HOW TO GO REMOTE
A 6-STEP CHECKLIST

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Here's the 6-point checklist of non-technical skills you'll need to master.

BY JASON LENGSTORF

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LOCATION-INDEPENDENT WORK: THE IDEAL SCENARIO AND THE ULTIMATE FREEDOM FOR KNOWLEDGE WORKERS

We're living in a service-based economy. A staggering number of jobs today are computer-based, and — whether or not it seems possible, most of those jobs probably can be done from anywhere you can set up a laptop and connect to the internet.

When I talk to most people about remote work, the most common belief is that only software developers and writers are able to work from anywhere.

That's just not true anymore; I've met trademark lawyers, accountants, customer service reps, sales managers, human resources man-

agers, administrative assistants, transcriptionists, translators, fitness and nutrition experts — even a marriage counselor — who are currently doing their jobs from couches and coffee shops around the world.

So **if your job is computer-based, you can probably do it from anywhere.** But that doesn't necessarily mean you can become a remote worker.

At least *not yet*.

REMOTE WORK REQUIRES A LOT MORE THAN COMPETENCE.

The thing is, remote work is a skill in itself. In order to be a good team member (or freelancer, or consultant, or whatever) in a remote scenario, we need to develop additional skills to navigate the new social dynamics and working environments that are part of location independence.

So that's what this checklist is all about: sharing the skills that I've found to be critically important for succeeding in a remote work environment, and offering some explicit action steps to help you develop those skills.

Because I believe that remote work is the smartest, healthiest, happiest path forward. And I want to help you find the freedom that location independence offers.

At the end of this document, I've included a printable checklist that condenses all the points in this book into a list of action steps. Save it, print it, tape it to your notebook or save it as your desktop background — whatever works best for you.

But whatever you do, **take these skills seriously, and make them a priority to master.** Because once you've got these down, the world of work is a much simpler, much less stressful, and much more lucrative place — a place in which you have the ability to generate an income from anywhere in the world, on a schedule that you control, with plenty of time left over to enjoy the other things that matter in life.

Here's hoping I see you in a coffee shop somewhere at 3pm on a Tuesday, reading a book or talking with a friend because you already finished your work for the day and the rest of the afternoon is yours.

FURTHER READING: HOW TELECOMMUTING IS A WIN FOR EVERYONE

STEP 1
MAKE CLEAR COMMUNICATION YOUR DEFAULT

MAKE CLEAR COMMUNICATION YOUR DEFAULT MODE AT WORK.

In an office, you have plenty of chances to discuss projects — often under quick, informal circumstances:

- While getting coffee, you might give someone a heads-up on your current status.
- At lunch, you and your coworkers might discuss the current state of a looming deadline.
- A manager might stop by your desk to ask a quick question.

As a remote worker, none of those circumstances come up. This means that communication needs to be deliberate.

WHY CLEAR COMMUNICATION IS NON-NEGOTIABLE FOR REMOTE WORKERS.

1. Without regular communication, you may feel disconnected from your team — and they may feel the same about you.
2. If a client or manager is waiting for you to finish something, silence creates unnecessary stress in the project.
3. The worst thing that can happen as a remote worker is to be considered "hard to get hold of" — you may as well head back to the office once people start to see you in that light.

YOUR ACTION STEP:
BECOME AN EXPERT COMMUNICATOR

At least once a day, send a status update for each project you're a part of. Set a reminder for the best time each day, and let the project's stakeholders know three things:

1. What you accomplished since the last update.
2. What you are planning to accomplish before the next update.
3. What — if anything — you need from the team before you can continue.

This is based on the "stand-up meeting", which is popular in software development. The goal is to keep everyone on the same page about what's happening, and to identify any issues in a project before they become problems.

STEP 2
TREAT PROMISES AS A MATTER OF LIFE & DEATH

TAKE YOUR INTEGRITY AND RELIABILITY SERIOUSLY.

If you want to become a remote worker, it's *absolutely vital* that you become someone the team feels comfortable relying on. While working remotely, everyone needs to trust that you're getting your work done, even though no one is with you to check if you're working, or to keep you on task.

You need to be someone who comes through on promises, who can always be trusted, and who the team knows they can turn to if something is really important.

WHY RELIABILITY IS SO CRITICAL FOR LOCATION-INDEPENDENT WORKERS.

