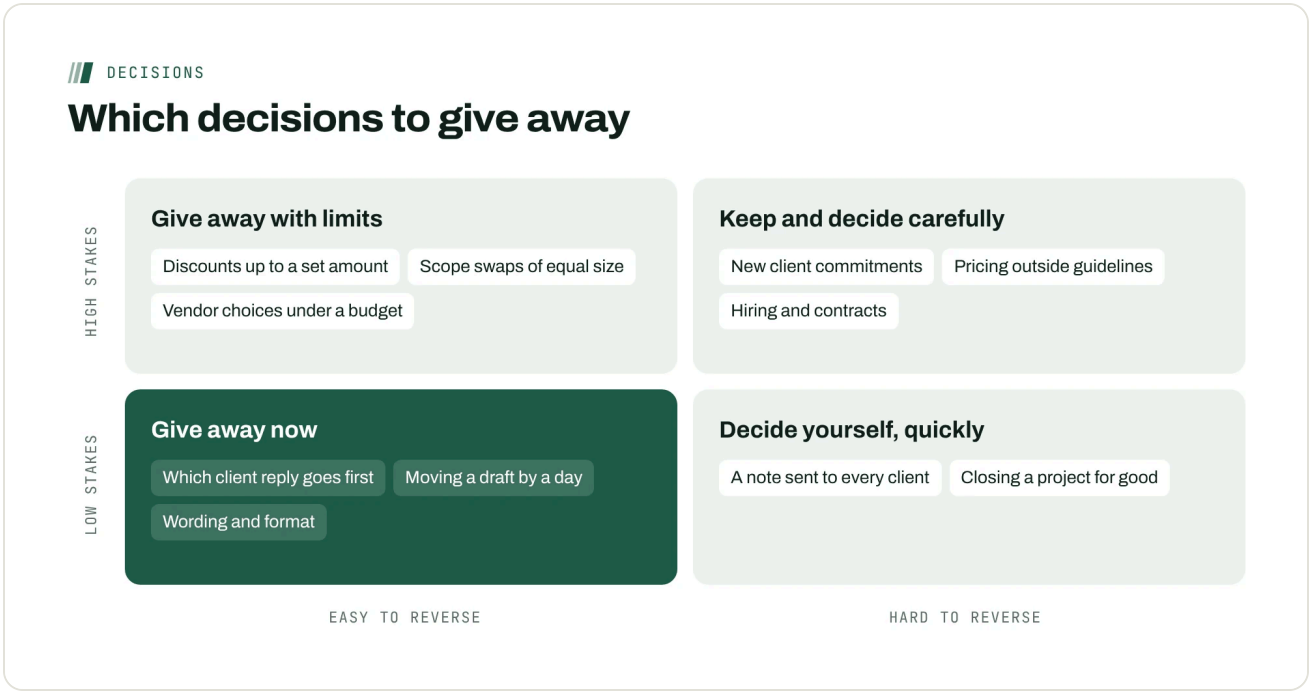


FIGURE 2 Give reversible decisions away with a default to proceed. Keep the costly, hard-to-undo ones.

Answer at set times, and review the result

Hold two short windows a day for anything that needs you, unless it's marked urgent. Comment on finished work, not on every step on the way to it. And when someone brings a decision they could make, ask what they'd do if you weren't around this week. Most people already have a reasonable answer.

Give everything important a second owner

Remote teams hide key-person risk, because the person holding the context is often the fastest replier, and nobody notices until they're away. When researchers estimated it for 133 popular open-source projects on GitHub, 65% depended on two or fewer people. Run a 30-minute audit: for each important responsibility, ask who could do it tomorrow, where the context lives and when the second person last did it. Then rotate a second owner through the real work, with the notes open, and use time off as a drill.

TRY IT THIS WEEK

- [ ] Use the handoff note for every handoff this week.
- [ ] Write limits for the five decisions that reached you most last month.
- [ ] Run the 30-minute key-person audit and name one second owner.

