



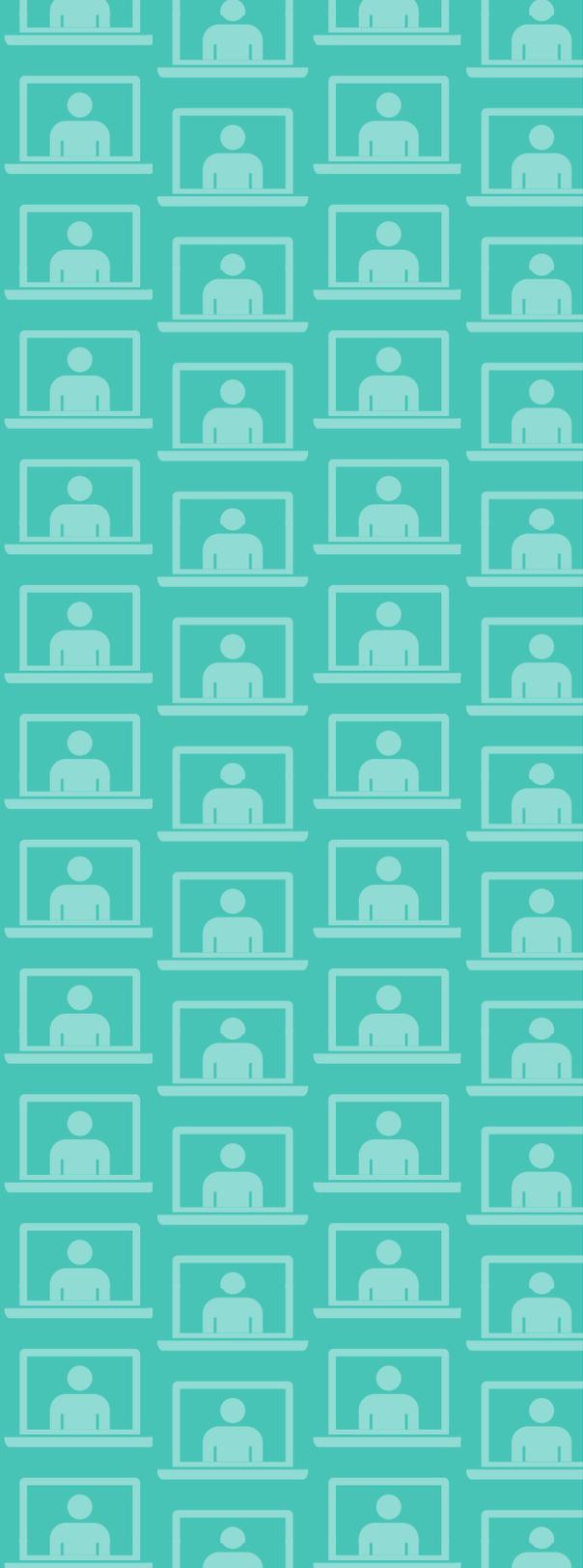
REMOTE MANAGEMENT AND ONBOARDING



HARVARD | BUSINESS | SCHOOL
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INTRODUCTION

In the wake of COVID-19, companies around the world are quickly changing how they get work done, which includes remotely managing summer internships and bringing new hires into the fold. While it is difficult to predict what the coming months will hold, companies have already started making decisions in order to plan for successful onboarding, training, and impactful work.

To help companies think through this process, Harvard Business School (HBS) Career & Professional Development has gathered best practices from companies who are crafting remote internships and virtual onboarding processes for the first time, and those who have managed virtual teams for years. Using these strategies and tools will help set your company up for an effective summer internship experience and to successfully integrate full-time hires into your remote work.

