



# Leadership Handbook

How Smartlies Want to Lead and Be Led





# Growing Smart Leaders

## Is One of the Most Impactful Things Companies Can Do


**Leadership has an enormous impact on a team's ability to make an impact and achieve great results.**

A leader who builds on people's strengths and helps them do their best work boosts the success of the entire company. We are passionate about growing smart leaders and crafting our leadership culture, because they are indispensable in our quest to bring brands and people together smartly and make every day of advertising easy, effective and enjoyable.


This handbook explains our approach to leadership—outlining some of the key principles and practices that we believe are integral to excellent leadership at Smarty.io. It serves as a guide for current and future leaders to behave in a way that fuels our growth and allows our values and culture to flourish.




**Whether we are growing new leaders from within or hiring experienced talent from outside, an essential element of a good leader at Smarty.io is to be humble and hungry to keep on learning.**



No matter how many years of leadership experience they have, smart leaders should always seek and seize opportunities to improve.



In the same spirit, we understand that the learning continues for us, too. While we believe we have the fundamentals in place, the principles and practices in this handbook continue to evolve. Moreover, we get good results only if we practice what we preach. Co-creating a smart leadership culture requires each Smartlie leader to work towards these ideals consistently and diligently every day.



Like many other companies, we have recently migrated to an all-remote mode due to the pandemic. **In tough times, great leadership is more important than ever before.** This is why we have shared this handbook openly—we hope this handbook inspires leaders in other organizations to think about their practices during these turbulent times and encourages them to nurture their own leadership cultures to support their people.

# Table Of Contents

06

Our Leadership Principles

19

Setting Teams up for Success

21

Building Powerful Teams

31

Fostering Impactful Teamwork

43

Nurture Growth and Wellbeing

56

A note about remote leadership

63

Our favorite goodreads on leadership

# Our Leadership Principles explain how Smartlies want to lead and be led

**The principles complement our values of being a humble hungry hunter, building trust, maximizing learning, working smartly, taking ownership and thinking customers first.**

They demonstrate how to lead in a way that nurtures the Smarty.io culture we cherish and helps us reach our goals, and ultimately, our vision. Like our values, the Leadership Principles

have been defined collectively. And similarly to our culture, we hope to see them evolve as our team grows and diversifies.

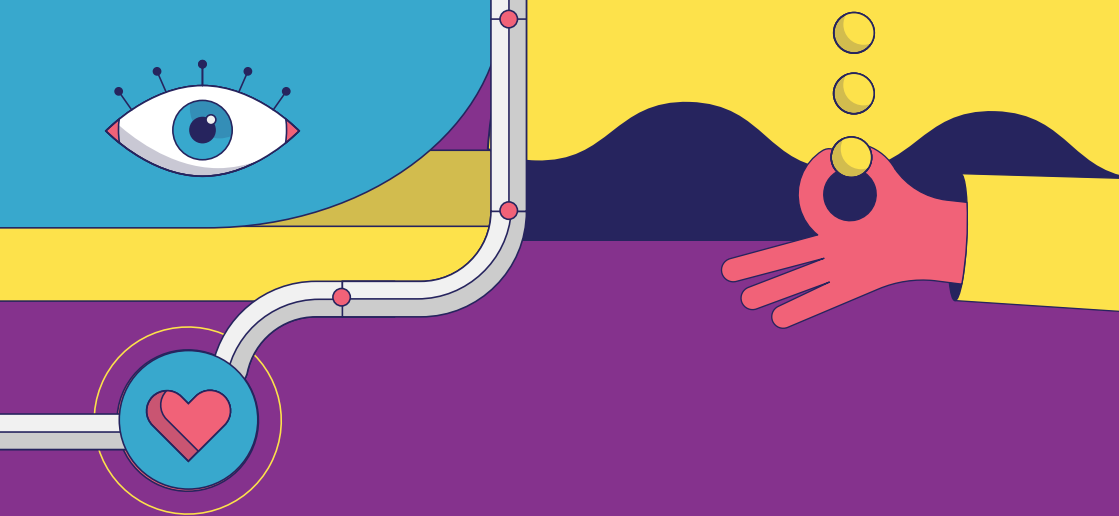
A leadership position isn't a prerequisite to following these principles. All Smartlies are trusted to take ownership beyond their role as well as expected to show leadership in their daily work and interactions.



“

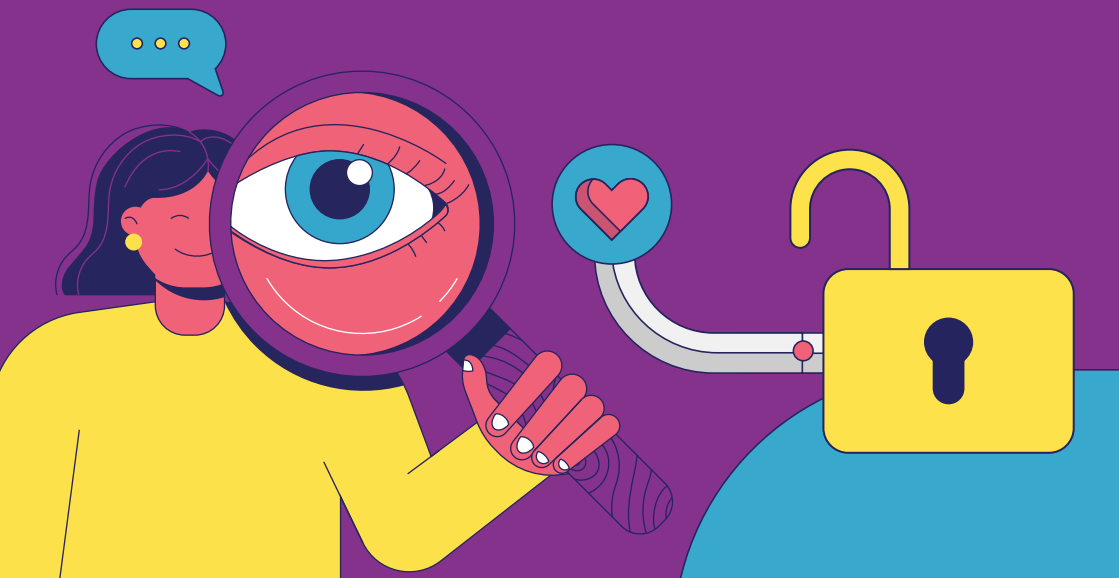
Every leader's fundamental responsibility is to ensure that the team produces results that solve customers' problems and take us towards our strategic goals and our vision. Ultimately, everything the team does should help us make advertising easy, efficient and enjoyable for our customers.

**Kristo Ovaska**  
CEO & Co-Founder



Smarty.io: Leadership handbook

# Our Leadership Principles



1

# Nurture Trust

Be consistent in decisions and actions, keep decision-making transparent and explain why.



## For Example:

**1** **Communicate the why behind a decision**, both the assumptions you have made and the data you used to make those assumptions.

**2** Listen to the team members and encourage them to **give honest feedback about hard topics**.

**3** **Default to communicating in public channels** and avoid starting private discussions unless the topic is strictly private.

**4** Deliver on your promises **in a timely and reliable manner**.



“

At Smarty.io, we build trust by keeping decision-making transparent, bringing in the best people, sharing a common goal, and by being consistent, human and empathetic. Never before in my professional career have I felt as certain to try new things and fail, and openly share both vulnerabilities and ambitious goals. We want to succeed together and as individuals – and that knowledge builds unparalleled trust.