GO DEEPER ON THE ACTIONORDER BLOG

How to Delegate Across Time Zones Without Losing Context · Stop Being the Router for Your Remote Team · Key-Person Risk on Remote Teams: When One Person Holds the Context

SOURCES

1. Safer Patient Handoffs (November 18, 2014), on the I-PASS study in the New England Journal of Medicine, Harvard Medical School
2. Task Management Trends Report (March 29, 2022), Reclaim.ai (sells scheduling software)
3. A Novel Approach for Estimating Truck Factors (ICPC 2016), Avelino, Passos, Hora and Valente

Protect focus without going dark

Agree how fast people need to reply, keep one active task, and park work in a minute before switching.



IN THIS CHAPTER

- Why constant checking costs more than it seems
- A one-page response-time agreement
- One active task, and the one-minute ready-to-resume note

The cost of instant replies

Every check of a message is a switch, and switches aren't free. In a Microsoft Research study, Iqbal and Horvitz found it took nearly 10 minutes, on average, after switching to an email alert before people got back to the application they had been using. After 27% of alerts, they stayed away from that window for more than two hours. Gloria Mark, who studies how people use screens at UC Irvine, found people now average 47 seconds on one screen before switching.

Checking less often helps. In an experiment by Kushlev and Dunn, 124 adults who limited email to three checks a day for a week reported significantly lower daily stress than in a week of unlimited checking.

Agree on response windows by type

A response-time agreement replaces "reply right away" with windows that fit the kind of message. Draft it, let the team edit it in writing for two days, then publish it where the work lives:

- **Windows:** urgent within two working hours; a blocking question within half a day; a handoff gets a plan back within a day; a review within two working days.

- **Urgent means** marked urgent by a manager, or due today. Nothing else.
- **Habits:** check at set times, label “no reply needed” and “reply by” with a date, and save the overlap hours for decisions.

Windows count the recipient’s working hours, not the sender’s. That one line stops most late-night replies.

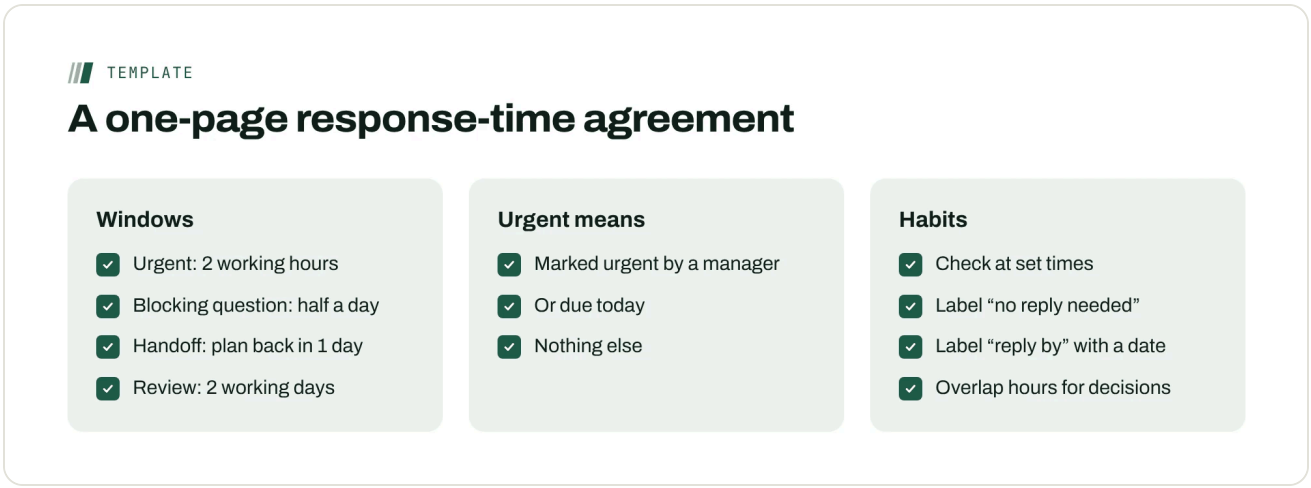


FIGURE 1 Draft it, let the team edit it in writing, then publish it where the work lives.

