

AT THE EDGE PODCAST



SEASON 2, EPISODE 2

DAVID BURKUS – Leading From Anywhere Interviewed by Michael Lee

David Burkus is the bestselling author of four books about business and leadership, including most recently and relevantly, *Leading From Anywhere*, a primer on hybrid and remote work. His books have won multiple awards and have been translated into dozens of languages. His insights on leadership and teamwork have been featured in the *Wall Street Journal*, *Harvard Business Review*, *USA Today*, *Fast Company*, the *Financial Times*, *Bloomberg BusinessWeek*, *CNN*, the *BBC*, *NPR*, and *CBS This Morning*. Since 2017, Burkus has been ranked as one of the world's top business thought leaders by Thinkers50. As a sought-after international speaker, his TED Talk has been viewed over 2 million times. He's worked with leaders from organizations across all industries including Google, Stryker, Fidelity, Viacom, and even the US Naval Academy. A former business school professor, Burkus holds a Master's degree in Organizational Psychology from the University of Oklahoma, and a Doctorate in Strategic Leadership from Regent University.

In this episode, David talks about:

- How remote and hybrid work are nothing new, but also still far from easy;
- Why hybrid work is the most effective model if done correctly;
- Some tips for how to manage hybrid work well;
- The role and meaning of understanding, identity, and purpose;
- The important balance between freedom and accountability;
- How to maximize trust and communication;
- The role of technology in all this;
- Why hybrid is better than fully remote;
- And much more.

Michael Lee

So David, welcome. It's really an honor to have you here. I have read a lot of your work. Really pleased to get to hear from you today.

David Burkus

Oh, it's my pleasure. Thank you so much for having me.

Michael Lee

*Your book *Leading From Anywhere* has recently come out. It is it one of the most important books on remote work around. It starts by telling us that remote work is actually not something new.*

David Burkus

Quite simply, it's not all that new, depending on what your definition is. You could think of it as hundreds of years old. The original corporation was the East India Trading Company. And that by definition had to be remote work.

And then even in the context that most of us think of, meaning the Knowledge Work Economy and not having to work from an office all the time, it's not all that new. In the 1970s and 80s, as soon as the communication technology to allow it to happen developed, we started seeing a movement, an upward trend. It was a very poor slope. But it was a rising trend. It wasn't flat, or negative, it was always two steps forward one step back in this sort of remote work revolution. And the biggest barrier to all of that was just this idea that, how do we know people are working? We had managers blocking that case. Saying I can't tell if they're working, if they're not here.

And then the great work-from-home experiment happened, where we collectively in the entire knowledge work economy said, "Okay, we're going to try and work away from each other for as long as possible."

And it worked! I mean, it took some readjustments. It took a whole lot of burnout. But fundamentally, the thing that I'm hearing now is that a lot of people have found out "I'm much more productive!" And whether or not that's a sustainable productivity is something we explore in the book. And what that does to culture. And how you have to be very different about building a deliberate culture in a remote environment. That obviously changes as well.

But for those reasons, and more, I think it's not going away. Here in the United States, where I am, my prediction on remote work is that post-pandemic, the percentage of the American workforce that works fully remote will double. And when I say double, I mean it'll go from 4%, to 8%. But more importantly, the other 90 something percent of people are going to be headed into a much more flexible working arrangement, where not everyone on their team is at the office all of the time. So we might as well continue to cultivate those

skills of collaborating from afar, because we're going to be collaborating from afar for the rest of our careers.

Michael Lee

Can you share some of the information and statistics about why remote work actually seems to work better?

David Burkus

Right now, I'm working with a lot of leaders that are that are talking about return to the office plans and those sorts of things, and everybody thinks in hours. And I think that's as in how many hours or how many days do we want people back? And that's the wrong approach. Because that's also not what makes remote work work. The question is, what types of work are we talking about?

