

Hubstaff team communication manifesto

Introduction and Goals

Working remotely has granted us much freedom — we work where we want, how we want, and for the most part, when we want. There are three main purposes of this document to go further:

1. Give the team freedom from distractions so they can focus on their best work that moves the needle for Hubstaff.
2. Allow greater flexibility for work hours and to establish work/life boundaries and therefore balance.
3. Set fair expectations for when team members should expect to receive responses and where.

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General

- For non-urgent messages via Slack, Gmail, Tasks, GitHub, Gdrive, or any other internal tool comments that require action, **Monday-Friday you are expected to respond to Hubstaff team members within 24 hours**. This could mean a quick confirmation with an ETA of more information, eg “I’m not sure about that, but I’ll dig in and will try and get back to you by Friday.” There are very, very rarely urgent requests. Something really important breaking comes to mind.
- Unless on call, no one is expected to respond to any communications on Saturdays or Sundays or while away for planned time off or emergency/personal situations. Rest and recharge.
- Time off - let the team know if it’s for a full day or more during the work week, reflect that in your status, and [put a request into Hubstaff](#). Emergency and other unforeseen circumstances are exceptions, but please let your manager know as soon as you can.
- Focus time - it’s 100% acceptable, and encouraged, to turn off Slack notifications and shut down email for 4 hour increments while you’re working so you can focus.

Slack

- It is required you have your Slack status reflect that you’re active (green) when you are working. It’s worth reiterating that it’s totally fine to pause notifications (DND mode) while you’re working or not.
 - If something truly urgent comes up DND mode can be bypassed so you are alerted when messaged directly.
 - If you are active in Slack, it means you are willing to receive and respond to messages within 24 hours. So if you are working on other Slack channels outside of Hubstaff, make sure your HS status is “Away” if you are not available.

- Use Slack Statuses as much as possible. “Focus mode”, “In a meeting” or “Commuting” are helpful but not required.

- If you’re stepping out to run an errand, hit the gym, etc, do your best to set a status with a general time that you think you’ll be back. This will help others plan accordingly before sending you a message.

- Be intentional with messages.

- Avoid general messages like, “Do you have a sec?” The answer is often dependent on what it’s for. This pulls people away from their work and they’re left hanging for more information. Include context and a desired date to receive the information. Some suggested alternatives:

- “Hey. Do you have time this week to take a look at this mockup and provide feedback? I tagged you in the task. Hoping to ship it by EOD Friday.”
 - “When you have a chance, can you check this report by Wednesday to make sure it looks alright before the call?”

- Default to messaging in channels when the information needed could be quickly available from multiple people. This helps with visibility, think: Could the answer to this question be of value to this channel? If it’s an emergency, you’re also likely to get a quicker response.

- If there’s an existing channel your message relates to, post it there. For example, if you notice a bug in Tasks, post in #tech-support-tasks. Bugs in Hubstaff in #tech-support. You can try searching to see if there’s a relevant channel.

Hubstaff Tasks

- Discussions about Tasks should happen in Tasks until/if agreed to move outside for a call or Slack exchange to speed things up. This is for documentation, easy reference, and transparency. It also helps keep Slack notifications from intruding.

- If 2 or 3 comment exchanges don’t resolve questions and move the task forward, set up a time to discuss to keep things on track. Be sure to follow up on the outcome of the conversation in the task.

- If conversations regarding a task happen outside of Tasks, conclusions and/or action items should be documented in the task or relevant GDoc.

- Notifications pile up quickly, it’s easy for them to get lost. Two suggestions:

- Eventually there will be a more robust notification center, but in the meantime, you can [check off notifications](#) as you’ve addressed them.

- When tagging someone for action needed, assign them to the task and give them a date and sprint for when you hope to receive a response by. This will help keep it on their list; they’ll even be reminded in their daily summary email without you having to check-in.

Meetings

While we’ve found that asynchronous communication is possible the majority of the time, it is not always 100% efficient. There are times when we need real-time exchanges of thoughts and information. That being said:

- Only schedule meetings when necessary with the right people. If the need for a meeting has died off or become unapparent, drop it. Everyone involved will appreciate it.

- The meeting organizer should come to the meeting with an agenda that is prepared ahead of time. This can be a simple, informal short list of items needing to be covered. Ideally any questions for the participants would be circulated in advance so they have time to collect information and think on it before the meeting.

- Meetings must start and end on time.

- Be sure to document (in GDocs or Tasks) the decisions, conclusions, and action items from the meeting.

- The host or designated note taker should post follow-up items and ask for confirmation either during the call as they’re taken or following in a task.

- If you’re working on a high-priority task or catching up on a long sprint list, message the meeting host and/or manager to let them know you won’t be attending and ask if there’s anything needed from you.

- Default to video on. This will help with non-verbal communication, plus it’s nice to actually see your teammates. However, [Zoom fatigue](#) is a real thing. So if you find yourself in back-to-back or long meetings, it’s okay to turn off the camera for a period so you can walk around and take a break from focusing on the camera and video.

- Team and company-wide meetings can be recorded and saved to the Gdrive or the [Hubstaff Wistia channel](#), respectively.

Email

- We love email. Just kidding. No one does. Strive to hold and document internal communications in Tasks or Gdocs. Slack is great but for task-related items be sure to follow-up with cliff notes in the task so information isn’t lost and it’s accessible to the rest of the team.

- External communications needing significant action by someone else should be put into Tasks and assigned.

Tips

Slack

- You can [set up a notification schedule](#) if you'd like to timebox for focus time (highly recommended by leadership).
- /send allows you to schedule a message within a 24 hour window
- [Adjust notification settings](#) by channel. You can mute notifications, only receive alerts when you or specific keywords are mentioned, and more.
- @channel notifies everyone online, regardless of status. While @here notifies anyone online and in that channel.
- Try the [Slack and Google calendar integration](#). It can automatically set your status, give you your daily agenda when you logon, and send you meeting reminders and call-in info.