Keep one active task

Sophie Leroy named the problem attention residue: when people switch away from a task they haven’t finished, part of their attention stays behind, and their performance on the next task suffers. Her 2009 studies found it was worse when the first task was left incomplete. Mark and colleagues found that interrupted people finished faster, with no loss of quality, but reported more stress, frustration and time pressure.

So keep one active task per person. New work waits its turn unless it meets the urgent rule.

Park a task in one minute

When you do have to switch, write a ready-to-resume note first. Leroy and Theresa Glomb found that a brief plan for returning, covering where you’ll pick up, what’s left and what you postponed, reduced attention residue. Three lines are usually enough, and the exact wording matters less than writing it before you switch.

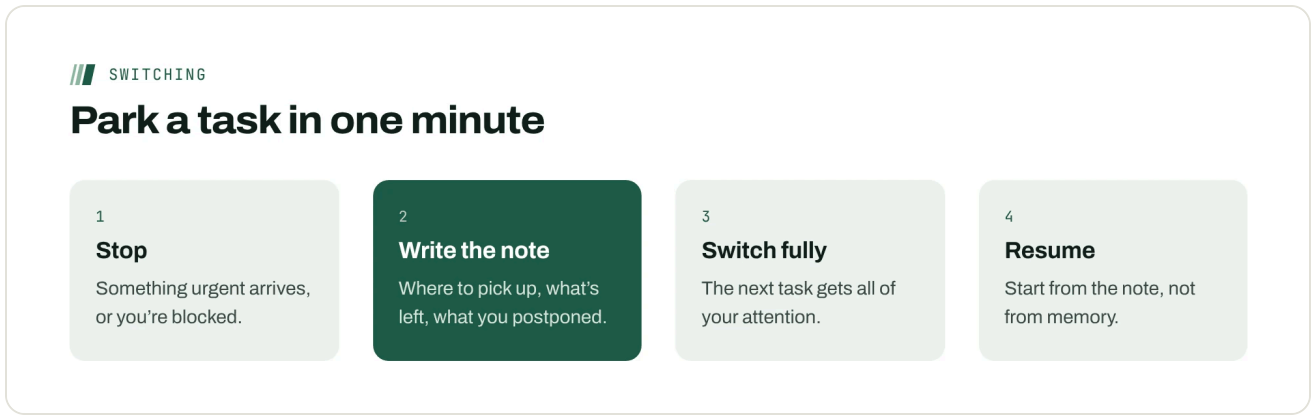


FIGURE 2 In studies by Leroy and Glomb, a brief ready-to-resume plan reduced attention residue.

Cluster meetings so focus has room

One call in the middle of the afternoon splits it into two pieces, and neither is long enough for difficult work. Agree on meeting windows, for example mornings for focus and early afternoons for calls, adjusted to your overlap hours. Review the calendar together once a month and remove any recurring meeting nobody would miss.

TRY IT THIS WEEK

- [ ] Draft the response-time agreement and share it for comments.
- [ ] Ask everyone to write a ready-to-resume note before their next switch.
- [ ] Count urgent items for one week, and keep the count.