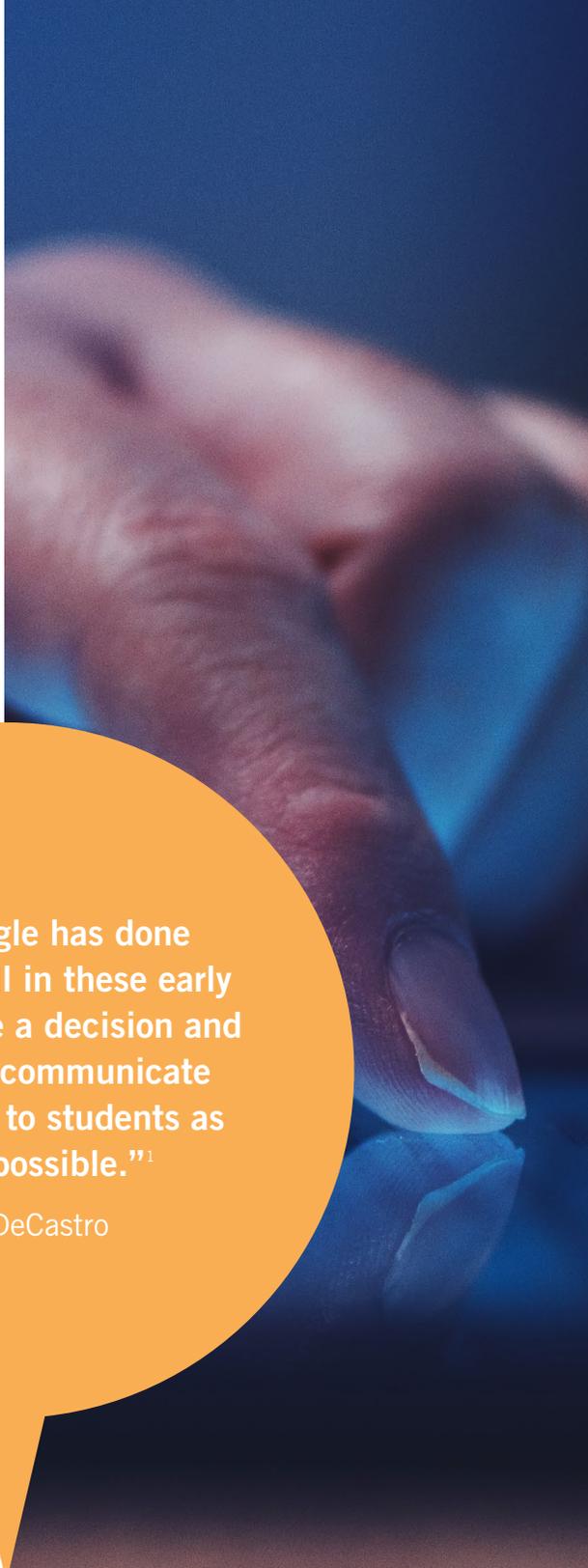


**START WITH CLEAR
COMMUNICATION**

START WITH CLEAR COMMUNICATION

Clear communication is now more important than ever as companies work to ensure all of their stakeholders are well informed about plans for the future, even if those plans are still in development in a rapidly changing situation. When the onboarding process pivots virtually, making sure new hires know what to expect and when is critical.

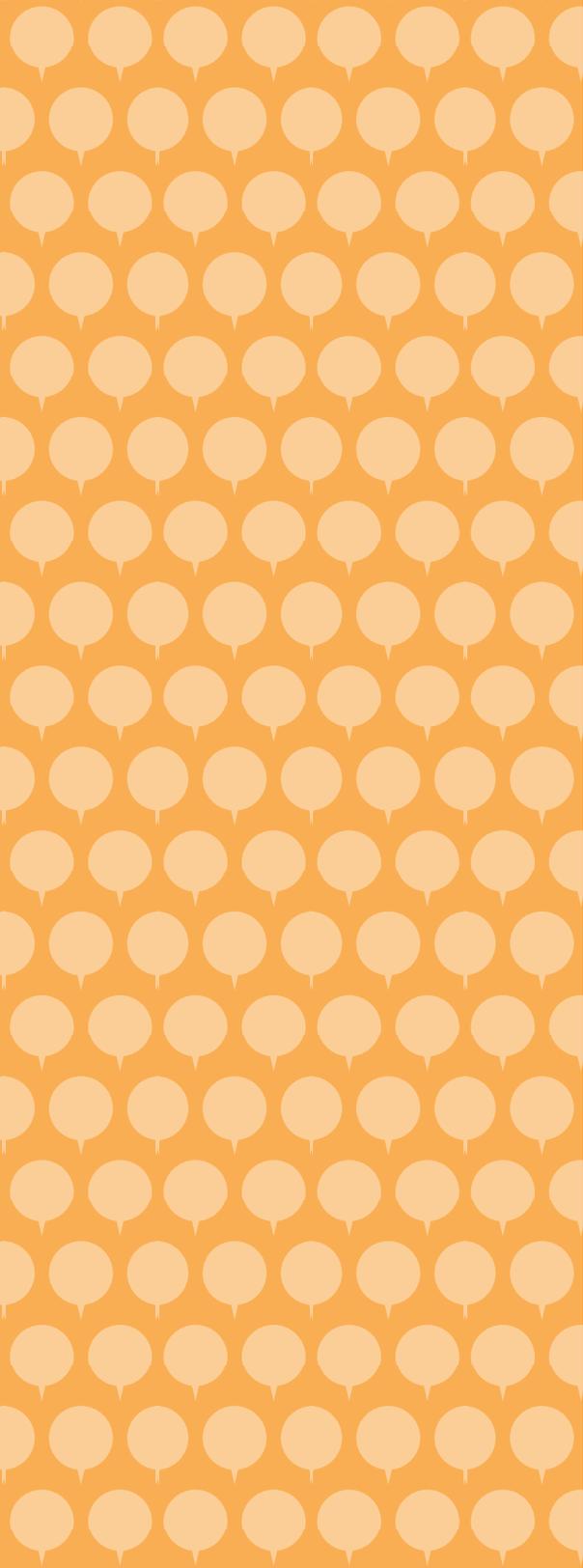
Molly DeCastro, Career & Professional Development Recruiting Relations Manager, works closely with technology firms who recruit at HBS. Shortly after the outbreak of COVID-19 in the United States, she saw many companies, including Google, quickly pivot their internship positions to remote opportunities. “What Google has done especially well in these early stages is make a decision and then clearly communicate that decision to students as soon as possible” said DeCastro.¹



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Molly DeCastro

¹ Interview with Molly DeCastro, March 27, 2020



Clear and decisive action coupled with direct communication with new hires is beneficial even if the details of the remote internship or full-time role are not finalized. In an uncertain economic environment, students are concerned about internships being cancelled and full-time offers being rescinded, so taking action now to move roles virtual goes a long way in establishing trust and confidence in the company's future. For internship programs specifically, by making the move to virtual early on and making that decision known to incoming interns, your company will have more time to craft an internship and onboarding experience that will be just as effective virtually as in person.

