A Year Without Pants
Strategies for Successful Remote Work

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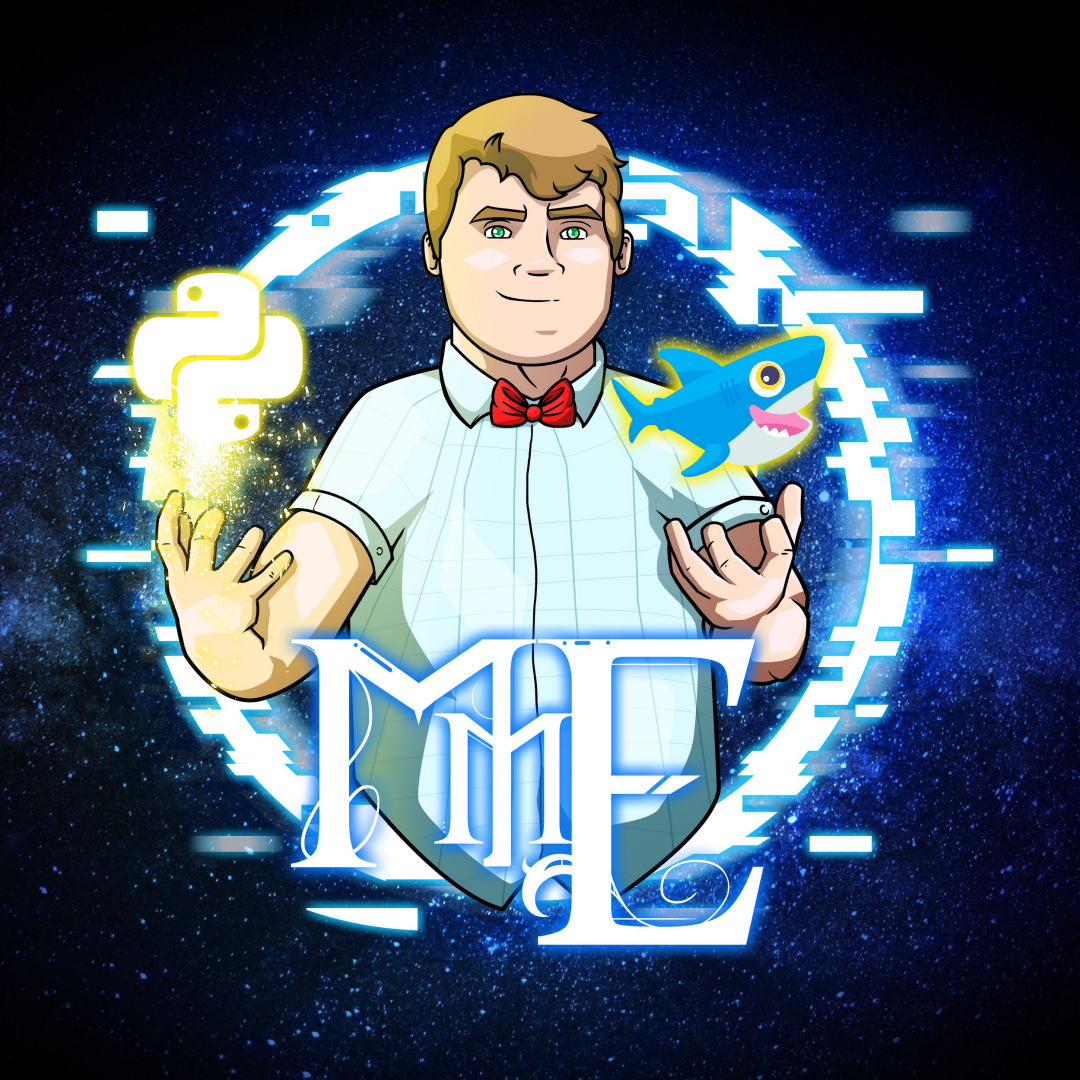
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About This Presentation

This presentation is a collection of recommendations about successful remote work from myself and my colleagues at DigitalOcean. It is **not** a prescription. Everyone's work rhythms are different. What works for me may not work for you. The trick is to try different things until you find what feels comfortable to you. I recommend you give everything you try at least 2 weeks before you determine if it works for you or not.

It may take a while before you find what works for you. It took me ~3 months before I felt productive at home. (Caveat: I was adjusting to remote work while *not* in the middle of a pandemic)

Now I don't think I'll ever willfully go back into the office. I am 1000% more productive at home.

Establish Routines

Routines get you mentally prepared to start your day and focus on work

- Start your day like you're going to work
    - Ex: Wake up, take the dog out, bathe, get dressed,
- Establish working hours
    - Enforce these. Work creep is real
    - Don't routinely check email or Slack after hours
    - Discuss with your manager. Some managers are totally willing to let you work 4/10s
- Don't skip meals
    - Meals give your brain a rest

Create Boundaries Between Work and Life

Work/Life Boundaries help your mind determine when it's time to work and when it's time to relax.

