



FlexBulletin #20 – Flexibility via Mutual Respect

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[Our readers told us recently that they see flexibility as a proven retention tool - with a lesser payoff of improved productivity. We know that flexibility systems can be designed and implemented that retain talent while focusing on greatly enhanced productivity. In the next several Bulletins we will outline the core principles, procedures, interventions and tools that maximize productive flexibility. Here we start with the core principles that shape a flexible culture.]

Flexibility Must be a Two-way Street When Flexible Work Arrangements are rolled out as benefits - even as "business-based" practices - they can deliver retention. But enhanced productivity grows out of a culture of systematic negotiation. Such cultures are marked by comfortable back-and-forth, the recognition that true flexibility is a two-way street and a practiced commitment to the principle of mutual respect.

Two decades of experience with large companies has taught us a simple truth. Productive flexibility flourishes in atmospheres of mutual respect. And it fares poorly in disrespectful environments. Mutual respect leads managers to treat flexibility proposals as legitimate business matters and causes employees to weigh the impact of potential arrangements on contribution, customers and peers above all.

Where disrespect prevails, managers greet the need for flexibility with skepticism and employees design arrangements that serve them more than the business. Business-beneficial flexibility can best take root where mutual respect exists - where managers respect the employee need for control and employees respect a manager's need for contribution.

Mutual Respect Defines a Flexible Culture A mutually respectful environment builds a superb platform for negotiating mature flexibility - the mutually beneficial redesign of work. There are principles and skills that lead to mutual respect and set standards of behavior for both managers and employees. These can be summarized as:

- **Avoid assumptions** - Don't assume changes will or won't work; welcome innovation
Rely on well-crafted experiments and careful monitoring
- **Pay attention** - Focus on the group's work system and the impact of any change
Designing new ways to work requires remodeling the existing ways
- **Listen attentively** - To listen genuinely on both sides embodies mutual respect
This core negotiating skill is the midwife of continuing change
- **Speak directly** - Straight talk is a rare and vital element in enabling innovation
Direct exchange leads to respect and the most productive outcomes
- **Delegate and develop fully** - Redesigning work allows and requires development
It is an act of respect to share and prepare for greater responsibility
- **Provide feedback consistently** - Feedback both motivates and redirects change
Successful flexibility demands appreciation and critique - early and often
- **Resolve conflicts respectfully** - Inevitable conflict must be worked through fairly
Adopting a method such as conciliation builds mutual respect and good results
- **Do what you promise** - Delivering on what you say is vital to successful flexibility
Innovative flex may be reflected in agreements, but it's guaranteed by integrity

This Mutual Respect platform enhances the prospects of productive flexibility. It creates the openness, communication and integrity required to move existing work environments into truly flexible workplaces. It enables firm and direct negotiations that respect the true needs of employees and the business. In the next Bulletin we will look at the structure that supports and grows from this platform.

In the meantime, please browse our website - www.rupertandcompany.com - to look at some of our client case studies and resource segments that describe our approach to consulting and training on business-beneficial flexibility.

Best regards,
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