Communication will continue to be important through the onboarding and training process, as well as when new team members are fully integrated and focusing on their key deliverables. There are a multitude of tools available for communication and best practices for using them, but the key is clarity of message and not being afraid to over-communicate. We have seen this to be particularly important during uncertain times and periods of dramatic change.



DESIGNING A

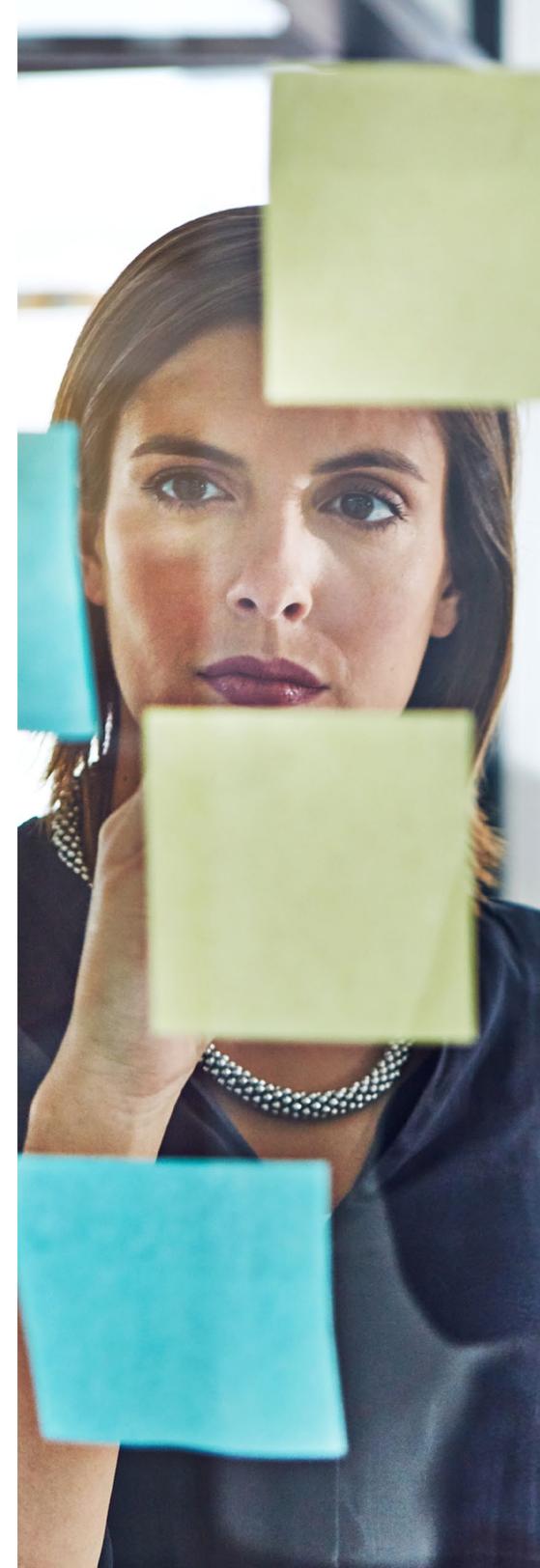
VIRTUAL INTERNSHIP

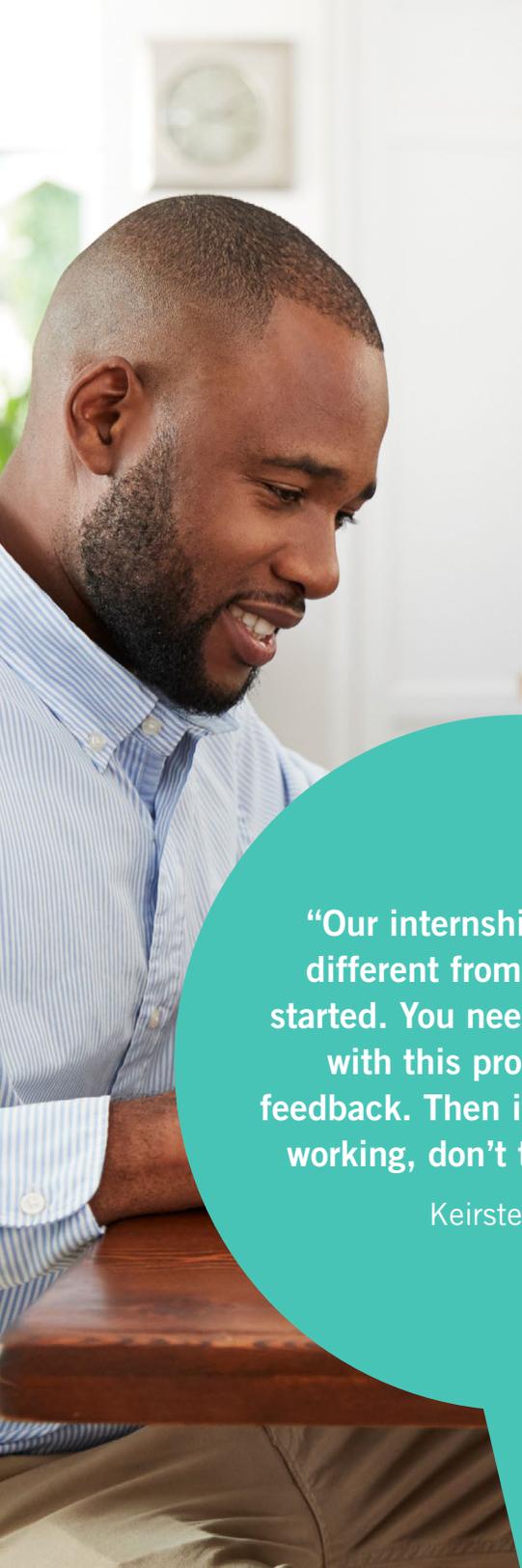
DESIGNING A VIRTUAL INTERNSHIP

To design an effective virtual internship, look to what has been successful for in person internships at your company and others. Kristen Fitzpatrick (HBS 2003), Managing Director of Career & Professional Development, has noted the common threads among great internship experiences. “Successful internships benefit both organizations and students by providing a chance for someone with fresh eyes to take a look at how things are done, and allowing students to bring their previous experience to bear in a new situation. Students with particularly positive experiences often remark that they felt integrated into the work of the team, and that people in the organization cared about what they were working on.”²

To replicate this integration, consider how you can create an online structure of support, mentorship, and ongoing education. The checkpoints Fitzpatrick often suggests, including regular 1:1s with a supervisor, a mid-summer check-in with leadership, and an end-of-summer presentation, can be completed using video conferencing with day-to-day work getting accomplished using chat, project management tools, and email. Not only will these pre-determined check-ins give your intern set milestones to work towards, but they will also allow interns to get to know team members and leadership from afar.

² Interview with Kristen Fitzpatrick, March 25, 2020