1. Working remotely represents a *huge* amount of trust: you have no one to check in, to keep you on task, or to bail you out if you're not staying on top of things.
2. Regaining someone's trust after you've let them down is *hard*. Without the proximity of working in the same office, it can be nearly impossible — which can sabotage your chances of remaining a remote worker.

YOUR ACTION STEP:
BE SOMEONE YOUR TEAM CAN TRUST

To ensure you're someone who can be relied on, **treat every commitment as though your freedom depends on it.** This means giving deliberate thought to each request before agreeing to it.

A simple rule that's served me well over the years is to **only make one commitment per day.** If I'm already on the hook for something today, the soonest I'm willing to *commit* to doing something else is tomorrow. The power of this approach is twofold:

1. It helps keep you from getting overbooked and, therefore, helps avoid burnout.
2. It helps avoid busywork tasks that tend to get offloaded; instead, you're only working on tasks that actually matter.

STEP 3
MEASURE BY RESULTS NOT HOURS

TIME-BASED METRICS ARE THE KISS OF DEATH FOR ANY HOPES OF LOCATION INDEPENDENCE.

Beyond that, one of the most effective ways to ruin a company is to reward presence over progress. After all, if we're paid simply for showing up, what's the incentive to do good work? (Hint: the incentive is actually to do *less* work, because we get paid the same whether we do a little or a lot.)

This means that encouraging a results-based working culture is a big deal not just for keeping dreams of remote working alive, but for the survival of the company itself.

WHY DRIVING FOR RESULTS-BASED WORK IS SO IMPORTANT FOR REMOTE WORKERS.

1. One of the best parts of remote work is more autonomy and control over your schedule; if you're being judged by the hour and not by results, that autonomy and control can't happen.
2. It's extremely hard for companies to measure time-based employees remotely, so your chances of getting approval for remote work are *much* lower if you aren't results-based.

FURTHER READING: HOW TIME-BASED WORK KILLS MOTIVATION

YOUR ACTION STEP:
SHIFT THE FOCUS TOWARD RESULTS

This is much more challenging than the other steps on this checklist, because it requires buy-in from the whole team in addition to an effort on your part.

Whenever projects are being planned, focus the discussion on measurable outcomes other than time. What metrics can you define to determine whether the project was a success?

Do the same with your performance reviews: what are you expected to produce? How will your team know you've met those requirements? This takes a lot of work at the start, but once it's in place you'll find — the *entire company* will find — that work is much more pleasant, and remote work is much more plausible.

STEP 4
MASTER THE ART OF PRODUCTIVE WORK

EFFICIENCY IS THE KEY TO YOUR LOCATION-INDEPENDENT LIVING.

Remote work can actually become a *bigger* time-suck than office-based work if we're not careful, so it's extremely important that we've got good habits in place to help us get our work done effectively, and within a reasonable time frame.

Creating highly efficient and productive habits not only help you become a remote worker, but also improve your value if you re-enter the job market or decide to go into freelancing.

Also, it just feels *really* good to know you kicked ass at work today.

WHY EFFICIENCY MATTERS SO MUCH FOR LOCATION-INDEPENDENT WORKERS.

1. If we work efficiently and stay productive, we can finish a full day's workload in just a few hours — leaving us the rest of our day to spend as we choose.

2. High productivity means bargaining power: you can set boundaries and dictate terms more easily if you're a top producer.

FURTHER READING: SCHEDULING FOR MAXIMUM PRODUCTIVITY

YOUR ACTION STEP:
CLEAR THE PATH TO GET SHIT DONE

To maximize efficiency, create positive urgency and find your ideal working environment. This means:

- **Create positive urgency by using a timer or leaving your charger at home.** Nothing keeps you focused like 15% left on your battery.
- **Shut out distractions by turning on Airplane or Do Not Disturb Mode on your phone and computer.** If necessary, use a distraction blocker like RescueTime.
- Don't check email, chat, or your phone during work blocks.

I break my day into 3 or 4 90-minute working blocks, with 10- or 15-minute minimum breaks between each. My colleagues and clients don't feel that I'm hard to get in touch with, and I typically finish an 8-hour shift's work in 4.5 hours or less.

STEP 5

FIND (AND KILL) YOUR URGE TO SLACK

WHY DO YOU PROCRASTINATE?

Procrastination isn't always caused by not wanting to do the work; it's often just a case of not knowing where to start, or a lack of clarity about what you're *really* trying to accomplish.

(If you find yourself procrastinating because the work itself is brutally awful or boring or repulsive, it's probably time to start job-hunting and/or soul-searching.)