**Tegan Kerr**

Head of South (Southern Europe, Middle East and Africa)

📍 Dubai



2

# Create Direction And Clarity

Understand your team's role in executing our strategy and vision, creating success and customer value in practice, and communicate it to your team regularly.





## For Example:

1

Make the connection between the team's work and Smarty.io's purpose of **bringing brands and people together visible** in concrete terms and align the team's plans with the company's strategic goals and vision.

3

**Be diligent in documenting and communicating** what you are working on to help team members and neighboring teams stay in the loop.

4

Explain what success looks like and **highlight accomplishments**.

2

**Remember to say no to things that aren't moving the needle.** Focus on doing a few things exceptionally well instead of spreading yourself too thin.



»»

A big part of creating direction and clarity is about open communication. As a leader you have access to more conversations than your team may have, so it's your responsibility to pass on the relevant information. You should be reporting to your team as much as they are reporting to you.

**Riikka Pello**

Global Head of Creative Solutions, Helsinki

📍 Helsinki

3

# Emphasize Action

Foster our culture of moving fast, iterating and learning to deliver the best outcomes.





## For Example:

**1** **Keep up a positive sense of urgency by asking** what your team can do today or this week to work towards their long-term goals.

**2** **Make fast decisions and don't get stuck.** If you made the wrong decision, reiterate and move forward.

**3** **Build tight feedback loops** into your team's work to adapt to changes quickly.

**4** **Start meetings with a clear agenda** and conclude them by assigning action points with owners and deadlines.

### 66



The key is to not confuse progress with motion: just because you're doing a lot, doesn't mean you're progressing. At Service Ops, we filter drastically to focus on the experiments with the highest chance of delivering a measurable impact. We're learning through experimentation and sometimes failing miserably, but more often we're making giant leaps!

**Marc-Olivier Meunier**  
Director of Customer Support

📍 Helsinki

4

# Hold Accountable

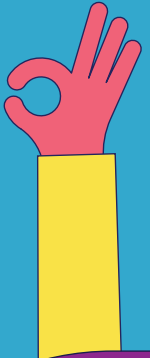
Monitor progress and  
intervene if necessary.



✓ Follow Working Agreements



✓ Help Others



✓ Give Real time Feedback



# For Example:

1

## Follow key metrics

you and your team are responsible for on a regular cadence and take action if progress stalls.



2

Hold yourself and others accountable **for following the working agreements of your team** and the shared practices of the company.

3

Set deadlines and **help others** meet them.



“

It's easy to get sidetracked by urgent, ad hoc matters or venture off track – sometimes we overthink, get involved where we shouldn't, or the quality of our work suffers from overload. My role is to help focus, give real time feedback, and hold our team accountable to the principles and practices we've agreed on – myself included. Most important is that we're all aligned on our goal and have agreed on a path to get there, and stay in constant communication throughout the journey.

**Kelly Zitzmann**

General Counsel & Head of Legal

📍 New York City

5

# Help Others Grow

Enable your team members  
to exceed themselves in their  
roles.





# For Example:



- 1** Identify your strengths and help others identify theirs.
- 2** If you are good at something, **take the time to teach others.**
- 3** Give honest and actionable feedback as often as you can **to help people keep on improving.**



☺☺

By encouraging and providing resources for teams to lean into their strengths, we are able to create an environment of confidence and knowledge sharing. As we all grow individually, we grow even more collectively.

**Alex Walkowski**  
Managed Services Lead US East

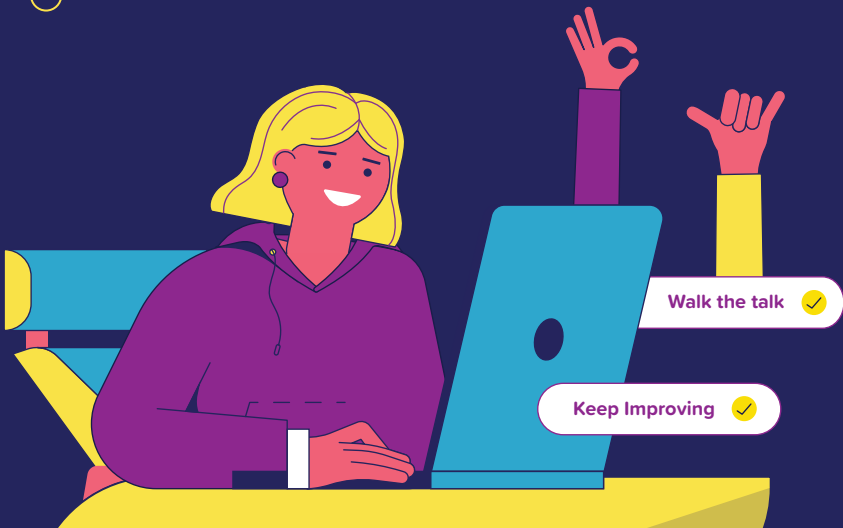
📍 New York City



6

# Lead By Example

Walk the talk, make our values come alive every day and keep improving to create more impact.



# For Example:



1

**Champion our values**  
to nurture the Smarty.io culture in your team.

2

Imagine the best leader you could have—**and then try to be that for your team members.**

3

Don't exempt yourself from the shared rules and working agreements. **You are part of the team, not above it.**

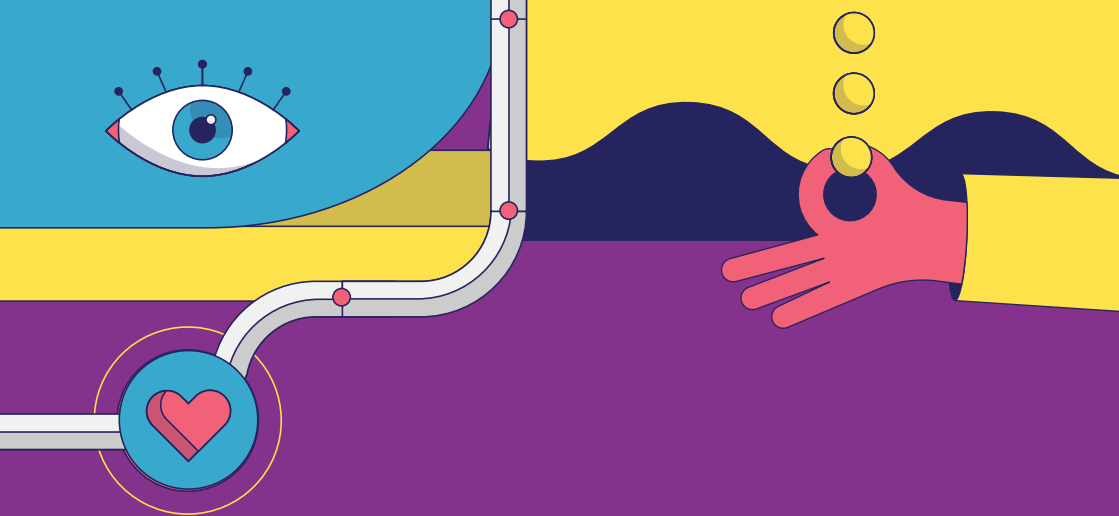


66

Our leadership principles are nothing but words until leaders walk the talk. Leading by example is the only way to implement and maintain a culture.