Darren Murph, Head of Remote for [GitLab](#), also stresses the importance of choosing the appropriate projects for remote interns. “It’s important to select projects which are important or notable to a large group. This ensures that many people in the organization are invested in the intern’s success, and it widens the scope of available mentors who are knowledgeable about the project and can step in and help across time zones.”³

You can also consider a rotational internship that will give students insight into various aspects of your business while not being on site with your team. Keirsten Sires, remote internship consultant and founder and CEO of [LRT Sports](#), has utilized this model for four years in the company’s remote 10-week rotational internship.⁴ Students go through five rotations with weekly assigned projects reviewed by mentors. The final rotation allows interns to choose the business area they are most excited about to complete a final project. She also stressed the need to be flexible within your structure. “Our internship looks wildly different from when we first started. You need to be dynamic with this process and get feedback. Then if something isn’t working, don’t try to force it.”

“Our internship looks wildly different from when we first started. You need to be dynamic with this process and get feedback. Then if something isn’t working, don’t try to force it.”³

Keirsten Sires

³ Interview with Darren Murph, March 30, 2020

⁴ Interview with Keirsten Sires, March 30, 2020



VIRTUAL HIRING BEST PRACTICES

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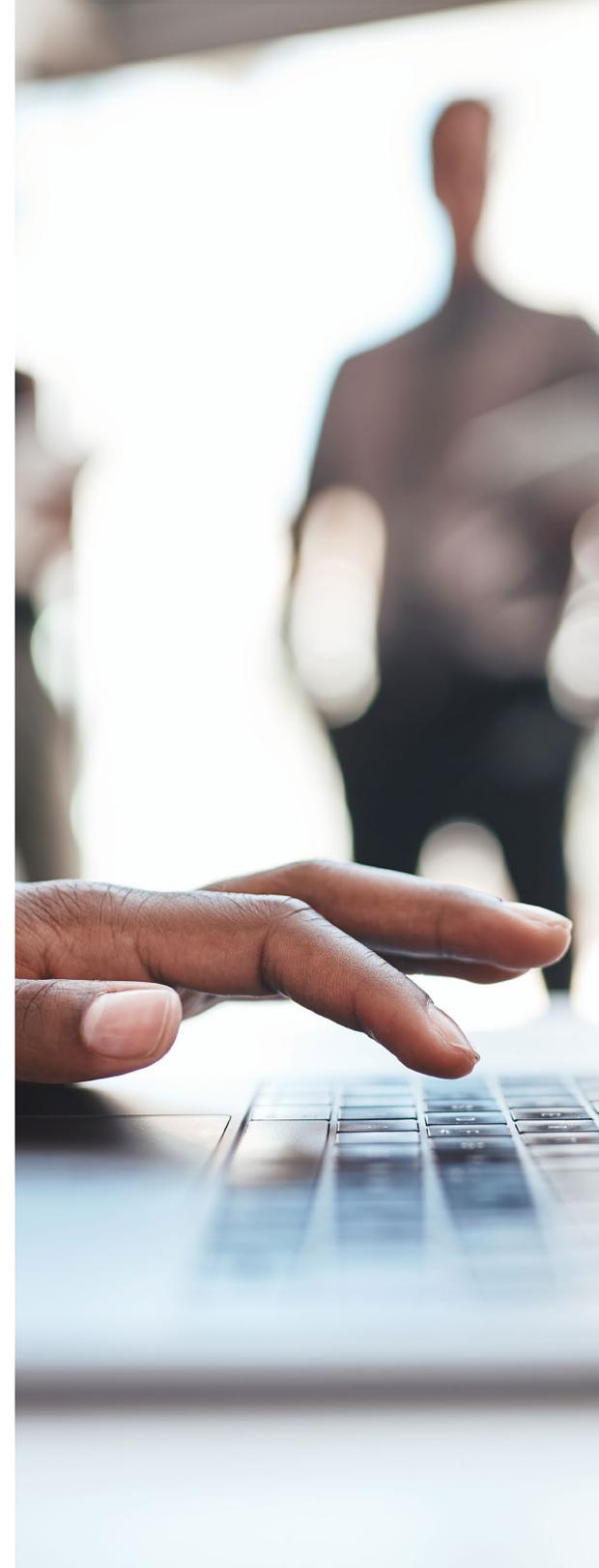
While for some companies the process of transitioning new employees into remote work is occurring after hiring has been completed, other organizations who typically hire in the spring or who are finding the need to strategically fill new or existing roles are starting now. This creates the need for designing a virtual hiring process that ensures candidates are thoroughly assessed for skills and fit, as well as the ability to successfully join the team remotely and contribute quickly.