- Determine how much you want to have work spill over into life and vice-versa.
    - Some people want 100% separation, some want to take a break and go do the dishes

- Most remote workers struggle establishing boundaries.

- There is no right or wrong way. There is what works for you.

Working Space

Having a dedicated working space is a *must*. You had one in the office, you still need one if you work from home.

- Create a separation of home and work.
- Create a space in your home dedicated to work and only work. Being able to walk out of the "office" is important.
  - If you have a spare bedroom, convert it to an office.
  - If you don't, set aside an area and try to isolate it. Closing your laptop lid can have the same symbolic effect as closing the door
- "Commute" to and from work
  - From work is especially important
  - Listen to some music, a podcast, read a book, browse YouTube

Take Breaks

You're used to interruptions in the office. Coffee/snack breaks, impromptu gatherings at someone's desk, bathroom breaks, etc. You have to create those for yourself now.

- Go for a walk, get a snack, read a chapter of a book outside of your work space.
- Perform a small task around the house
    - Unload dishwasher
    - Start preparing dinner
- Get out of the house as needed

Gear

Work provided you equipment when you were in the office. Its necessity didn't disappear when you started working from home

- Ergonomic chair and standing desks
- Noise canceling headphones
- Outage proof equipment
  - Uninterrupted Power Supply (UPS)
  - Hotspot
    - Phones usually have these
  - Go Bag
    - Bag with cables to go to "coffee shop"

Socialize

Getting lunch with coworkers, happy hours, team offsites, even just walking up to someone's desk allowed us to socialize. In a remote world you have to schedule your socialization.

- Host virtual happy hours via video call
- Have an optional open video call for everyone to have lunch/coffee in daily
- Schedule a 1:1 with each team member on a recurring basis to keep in touch
- Join hobby slack channels
- Get a pet
    - Preferably a social pet, like a dog.

Protect Your Time

Remote work tends to lend itself to more meetings. So you have to schedule meetings wisely and protect your time at all costs.

- Have a designated "meeting day"
- Block off "Heads Down" or "Do Not Disturb" time on your calendars
- Don't default to "Let's put something on the calendar"
  - Try to come to a solution asynchronously first
- When in focus mode, remove all distractions
  - Slack, Discord, Phone
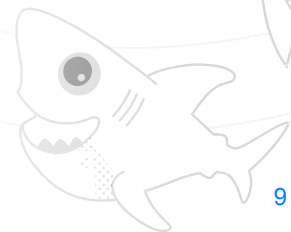
Embrace Asynchronous Work

Remote work works best when dependencies are handled asynchronously. Globally distributed teams aren't possible synchronously.

- ○ Remove useless Slack messages
    - ○ "Hey" "Do you have a minute" "Can I ask you something?" are all productivity killers
    - ○ Send your message with a greeting and immediately explaining your question or what you need. It saves *so much time*
- ○ Default to a message thread instead of a meeting
- ○ Remove meetings that can be channels/threads
- ○ Realize that others may not work the same hours as you
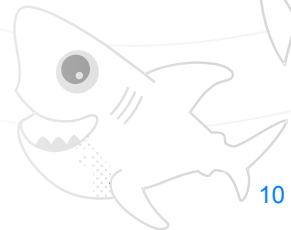
Remote Company Culture

Companies must modify their current culture to evolve and support remote work.

- Offsites
  - For both teams and entire company
- Invest in employees
  - Internet and Gym stipends, Snacks as a Service
- Invest in remote friendly software and practices
  - Allowing for resources to be available remotely (via VPN)
  - Slack licenses, Zoom licenses, etc.
- Guard against excess meetings, but don't discourage them
  - People know which meetings are vital and which aren't

- Check out "The Year Without Pants"
  - A dive into WordPress.com's success with remote culture

Conclusion

- **Remote work is here to stay**
- When executed and supported properly, remote work can be highly productive
- Companies that don't offer remote work will see an exodus of employees to companies that do offer remote work

- Personally, I never want to work in an office again
  - So much so that it says on my LinkedIn "If your job requires relocation or being in an office more than 10% of the year, I'm not interested."
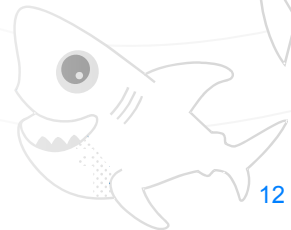
Questions?

That's all for this time!

- ○ Follow me on Twitter [@masonegger](https://twitter.com/masonegger)
- ○ Slides can be found on my website
  mason.dev/speaking/remote-work