

EPISODE 141

Out of Sight, Out of the Running

Claire, a director with nine reports across three cities, watches her strongest analyst — best numbers on the team, working from home four days a week — get passed over at promotion time, because the room never sees her. This episode shows you how to make invisible work visible: write the record, raise the level, connect on purpose, and carry their names upstairs.

KEY STRATEGIES & IDEAS

1. The Strongest Analyst, Invisible

Claire runs a team of nine, spread across three cities, and four of them are fully remote. Her strongest analyst works from home four days a week. Best numbers on the team, cleanest work, never misses a date. Then promotion season came, and Claire watched the names go up for discussion. Her analyst's name was not among them. The name the room knew was the one who sits two floors down and drops by with the update in person.

2. More Output, Half the Promotions

Nicholas Bloom ran the experiment on this. Back in 2015, he took about five hundred call-centre workers and randomly sent half of them home four days a week. The home group produced thirteen percent more, and their promotion rate was about half that of the office group. A study of nine hundred and thirty-seven managers found the same gap from the other side. They were ten percent less likely to promote a full-time remote worker, even when they were told the performance matched. So here is the honest line. Fully remote carries the penalty. Two days hybrid did not, in one trial. The penalty is not about output. It is about the absence of a face.

3. Two Bets: Hallway or Record

Two real leaders faced exactly that question and answered it in opposite ways. In 2013, Marissa Mayer took over Yahoo and ended working from home. Her memo said the best decisions come from hallway and cafeteria discussions. Her bet was that the hallway is where the best decisions happen, so presence is the fix. Now the other bet. Sid Sijbrandij built GitLab with no office at all. His bet was the written word. The handbook is the office. The hallway gives you a face. The record gives you the work.

4. The Five Levels

There is a diagnostic for that, from Matt Mullenweg, who runs Automattic fully distributed. He lays out five levels. Level two is where most teams sit — the office recreated online, every meeting live, days full of interruptions. Do not stop at level two. Level three is remote-first: written communication becomes crucial, and the work moves to writing instead of meetings. Level four is truly asynchronous: people are judged on what they produce, not how or when, and trust emerges as the glue that holds the entire operation together. That is the level the record buys you.

Joe Dutkiewicz

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5. The Honest Cost

That is the honest cost, and one study names it. When sixty thousand Microsoft employees went remote, the collaboration network went quieter and more siloed, fewer bridges between groups. One company, one pandemic-era shift, so it is a warning, not a law. But it means the record alone is not enough. You also have to engineer the connection, on purpose, or the team drifts apart while the output holds.

The picture: Claire's strongest analyst works from home four days a week. Best numbers on the team, cleanest work, never misses a date. Promotion season comes around, and her name is not among the names the room discusses. The name the room knew was the one who sits two floors down and drops by with the update in person.

ACTION & REFLECTION STEPS

- [ ] **Step one — write the record.** Pick one remote report and write down their last month in three lines. What they delivered, what decision it changed, and what it is worth to the team. Put it where the level above can see it, in the update, in the review, in the room. The record is how the room sees them.

The report:

The three lines:

- [ ] **Step two — raise the level.** Run Mullenweg's diagnostic on your own team. Find one thing that lives as a live meeting and move it to writing. A decision log, a pre-read before the meeting, a written update instead of a status call. And one practical move while you are at it. If anyone is remote, everyone joins on their own screen. No in-room cluster while two people dial in. That is the meeting where the remote half goes quiet.

What I will move to writing:

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- [ ] **Step three — connect on purpose.** The network thins on its own, so you build the bridges on purpose. One deliberate connection a week for each remote report, a coffee chat, a one-to-one, a short call with someone outside their own group. GitLab's handbook puts it in one line. Do not underestimate a one-to-one. This is not more meetings. It is the connection the hallway used to give you for free, built on purpose instead.

This week's connection:

- [ ] **Step four — carry their names upstairs.** In the room where promotions get decided, say the remote names out loud, with the record behind them. Here is what she delivered, here is the decision it changed, here is why it matters. You are the face your remote reports do not have in that room. If you do not carry the name, nobody in that room will.

The name I will carry:

Think two levels up. — Maya & Marcus

Joe Dutkiewicz

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