Peggy Yu (HBS 2007), HBS Career Coach and CEO of [Stack Education](#), manages a team that is “solutions and results oriented rather than face time oriented.”⁵ In normal circumstances, team members at Stack Education come and go from the office and will also work remotely part of the time. Fellow HBS Coach and COO of [Verata Health](#), Jon Puz (HBS 2008), manages his company in a similar way.⁶ With offices in Boston, Orlando, and Minneapolis, the team is accustomed to working remotely and managing a virtual hiring process. For these remote teams, there have been lessons learned in remote hiring over the years, as well as shifts to their current best practices to accommodate a fully virtual process.

For example, when selecting candidates, Yu’s hiring process focuses on the attitude and aptitude of people in order to ensure they will succeed at the company. “We are looking for curiosity, flexibility, and ability to communicate. These factors help

⁵ Interview with Peggy Yu, April 14, 2020

⁶ Interview with Jon Puz, April 18, 2020





remote employees adapt and contribute to the team when we aren't together in the office" she said. Puz is also focused on ensuring that new hires can succeed in a remote environment and is following a "measure twice, cut once" philosophy in the interview process. "We are having more conversations with candidates and getting more people involved in the decision making. We are also doing increased reference checking to be thorough about our process and make smart hires."

Central to the virtual interview processes at Stack Education and Verata Health is video. "In lieu of in person interviews video is essential to get to know candidates, but it's important to recognize that different people have different comfort with video," Yu said. To help make candidates feel comfortable, Stack Education brings in multiple staff members to the interview process at one time. They find this is an effective way to reduce time spent in front of the screen for the candidate, and it creates a conversational environment that is more comfortable.

Recruiter, Kate Griffin, at [Indigo Ag](#) agrees that ensuring candidates feel comfortable and prepared is a very important part of this process.⁷ "This is a time when candidates are not only juggling work but a lot outside of work as well. We are working with candidates to be as flexible as possible with scheduling interviews, truly operating within a 'we're in this together and we'll work with you to make things happen' mindset," she said. They have also implemented a 5-minute Zoom trial run with interview coordinators and candidates to ensure candidates understand the technology, and then they follow up with a detailed logistics email that includes the interview schedule, technology tips, and best practices for remote interviews.