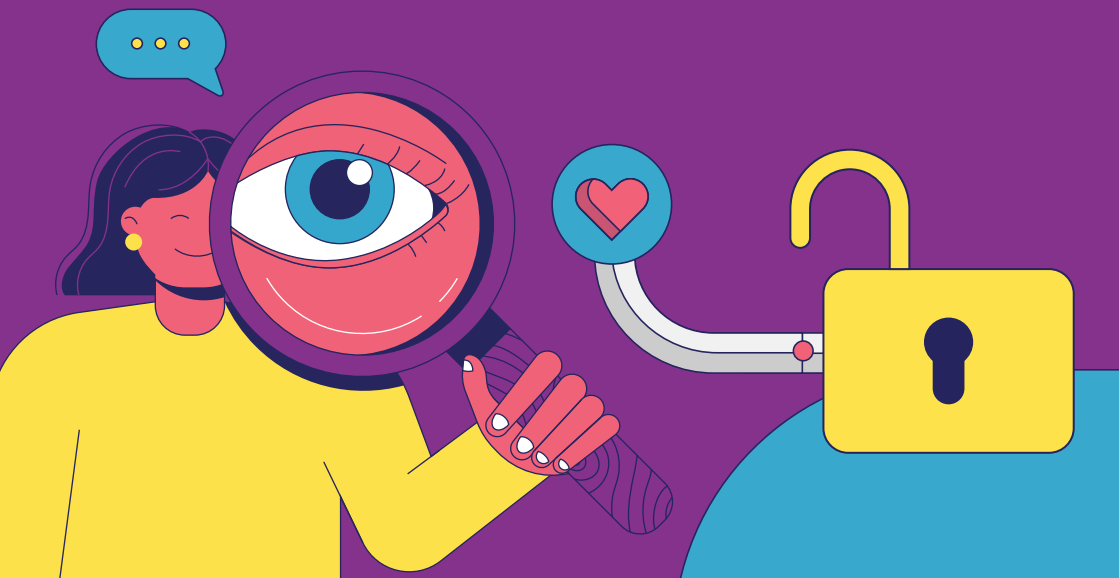
**Santtu Koivumäki**  
Global Head of Customer Success Operations

📍 Helsinki



Smarty.io: Leadership handbook

# Setting Teams Up For Success





# Setting Teams Up For Success

Great leadership helps teams make timely and informed decisions and execute at speed, which in turn helps us to solve for our customers in an effective manner. It also nurtures an engaging working environment where all team members can use and develop their strengths and make an impact.

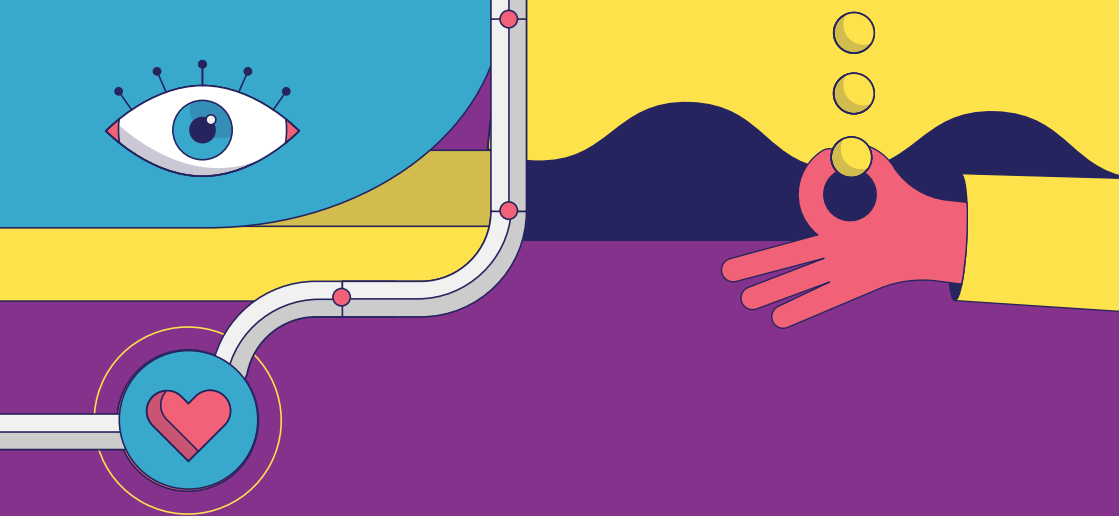
We believe in a set of practices that are central to a team's success at Smarty.io.

**The practices fall under three main categories:**

- 1 **Growing powerful teams**
- 2 **Fostering impactful teamwork**
- 3 **Nurturing growth and wellbeing**

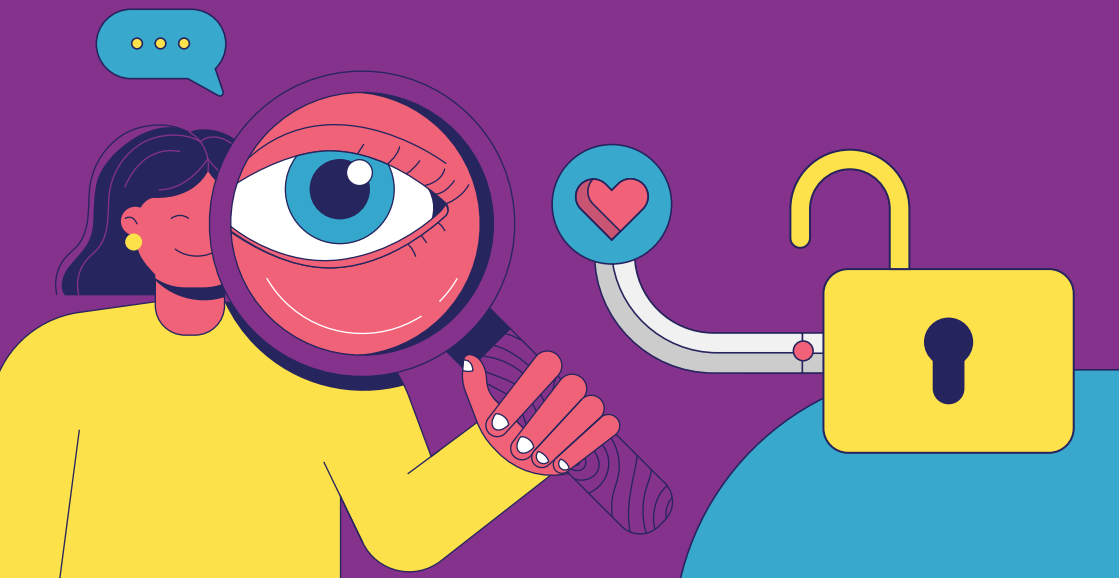
This is where team leads put the Leadership Principles into practice to set their team up for success.





Smarty.io: Leadership handbook

# Growing Powerful Teams



# Growing Powerful Teams

## Powerful

## Powerful

## Powerful

## Pov

**At Smartly.io, a team lead is responsible for building a high-performing team. This means analyzing what expertise the team needs in the next 6 to 12 months to reach its goals and having a plan for bridging those gaps.**

To do this, a team lead needs to keep an eye out for changes in the team's composition. The team may be getting large and need splitting—which means grooming someone to become a lead for the other half. Perhaps one team member has aspirations different from what your team does and wants to take on a new role. Maybe someone is taking a parental leave or study leave. A smart team lead knows how their team evolves in the near future and how to adapt.

Hiring new team members shouldn't be a team lead's first strategy for improving the team's effectiveness. **Instead, they should...**

1

**Prioritize!** Do fewer things, but do them better.

3

Look into automating manual processes **to save time.**

5

Reorganize ways of working for **higher efficiency.**

2

**Scope and clarify responsibilities for both the team and its individual members.**

A lack of clarity hurts their ability to focus on the right things at the right time.

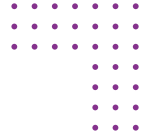
4

**Train team members in new skills** or help them find a coach from outside of the team.

6

Recruit **internally.**

We strive to work more smartly rather than throw more bodies at the problem to keep our team lean. Sometimes the strategies above don't cut it, and we turn to hiring a new team member from outside.



# Recruiting New Team Members

**We want to hire growth-minded people who have a drive for developing their strengths through hard work and dedication.** We are a fast-growing company in a rapidly changing ecosystem, and our customers' needs evolve constantly, which means we value the ability to learn new skills at speed and the potential to grow with us.

The best people want to work with the best people, which is why we hold a high bar in recruiting. We believe that it's better to occasionally miss out on a great hire than to make a bad one.





**The best people  
want to work  
with the best  
people, which  
is why we hold  
a high bar in  
recruiting.**





**Team leads own the recruitment process**

**for their teams.** It is, however, a good idea to involve at least one team member in interviewing recruitment candidates. Not only do you secure someone to back you up, you are also giving team members a chance to learn leadership skills. Dedicated Talent Acquisition Partners support team leads throughout recruitment processes to ensure a stellar candidate experience.



**We hire to elevate.** That means building complementary teams where each new person expands the team's collective expertise and adds value to the team's output. We pay close attention to hiring new colleagues at the right career trajectory, focusing on their potential for further growing their expertise. By constantly re-evaluating and raising our bar for quality we ensure that we are able to stay on the cutting edge of innovation, delighting our customers.

**We don't hire for culture-fit, but for value-fit and culture-add.** Our teams benefit from bringing on people with different backgrounds and perspectives and who can change the direction of thought in the organization.



To ensure inclusivity and fairness, we never make hiring decisions on gut feeling, but by running structured interview processes, trying to see past our biases and striving for as much objectivity as possible. We take detailed notes in interviews to be able to give relevant feedback to the candidate and compare candidates reliably. **We always aim to provide an excellent candidate experience. The applicants invest a good amount of their time in the process, so we want to treat it with respect.**

These guidelines apply to internal recruiting, too. We share open roles internally to increase Smartlies' opportunities for career development. We make internal hiring processes as fair and structured as external ones, so that everyone has the same chance, expectations are managed and the candidate experience is positive.



# Orienting New Team Members

When a new Smartlie joins the team, we want to help them get off the ground quickly. We believe that a brilliant orientation experience is driven by two things: the sense of accomplishment that comes from making an impact early and the feeling of belonging in the team.

## 1 WELCOME!

While everyone in the team should participate in welcoming a new team member, team leads are responsible for supporting them through the orientation and helping them reach their full potential.

## 2 PREPARING

We want to make new team members feel welcome already before they join and prepare them for what is coming on their first day and week. The team lead will always aim to be available either face to face or remotely on a new Smartlie's first workday, as well as check in on them at the end of each day during the first week.



### 3

#### CONNECTING

Our aim is to make everyone feel at home at Smarty.io from the beginning by supporting new Smartlies in connecting and socializing with others. We always name a buddy who will help show them the ropes, while our orientation program includes meetings with people from the different teams at Smarty.io.



### 4

#### PLANS AND GOALS

To get onboard with their work quickly, we outline what is expected of the newcomer each week during the first months using personalized orientation plans and goals. We always have a checkup at the end of the first two-month period with every new Smartlie to see how their work has started, remove any obstacles, and celebrate early achievements together.



### 5

#### SUPPORTING

There's no such thing as too much time spent on orienting new team members. Changing jobs is a big move—we respect that and do our best to make that move feel like their best decision ever.





Diversity is one of the main reasons my team's productivity and quality of work have been at an all-time high during the pandemic. When you bring people with different backgrounds together, you access a bigger and better pool of approaches to tackle the challenges you face. The different perspectives we bring to work have helped us adapt to the new circumstances and they will help us come out of the pandemic stronger together.

**Jose M. Sánchez**

Global Head of Creative Studio

📍 New York City

When recruiting and onboarding new team members, it is important to manage expectations. To best set up new employees for success, a manager has to be transparent and communicative about roles, responsibilities, and how those play into the overall team and company strategy.

**Kelly Patterson**

Global Head of Product Marketing

📍 New York City



The single most important factor to make a new team member feel welcome is to be available and not seem preoccupied with all the other duties one has.

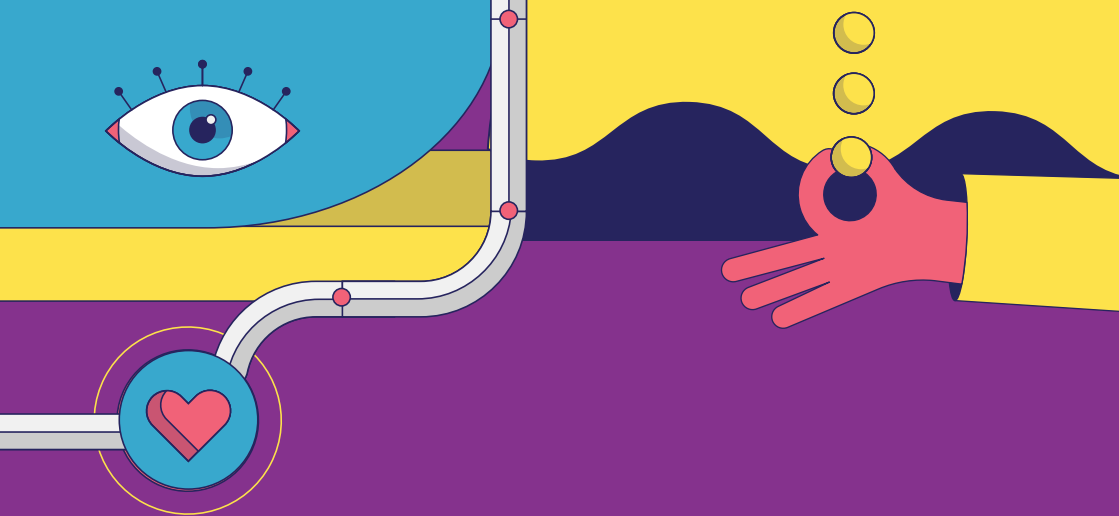
**Onboarding a new team member should be the top priority for a leader**, which is why I try to clear up my calendar during the first weeks to make sure I get to spend enough time with new recruits.

**Jaakko Talvio**

Customer Success Lead North

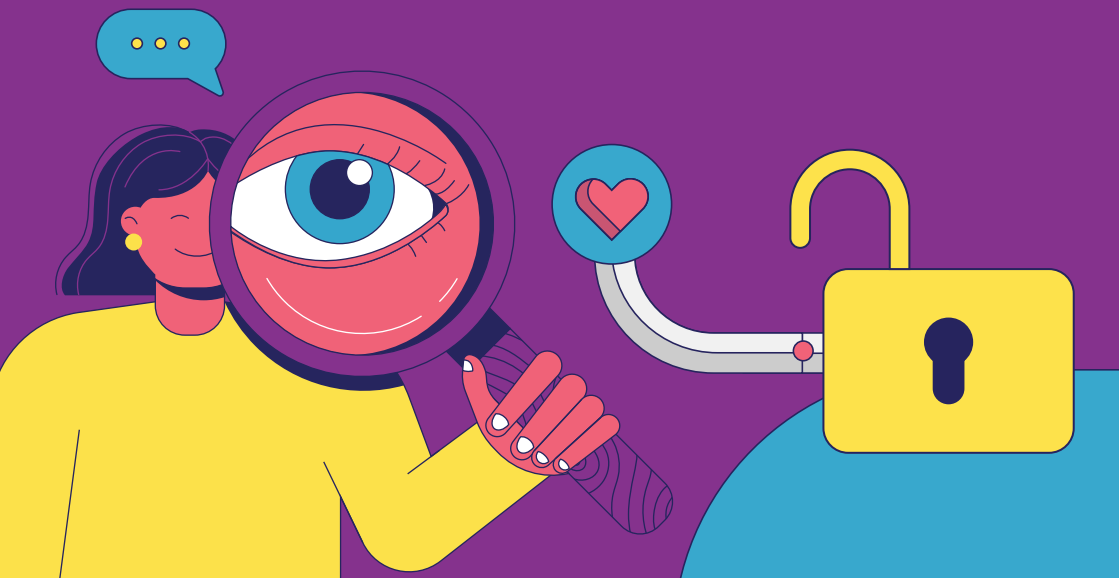
📍 Helsinki





Smarty.io: Leadership handbook

# Fostering Impactful Teamwork



# Fostering Impactful Teamwork

The goal of every team is to deliver results that have business impact and create value for our customers – to help us make every day of advertising easy, effective and enjoyable.

After leaders have built powerful teams, they must guide them to find the most effective ways to:

- 1 WORK TOWARDS OUR SHARED GOALS**
- 2 MAKE SMART DECISIONS**
- 3 ACHIEVE GREAT RESULTS**
- 4 LEARN FROM FEEDBACK**

Leading high-performing teams requires discipline and consistent effort.







GO TEAM!



We have found that impactful teamwork can be nurtured by the way the team sets its working agreements and goals and runs its meetings and retros. This is by no means an exhaustive list, but covers some of the basics of facilitating teamwork with a sense of trust and ownership, tight feedback loops and making an impact.

**Impactful teamwork extends beyond team boundaries.** A powerful team knows what role it plays in the bigger picture and builds connections to other teams within the company. A good team lead understands where their team's work interlinks with the work of other teams and fosters collaboration that crosses teams and functions, making a bigger impact than one team could on its own.

# Setting Goals

**A team's Objectives and Key Results (OKRs) define the focus and plans for each team on a quarterly cadence.** Team-level OKRs should work towards company-level OKRs and strategic lifelines, as well as the overarching vision. Teams work together to set their OKRs and each team member is expected to take part in setting the team's focus for the next quarter.

Team leads don't monopolize planning or decision-making — instead, they facilitate a discussion where the team can collaborate on goal setting. Only if the team can't reach a consensus, will the team lead make the final call.



**Ideally, OKRs capture goals that bring about change and shake the status quo, and at least one of them should be a stretch goal.**

A team should have a maximum of five objectives per quarter to avoid losing focus. OKRs are documented and shared openly with other teams for the sake of transparency — that way teams can see if their goals overlap with those of other teams and adjust accordingly.



After the OKRs have been set, documented and shared, the team regularly refers back to them in team meetings to monitor progress. It's the team lead's responsibility to hold the team accountable for the goals they've set together and intervene if it looks like progress stalls.



Each quarter, we run a people engagement pulse survey and share the results openly with all Smartlies. The insights on team wellbeing and engagement should feed into OKR planning, together with other business metrics such as customer satisfaction, product adoption and financial metrics.

A good team lead will analyze the team's survey results, ask for feedback on how to improve the team's experience and strive to continuously improve the team's effectiveness and wellbeing.

# Creating Working Agreements

Working agreements are guidelines that define how teams want to work together and what they want in their working environment and from each other to be effective, to feel safe and free to learn, as well as to explore and discover. Creating working agreements is a great way to be intentional about how your team works together in the most effective way.

**Ideal working agreements are developed by the team** and they determine how the team will work together and describe positive behaviors that need to be present for the group to be effective. They are most effective when they are simple, documented, enforceable, direct and limited in number. Working agreements should also clarify a division of responsibilities within the team, because clear responsibilities are key to having a sense of accountability.



**By collectively agreeing on a set of working agreements**, we establish the ground rules of effective teamwork. Documenting these working agreements and sharing them with new team members – and other Smartlies – makes it easier to hold ourselves and each other accountable for the desired behavior. Most importantly, working agreements help provide a sense of stability and predictability in the working environment by nurturing trust and psychological safety.

**All teams should create working agreements and publish them for others to see.** Many functions, like Customer Success management, Sales and Product Engineering also have more high-level working agreements or playbooks. Their purpose is to introduce just the right level of standardization within a function so that we know what to expect from other teams, while at the same time leaving as much room as possible for each team to customize their own ways of working. Having some coherence in how teams operate allows us to collaborate efficiently and prevents siloing, so we aim to align working agreements with playbooks where it makes sense.



# Running Meetings

Time is the most valuable asset of all Smartlies, so try not to waste it on bad meetings. Always start by asking **what is the goal of this meeting?** And then plan and time the meeting accordingly. For example, if the goal of the meeting is to make a decision, this should be clear to all participants in advance so they know how to prepare.

Depending on your goal, you may have different kinds of meetings. Some meetings are made for relaying information, others are meant for brainstorming, decision-making or reflecting on past events – whereas others are meant for simply socializing and bonding with team members. Some meetings might have multiple different goals.





## Some Rules Of Thumb Apply Regardless Of Meeting Type:

### 1. PLAN

**Always plan meetings beforehand** and share a timeboxed agenda with the participants.

### 2. MAKE NOTES

All meetings should have a **facilitator and a note taker**.

### 3. ASK

Try to engage everyone to **participate in the discussion**. If someone stays quiet, ask their opinion.

### 4. CHOOSE THE RIGHT PEOPLE TO PARTICIPATE

**Participants can choose to leave** if they feel the meeting is not good use of their time or if they aren't adding value.

### 5. CLOSE WITH CONCLUSION

**Close each agenda point with some documented conclusion**. If (and hopefully when) you have agreed on action points, assign clear owners to them and set a deadline for when they are going to be completed.

### 6. REMEMBER THE GOAL

**Remember the goal of the meeting** and reflect on whether or not it was accomplished.

### 7. SHARE YOUR NOTES

**Always share notes**. If you didn't discuss anything sensitive in the meeting, share the notes as per your team's working agreements so others can opt in to catch up. Even our Leadership team shares its meeting notes.



# Running Retros



**Building a routine of reflecting on your team's work builds crucial feedback loops and creates a culture of continuous learning and improvement.**

## **AT SMARTLY.IO WE RETRO**

A retrospective or retro for short is a team activity that seeks to find bottlenecks that slow things down and how the team can work more efficiently together. Even if the origin of the retrospectives lies in agile software development, all teams can benefit from regular retroing.

We recommend running retros on a regular cadence to get small wins all the time – strive for gradual change instead of huge overhauls. We try to frame changes as experiments that don't have to succeed: we monitor progress and kill the ideas that don't work while amplifying those that do.

## **FOR RETROS – AND ANY TEAM WORK – WE MAKE SAFETY A PREREQUISITE.**

Getting to root causes requires a lot of honesty that is possible only when team members trust each other, feel safe to delve into hard issues and take interpersonal risks. Psychological safety requires that no one is attacked or ridiculed for what they say. Also, everyone must be heard – not only the loudest voices.







We all follow some specific process when working together, whether we acknowledge it or not. **Explicit working agreements make the expectations we have towards one another clear and allow us to have conversations about the way we operate and whether or not it is helping us reach our goals.**

**Otto Vehviläinen**  
VP Engineering

📍 Helsinki



**Psychological safety and trust are key to a team's success.** I'm open about my own mistakes to try and create a safe space where everyone feels it's alright to be vulnerable, fail and learn from it.



**Thomas Schoemaeker**  
Technical Solutions Lead EMEA and APAC

📍 Dubai





Every quarter our team does a retro where we share our findings with and seek feedback from the teams we work closely with. This helps us pick more impactful projects for the next quarter's OKRs, introduce improvements to our daily work, and keeps us motivated by maintaining a sense of continuous improvement.

**Yulia Dolgodvorova**  
Director Services APAC

📍 Sydney

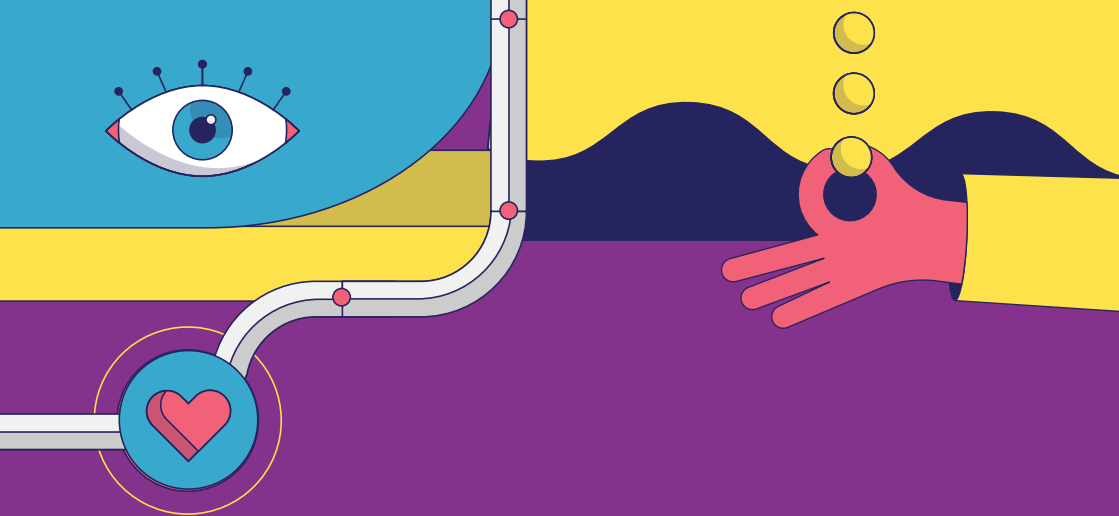


In the APAC Sales Team, we work together to research and evaluate future prospects systematically. With a clear direction and well-defined objectives, **the team has a razor-sharp focus on what steps we have to take to achieve our collective goals.**



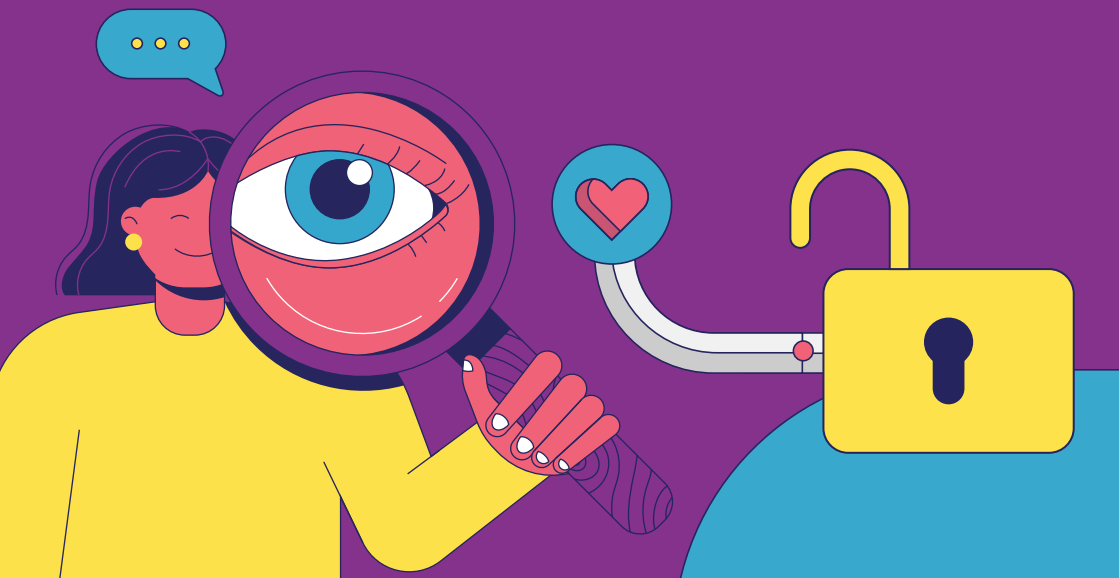
**Kevin Huang**  
VP APAC

📍 Singapore



Smarty.io: Leadership handbook

# Nurture Growth And Wellbeing





# Running Successful 1-1s

**Regular 1-1 meetings are a great tool for team leads to check in on team members.** It's easier to build trust when you show genuine empathy towards your team members and build personal relationships with them. Trust is the cornerstone of any successful team and a must for being able to give and receive candid feedback. A trusting relationship doesn't spring up on its own—it requires consistent effort and time.



A way to build trust and keep up with your team is to hold regular 1-1s with team members. We require this from all team leads.

# Three Rules Of Thumb For 1-1s:

1

## IT'S THEIR TIME, NOT YOURS

Let your team member decide most of the agenda. Coach the person, not the problem: 1-1s are more about finding out how you can help each other solve bottlenecks than giving direct instructions on what to do.

2

## LISTEN MORE THAN YOU SPEAK

Don't listen to reply—seek to understand rather than try to speak your mind. Practice active listening: listen and repeat back what you've understood to make sure you're on the same page. Never assume you know where the other person is coming from—ask instead. Convey empathy by taking the other person's perspective, avoid judgement and try to understand how they feel and why.

3

## BE CONSISTENT

Keep a regular cadence, don't postpone or skip 1-1s. Keep notes so that you'll be able to refer back to previous discussions, follow up on action steps and transfer notes to a new team lead if you or your team member change positions.



# Giving And Receiving Specific And Actionable Feedback



**Feedback is one of the cornerstones of our company culture.**

Candid feedback keeps us humble and hungry to learn. All Smartlies should practice giving, receiving and asking for feedback, because mindfully given feedback is a brilliant tool for us to help each other grow. Team leads have a special responsibility to give team members honest, direct and frequent feedback so that they can exceed themselves in their roles.

We have developed our own framework for giving and receiving feedback in a constructive and considerate way, which is based on combining radical candor with non-violent communication. We also regularly train all Smartlies on feedback skills.

**This is what our feedback framework means in practice:**

Positive feedback is nice, but specific and actionable praise is even better. When you give praise, make sure to be specific about what your team member did well and why it made you proud of them.



# Making Praise Actionable

**When You..**

DESCRIBE THE BEHAVIOUR



**I Feel/Get/ Start...**

DESCRIBE YOUR REACTION



**Because...**

EXPLAIN WHY YOU FEEL THIS WAY





# Giving Constructive Feedback

Criticism can be difficult, even daunting to give, but it's worth it. Remember this when giving constructive feedback:

1

**STRIVE FOR OBSERVATIONS NOT EVALUATION WHEN YOU'RE GIVING CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK.**

2

**KEEP IT ACTIONABLE**

Always describe behaviors, not traits. Focus on what the person can actually do something about going forward (i.e. "It would be good to see more of X as it leads to Y").

3

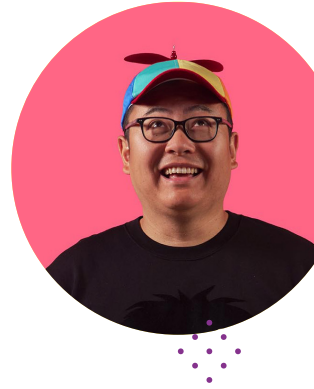
**BE RESPECTFUL AND HONEST**

Keep in mind that the purpose of feedback is to help the other person improve and not to judge.



# Giving Constructive Feedback





# Receiving Feedback

**To foster a great feedback culture we need to not only know how to give feedback but also how to receive it in a constructive way.**

We listen to the feedback we are given and reflect on where it's coming from. We ask clarifying questions, especially if the feedback was poorly formulated. We say how we are going to change behavior based on the feedback.

We always should show appreciation for given feedback by saying thank you. We are always better off receiving feedback, because it's meant to help us grow. Sometimes feedback can stir emotions. If that happens, we advise to take a breather and try to understand where the reaction is coming from. We let the other person know you've heard their feedback but you need some time to gather thoughts before responding. And we always do respond — ignoring feedback can result in people avoiding to give any.

**WOW!**

**THANK YOU!**

# Having Hard Discussions



**Every leader will face hard discussions, so it's good to prepare for them.**

At the bottom of every hard discussion needs to be genuine care for the other person and their growth. We adopt a mindset that while hard discussions may feel uncomfortable, they are usually good for your team member's personal development – and we will learn at the same time.

We aim to have the hard discussion as soon as possible, so that the events that sparked the need for it are still clear in mind. We don't kick hard discussions down the road for your or your team member's comfort. Procrastination risks letting the unwanted behaviour continue and worsen, making the discussion even more difficult to start.

In hard discussions, we are as objective as possible and avoid making assumptions.

**We rather ask than assume.**

We don't use the hamburger feedback model (good feedback, constructive feedback, good feedback), more commonly known as the "shit sandwich".

**Instead, we go directly to the point:**

- 1 ASK QUESTIONS TO UNDERSTAND YOUR TEAM MEMBER'S POINT OF VIEW.**
- 2 BE SPECIFIC IN THE FEEDBACK**
- 3 BASE YOUR FEEDBACK ON FACTS**
- 4 USE OUR FEEDBACK FRAMEWORK FOR WORDING CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK**

**Finally, agree on next steps:**

- 1 HOW THE TEAM MEMBER SHOULD IMPROVE**
- 2 HOW YOU'LL MONITOR PROGRESS**
- 3 WHEN YOU'RE GOING TO FOLLOW UP ON THE TOPIC**

**Remember to always follow up—it shows that we care about our team member's growth.**

**Digesting constructive feedback or bad news may take time and pass multiple stages.**

There may be denial, anger, disengagement, anxiety and resistance. The role of the leader is to empathize with their team member throughout the different stages, until the whirlwind of emotions has calmed down and there is some level of acceptance and the team member is able to see past their disappointment and see new opportunities. Then it's the leader's responsibility to give as much information as possible, answer questions and plan for the future together.



**THANK YOU FOR  
THE FEEDBACK!**



**YOU WELCOME!**



Show sincere interest in your team member and get to know them deeply as a person. When you show care, empathy, trust and understanding, a sense of belonging follows naturally.

**Susan Vättö**  
Global Operations Team Lead

📍 Helsinki



**No meeting on my calendar is more important than the time I set aside to understand how I can serve my team better.** 1–1s are not to be used for updates, we can do that elsewhere. I remind each person on my team that this time is for them not me, and we spend the time uncovering operational blockers, discussing struggles, clarifying confusion and exploring development and professional growth opportunities.



**Robert Rothschild**  
Vice President, Global Head of Marketing

📍 New York City



BB

As leaders we are responsible for taking a sincere interest in the people we work with and for supporting and guiding them towards **reaching their full potential, so that they will grow personally and professionally.**

**Brian Marin**  
Vice President, Services

📍 London

BB

I try to give feedback in the form of suggestions on how to improve in future projects, not as criticism towards what we are working on right this minute.

**Riikka Söderlund**  
Marketing Director

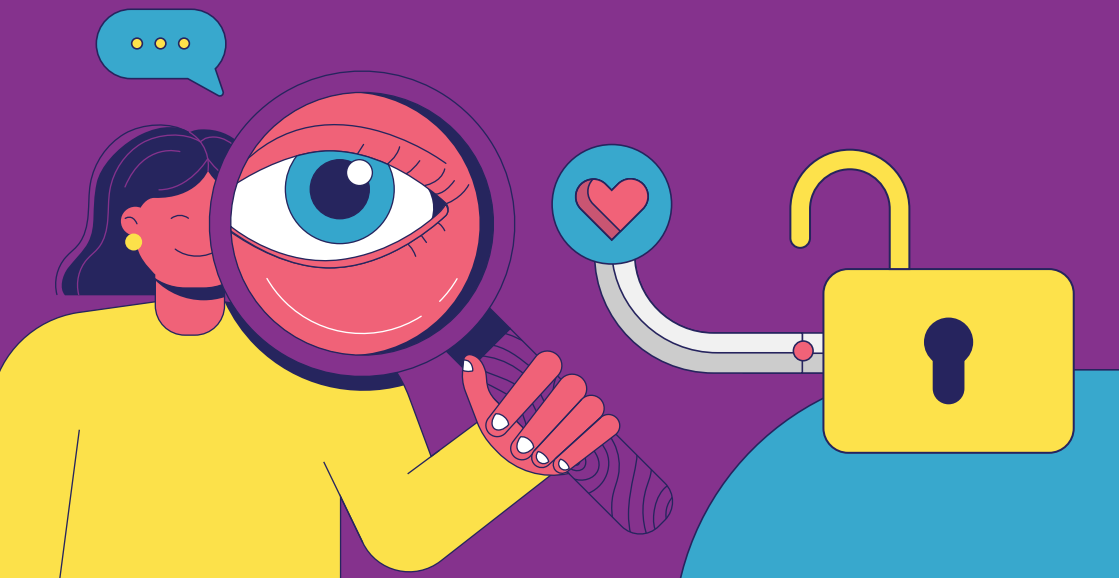
📍 Helsinki





Smarty.io: Leadership handbook

# A Note About Remote Leadership








# A Note About Remote Leadership

# Remote Leadership Remote Remote



**This Leadership Handbook has been built with remote teams in mind. The principles and practices outlined in the previous pages are relevant for both co-located and dispersed teams.**

We believe that, fundamentally, good leadership is the same regardless of circumstances. Nurturing trust, creating direction and clarity, emphasizing action, holding each other accountable and helping each other grow, as well as leading by example are equally relevant in an all-remote environment as they were before the pandemic revolutionized our ways of working. Remote leadership simply requires more legwork.

**Here are some elements of leadership that we believe warrant extra effort when we're all working from home:**



# 1

## HAVE AND SHOW EMPATHY

People live very different realities. Some are confined in a small one-room apartment alone, while others are juggling childcare and work with small children demanding their attention throughout the workday.

People also react to their circumstances very differently: some might embrace remote work as an opportunity to spend more time with their family, while others crave the office environment. A leader needs to have empathy for their team members' realities and how those may affect their work.

In a remote setting, it is more difficult to know how your team members are doing. Go out of your way to reach out and connect with them. Remember to start every meeting by asking how others are doing and really listen to how they respond. Use these opportunities to look for signs of struggle, demotivation and loneliness, and if you see them, take it up with them.

### SMART TIP:

Try extending your 1–1s **from 30 minutes to 45 minutes** to have more time to talk non-work related topics and catch up.



## 2

### PUT EXTRA EFFORT INTO COMMUNICATION

When a team works remotely, it takes deliberate care and attention to keep information flowing, collaborate effectively and create space to discuss big ideas. Remote leaders should prepare to spend more time setting direction and explaining their thinking, clarifying expectations and giving actionable feedback. They should also pay attention to documentation and making information easily accessible.

This applies to the team members, too. Everyone should reassess their communication patterns and form new routines to keep others up to date about what they are working on and why.



#### SMART TIPS:

- 1 Keep information flowing
- 2 Create space to discuss big ideas
- 3 Pay attention to documentation



### 3

## STRENGTHEN CONNECTIONS BETWEEN TEAMS AND FUNCTIONS

Fast-growing organizations are at risk of siloing and an all-remote environment makes it even easier for teams to turn inwards at the expense of cross-team collaboration. Teams should map how their work interlinks with and supports the work of other teams and find ways to keep in touch with those teams, aligning goals and building feedback loops between each other.

Team leads need to make sure they aren't bottlenecks for knowledge sharing between teams. When everyone can talk to everyone directly rather than pass messages through the steps of the organizational hierarchy, communication and information flows fast between teams, functions and locations.





## CREATE NEW ROUTINES

**A team that doesn't meet each other face to face regularly can lose touch over time.** That is why being intentional about socializing and designing opportunities for connecting with team members is crucial for remote teams. Engage in casual talk over Slack and in the beginning of video calls. Organize remote team lunches, afternoon coffees or afterworks on a regular cadence, or try to find other forms of remote socializing that work for your team.



**The lines between work and life can blur when working from home, which is why building boundaries between working hours and free time is important.** Repurpose your commute time and encourage your team members to do the same: use it for exercise, meditation or getting some fresh air to crank up and wind down from work.

While Smarty.io hasn't been built as a remote-first company, we are a global company with 17 offices around the world, which means that we are used to collaborating across distances and time zones. As the pandemic forced us to go all-remote, we were happy to notice that our culture of trust, transparency and feedback, the freedom and responsibility all Smartlies enjoy, as well as our remote-friendly operations helped with the transition.





Keep in mind that you aren't just a member of your team, but also a member of team Smarty.io, working together to achieve our common goals and reach our vision. **Look at the big picture, take ownership of solving problems that extend beyond your team's scope and find ways to collaborate with other teams, functions and regions.**

**Anssi Rusi**  
COO

📍 Helsinki



The best advice I can give to those working for the first time in a remote-first setting is to be firm in setting your boundaries around the time devoted to work and the rest of life. Work will creep into all the open spaces on your calendar if you let it, so **block off the time you need to focus on any hobby you have or activity you use to relax and recharge.**

**Timothy Fischer**  
Director of Customer Success

📍 New York City



**Especially when working remotely, it is crucial to have recurring 1-on-1s.** Having a stable schedule and enough time for a meeting helps both sides participate effectively, and when time is not a pressing issue, we're able to chat about more informal things, too.

**Igor Shevchenko**  
Engineering Team Lead

📍 Helsinki



# Our Favorite Goodreads On Leadership



We believe in the power of learning by doing and leadership is definitely one of those skills you can't learn from a book. But that doesn't mean we can't draw inspiration from sharp minds in the field. Here's a list of our most tried and tested goodreads on leadership.

## **The Five Dysfunctions of a Team**

by Patrick Lencioni

## **Radical Candor**

by Kim Scott

## **What You Do Is Who You Are - How to Create Business Culture**

by Ben Horowitz

## **Nine Lies about Work - A Freethinking Leader's Guide to the Real World**

by Marcus Buckingham & Ashley  
Goodall

## **Nonviolent Communication: A language for life**

by Marshall B Rosenberg & Deepak  
Chopra

## **Team of Teams: New Rules of Engagement for a Complex World**

by General Stanley McChrystall

## **Your Brain at Work**

by David Rock

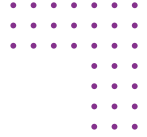
## **High Output Management**

by Andy Grove

## **Dare to Lead: Brave Work. Tough Conversations. Whole Hearts**

by Brené Brown





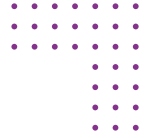
# Closing Words

**At Smartly.io we believe that great leadership is a key to success and enables our Smartlies to unlock their full potential both now and in the future. It is even more important when things get tough.**

We have invested in a conscious and collective effort to craft our leadership culture, because we believe that it is crucial in making Smartly.io a fulfilling, sustainable, diverse and inclusive working environment for growth-minded people to make an impact.







**This Leadership Handbook** represents our point of view on great leadership, distilled and adapted from countless books and articles into a set of principles and practices we aim to follow in our everyday life at Smartly.io. We hope you have found this handbook both inspiring and useful – we'd be happy to hear your feedback on it too!

We know this is a journey, not a destination, and that we have much to discover and learn along the way. As with our product code base or our culture and values, we're committed to continuously refactor and improve our leadership, both in theory and in action. If our approach to leadership resonates with you, join us on our journey.



Our team is growing fast and our world is in a state of constant change. Smart leaders play a key role in facilitating that growth and change by creating clarity, maintaining focus, removing bottlenecks and helping Smartlies succeed.

**Tuomo Riekkilä**  
CPO & Co-Founder



# Curious For More?

Then dive deeper into our culture or  
check our career opportunities.



OUR CULTURE



CAREERS