GO DEEPER ON THE ACTIONORDER BLOG

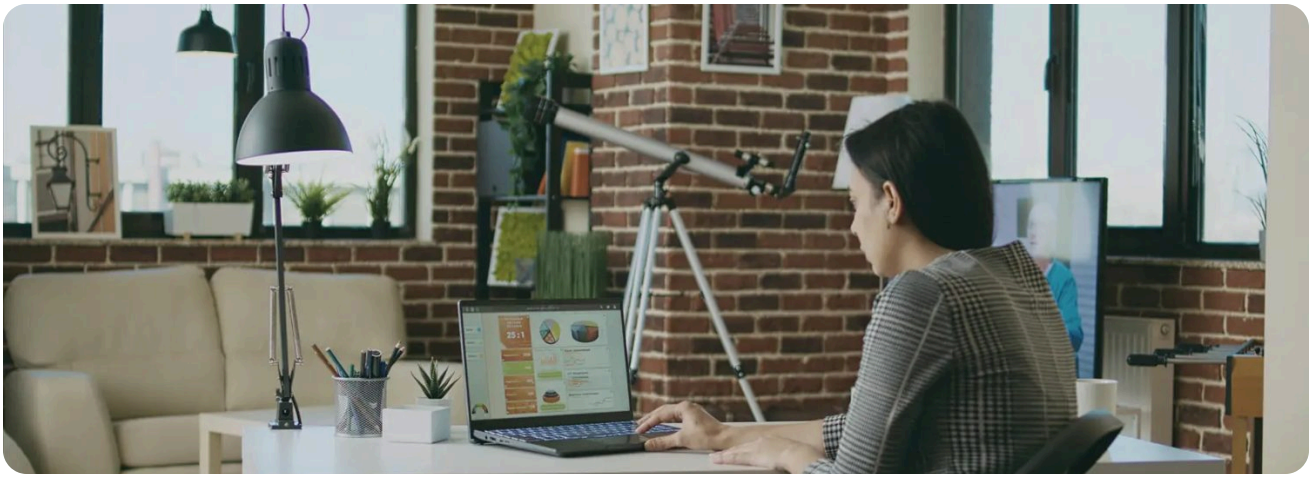
Write a Response-Time Agreement Instead of Expecting Instant Replies · Protect Focus on a Remote Team Without Another Meeting Policy

SOURCES

1. Disruption and Recovery of Computing Tasks (CHI 2007), Iqbal and Horvitz, Microsoft Research
2. Can't pay attention? You're not alone (May 11, 2023), University of California, on Gloria Mark's research
3. Checking email less frequently reduces stress (Computers in Human Behavior, 2015), Kushlev and Dunn
4. Why is it so hard to do my work? The challenge of attention residue when switching between work tasks (2009), Sophie Leroy, Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes
5. The Cost of Interrupted Work: More Speed and Stress (CHI 2008), Mark, Gudith and Klocke
6. Task interrupted: A plan for returning helps you move on (January 16, 2018), University of Washington, on Leroy and Glomb, Organization Science

Hold the team accountable without watching it

Watch the work, not the people. Publish what you look at, and let logged time make estimates and pay fair.



IN THIS CHAPTER

- What monitoring does to people
- Four signals from the work, and a one-page visibility policy
- How logged time improves estimates and contractor pay

Why monitoring backfires

Monitoring software appeals because it promises the visibility remote managers are missing. What it delivers is a record of activity, which isn't the same thing. In Harvard Business Review, Chase Thiel and colleagues reported two studies in which monitored employees were substantially more likely to break rules, including cheating on a test, stealing equipment and deliberately working slowly.

Measure the work instead

Four signals tell you far more than an activity log, and each is about the work, not the person:

- **Queue time:** how long work waits before anyone starts it.
- **Skips:** how often a task is put aside for something else.
- **Stuck flags:** work the owner has marked as blocked, and for how long.
- **Time against the estimate:** self-reported time on the task, compared with what it was expected to take.

Each one leads to a useful question: why is this waiting, what's making it hard to start, what does the owner need?

SIGNALS

Activity tracking vs signals from the work

	Activity tracking	Signals from the work
What it records	Screens, keystrokes, online status	Owner, state, waits, skips, time on task
What it tells you	Someone was present	Whether the work is moving
Where it points	At the person	At the work and the process
Easy to game	Yes	Hard; it comes from the work
Effect on trust	Lower	Neutral, when the rules are published

FIGURE 1 Signals from the work point at what needs help. Activity data points at who looks busy.

Publish a one-page visibility policy

Fair visibility needs five headings: why you measure, what you track, who can see it, what you never collect, and how the policy changes. Let each person see their own data first. When a signal looks off, start with the work: "The migration card hasn't moved since Tuesday. What's getting in the way?" invites a useful answer. "You seem less active this week" invites a defense. Never rank people against each other.