⁷ Interview with Kate Griffin, April 20, 2020



ONBOARDING

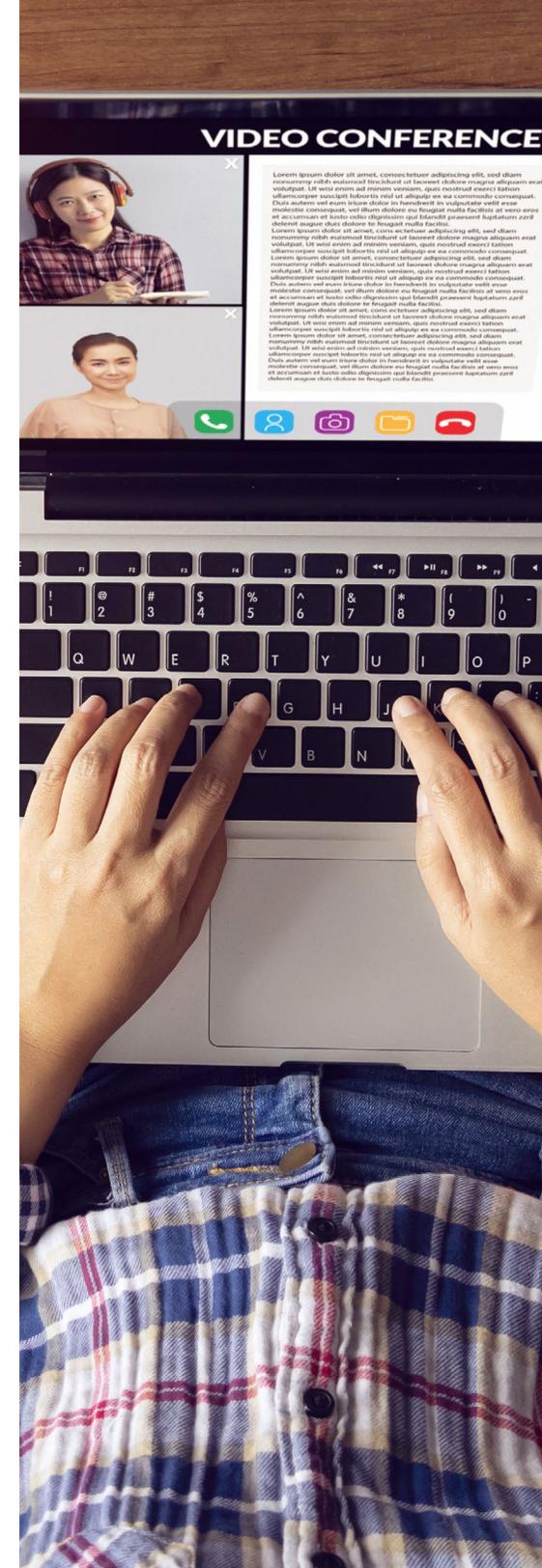
REMOTELY

ONBOARDING REMOTELY

Now that your remote roles have been defined and hires have been made, it will be time to bring new employees on board. A remote onboarding experience for your interns or new full-time hires won't be filled with handshakes around the office and a team lunch. However, you can effectively onboard new employees and enable team integration from day one with effective processes and ongoing support.

One best practice used across successful companies is frequent 1:1 check-ins with managers, peers, and other important stakeholders. At Indigo Ag, the recruiting team has worked closely with hiring managers to make sure new hires have virtual introductions scheduled. “We measure our efforts in this regard with two questions in a survey we send to employees on their second day, “My first day at Indigo felt well-structured” and “I have met with/will be meeting with my manager to have a 1-on-1 in my first week,” said Griffin.

At GitLab, where all employees are remote, there is also a focus on 1:1 connections to ensure a smooth introduction to the company. The team utilizes a well-established [onboarding buddy](#) program that pairs new hires with experienced team members who can offer basic training on communication tools, offer guidance on how to complete specific tasks on the new hire checklist, and act as a general resource. For the GitLab internship program specifically, Murph recommends onboarding with check-ins at a regular cadence, up to several times a day in the ramp up period, to replicate an in person experience. You can also set up an “always on” video meeting room to encourage questions and interaction.





“Whether in person or online, during onboarding we focus on creating an engaging, fun, and memorable learning environment and making sure new employees feel comfortable.”⁸

Kelly Chuck

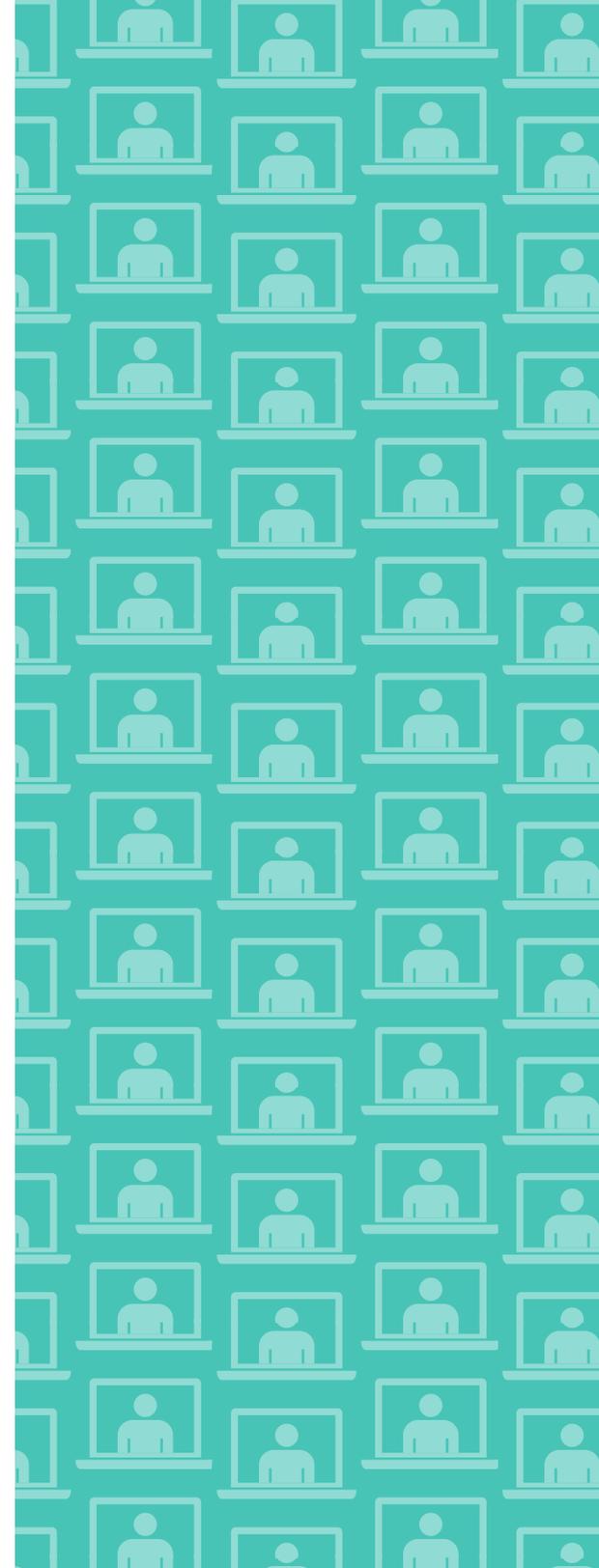
Much like the interview process, the 1:1 connections during onboarding are best established using video which can help simulate the in person exchanges you may be more accustomed to. At Stack Education, new team members are onboarded remotely using video calls as the primary communication tool. Yu said, “These are new relationships and video allows for more physical cues that help people get to know one another. We use video in 1:1 meetings set up with managers but also with various other members of the team just as we would with in person onboarding.” While communication may shift towards Slack or email later on, these video meetings allow new hires an important opportunity to establish relationships and build a foundation of trust and comradery.