So right away, there are fundamentally in a Knowledge Work setting two different types of work. There's collaborative work. And then there's sort of solo focused work and what Cal Newport would call deep work. There are times where you need to have meetings where you need to come up with solutions. There's times where you need to collaborate on documents, and that sort of thing. And then there's times where you need to be left alone and be given time to focus.

The offices that we all left, even before there was the threat that they would make us sick from COVID, they were making us sick from a whole lot more. The research was really clear on it, especially if you were in one of those open offices. Offices were interruption factories. Offices were places where you ended up getting called into about as many terrible meetings as you get called now into terrible Zoom meetings. Plus the idea that people could tap on your shoulder if you had a cubicle, at any given time. People were more likely to be physically sick and stressed, absenteeism rates were higher, etc.

When it comes to that deep work, that solo focused work, the office is a terrible place to get it done. Now, that said, I think that a lot of collaborative work, a lot of creativity and problem solving, that's still gonna be better done in person. But that doesn't mean we have to be there from eight to five, five days a week anymore.

Michael Lee

Let's talk a little bit about the use of technology to achieve what you used to achieve in the office. You have to now achieve it in a distributed way. What are the ways that technology can help?

David Burkus

A couple different ways. The number one technology that everybody's talked about over the last twenty months or so has been video chat technology. Love it or hate it. And to be totally clear, I think a lot of the endless zoom meetings and the Zoom fatigue we were all facing

was actually because team leaders were not used to this idea that presence didn't exactly correlate to productivity. They had raised the manager in a situation where I can see you, I know what time you're coming, I know how late you're staying. So that that's how I know you're working.

And that's a huge problem when you suddenly do a forced work-from-home experiment. You get a lot of managers that cling to this idea, "Oh, no, I can't see you, therefore, I need to find reasons to see all of us together." And so we end up getting invited to far more meetings than we needed to take. A lot of that doesn't need to happen.

The research on most effective ways to collaborate as a team, we'll get into tools in a second, argues for what the researchers called "bursty" communication. Meaning small periods of time where we come together and hash out issues and details and then go separately away from that.

And so the tools and technologies that I think are actually much more incredible in this remote work setting are our asynchronous tools. Our collaboration and sharing documents. I mean the low-fi versions like Google Docs, or even high-level versions, like a variety of different whiteboarding softwares and project management softwares that let people collaborate.

Yes, they could collaborate in real time. But perhaps more importantly, they can sign into that whenever they're ready, and see the running thread of communication, not worry about being left off of an email and that sort of stuff. So that's the technology that excites me, far more than any improvements made in zoom over the over the last 20 months, those technologies, I think, because that's the key to making remote work is to trust your people to do a lot more uninterrupted asynchronous work, rather than Oh, you need to always be on Zoom, because I don't know you're working if I can't see you, or the new pixelated version of you.

Michael Lee

We talk about hybrid work as part-time or half-time in the office and the rest remote. You say in the book that it seems to be the best model. Why is that? And how can companies manage that differently than just pure remote work?

David Burkus

I'm going to hedge my bets here, too. It depends on what we mean by best. Because certainly, I believe that hybrid is actually harder. It'd be the easiest thing you could do, coming out of the pandemic, to go right back to where we were in January 2020 and just say, Everybody back!

I don't think you'll be able to do that. I think if you try that you're going to get all sorts of people quitting and finding more flexible offers. So what most people have settled on is hybrid. But hybrid is actually harder, because it requires you still use the skills of remote work. And it requires fighting proximity bias. But once you do fight proximity bias, a lot of

huge benefits come. The first one that everybody is sensing and talking about right now is, from a pure talent standpoint, when the world is your talent pool, instead of a sixty-minute radius outside of Cleveland, Ohio, suddenly you have the opportunity to build teams and tap into much more innovation, more creativity, because you've got much smarter people that are suddenly viable candidates.

I think you've also got inside larger organizations, you've got this idea that now that everybody's had two years of learning how to collaborate virtually, we don't need to look to the people to the left and to the right of us to build teams inside the organization. So even how we form teams around certain projects, is much more geographically dispersed. So you have that, you have that as well.

And then I think the biggest thing is, we know this from forty years of research, that if you give people more trust and autonomy over where they do their work, how they do their work, etc, they end up being more productive and more engaged. And hybrid allows for that. It allows for people to say, well, you know, I finished anything I need to be doing at the office at 3:30. And I have no reason to just sit around and wait till five, because it's culturally acceptable that that's when we leave. I can actually go do something that restores me. I could beat the line to the gym, or I could go pick my kid up from school, instead of waiting for the bus and having them let themselves into the house. And then maybe I'll circle back at seven or eight o'clock at night, when they're put to bed. And I'll focus in on a little more hours of work, like giving people that freedom of their schedule keeps them more engaged in the organization and makes them more productive. Because they know when and how and where they're at their best. And now we're giving them the freedom to do that.

Michael Lee

It's interesting, because hybrid can mean two things. As you've pointed out, it could mean somebody who works part time in the office and part time at home. And it can mean a company where people are working in the office and others are across the world. What's the difference between those two models?

David Burkus

So that's actually a great point. Perhaps we should use hybrid to discuss the latter. Hybrid to discuss a mix of people who are in the office and collaborating remotely. Because most of my work focuses on teams, I've been calling those "virtual teams." As in, we don't care where you are. Some are in the office, some are not. So we're collaborating in a virtual space. The better term for it is probably flexible. A flexible work arrangement. Which by the way is what most employees want. When you're in the midst of doing all these surveys now, as we are when are we going back to work: what do you want to do, etc? Even most of the employees that say I want to work remotely two days a week, they don't actually want to work remotely. What they want is flexibility and autonomy. And that means that they'll be working remotely some of the time but deep down what they actually want is flexibility. Autonomy, once we get used to this idea that we're going to be different, we're going to have the world as a talent recruiting pool, or we're going to have people from multiple

different offices coming together on a project, regardless of where they are, we can build teams that are much less based on proximity.

It's shocking to me, this is actually a really consistent research finding that one of the, at least prior to the pandemic, one of the most consistent predictors of who you ended up collaborating with at work - we saw this in a knowledge work setting, we saw this in the academic setting, we saw this in a laboratory setting in a variety of different studies - the number one predictor of who you're going to collaborate with on projects is proximity. In other words, you're six feet away from me, or you're on the same floor as me, or you're in the same building as me. All of those concentric circles make it more likely we're going to collaborate.

Well, we've just had two years of maybe breaking away from that. And as long as we can keep that mindset that I want who in the organization would be the best people on this project, we can see a much bigger advantage than looking around to the left to the right and picking the four or five people that are around us, which is what we normally do.

Michael Lee

The basis of good remote or hybrid work, it seems like you're centered around the idea of sharing. You listed understanding, identity, and purpose, and finding ways to share those three things.

David Burkus

Shared in this sense, meaning that it's common. That we have a common knowledge on this. We have a common agreement about it. Do we actually have a common understanding about each other's knowledge, skills, abilities, work preferences, the context we're working in? And is that accurate? Does what my team thinks of me actually match what I think of me in terms of strengths and weaknesses, prep, work, preferences, etc? That's shared understanding.

Identity - this is the big thing I worry about in those virtual rooms, in those some people here in person and some people remotely settings, is a sense of shared identity. Silos are nothing new to organizations, but prior to now, they've almost always been based on function. Your marketing will always hate legal. Don't care what organization it is, you can just count on that happening. Now we have the potential to have little in-group biases and silos and preferences towards the people who I see every day and the people who I don't. And that can be a problem. And shared identity, this idea that we're working to make sure people see themselves as one team, they're working to see themselves as one collaborative group - that's huge.

And the last piece around shared purpose is really my way of describing what we do to connect people back to why we do this work in particular. Purpose around who and around what we're fighting for. Not as in fighting against competitors. But what is the larger mission? And how can I connect it back to the work I'm doing every day? And this is crucial for an entirely different reason than getting teams to collaborate. It's crucial for keeping top

talent. It's crucial for surviving the "Great Resignation" and keeping people engaged. It's so much easier when you're working from home for a company where you're so used to collaborating in the office. It's so easy at the end of the day to not make that connection between who you're helping inside the organization, or how that organization is helping its industry or society.

It's easy to just see it as a random list of tasks that popped up in your email inbox, and you do them all and then you go back to Netflix or whatever. And it makes you wonder, okay, why am I doing this? If it's not for that shared purpose piece that I'm not not engaged.

Michael Lee

OK. Give us the secret recipe. What do we do in a hybrid situation to overcome the challenges of hybrid in building shared understanding, identity, and purpose?

David Burkus

So in building shared understanding, my biggest recommendations here always seem so simple, and yet people don't necessarily do them. The easiest one is how well are we sharing calendars? How are we aware of when each other are, I was almost gonna say working there, but I don't like to say working anymore. I like to say responsive versus non responsive.

Do we have someone sitting there, at the end of the day, it's 3:45, and they're sitting there waiting for a response in an email that's not going to come, because that person's done for the day because they started work at 7am? Because that worked better for their schedule. Or the opposite happens. We have that one person who's the night owl, and they're sending 1130 at-night emails, and then jumping on the meeting the next morning at 9am going "Did everyone see the email?"

No, not everyone in your team saw the email! Because some of them are starting their day with this meeting. And so they haven't had a chance to see it. So that's an easy surface-level sense of shared understanding. It's also understanding the context people are working in, what they're going through, what life stages they're in, because all of that's going to affect how responsive they are, how collaborative they are.

In terms of identity, one of the biggest things I've been thinking about recently is, what little rituals we can do that let people know they're a part of our team. Every organization has rituals. Some are really elaborate, like, pick your sales organization, there's usually some gong type ritual where you close the big deal and you get to run to the front of the room and smash the gong, or sometimes it's a bell or something weird like that. In the sales organization, that's a big deal. Every organization has, whether they're acronyms, jargon or things like that, but a lot of them were based on in-person interactions instead of thinking about what virtual rituals would be.

So like one group I worked with the virtual ritual we came up with, it helped the team feel a sense of identity with each other is, they went on Fiverr, and they hired a graphic designer

to design six zoom backgrounds, virtual backgrounds that had the company's core values on it. And the idea was, hey, we have a Monday morning all-hands meeting and our ritual is, before that meeting, think about which of these core values you want to focus on developing in this meeting? Do you want to be more bold? Do you want to be more inclusive? It was the different core values. And so you signed on and you saw what every member of your team was working on, or focused on, you knew what that meant. Because you did the same ritual yourself. And so you felt a little more in the group, than when you're on cross-functional teams, and everybody's just using that blurry background and pretending they're at the beach or what have you.

On the shared purpose, my best concise piece of advice here would be how well can you connect the work that we're doing to who benefits from that work. I think it's really easy to forget that that project that we're working on, that deliverable that we're focused on that goes to someone else in the organization or to a customer of the organization and helps them in some way. Often, especially in a remote environment, and especially in a large organization, people forget that. How well can you, anytime somebody expresses gratitude, if you're a team leader, make sure you share that with the team? How well can you connect when you're asking somebody to do something? When you're doing your check-in with individual people? Can you remind them how important their work is for other members of the team to be able to do their work?

It's funny, there's this book, it's pretty popular, came out a long time ago. And it talked about the importance of talking about purpose as a why. And I actually think that's wrong. The more I look at the research on it, purpose is a WHO. People feel a sense of purpose and significance when they know WHO benefits from the work that they're doing.

So how well can you as a leader, draw that obvious WHO to them and keep reminding your people of it?

Michael Lee

One of the things I noticed when you talk about shared purpose is that you're saying that the best shared purpose is not about the company's succeeding or getting through a difficult time. You actually listed three specific types of purpose.

David Burkus

There's this little trick that I do when working with teams. If I'm trying to get a sense of how well they've internalized the organizational mission or vision, I'll ask the question, "What are we fighting for?" Now, I actually ask the question, "WHO are we fighting for?" But that's a different story.

I get four different types of answers. The first answer I get is "I don't know!" Or they'll recite the existing mission statement. And that's just as good as saying I don't know. Because when you've got this buzzword-laden four-sentence long mission statement, you haven't internalized it. I'm impressed that you can remember it. But you haven't internalized it.

And then the other three I get fall into three different categories. And I call them the three fights. The Revolutionary Fight, which is how our group or organization is working to change something about the industry, about the society, about the organization. Sometimes when you can point to the status quo, and here's how we're working to change it, you're leading a little miniature revolution. And that has its own motivating effect.

Then there's the Underdog Fight, which is about being on the receiving end of unjust criticism. So and so in the organization says our department's the smallest one, and we're going to prove them wrong! Or they say that there isn't a big enough market for this specific service.

And then the ally fight is actually sort of at arm's length. Because it says, it's not actually about us, and what we're fighting for our customer, or stakeholder or society is fighting for this. And we help them do that. And here's how we do it.

You could actually reframe the mission in any of those three ways. And that's where managers and team leaders come into play. Because different people resonate with different elements. I was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, which is like the City of Underdogs. Our greatest sports hero is a fictional character who loses a boxing match! So I resonate much more with the underdog story than your average person.

So can you restate? Can you talk about what the organization is doing, and can you restate that as something that resonates to each individual differently?

When in doubt, go with the Ally Fight. And that's why I've changed it to WHO are we fighting for? If you can connect it to WHO inside that organization you're helping? How did you make Sara's life easier today? How did you help so-and-so come off with a much better solution to a problem that they were working with? When you can connect it to that WHO the work you do for matters, because it makes the work that other people do easier or better. You can still tap into that Ally Fight piece even if there's not this larger mission. So that's why I bring it I find myself bringing it back to who much more often these days.

Michael Lee

What would you say is the biggest determinant of success in a remote team?

David Burkus

I would say it's managing the balance between freedom and accountability. This is something a lot of managers struggled with right off the bat, managing the balance between freedom and accountability. Meaning that we're going to default to trust and we're gonna default to letting the team come up with what works best for them. Some people choose to be in the office all the time, some none, some people a mix.

But whatever you pick, the line I use a lot of times when I'm talking with organizations about what does our remote work return to work policy look, like? I say, Well, the question you

should be answering isn't that. It's how do we create an office where everyone feels welcome but no one feels obligated?

At the same time, there are a lot of situations where you give people enough rope and they will hang themselves. You give people too much freedom and you'll never see them again. And that's a problem. That's where some people default to being out of such a fear of that they default to ending up being a micromanager constantly checking in on people. Well, a team always does a better job holding individuals accountable than an individual manager does anyway. So that's what I really look for in making this work. Is how well does the team know that they want to give each other maximum freedom to determine when and how and where they do their work?

But also they have systems in place that keep each other accountable, not relying on just the individual manager to always be the bad guy or the bad girl. But the team itself is holding each other accountable.

Michael Lee

When you're getting into holding each other accountable, obviously, it involves communication.

David Burkus

I really like the scrum or the daily stand-up from the world of agile development. For a long time, you had software development teams that would meet in person for a quick stand up meeting every day. And they would answer three questions. What did I just work on? What am I working on next? And what's blocking my progress?

And I find truthfully that most teams don't have easy answers for each other on just those three questions. Think about it. This doesn't have to be a stand up. It doesn't have to be daily. I see a lot of success with teams that I've been working with over the last year that do this as a weekly Monday email. So every Monday, they email out to the rest of the team the answer to those three questions: Here's what I completed last week, here's what I'm focused on this week, and here's what's blocking my progress. Which is a great way to ask for help without admitting you're failing at something.

So you let the team actually start helping each other kind of like they used to do and they were all in the office together. And they can talk to each other much easier. We do a great job at calling together Zoom meetings and then talking AT them, instead of letting them connect around three simple answers to three simple questions that can make a huge difference. What did I just finish? What am I focused on next, so no one's gonna drop the ball. And then what's blocking my progress so that we can find ways to help each other.

Michael Lee

You talk about probably the most important element of culture being psychological safety, and the two elements of safety being trust and respect. And it seems like when you look at

safety, trust and respect, those are three things that are hard to achieve hybrid, especially people that never actually met each other before, people that actually met online and working together.

David Burkus

it's harder to express dissent. I mean, that's the biggest thing. And then it's how you respond to people who disagree that affects the trust and respect piece. But it's just harder to speak up on a Zoom call. It's hard to be the one box that's disagreeing with everyone else who, you know, first of all, if you talk over anyone else, then suddenly the mics of everyone cut out, nobody hears you. But it's just so logistically, technology-wise, it's hard. But it's also mentally hard. You're seeing all these people in agreement. And in the room, a skilled facilitator, a decent manager might see that little micro-expression of dissatisfaction on your face, notice it and draw you out. They're not going to notice it in this pixelated form of you. So it's harder even for the facilitator to notice it. It's really hard to be the one person disagreeing when the "Reply All" emails start flying, to be the one person that disrupts a "Wow, actually, maybe this?"

Try and create more space for people to express dissent. When you're on that Zoom call, don't just spend the last two minutes with, "Okay, any questions?" Actually admit whenever whenever you - and this is good advice in a virtual or a real life environment - whenever you feel like there's a consensus happening, that's a really strong signal that you need to stop and go, "Okay, we're probably missing something because we got to consensus really quickly, what are we missing?"

And then when people disagree with you, how you respond to that goes a long way. People notice that, and it determines whether or not they trust you to have a psychologically safe response to their dissent. And they notice the language you use and how well that either contributes or doesn't contribute to a culture of civility and respect. So that'd be where I would start. It's a whole lot harder to have teams go through task-focused conflict in a remote environment/ And so we need to make space for it to happen more often so we can model the way of how it's supposed to happen when it does.

Michael Lee

You talk about some research in the book as well around trust and respect as an environment that has significantly lower stress, more energy, higher engagement, more productivity, and so on. Where do these statistics come from? And how do you actually get those levels of trust and respect?

David Burkus

There's a couple different researchers here that I want to give credence to because they're doing some great work. The first one around psychological safety. And where this trust and respect comes from is Amy Edmondson, who coined the term and founded the research on psychological safety, and was the one that talked about how it's based on trust and respect. And she's actually big on this idea that this dissent is a sort of starting place. In the book, I

also talked about the research of Christine Neurath, another brilliant researcher on civility in the workplace. Most people report that their workplace is toxic or is uncivil. And then you ask why? They'll say, Well, it's because most people follow how the leaders act, as in, there's two or three people at senior leadership roles that are just nasty. Or have never actually had someone call them out on how their behavior when someone disagrees with them is belittling, or how they push a false consensus because they just want people to agree with them. So how do you get it? I mean, it's one of those things that as much as I love bottom-up change, as much as I love bottom-up culture and egalitarian change in organizations, some things do have to happen top-down, and trust and respect is one of them.

Michael Lee

Maybe the only thing that's harder in the hybrid space than communicating and collaborating is engaging.

David Burkus

Yeah, I mean, the interesting thing for me is that the research prior to the pandemic, or what I like to call BC research, "Before Corona" research, remote workers unquestionably most of the research found they were more productive. And this little footnote underneath all of that research that nobody really paid too much attention to was why they were more productive. The most common reason was that they worked more hours. They would start their workday when most people would start their commute. They would keep working until most people would end the commute. They would have a harder time, blurring the lines between work and life.

So they were much more responsive throughout the rest of the time. No surprise that they were more productive. And no one thought about, Okay, well, what if we had a global eighteen-month long work-from-home experiment? What would that increase in productivity do to their mental health?

And I think we all figured that out last summer, or last fall, that, Oh, I'm more productive because I'm working more hours. And I'm blurring the lines between work and life. It didn't work all that well. So we had this, honestly, this over-engagement, if we want to call it that. People were more focused on their job. But that did horrors for our mental health. It's the big challenge here is long-term sustainable engagement. It's actually about making sure that people don't believe their work is their entire life. Because as we all found out, when we made our work most of our life for awhile, over the last eighteen months, it's a terrible way to live. Working from home is fine. Living at work is really not a good way to live.

Michael Lee

Let's talk a bit about hybrid creativity, and the challenges and benefits there.

David Burkus

Wow, okay, this is an interesting one. So I mean, the first thing I would say is, it depends on the work that we're doing. But I'm going to assume you're sort of like, let's design. Let's take working from the office, and let's design a better space. So there's generic work. I mean, the first thing I would say is it would be an office, but it would be an office space where everyone feels welcome. And no one feels obligated. And what welcome means is that there is a place for you. And in fact, there's probably multiple places for you. So you're going to need an office space, that even though you don't have people there all the time, could fit everyone there, but in a variety of different settings. So you may have certain people, certain functions that need an actual office with the door that closes. I doubt you would need that as much because people have the opportunity to hide elsewhere by leaving. But you would need different size meetings, you would need little sort of corrals for one-on-one meetings, two or three person conference rooms or five persons. Instead of like the traditional office was a sea of cubicles, and then three conference rooms that fit eight people and it always felt weird to have a two person meeting at a twelve-person conference table.

So you need that - the term I would use is a palette of places. And then you would need some synchronicity on when would work best if we're here. And that's so different for every team that it's hard to do. Some teams may be like, yeah, everyone's gonna be here Monday.

I think for most teams, the answer is actually times of day. If you are not a geographically-dispersed company, you're all in the same area, you were all working out of this office before the pandemic and now you just know you want flexibility. Then thinking about okay, what are the hours of the day that are our meetings hours, like, from ten to two it's cool to schedule a meeting and you won't step on anyone's toes. And that way we know most people are in the office from ten to two. But if you want to leave at two fifteen, that's fine. If you want to come in at seven in the morning, that's fine. We don't actually care as long as you're around that.

So that would probably be what it looked like for me. But the other thing I'll tell you is that none of this matters at a companywide level. And that's why I'm struggling to answer your question. It matters at a team level. It doesn't matter what the companywide program is. What matters is that we have managers that have some level of flexibility to come up with what arrangement works best for their team. And also feel free to change it three months, six months, nine months later, when the team changes or when the work that they're doing changes.

Michael Lee

And what about the virtual part of that hybrid space? In other words, you open your computer, you enter your online office, what would that look like?

David Burkus

If you're a team that even twenty months into this, still isn't using some kind of project management software that manages asynchronous communication, then I think you need

to add that to your collaboration tools. Because that usually defaults to asynchronous communication, which is what we're not doing all that well over the past twenty months.

Michael Lee

If you have to give one last message to people listening to say that this is what David Burkus has to say about remote work, and especially the use of technology to make remote work more human – what would you say?

David Burkus

I would say that connection matters more than connectivity. And what I mean by that is the speed of your bandwidth, and the tool that you're using to get everyone in a fancy Zoom meeting or some other chat software, that matters less than whether or not people are actually connecting human to human, whether or not they actually see their teammates as a real team, whether or not they know what else is going on in that person's life.

I mean, this is one of the big downsides of a virtual collaboration environment is in an in-person office, I get to see pictures of your kids and the degrees from where you went to school. And I get to learn much more about you than when we run these really efficient connectivity-oriented meetings where speed of connection matters. And let's fly through this agenda. Boom. And man, that was a really efficient meeting.

What gets sacrificed is the individual connections that team members build in the unstructured moments. So making sure you're allowing for that human connection matters so much more. And there are tools that help that. And there are tools that hinder that. But it also matters that you have managers who work to take advantage of that much more than what tool you choose.

Michael Lee

Thank you, David. It's been really great to hear from you about all this. Really appreciate you being with us.

David Burkus

Thank you again so much for having me.