



FlexBulletin #111: Go Forth and Flex This Fourth

June 29, 2016

HAPPY INDEPENDENCE DAY!!!

A tradition of fireworks and the promise of highly flexible work

Five years ago I wrote a Bulletin on the 4th of July, reproducing the core of the Declaration of Independence and drawing links between its spirit and the movement for greater flexibility, control and independence in our evolving workplaces. I reproduce the bulk of that essay below, with some minor edits. Enjoy your holiday and imagine yourself revisiting the Declaration on your beach chair.

Declaration of Independence

Adopted by Congress on July 4, 1776

(The original spelling and capitalization of this partial text have been retained.)

The Unanimous Declaration of the Thirteen United States of America

When, in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the laws of nature and of nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. That whenever any form of government becomes destructive to these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shown that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such government, and to provide new guards for their future security...

Principles of the Declaration inform core American assumptions and actions

What does this broad call for democracy and self-governance have to do with your company becoming a flexible workplace? Let's start by isolating the key principles from the Declaration:

- All men [people] are created *equal*
- They are endowed with *unalienable rights* that include *life, liberty* and the *pursuit of happiness*
- Governments derive their just powers from the *consent* of the governed
- When government is destructive of these ends, *abolition* and *new forms* are in order
- History shows that people are "*more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable*" than to act

Now we all know that political governance and corporate governance are very different forms. Our political system is perceived to have a bottoms-up flow of power and authority, while our companies are believed to function on a top-down basis. But as the workplace teaches us, things are seldom so neat and linear. While managers and employees know that different rules and habits govern the workplace and the polling place, the boundaries are not so stark. The assumptions and expectations of one subtly seep into the other.

How the declaration can shape broad social initiatives like flexibility

We may think of flexibility on the company-by-company basis through which we implement it. We drive a telecommuting initiative here, a part-time effort there, a rare job share or phased retirement option elsewhere. We see these as modest programs, benefits or accommodations. But the amalgamation of these thousands of efforts has as its goal or effect the creation of the flexible workplace - over time an organization of a new type.

This broad effort in changing social policy occurs within the confines of top-down organizations, but resembles the bottoms-up world of political change. Some of the Principles we summarized from the Declaration have their counterparts in the movement for greater flexibility:

- All men [people] are created equal
Equitable treatment is a key criterion in flex initiatives, and a driver of broader and deeper access - it is a strongly held value throughout any flexibility process
- They are endowed with unalienable rights that include life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness
Where flex flourishes, it values retention (life), control of schedules (liberty) and employee satisfaction (happiness.)
- Governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed
Companies can command, but today's focus on engagement is really code for consent of the governed, a push for employee empowerment and "Employer of Choice" status
- When government is destructive of these ends, abolition and new forms are in order
Unlike the world of political revolution, flexibility is evolutionary; those who don't adapt are more likely to disappear over time, rather than at once. New forms emerge.
- History shows that people are "more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable" than to act
As in politics, so in flexibility; complaining, perhaps behaving passive-aggressively can win out over agitation. Only "engagement" will guide any initiative to success.

CELEBRATING INDEPENDENCE from July 4 forward

It would be presumptuous to assume that we can - or should - appropriate July 4 as a kick-off for a new phase in a great national flexibility campaign. But it would also be a mistake to so trivialize the scope of what we do that it bears no relationship to the great streams of our national pageant.

On this holiday of beaches, barbecues and family gatherings, it's worth taking a minute to remind ourselves of the inspiring words of the Declaration and to rededicate ourselves and our companies to embodying its spirit in the flexible progress in the year ahead.

Enjoy whatever time you take. We look forward to working together in the second half of the year to build bigger and better flexibility initiatives.

Best regards, Paul Rupert

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