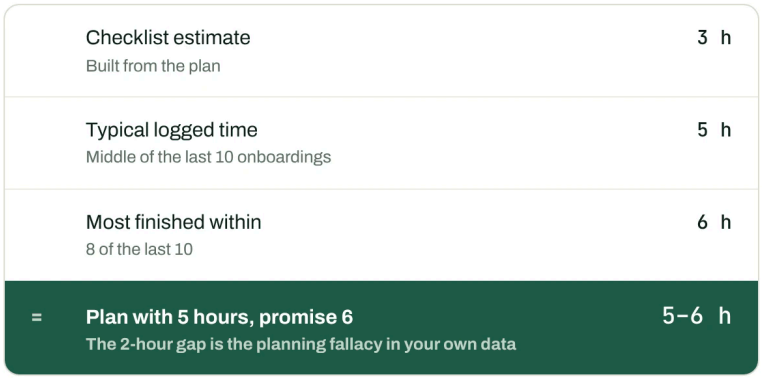
Use logged time to estimate honestly

People log time against the task they're working on, not against the day. Over a few weeks, that gives you something most teams lack: a history of how long similar work actually takes. It matters because plans run optimistic. In a 1994 study by Buehler, Griffin and Ross, only about 30% of students finished their thesis within the time they predicted.

Estimate in ranges from your own history. Plan the week with the typical time, and make promises with the time eight out of ten similar tasks finished within.

WORKED EXAMPLE

Estimating client onboarding from logged time



Where the numbers come from

Ten logged onboardings: 3.5, 4, 4, 4.5, 5, 5, 5.5, 6, 7.5 and 9 hours.

FIGURE 2 An estimate built from ten logged runs of the same work.

Pay contractors for task time

The same logs make contractor pay fairer. Start with hourly pay capped per task, logged to the task. Once a kind of work has been done about ten times and most runs land in a narrow range, offer a fixed price set slightly above the typical hourly cost. Keep hourly pay for work whose scope can't be known in advance, and introduce any change openly, running old and new side by side for a month.

TRY IT THIS WEEK

- [ ] Draft the visibility policy and share it before you change anything else.
- [ ] Pick one kind of recurring work and list its last ten logged times.
- [ ] Open your next check-in about a stuck task with a question about the work.

GO DEEPER ON THE ACTIONORDER BLOG

Accountability Without Surveillance on a Remote Team · Better Estimates From Your Team's Own Logged Time · Paying Remote Contractors: Hourly, by Outcome, or Both

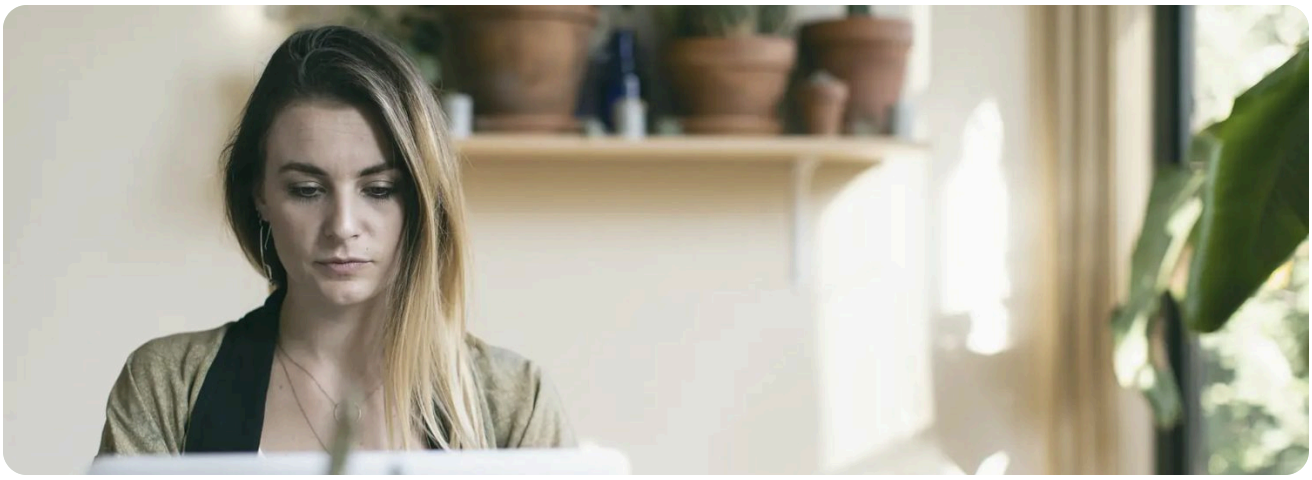
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1. Monitoring Employees Makes Them More Likely to Break Rules (June 27, 2022), Harvard Business Review
2. Exploring the "planning fallacy": Why people underestimate their task completion times (1994), Buehler, Griffin and Ross, Journal of Personality and Social Psychology

CHAPTER 7 OF 7

Your first 30 days

One habit a week, in the order that pays back fastest, and four numbers that tell you it’s working.