In addition to the important 1:1 meetings, companies are also creating onboarding plans that include a mix of presentations, videos, articles, and engaging activities for new hires to complete. When tackling the challenge of swiftly moving onboarding remote, Kelly Chuck, Onboarding Program Manager at LinkedIn, put together a [five day virtual onboarding program](#) that allows for more flexibility as new hires handle the current challenges of managing home, work, and family life.⁸ Highlights of the onboarding plan include using storytelling to present key topics and resources, executive speakers, and virtual breakout rooms that encourage interaction among new hires. “Whether in person or online, during onboarding we focus on creating an engaging, fun, and memorable learning environment and making sure new employees feel comfortable,” says Chuck. For remote onboarding in particular, spreading out the necessary virtual presentations helps manage screen fatigue in a time when screens are our primary mode of communication.

⁸ Interview with Kelly Chuck, April 27, 2020

Another strategy that works especially well is providing online resources and links to relevant social media posts or discussions before their start date. Sires has incorporated this mode of early education into the onboarding process for their internship program at LRT, which also includes a “pitch session” two weeks into the internship. Each intern pitches the company back to managers after two weeks on the job to ensure they are up to speed and can effectively communicate the company’s values and goals.

A comprehensive online handbook is also a helpful tool. At GitLab, new employees complete their task checklists with help from the 5,000 page online handbook that is constantly updated as employees find gaps, new tools, or more efficient ways of getting work done. It is not meant to be read cover to cover, but to act as a resource guide for questions. Consider what existing educational material your company has and how that can be packaged together for remote onboarding purposes.





MANAGING A VIRTUAL TEAM



MANAGING A VIRTUAL TEAM

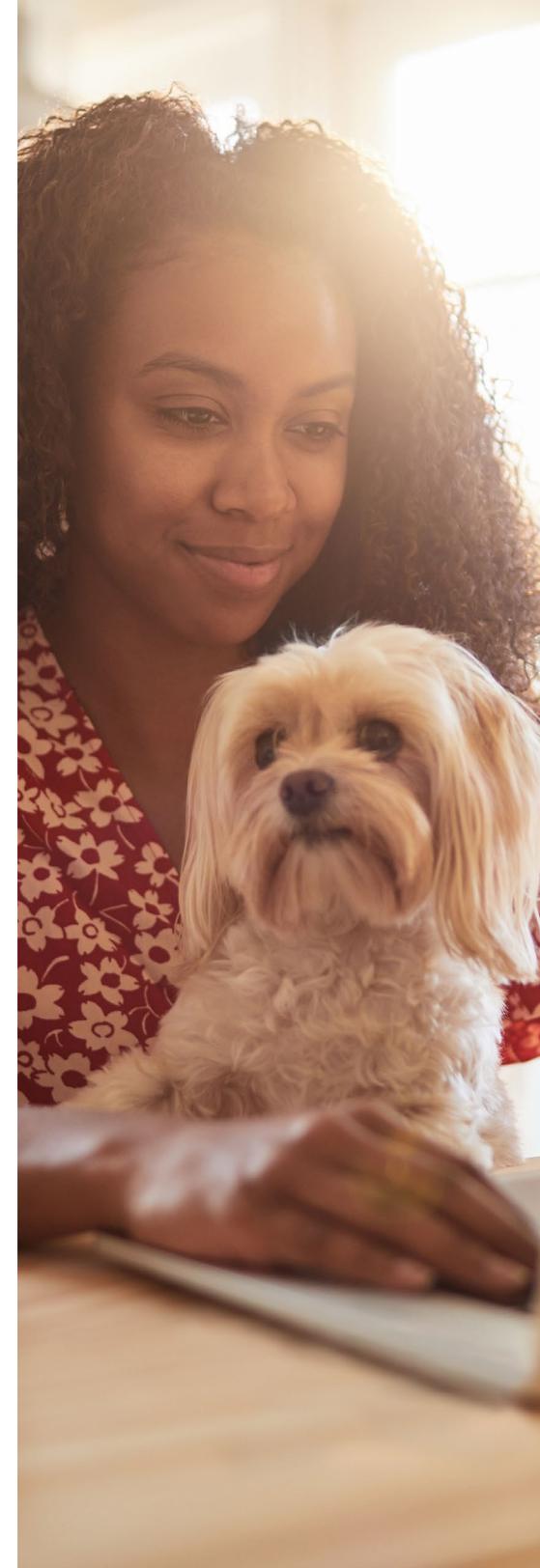
Technology has made remote work easier today than it ever has been and there are numerous tools like Zoom, Slack, Microsoft Teams, Basecamp, and Google Drive that help teams collaborate. However, there have been remote teams for decades in various industries and much of what makes these companies successful is effective management rooted in support and trust. These practices apply to managing successful summer interns and new full-time hires.

