

How to Earn Credit and Visibility for Remote Work

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FULL TEXT

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When your peers start returning to the office while you continue working from home, you risk being seen as less productive, or worse, forgotten about or relegated to the sidelines. Not only are remote workers "out of sight, out of mind," many bosses are mistrustful of the home-based employee's work ethic. So, in the hybrid workplaces of today, it's increasingly important for remote workers to elevate their efforts and deliberately demonstrate their value.

Take the example of Stephen. His work style has always been to tackle a project for his consulting firm and finish it largely on his own, with little interaction in the interim. This style was fine when he used to work on site. But it's no longer serving him well.

In the past, he and his manager would bump into each other or catch up on the status of work in progress when leaving a meeting together. But remote work has made these informal check-ins impossible. When all Stephen's peers were also remote, his style wasn't as much of a liability. But now that co-workers and managers are back in the workplace, Stephen's work became less evident than that of his office-based colleagues.

His manager, worried about how much work Stephen was doing, asked ever more pointed questions: "How many hours did you work today?" "What's going on with project X?" Stephen began to worry that his manager's perceptions would impact his coming performance assessment.

Four strategies would help workers like Stephen quell their managers' concerns, increase their visibility and ensure they receive appropriate credit for their remote work.

1. Share a work list. At the beginning of each week, create a list of your current projects, breaking each task into milestones. Break these milestones into smaller chunks than you would have if working in the office. Assign target dates. Breaking the components into two-to-three-day chunks, for instance, allows managers to track projects when they no longer have the benefit of spontaneous progress reports in person.

Review your overall plan during one-on-one meetings with your manager, scheduled more frequently than in the past. Then email your manager as mini milestones are completed. Your boss is then able to flag a misaligned priority, as well as knowing that the work is getting done and on target.

2. Zoom out on your week. At the end of each week, share a weekly one-on-one video call with your manager, or email a reflection log of successes, failures and lessons learned to ensure your efforts emerge from the shadows. Sharing even incremental progress and analysis increases your manager's insight into challenges and achievements while improving trust and transparency. It also neutralizes your manager's instinct to hunt for errors or omissions as it demonstrates your capacity to learn from mistakes.

3. "Unbox" your work. Don't just do the work. Instead, show your boss how the work was done. You want your manager to see your thought process and diligence in arriving at the final solution, and to understand why the project is taking as much time as it has. Share the alternatives you considered, research conducted, pros and cons of each option, insights gained, and criteria used to make your choice before presenting your completed deliverable.

4. Increase generosity. Your work needs to be visible, not just to your manager but also to your colleagues. This encourages them to approach you for help on initiatives you've previously tackled or to leverage your output for their projects. But this can be hard when your teammates aren't sitting a few feet away. Counterintuitively, one way to get co-workers to notice your contributions is to spotlight their work, and to congratulate or thank a colleague, every day.

By raising the visibility of others' work, your participation will be revealed. A colleague's citation or iteration on your work magnifies your impact. This kind of collaboration is better for your reputation and credibility than patting yourself on the back. And it sparks reciprocity.

Just like nature, it turns out that managers abhor a vacuum, which they may sense from your empty chair in the office. Fill that void with information about your daily efforts in order to counter the disadvantage of being the teammate who is working remotely. The energy you put into self-accountability will contribute to your job security and success.

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