IN THIS CHAPTER

- How to introduce the changes without a big launch
- A week-by-week plan
- Four numbers to review on day 30

Before you start

Don’t announce a new operating model. Tell the team you’re going to try one change a week for a month, that each change is an experiment, and that you’ll keep only what works. Pick one shared place where the priority post, the agreements and the templates will live. Then write down where the four numbers at the end of this chapter stand today.

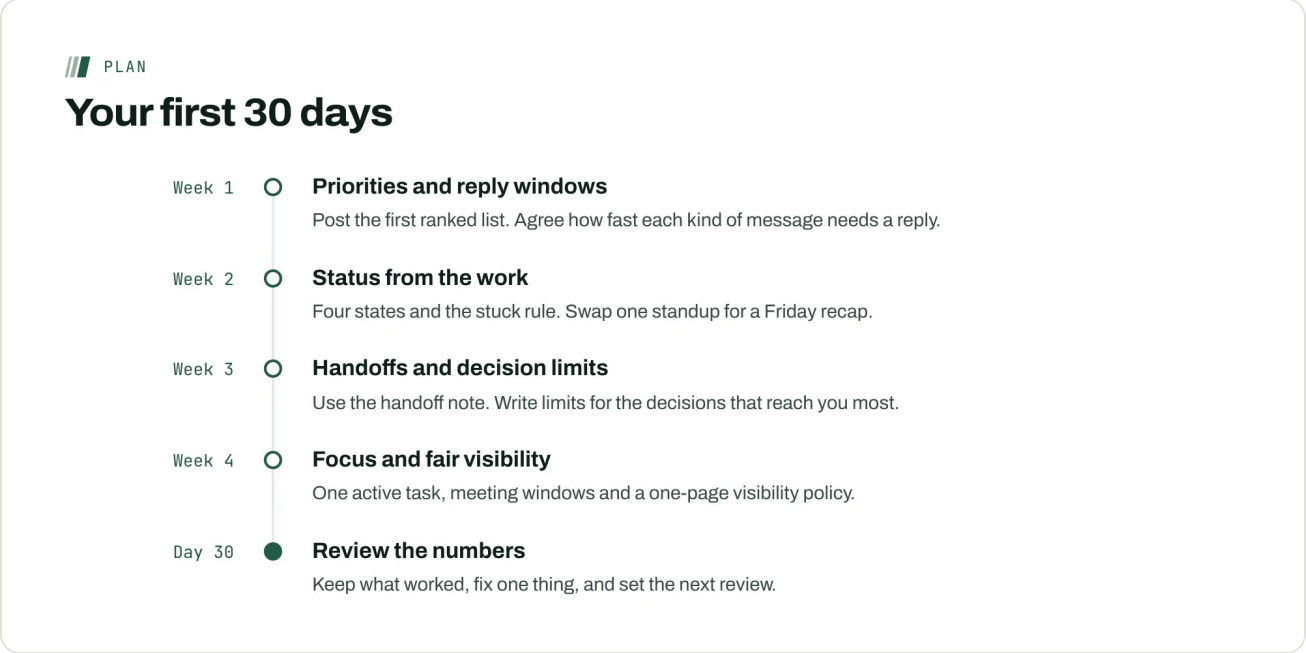


FIGURE 1 One habit a week, in the order that pays back fastest.

Week 1: priorities and reply windows

Publish the first ranked priority post on Monday, with a “not now” list and the exception rule. Share a draft response-time agreement and let the team edit it in writing until Wednesday. Publish the final version on Thursday.

Week 2: status from the work

Agree on the four states and the stuck triggers. Make sure every active task has one owner. Send the first Friday recap, and cancel one standup the following week. Keep the social part of the call if people want it, as an optional, unhurried conversation that has nothing to do with status.

Week 3: handoffs and decision limits

Ask everyone to use the handoff note for work that crosses a time zone. Write limits for the five decisions that reach you most, and start two short office-hour windows a day. Run the key-person audit and name a second owner for the riskiest responsibility.

Week 4: focus and fair visibility

Introduce one active task and the ready-to-resume note. Agree on meeting windows. Publish the visibility policy, and show each person their own data before anyone else looks at it.

Day 30: review the numbers

Compare the four numbers with where they started. Keep the habits that moved them, fix the one that didn’t, and set the next review for a month out. If a habit slipped, don’t add a rule. Ask what made it hard to keep, and

make that easier.

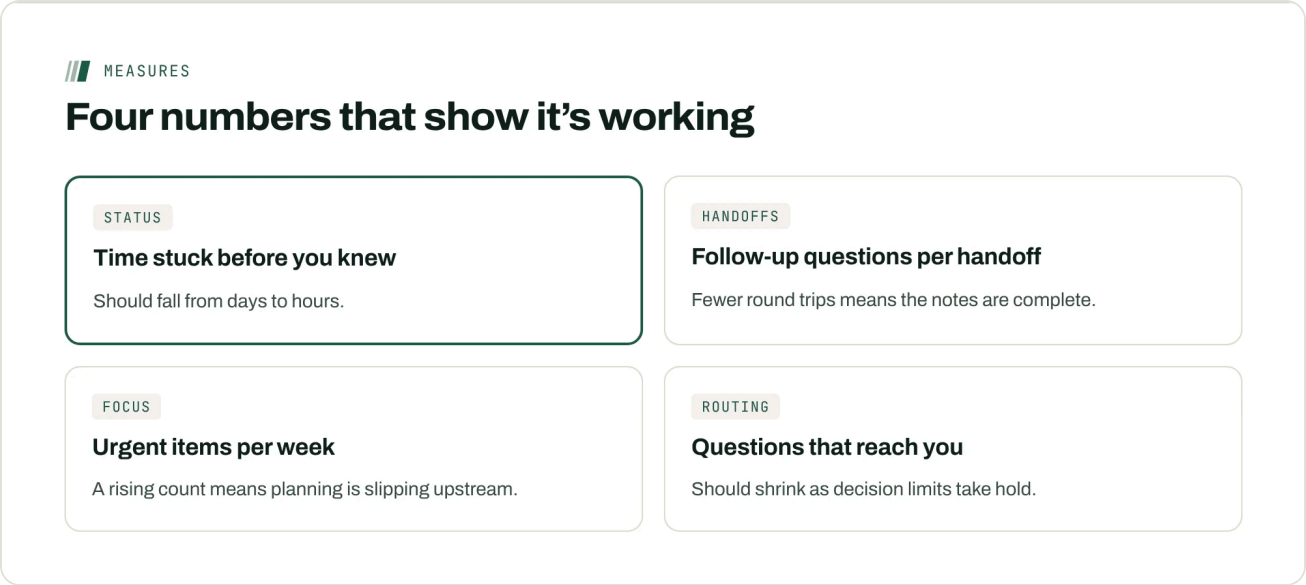


FIGURE 2 Write down where each number stands on day one, so day 30 has something to compare with.

What comes after

After the first month, the habits mostly run themselves, and your job shifts from routing work to improving how it flows. Look for the same problem showing up again and again: the same kind of task stuck, the same handoff bouncing back. Each one is a chance to fix the source, not the symptom.

TRY IT THIS WEEK

- [ ] Write down where the four numbers stand today.
- [ ] Tell the team about the first change, and call it an experiment.
- [ ] Put the day-30 review in your calendar now.

GO DEEPER ON THE ACTIONORDER BLOG

How to Stop Chasing Status Updates on a Remote Team · How to Set Priorities for a Remote Team Without a Weekly Meeting

TEMPLATES

Nine templates to copy

Every document the playbook asks for. Change the words in brackets and keep the headings.

Weekly priority post

Chapter 2 · Post every Monday, at the start of the earliest time zone's day.

Priorities for the week of [date]
1. [Priority one] · Owner: [name] · Next step: [one line]
2. [Priority two] · Owner: [name]
3. [Priority three] · Owner: [name]

Not now
[Work people will be tempted to start, and why it waits]

What changed since last week
[One line on anything that moved, and why]

What can jump the order
Only work marked urgent by a manager, or due today.

Disagree?
Reply in writing by [Tuesday, time and time zone].

Friday recap

Chapter 3 · Fifteen minutes to write, built from the work.

Week of [date]: what moved, what's stuck
Moved: [what finished or crossed a milestone, one line each]
Stuck: [what's blocked, who it's waiting on, and since when]
Decisions needed: [anything waiting on me, with the date I'll decide by]
Next week's top three: [copied from the priority post]

Status states and the stuck rule

Chapter 3 · Agree once, then silence means on track.

States

Done · In progress · Waiting · Stuck

Mark a task stuck when

- You've been blocked for more than half a working day.
- You've passed the estimate by half again, and you're not close.
- You've put the same task aside twice.
- You learn something that changes the deadline.

When you mark it stuck

Say what you need, and from whom, on the task itself.

Async handoff note

Chapter 4 · Usually fits in one short message.

Handoff: [task]

Done looks like: [one sentence with a finish line]
Background: [links to the thread, files and last version]
My hunch about the first step: [one line]
You can decide alone: [list]
Check with me on: [list]
Proceed unless I object by your morning on [date].
Most likely way this goes wrong: [one line]
Checkpoint: [a point in the work, not a time]
Close-out: reply here with the link and a two-line summary.

Decision limits

Chapter 4 · Write limits for the decisions that reach you most.

Decision · Decide it yourself when · Check with me when

Client scope requests · It fits the signed scope or adds under [2] hours · It changes a date or the price
Spending · Under $[500] and inside the budget line · Over $[500], or a new vendor
Your own task order · It doesn't move anyone else's deadline · It delays someone else's work
A client complaint · You can fix it within a day · It involves a refund or the contract
Numbers in brackets are examples. Raise them as the team shows it can handle them.

Handover document

Chapter 4 · Kept next to the work, updated by whoever ran it last.

[Responsibility]: handover

What this is and who it's for: [one paragraph a newcomer could read]

Recurring steps, in order: [step, and where it happens]

Exceptions: [the client who pays late, the report that needs a manual fix]

Access: [which accounts, who grants them, where credentials are stored; never the credentials]

People: [who to contact outside the team, and what each cares about]

Done looks like: [how the second owner knows when to stop]

Response-time agreement

Chapter 5 · Windows count the recipient's working hours.

Reply windows

Urgent: within 2 working hours

Blocking question: within half a working day

Handoff: a plan back within 1 working day

Review: within 2 working days

Urgent means

Marked urgent by a manager, or due today. Nothing else.

Habits

- Check messages at set times.
- Label messages "no reply needed" or "reply by [date]".
- Use overlap hours for decisions, not updates.

Ready-to-resume note

Chapter 5 · Write it before you switch, not after.

Where I am: [what's done and what's missing]

Next step: [the first thing to do when I come back]

What I parked: [anything I postponed that needs checking]

Visibility policy

Chapter 6 · Publish it before you change anything else.

Why we measure

To see where work waits and get it moving, not to judge individuals.

What we track

Each task’s owner and state, how long it waited, how often it was set aside, and time logged against its estimate.

Who sees it

You and your manager. Logged hours also go to payroll or billing. Nobody else.

What we never collect

Screenshots, keystrokes, app or website activity, or anyone else’s inbox. No rankings of people.

How it changes

In writing, with a week’s notice, after the team has had a chance to comment.

Put the playbook to work
with ActionOrder.

ActionOrder gives each person on a remote team one clear next step, already prepped, and builds status from the work itself. It's in pre-launch now. Join the waitlist to hear the day it opens.

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