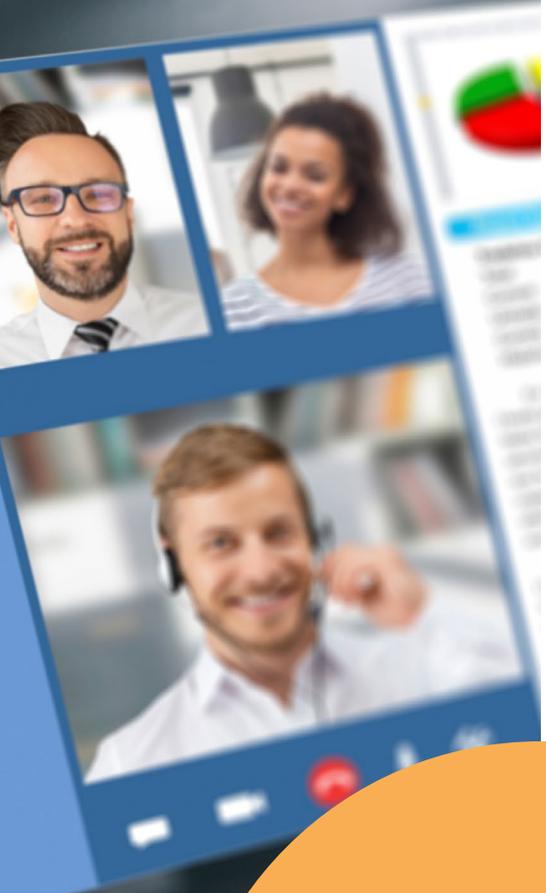
Claire Lew, CEO of [Know Your Team](#), a software company that helps managers become better leaders, has led her all-remote company for 6 years and provides tools and resources for other companies to do the same. The advice she shares regarding managing virtual teams centers on setting clear expectations about what success looks like coupled with systems to track progress.⁹ By setting the groundwork early on with all new employees you can avoid micromanaging projects and instead create a culture of trust and give the team the time and space to do impactful work.

⁹ Know Your Teams [Managing Remote Teams Workshop](#)

It's also important to set clear expectations around communication, and failure to do so can create a bumpy start for new employees. From her experience at Stack Education, Yu noted "While the default mode of communication may be Slack, there are certain topics that should be discussed on a call. As managers bringing on new team members, we need to model the behavior we expect, have conversations and trainings on this topic using case studies to provide examples, and allow room for error." If your team has a preferred mode of communication, make sure interns and new full-time employees are well informed about what channels to use and when. How quickly are team members expected to respond to messages? What belongs in chat and what is best for email or a video conference meeting? In a recent *Managing Remote Teams Know Your Team* webinar, Lew shared examples of companies who do an excellent job setting communication expectations including [Automattic](#), [Buffer](#), and [Basecamp](#).

Lew, along with Murph at GitLab, also recommends implementing a practice of asynchronous writing instead of relying entirely on video conference meetings. Kicking off brainstorming sessions in writing or posting questions on shared documents allows team members time to think and then be less reactive and make decisions more thoughtfully. As you integrate remote interns and full-time employees into your team in the coming months, asynchronous writing also allows for collaboration across time zones and provides written documentation of how team members have made impactful contributions.





Furthermore, don't forget that how you handle a crisis showcases a lot about your organization and your culture. Yu noted "in a virtual environment, you need to be more intentional and carve out opportunities for employees to connect." Without walks in between meetings or a quick chat while getting water, team members don't have the natural opportunity to interact.

At LinkedIn, during onboarding new hires are encouraged to use breaks between presentations to stay on the video call to chat with their peers over lunch. "We've also brought our Learning & Development team daily dance parties online so we can stay connected" adds Chuck. At Stack Education, they have instituted weekly Jeopardy Happy Hour at the end of the week, a designated person to bring the "funny and smiles" each day on Slack, and they added in ten minutes of social time in their daily Zoom stand up meetings. "Source suggestions from your team members so there is collective ownership of the culture and employees feel invested in helping one another stay connected," Yu adds. In this way, your interns and new full-time employees will be integrated into the team not just by you as the manager, but by the entire group, and get a sense of your culture.

"Source suggestions from your team members so there is collective ownership of the culture and employees feel invested in helping one another stay connected."⁵

Peggy Yu

FINDING WHAT WORKS FOR YOU

Keep in mind that many of the companies profiled here have been managing remote teams and/or internship programs for years, and they have each had time to craft their strategies and make changes along the way. We encourage you to think about the time and resources your company has available and pick from some of these best practices to make remote work work for you.

In addition, as you move forward with managing your virtual interns and full-time hires this summer, you can also reference remote management best practices and thought leadership from Harvard Business School faculty:

- [The New Rules for Remote Work: Pandemic Edition](#)
- [How the Coronavirus is Already Rewriting the Future of Business](#)
- [15 Questions About Remote Work, Answered](#)

Questions about effective virtual hiring and onboarding? Contact our office to discuss your personalized recruiting strategy.

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