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## WORK & LIFE

# While Working Remotely, Here's How to Get Noticed—and Promoted

With millions of people working from home during the pandemic, it's time for strategies to keep your career on track and not be overlooked



ILLUSTRATION: AJ DUNGO



By

[Rachel Feintzeig](#)

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Ditching your commute and working in your pajamas is nice. But is remote work hindering your career?

As millions of people hunker down in the telecommuting experiment that won't seem to end—and some toy with making the setup permanent—they are getting a taste of what working-from-home veterans have known for years: It can be hard to climb the ladder when no one can see you.

The best projects and promotions often go to in-office workers. Those logging on from home say they feel invisible at times or find that opportunities for advancement, such as

making the leap to manager, are closed off to them. Some face suspicion about what they're actually doing all day. Without the ability to spot who's sitting next to whom in a glass-walled conference room or talk with a colleague from another department at the coffee machine, it can be hard to read the power lines of the workplace and make connections.

In some ways, the pandemic has been a great equalizer. Now, at many companies, everyone is working remotely. But even with a level playing field it can be hard to prove over Zoom that you're ready for a promotion.

Consider life back at the office, where people could see you plugging away each workday. "If you were showing up and sitting in your seat every day and maybe getting in a little earlier than they did and staying a little later than they did, you were a top-notch worker," says Cali Yost, the chief executive and founder of workplace-consulting company Flex+Strategy Group. "Really, at the end of the day, they had no idea what you're doing. You could have just been sitting there."

Without that built-in cue for your manager, the onus shifts to you to prove your value and make sure you're in the flow. Ms. Yost recommends providing frequent updates on your progress, asking for work and making sure you're clear on the company's priorities and expectations. "It's a much more specific and intentional way of doing your job," she says.

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*If you have been working remotely during the pandemic, how is it going? If well, how would you go about making the arrangement permanent? Join the conversation below.*

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At ButcherBox, a meat-subscription service based in Boston, workers living in Texas, Pennsylvania and other locations often felt like second-class citizens, says CEO Mike Salguero. Corporate decisions often were made on the fly by pulling a group of people into a conference room at the office, leaving out those farther afield.

"They felt like they were not involved in the important conversations," Mr. Salguero says. "Basically, their career was being held back by the fact that they were remote, which makes sense."

Paula Davis, a member support manager based in Dallas, recalls not being included in a meeting in January where the rest of her team made a decision about call-center

operations, a key part of her job. Another time, she opened up the email invite to a meeting and found no dial-in or videoconferencing link. She frantically emailed her colleagues, but they didn't realize she was absent until 10 minutes before the meeting was over. She wondered how she would rise in the ranks at the company if she could so easily be overlooked.

“I just truly felt like an afterthought,” Ms. Davis says. “Does my opinion not matter?”

Ms. Davis' manager, Joe Kelly, says he felt terrible each time he accidentally left Ms. Davis out, especially since he'd been in her shoes recently, having worked remotely in Colorado for the company for a year. “As much as you try, you definitely make those mistakes,” he says. He began to advocate for Ms. Davis in the office, urging others to loop her in when he'd overhear conversations related to her job. Ms. Davis also started pushing herself to speak up more, pointing out when lapses happened and insisting on dial-in links before meetings.

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The pandemic helped solve many of the dynamics at ButcherBox. With everyone working remotely for now, and the company hiring in different locations, Ms. Davis says she sees much more potential for herself there. But Mr. Salguero, the CEO, is still wrestling with how to keep things fair for telecommuters long-term. One thought is to make sure he is out of the office as much as possible so those impromptu meetings can't happen. “If I'm remote, there's always that buffer,” he says.

Research shows that remote workers adapt to the pressures and disadvantages of being far from headquarters, but their coping mechanisms come with consequences. A 2019 study called “Get Noticed and Die Trying,” which analyzed interviews with 60 remote workers and dozens of their managers and peers, found that employees who aren't co-

located with their bosses tend to obsessively monitor their email and volunteer to take early-morning and late-night meetings—anything to prove they're committed and working hard.

The result is burnout, says Paul Leonardi, a co-author of the study and professor of technology management at University of California, Santa Barbara. Many either give up trying to advance or quit their jobs.

It's worth emphasizing that was the result when working from home was just, well, working from home, as opposed to what you did while also home schooling and navigating a recession and health crisis. These days, aiming for a promotion remotely can be even more fraught.



Haley Bryant, seen with her son, Oliver, was promoted but shifted her approach to work after feeling 'on a treadmill that was going faster and faster.'

PHOTO: JULIA EISENBERG

Haley Bryant spent the spring trying to ascend to the chief operating officer role at content-marketing firm Animalz while sitting side by side with her son, Oliver, then 4 years old, in their Bethesda, Md., home. Having worked remotely for a few years, she knew she was prone to some unhealthy habits, like working for hours without pausing for food or a break. But now every day felt like both an audition for the new gig and an emergency. The business was shedding customers, employees were overwhelmed and her son was

constantly interrupting her, sad that she didn't have time to color with him. "I just was on a treadmill that was going faster and faster," she says.

Working long hours, Ms. Bryant began suffering from persistent headaches. Her energy sank. She got the job, but realized her approach during the trial period wasn't sustainable. She needed to draw firmer boundaries and preserve more time for herself. "It forced me to set a bar and change how I work," she says. "I'm a human, not a robot."

## How to Score a Promotion From Home

**Check in:** Keep your boss updated on your accomplishments and raise your hand for projects.

**Get aligned:** Make sure you know what your manager's expectations are and where the company's priorities lie. Think about work you can do that would make your boss's life easier.

**Stay in the flow:** Participate in group chats on technology like Slack and schedule random catch-up calls with colleagues, including those not on your immediate team. If travel is an option, schedule office visits.

**Speak up:** Make sure you have the phone number or link for a meeting beforehand. If you are left out of a meeting, say something.

**Express your goals:** Make clear you're aiming for the next step in your career. If you're open to transitioning back to the office to make that happen, perhaps as part of a hybrid setup where you go in once a week, spell it out for your manager.

Write to Rachel Feintzeig at [rachel.feintzeig@wsj.com](mailto:rachel.feintzeig@wsj.com)

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