



**ROBERT WALTERS:
GETTING REMOTE ONBOARDING RIGHT**



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In January 2020, the EDD (Employment Development Department) reported an unemployment rate of 3.6% in the United States (an incredible 50-year low). At that time, the U.S. economy added 225,000 jobs, showing significant strength and unexpected growth. In March, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic put a halt to that positive trend. Shelter-in-place orders required employees to work from home to reduce the spread of the virus. While some businesses were forced to lay off employees or initiate hiring freezes, other industries, such as ecommerce, online grocery, and telehealth grew during lockdown.

In order to adapt to the new normal, HR managers are recalibrating their approach to onboarding, working to put the right technologies and practices in place. Now more than ever, your business has an opportunity to show off their resilience. During the remote onboarding process, new employees will be able to see how well companies handle themselves during a time of crisis. We've collaborated with Range, a leader in team success software, to give you our top tips for successful remote onboarding.



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CHAPTER 1: PAPERWORK, HARDWARE & COMPANY SWAG

One of the most dreaded parts of starting a new role is the hoards of paperwork that new hires are required to sign and return. We expect many businesses have already graduated to digital paperwork, but if not, we recommend using a platform to collect all of this information in one place (like [Gusto](#)).

You can also send out paperwork digitally using tools like [DocuSign](#) or [DocHub](#), but be sure to send them well in advance of your new hires' start dates. Besides your I-9, this paperwork could also include an employee handbook, code of conduct, or any references you have on company vernacular.

- This is a great article from Tech Inclusion explaining [how to write a strong code of conduct](#).
- We like [this video shown to new hires by Atlassian](#), conveying Atlassian's background, mission, and values.

Mail out hardware (like company laptops, a wireless mouse, etc.) and confirm that all technology is in working order well before the first week. This is also a great opportunity to send out company swag.

[This guide](#) from [Impact](#) is loaded with ideas for putting a welcome pack together.

Ensuring that video chat technology is in working order will be crucial at this stage. Poor connectivity, or problems with sound can massively impact productivity and make for an awkward conversation. An IT support session is often the best second meeting to schedule, following a warm welcome. Make sure your new hire knows who to turn to if they need technology troubleshooting at short notice.

The onboarding process is an essential time to demonstrate your company culture and communicate your values and mission. Look at your new hire's first day as an opportunity to prove that your business is everything you promised them and more during the recruitment process.



WHEN I JOINED LABELBOX, MY LAPTOP WAS SHIPPED TO ME ALONG WITH A NEW T-SHIRT, A JACKET, AND STICKERS— JUST SOME COOL ACCESSORIES, LIKE A WELCOME PACK. IT WAS SHIPPED OVERNIGHT, WHICH I THOUGHT WAS COOL.

[Matthew Hammon](#), Director of Demand Generation Marketing, Labelbox



Companies with strong onboarding processes improve new hire retention by 82%.

(Glassdoor, 2015)



LABELBOX HAS A 3 DAY ONBOARDING PROGRAM WHICH INCLUDES AN INTRODUCTORY PHONE CALL WITH EACH OF YOUR TEAM MEMBERS. NEW TEAM MEMBERS ARE ALSO INTRODUCED IN OUR ALL-HANDS MEETING ON MONDAY. THEY'LL HAVE A SLIDE WITH THEIR PHOTO & BACKSTORY AND WE ALSO ASK THAT THEY ANSWER 3 QUESTIONS (TO BREAK THE ICE).

Matthew Hammon, Director of Demand Generation Marketing, Labelbox



AT PATCH HOMES, ON A NEW HIRE'S FIRST DAY, I HAVE A 30 MINUTE TO 1 HOUR VIDEO CALL WITH THEM TO MAKE SURE THEY HAVE EVERYTHING THEY NEED TO SUCCEED. AFTER THE CALL I INTRODUCE THEM TO THE TEAM VIA SLACK. WE ALSO DO A COMPANY-WIDE CHECK-IN EVERY WEDNESDAY WHERE THEY WILL INTRODUCE THEMSELVES IN-PERSON.

Tiffany Suazo, Human Resources, Patch Homes



WITH RANGE, REMOTE EMPLOYEES CAN USE THE TEAM DIRECTORY TO FAMILIARIZE THEMSELVES WITH FACES, ROLES, AND PROJECTS.

Nicholas Walsh, Chief Marketing Officer, Range

CHAPTER 2: IMMERSION INTO COMPANY CULTURE

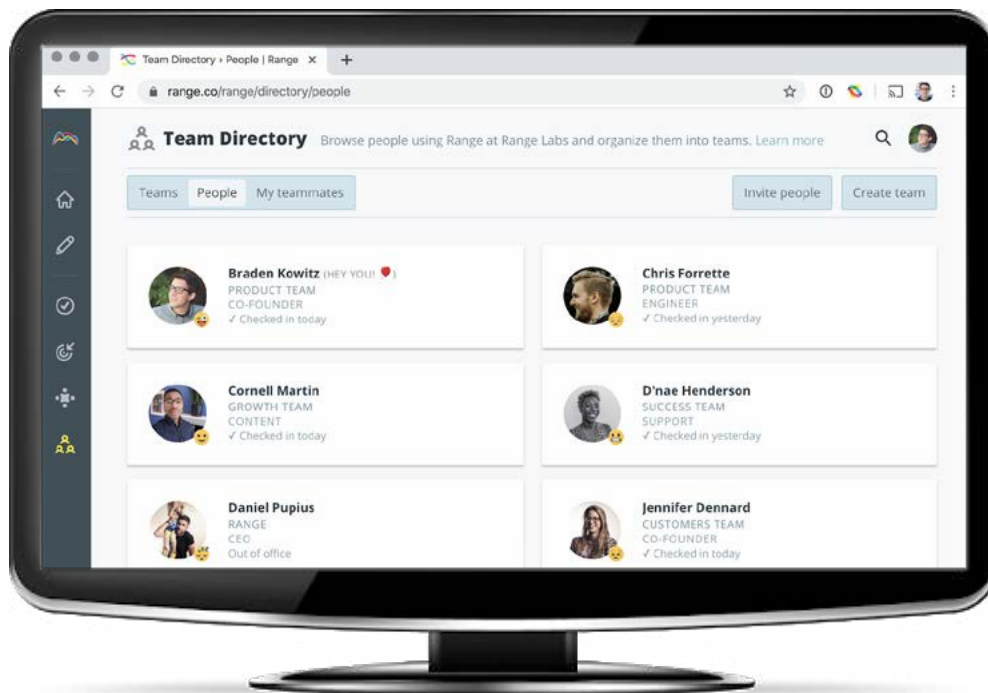
First impressions matter. Research shows that employees who have a negative onboarding experience are less likely to recommend your company. Conversely, 69% of employees are more likely to stay with a company for three years if they have a great onboarding experience.

A great way to help new remote hires feel like they are a part of the team is to create opportunities for them to connect with the rest of the company.

- We love this [icebreaker tool](#) from Range.
- [Kudoboard](#) is also a great tool for celebrating team birthdays or small wins. It's like a digital wall that you can fill with GIFs, photos, & videos from your group.

A halt on in-person activity doesn't have to mean a halt in socialization. In fact, being intentional about creating opportunities for remote social engagement is a key part of maintaining and strengthening company culture. If your workplace typically has weekly lunches, consider sending lunches through a delivery service. For example, send employees tacos for Taco Tuesday or bagels for bagel Wednesday (a [Robert Walters San Francisco](#) tradition).

Depending on the size of your team, enjoying those meals over a group video chat could be a fun way to inject a little fun into the day, and help each other feel less isolated. Some teams reserve optional coffee or lunch times during the week so people can just drop in and chat.



“All meetings should be cameras-on when possible. Seeing a face even remotely goes a long way.”

Tiffany Suazo, Human Resources at Patch Homes

CHAPTER 3: OVERCOMMUNICATE USING THE APPROPRIATE CHANNELS

Most businesses have several communication channels each serving a different purpose: Email, [Slack](#), [JIRA](#), [Asana](#), [Zoom](#), [Skype](#), etc. Having a short guide explaining how each channel should be used is helpful in the onboarding process. Be sure to add your new team member to all relevant Slack channels, and communicate which channels should be used for team communication and which can be used for all other interaction (memes, water cooler chat, news stories).

We like this channel guide example from [The Complete Remote-Work Playbook](#) by our friends at [LifeLabs Learning](#):

TOOL	PRIMARY USE	NORM
Email	For non-urgent requests	Respond within 24 hours
Phone	For urgent requests	Use only in emergencies
Text	Use if call sent to voicemail	Response time within 1 hour
Slack	For learning and connection	All channels are open and optional

Establishing communication best practices upfront is another step that will put your new remote employee on track for success. Two things you can do is set up recurring one-on-ones with clear agenda items and questions and, in larger meetings, give everyone a chance to speak and share without interruption. When people speak at the beginning of a meeting, they are more likely to be engaged and participate throughout the meeting. Range uses a “spinner” at the beginning of a meeting and asks everyone to do a short check in. Take advantage of screen sharing tools (Zoom is great) to highlight new processes and demonstrate how to use team programs.

People are able to track progress and stay in sync without having to book meetings all the time.

Communicate key objectives to your new hire, providing them with an initial project so they can hit the ground running. Having clear expectations is a great way to help your new team member feel like they’re contributing in a meaningful way.

Don’t forget that the onboarding process extends far beyond the first month, and even the first several months. Ask your new hire to set up their own 30-day, 60-day, and 90-day plan for success so that everyone is on the same page.



WE ARE CURRENTLY HAVING NEW HIRES SCHEDULE 1:1S VIA ZOOM WITH TEAM MEMBERS ACROSS THE COMPANY— A SORT OF VIRTUAL COFFEE CHAT. WE’RE ALSO TRYING A NEW PLATFORM CALLED [TANDEM](#) TO FACILITATE THE FEELING OF BEING IN AN OFFICE AMONG TEAMMATES.

Joe Totten, VP Sales at [Gem](#)



AT PATCH HOMES, WE USE SLACK AND HAVE CREATED A FEW NEW CHANNELS LIKE #HELLO. PEOPLE POST HERE WHEN THEY ARE STARTING THEIR DAY, GOING ON A BREAK, GOING TO LUNCH, AND WHEN THEY ARE ENDING THEIR DAY. WE ALSO HAVE A #HELPDESK CHANNEL WHERE PEOPLE CAN POST IF THEY ARE HAVING AN ISSUE, AND EITHER MYSELF OR ONE OF THE ENGINEERS WILL STEP IN TO HELP.

Tiffany Suazo, Human Resources at Patch Homes

Of those who don't hit their first performance goals, 50% did not have a formal onboarding process.

(Urbanbound, 2018)



ASK TEAM MEMBERS TO SHARE A WRITTEN DAILY CHECK-IN FIRST THING TO LET FOLKS SHARE WHAT THEY'RE PLANNING TO DO THAT DAY. ASYNCHRONOUS WRITTEN UPDATES ARE BETTER THAN VIDEO/PHONE BECAUSE YOU CAN ADD LINKS AND LOOK BACK ON WHAT'S HAPPENED.

Nicholas Walsh, Chief Marketing Officer, Range



RANGE'S DAILY CHECK-IN FEATURE ALSO LETS EVERYONE SAY HOW THEY'RE FEELING, ANSWER QUESTIONS ABOUT PERSONAL GOALS, THANK TEAMMATES AND UPDATE THEIR TEAM ON WHAT THEY'RE WORKING ON AND WHAT THEY'VE ACCOMPLISHED RECENTLY. IT PROVIDES A LEVEL OF TRANSPARENCY THAT HELPS REMOTE TEAMS SEE WHAT'S GOING ON AND TO COMMENT, LIKE, AND INTERACT IN THE SAME WAY THAT CO-LOCATED TEAMS DO.

Nicholas Walsh, Chief Marketing Officer, Range

CHAPTER 4: BE OPEN TO FEEDBACK

Unsure if your new hire is equipped with all the tools and resources they need to start the ball rolling? You won't know if you don't ask. Ask new team members for a tour of their remote work space. Environment and ergonomics are critical to performance and well being, and many will need specific support in how to best set up their home workspace. They may be in need of an extra monitor, an ergonomic mouse, or noise cancelling headphones. Some remote workers may not have a physical desk, working instead at their dining room table or couch. If your company doesn't have guidance on ergonomics, look to [resources on YouTube](#). Offering what you can to make them comfortable will help boost productivity and morale.

Give new hires the opportunity to provide feedback anonymously, as well. [Lattice](#) is a commonly used tool, as well as [Leo](#), a bot that can be connected through [Slack](#) to collect anonymous feedback and get a pulse for how your team is feeling.

At the end of the onboarding process, be sure to ask your new team member what can be improved. Perhaps they could have benefited from a more organized system, or would have appreciated fewer meetings and more down time to get settled in. It's important to take into consideration how different personality types may react to a novel situation, and you won't be able to improve your process if you don't ask.

“The most effective people and teams rarely “get it right” from the beginning. The secret to finding the right communication frequency and format is to keep learning and iterating. So, set a reminder for yourself to pull for feedback at least once a week. Ask your manager and collaborators: “What is something you wish I or we did differently? What could I do 10% better? What’s working well?”

The Complete Remote-Work Playbook, LifeLabs Learning

CHAPTER 5: POTENTIAL PROBLEMS THAT MAY ARISE

A common issue that tends to arise for remote workers is that employees may have a tendency to over-achieve and show their work in order to let their employer know they can be trusted. In fact, according to a recent report by [Buffer](#), the biggest struggle that remote workers cite is being able to unplug after working hours. To combat this issue, we recommend setting expectations around when people are online and available to connect. This is a great way to avoid misalignment and confusion. You can highlight things like employee location and even individual preferences for scheduling meetings in individual team member profiles with Range.

According to a global [Workplace Trends Study](#), the two biggest complaints for remote workers are isolation and loneliness and lack of facetime with coworkers. New employees especially are likely to feel left out if there isn't time dedicated to social activity. Schedule in social hours where there is no talk of work allowed, have everyone participate in an [Icebreaker activity](#), or have a "bring your pet to work day" where team members show off their furry companions.

Since video will be such an important communication channel at this time, share some best practices to your new team member and the rest of the business.



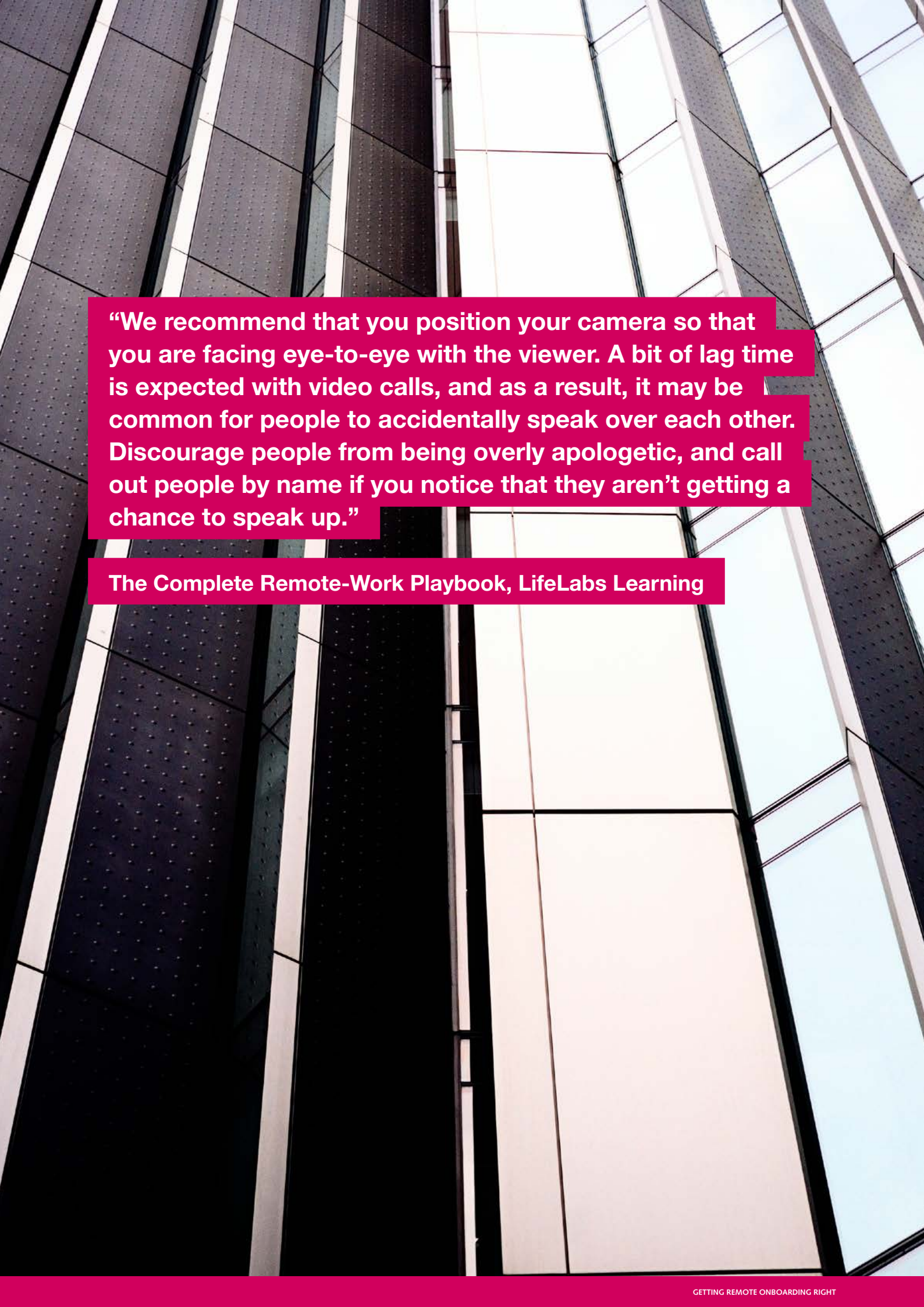
I DO THINK AS A NEW TEAM MEMBER THAT YOU HAVE TO TAKE INITIATIVE TO MAKE SURE YOU'RE GETTING IN FRONT OF THE RIGHT PEOPLE. IT WOULD BE VERY EASY TO TAKE A STEP BACK, SINCE YOU'RE NOT PHYSICALLY IN THE OFFICE, BUT I THINK IT'S IMPORTANT TO ESTABLISH RELATIONSHIPS AND BUILD ON THOSE INTRODUCTORY VIDEO CALLS.

Matthew Hammon, Director of Demand Generation Marketing,
Labelbox



EMPLOYEES WHO ARE USED TO A COLLABORATIVE AND BOISTEROUS OFFICE ENVIRONMENT MAY FIND REMOTE WORK TO BE ISOLATING OR LONELY. ENCOURAGE TEAMMATES TO CHECK IN WITH EACH OTHER FREQUENTLY, AND ASSIGN A MENTOR TO YOUR NEW HIRE TO SHOW THEM THE ROPES.

Simon Bromwell, Managing Director, US & Canada



“We recommend that you position your camera so that you are facing eye-to-eye with the viewer. A bit of lag time is expected with video calls, and as a result, it may be common for people to accidentally speak over each other. Discourage people from being overly apologetic, and call out people by name if you notice that they aren’t getting a chance to speak up.”

The Complete Remote-Work Playbook, LifeLabs Learning

CONCLUSION: STRENGTHENING YOUR BUSINESS

During this uncertain time, as everything shifts around us, it's important to retain a sense of normalcy and routine. If your business is not typically remote, then having this opportunity to test out remote working and remote onboarding is a great learning opportunity that can make your business stronger in the long run. Remote practices are often just good practices, from how to best run meetings, to clarifying practices through comprehensive, accessible documentation. Remote onboarding certainly has its unique challenges, but by leveraging the right tools, you can ensure your newest team members find cohesion within their new teams.



CONTACT US

To discuss this ebook in more detail, please contact your Robert Walters recruitment consultant, or email us at getintouch@robertwalters.com. We can also be reached at our individual offices below:

Robert Walters New York

7 Times Square
Suite 4301
New York
NY 10036
USA
t: +1 212 704 9900

Robert Walters San Francisco

575 Market Street
Suite 2950
San Francisco
CA 94105
USA
t: +1 415 549 2000

Robert Walters Los Angeles

1925 Century Park E
Suite 1700
Los Angeles
CA 90067
USA
t: +1 424 204-8725

Robert Walters Toronto

720-145 King St W
Toronto
ON M5H 1J8
CANADA
t: +1 647-288-2438



@RobertWaltersSF



facebook.com/robertwaltersplc



[robert-walters](https://robert-walters.com)

To learn more about Range, visit www.range.co



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