This is good news, because it means you can eliminate most procrastination simply by making a better plan.

WHY BEATING PROCRASTINATION IS SUCH A BIG DEAL FOR REMOTE WORKERS.

1. It helps keep the focus on clear planning up front: you need to know _exactly_ what you're trying to accomplish, and how you'll know it's done.

2. You'll still have plenty of time for social media, watching TV, and anything else you would typically do to procrastinate, but now you're able to do it without the nagging guilt that you haven't finished your work yet.

FURTHER READING: THE ART OF EFFECTIVE PLANNING

YOUR ACTION STEP:
FIGHT THE URGE TO SLACK BY PLANNING

The simplest way to eliminate procrastination is to get *extremely* clear on what you're trying to do when you sit down to work. To do this, **create a todo list each day that only lists what you're going to do *that day*.**

Ideally, this list will be a single item — the one thing you committed to for the day — and you'll have crystal-clear criteria to determine whether or not you've finished.

A daily list has the added bonuses as well:

- The todo is results-based, so you're creating daily metrics.
- You're very clear on what you've committed to do, which helps you keep your promises.
- Communication is very simple: you can share the list and state whether or not you were able to finish it.

STEP 6

TOOT YOUR OWN HORN

NO ONE KNOWS WHAT YOU CAN DO IF YOUR HEAD STAYS DOWN.

You don't have to be (and *really* shouldn't be) a self-aggrandizing jerkoff, but you *do* have to find a way to share what you've done — and *what you can do* — with the people on your team.

WHY SELF-PROMOTION ISN'T OPTIONAL FOR LOCATION-INDEPENDENT WORKERS.

1. Star team members have bargaining power. You can get more of what you want if the people you're negotiating with are aware of everything you bring to the table.

2. You can start a positive cognitive bias snowball by using [the halo effect](#) (where people see your positive attributes as proof of other positive attributes) and [the Pygmalion effect](#) (where a group's expectations of you tend to become a self-fulfilling prophecy) where you represent yourself as capable, which causes people to expect you to be capable, which causes you to become capable.

This sounds like feel-good, self-helpish bullshit. It's not bullshit. I've watched it happen in my own life, and in the lives of my friends. Unfortunately, the reverse is also true, so it's extremely important to avoid a low opinion of yourself.

YOUR ACTION STEP:
MAKE YOUR PRESENCE KNOWN

One way to make sure your manager is aware of how you contribute is to **ask for a performance review every 90 days or so.** This draws attention to your output without requiring you to brag.

For bonus points — and to maximize the positive cognitive bias snowball — you can step it up with a bit of extra effort:

- **Become a resource for your team/community in any way possible.** You'll help people, build good will, and establish yourself as an expert — all at the same time. Win-win.

- **Go to your manager when a project is completed to ask if there's any way you can help out the team.** This points out that you're kicking ass — you finished early! — and shows a willingness to help out the team.

YOUR REMOTE WORK CHECKLIST
WANT TO EARN YOUR LIVING FROM ANYWHERE? FOLLOW THIS CHECKLIST & MASTER THESE SKILLS.

1. BECOME AN EXPERT COMMUNICATOR.

Send a stand-up style check-in to every member of each project you're involved in at least once each day.

2. BE SOMEONE YOUR TEAM CAN TRUST.

Only commit to one project per day, and only promise something if you're 100% confident you can hit the deadline.

3. SHIFT THE FOCUS TOWARD RESULTS.

Define measurable results for projects and performance reviews that are based on what you produce, now how much time you spend.

4. CLEAR THE PATH TO GET SHIT DONE.

Use a timer and eliminate distractions (including email and chat) while working to keep focus high.

5. FIGHT THE URGE TO SLACK BY PLANNING.

Write a todo list each day with only what you're doing today, and make sure there's a clear way to measure when it's done.

6. MAKE YOUR PRESENCE KNOWN.

Ask for regular performance reviews to discuss what you've accomplished and how you can contribute to the team.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:
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I've been a remote worker for over a decade, working first as the owner of a web design agency, and later as a consultant for some of the world's most innovative companies.

In 2014, I gave up the lease on my apartment, sold everything I couldn't fit into a carry-on suitcase, and started traveling the world with my girlfriend, Marisa. We've been on the road ever since, exploring the world and earning a living while we do it.

I write about how I'm finding balance, happiness, and meaning in my life on my blog, lengstorf.com. Sometimes I overshare on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram.