



# The Definitive Guide: Communication for Hybrid Teams

SUPERHUMAN



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# WORKPLACE COMMUNICATION IS VITAL TO EMPLOYEE HAPPINESS

The ways people communicate don't just facilitate work. They are vital to employee happiness and general wellbeing.

Research by [Salesforce](#) shows that 86% of employees and executives cite the lack of effective collaboration and communication as the main causes for workplace failures.

With more fully remote or hybrid teams than ever before, asynchronous communication is on the rise. That means more email, more instant messaging, and the tools that enable them. But the same tools that allowed us to do our work from home, that we celebrated for their convenience early on in the pandemic, have started to leave room for misalignment. They've even begun to [encroach on our mental health](#).

But they don't have to. With defined guidelines, email, Slack, and Google Hangouts can all become powerful resources. Teams who communicate effectively may increase their productivity by [as much as 25%](#).

Companies tend to develop their own messaging habits, whether they're explicit, or just part of the tacit culture. But having an unspoken cultural understanding of email, Slack, or virtual meetings leaves lots of room for frustration and confusion.

- Newcomers aren't sure they're picking up the right cues and are afraid of missteps.
- Different interpretations can create misalignment on expectations.
- No standardization makes it difficult to improve upon existing processes.

**Person A**

Just following up...

**Person A**

Did you see my email? We need those mock ups by EOD.

**Person B**

Sorry, I only check my email in the morning — I won't be able to get to it today.

What went wrong?

Neither of the people involved in this exchange did anything outwardly wrong. The misalignment happened because they both had different expectations, and had no point of reference to come together.

Established frameworks are now more important than ever. With fewer options to pop into someone's office, or ask them a quick question over lunch, email becomes a primary method of communication, but the rules can get blurry. Blurry rules lead to discontent and missed opportunities.

Which brings us here. It's never been more important to understand how email impacts our performance and how we feel at work. That's why you need to create a digital communication framework to set up your team for success.

Inside these pages you'll find everything you need to establish your own communications guide for your distributed or hybrid team, as well as a few tips from our own internal guide. With this, you can create a guide that's intentional and reflects your company values.

### THE COST OF SLOPPY COMMUNICATION

A [study](#) by the Economist Intelligence Unit shows the impact of poor workplace communication:

- Failure to complete projects — in 44% of cases
- Low employee morale — in 31% of cases
- Missed performance goals — in 25% of cases
- Lost sales — in 18% of cases

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## STEP 1: ASSESS MAIN POINTS OF FRICTION

Before we get into assessment methodology, know that your team really does want standards for communication.

In our [2021 Workplace Wellness Report](#) we found that 44% of knowledge workers state that their company has no norms and standards around workplace communication.

This probably explains why **35% feel they are expected to respond to messages from their manager immediately** — and more than half feel the need to respond to colleagues and other managers within 30 minutes. That's no way to focus or produce brilliant work (and probably a major point of friction).

So how do you find out where to guide your efforts? Our advice: just ask. Running a company-wide survey — or team-wide if your company isn't ready to set anything in stone, but your team needs some support — is a great place to start.

### IDEAL COMMUNICATION SURVEY

In your survey, make sure to ask:

- Favorite tools/apps to communicate with
- Least favorite tools/apps to communicate with
- Email habits
- Slack preferences
- Meeting expectations
- Whether decision-making frameworks, like RAPID, are working
- How they approach cross-functional communications
- Preferred communication methods for different scenarios



PRO TIP



Use the [survey we made at Superhuman](#) as a template to create your communications framework!

## Take every department's logistics into consideration

With responses from (hopefully) everyone in your team or company, you're ready to start designing a framework that reflects the ethos of who you are. However, you're still putting together a general guide that's bringing in preferences from a variety of people, who have different working styles, habits, and lifestyles.

It's important to build in logistical considerations when designing your communications guide, for example, how responsiveness expectations might differ between Sales and Engineering. Not to worry, it's possible to create a detailed handbook, while still leaving room for departmental customization and addressing each team's varying degrees of communication — as well as each person's individual working style...

## Tips from Superhuman's Head of People

1. Put in place norms that speed people up, rather than slow people down. Clarifying when to use email vs Slack, and how to create meeting agendas and apply decision-making frameworks — those are all examples that speed people up. You can also speed people up by aligning on cross-functional communication expectations.
2. Communication norms cannot be created in silos. They have to be built through collaboration, with input from each team. In your discovery process you have to seek to understand *how* teams work, as well as *why*.
3. Be open to different ways of working. Create space for someone to say: "Oh my gosh, no way! This doesn't work for us, *this* is how we do it."
4. Decide what is a recommendation vs what is an expectation. Create space to communicate the requirements and roll them out consistently — for example, having an agenda for every meeting could be a requirement for every department.



It's important to have a balance between consistency, but also empower teams to do what they need to do. In the operating cadence, we have company-level practices, and then areas where the individual is empowered — for example, goals.

**Kristen Hayward**  
Head of People, Superhuman

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## STEP 2: PUT THE FOCUS ON WELLNESS

Happy employees are [more productive](#).

Our wellness report proves it: knowledge workers who say their employer provides substantial mental health resources were 65% more likely to rate their productivity as "excellent" than those enjoying only partial or non-existent resources.

Plus the health and wellbeing of your team can have a massive impact on the entire team's productivity, which is why it's so important for businesses to prioritize taking care of their most important assets: their people.

From encouraging team members to take care of both themselves and their co-workers, to offering comprehensive health and wellness benefits, to [supplying employees with tools designed to help them save time and reduce stress](#), there's so much businesses can (and should) do to help their team members stay happy and healthy — and reap the rewards in maximum productivity.

A digital communication framework is definitely one of those things.

Here's what to think about:

- Tools like Slack can be a source of distraction. Setting guidelines for which comms are worth a Slack message and which ones should be emails can ease unnecessary disruptions.
  - It helps to think about Slack pings as similar to knocking on someone's office door.



We use iMessage/SMS for the simple reason that, socially speaking, it feels like you're "knocking on someone's office door" when you text their personal number. It's got to be important to do that — and to interrupt someone's flow, it really should be.

**James Beshara**  
Founder, Magic Mind

- Set a timeframe for replying in each channel to help everyone set healthy boundaries and know where to direct their message
  - Superhuman's reply expectations:
    - Email — 24 hrs
    - Slack — 1-3 hrs
- Be as detailed as possible to leave no room for guesswork, or anxiety around which channel to use.
  - However, we recommend making a note that there's flexibility in the framework to accommodate employee preferences and unexpected situations.

- Give collaborators actionable ways to follow through on email best practices. For example, some people choose to include messages along these lines on their email signature: "I send email at a time that's convenient to me, but that doesn't mean I expect a reply right away."
- Consider a "focus" day. At Superhuman we have no-meeting Tuesdays — they're a hit!

#### 💡 SUPERHUMAN TIP:

A best practice the folks at Superhuman love is to include a signal in the subject line of what's required or what to expect, prefacing the subject with brackets like [Action required], [Urgent], or [Feedback by EOD]. This helps recipients prioritize inbound requests.

## The rules that work at Superhuman

- Use Slack if any of the following hold:
  - Your message is quick (e.g. only takes 30 seconds for the reader to read and reply)
  - You're not sure exactly who to ask, but you know which general channel or group of people to ask
  - You want a response within ~3 hours
- Move to email if any of the following hold:
  - You're asking someone else to do something that will take them >30 seconds
  - You're sharing information that you expect others to read
  - You're writing a thoughtful message that will benefit from structure (e.g. bullets, in-line images, etc)
  - You're okay with a response time of around ~1 day
- If you need a response more urgently, call or speak in person

# STEP 3: OFFER GUIDANCE THAT STREAMLINES PRODUCTIVITY

Help your team become great at using your company's communication tools by including tips in your guide.

## Superhuman's email tips

|                            |   |
|----------------------------|---|
| Email triage               | Set specific times for email each day and apply this simple principle to everything in your inbox: leave anything that's for today, snooze anything that's for later, get rid of anything that doesn't need your attention. |
| Scheduling reminders/sends | Ease some mental clutter by scheduling reminders for emails you need to get to, but can't at the moment.  |
| Automating follow ups      | Schedule follow-ups if you don't receive a reply in a specific time frame.  |
| Splitting your inbox       | Create buckets to organize your incoming email, so you instantly know where to go.  |



With Superhuman, your team can cut their email time in half, prioritize their inbox in seconds, schedule reminders, automate follow ups, and so much more. [Get Superhuman for your team.](#)

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## STEP 4: FIND A PLACE FOR YOUR COMMS HANDBOOK TO LIVE

Your communication framework should live in a place that's easily accessible to all collaborators.

Really, the average interaction worker spends [an estimated 28% of the workweek managing email and nearly 20% looking for internal information](#) or tracking down colleagues.

And if that doesn't convince you, a report by [Think Talent](#) shows that employees working in organizations with effective and centralized communication plans are 3.5 times more likely to outperform their peers.

### 💡 SUPERHUMAN TIP:

At Superhuman we use Notion. There are a few apps that make centralizing info pretty easy.

Check these out:

1. Notion
2. Confluence
3. BambooHR
4. Lattice



Want more apps to organize your team?  
We made [this list](#) of 12 apps for getting things done.



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## STEP 5: EMBED AND UPHOLD YOUR NEW AND IMPROVED CULTURE

It's all about setting the right example. Healthy workplace habits, including emailing and other types of remote communications, should be embodied by the company leaders.



I'm protective of my time and make it clear with my team — not only for myself — that it's important to set healthy examples. If I'm ever sending an email outside of work hours, I'll schedule it on [Superhuman](#) to be sent out in the morning, so that they never feel pressured to work late into the night or wake up extra early.

**Luba Yudasina**  
CEO, YouTuber, and Opera Singer

Here are a few things you can start doing to encourage your team to set healthy boundaries and follow best communication practices:

- [Calendar blocking](#) involves designating blocks of time during your day to essential tasks and scheduling them into your calendar. By assigning tasks to time blocks, you can easily avoid distractions and stay more focused.
- Say no to meetings you feel you have nothing to add to, taking a page from [Sophia Amoruso's playbook](#) by practicing healthy avoidance. "Avoidance is portrayed as something that isn't a good trait — but I've learned that healthy avoidance can allow things to unfold, and help the important things rise to the top," she said.
- Establish "focus" days during the week, with no internal meetings.
- Avoid sending WhatsApp messages or making phone calls to team mates outside business hours.
- Schedule Slack messages and email sends to remove them from your mental load (and keep them within business hours!) if you happen to be working odd hours. Remember to be mindful of people's time zones when scheduling. [Superhuman](#) allows you to quickly schedule emails by simply typing out a command like "send at 9 AM London."
- Follow your new framework to a T!

### DON'T KNOW WHERE TO START?

We got you. [Click here](#) for a skeleton doc of your communications framework you can duplicate and easily start filling in.

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## BONUS: EMAIL AS A TOOL FOR TRANSPARENCY

Hunting down information can be time-consuming, daunting, and not very productive.

Most companies aim to be transparent, but the logistics of being transparent aren't always clear.

At Superhuman, we've figured out that a few email lists and archives, as well as detailed and nuanced guides on when to use each one, are key in cross-departmental visibility. Plus it helps anyone at any point find info they need.

### Superhuman's mailing list philosophy

We took inspiration from the brilliant folks at [Stripe](#) to create it.

At Superhuman we CC (or BCC) a mailing list on every email we send. Reasoning:

- There are plenty of email conversations the team has internally or externally that are beneficial for the team to learn from.
- In most companies, these valuable emails are hidden within peoples' individual mailboxes.
- To help with this, we make use of mailing lists: we CC (or BCC) a mailing list on every internal (or external) email we send.
- This has the following benefits:
  - It enables us to move faster by sharing information passively with each other.
  - Being transparent as an organization improves efficiency of team members. It's empowering to be able to go find out anything yourself, instead of bothering others!
  - Each mailing list, over time, builds up into a useful shared archive of information.
- Team members can opt-in to lists, to receive emails about the things they're interested in.

# Mailing list guidelines

1. We have "x" lists, and "x-archive" lists. Example: "**departmentname@superhuman.com**" and "**department-archive@superhuman.com**"
  - a. "x" lists are for when senders expect list members to read all the traffic on that list
  - b. "x-archive" lists are for when senders **do not expect list members to read all the traffic on that list**
2. The exceptions to the "always CC/BCC a list rule" are:
  - a. Confidential emails:
    - i. Feedback to or about a teammate
    - ii. Compensation information
    - iii. Specific and sensitive details relating to candidates we are interviewing e.g. interview notes, rejection emails — the reason is that any candidate may be a future colleague, or may be connected socially to someone in the company, so these emails are confidential
  - b. User-facing bulk emails which are of little value for search purposes: receipts, activation campaigns, auto-responders, product announces, etc (note: this is merely to save inbox clutter; these messages should all still be accessible and transparent via send logs)
  - c. Spammy / jokey emails that you don't want to share 😊
3. If you are deliberately off-list, please explain why (e.g. "offlist; because I'm discussing comp details")
4. When you create a new list
  - a. Add that list to the lists Notion doc
  - b. Let the team know, by email or Slack, when you create a new email list and explain its purpose

Gift your team a better way to email. Engineered for speed, built for productivity, designed for joy, Superhuman empowers teams to conquer email. [Get Superhuman for your team.](#)