



**Rupert & COMPANY**

Guides to a changing workplace

**FlexBulletin #54: Positioning Flex for Superior Recruitment**

September 14, 2011

*[In the last issue of the Bulletin, we explored how effectively companies were using flexibility as a recruiting tool. The verdict: not so well. On the trusted theory that the quality of one's diagnosis shapes the effectiveness of one's treatment of a problem, we spent most of **Bulletin #53** analyzing areas for change. And we promised that in this issue we would dwell on solutions.*

*So we have reproduced below for easy reference the "diagnostic issue" (**FlexBulletin #53: Turbo-charging Flex as Recruiter?**), followed by the promised strategies for success.]*

**But first, a word on coming attractions**  
**FlexCatalog ♦♦♦ Millennials Speak ♦♦♦ Blog-on-Demand**

Fall will come and go quickly, so here are a couple **Bulletin** enhancements to watch for.

**FlexCatalog** As mentioned earlier, we have been hard at work retrofitting and innovating new tools for the evolving flexible workplace. While many of these tools advance strategies that we outline in the Bulletin, we have not wanted to burden these pages with tool previews. Starting this month, we will be sending out a periodic "catalog" that showcases new tools. We think you will find it useful. (If you prefer not to receive it, there will be instructions to "unsubscribe" from it without undoing your bulletin subscription.)

**"Millennials Speak"** We are nearing completion of our 9-company focus group study of millennials and flexibility. It has yielded some very rich findings. We will be presenting an overview of the results at Working Mother's annual Work-Life Congress along with two participating companies on October 19. The Bulletin will feature highlights at month's end and our website – [www.rupertandcompany.com](http://www.rupertandcompany.com) – will feature the findings in October. More to come

**Blog-on-Demand** There is a discipline and rigor to writing the Bulletin that seems to produce a satisfying result. But blogging has its own freewheeling rewards. In the next **Bulletin** we will include an issue of our new blog and a way to get direct delivery of it. Our motto: "Fewer bullets, a touch more punch."



**THE CHALLENGES AND INFRASTRUCTURE for enhanced recruiting**

Last issue we sketched four areas that pose challenges to those trying to make flexibility more accessible to new recruits. They all revolve to some degree around managers' need for control,

especially when trying to integrate the unknown and untested into complex systems. Those areas were:

- ◆ The more or less crystalline definition of goals and outcomes
- ◆ The ability to communicate crisply and clearly
- ◆ The patience, observation and timing to initiate corrective action
- ◆ The thorough sharing of critical embedded assumptions  
[You can find detail on these elements in **Bulletin #53** below.]

One can view these items as minor and discrete skills, in which case they should be matters to easily model, teach and refine. Or one can step back and take the view that these attributes are decidedly at the core of a culture – and shifting them requires culture change at a very high level. We take the latter view, and suggest that a comprehensive and persistent process of transformation is needed to build a platform that makes retention and recruitment comparable possibilities. The vehicles for that change should include:

- Key leadership and business messages
- Consistent processes to guide selection and integration of users
- Manager skill development suites
- Employee skill development suites
- Monitoring and metrics system to assure satisfaction

#### **KEY LEADERSHIP AND BUSINESS MESSAGES reshape the view of talent**

Why does recruiting with flexibility matter? A small but growing number of companies, with an example or a pocket here and there, are recognizing that the HR boilerplate (“we have to go where the talent is” or “talent takes many forms”) has moved out of speeches into a vexing reality. Different ways of working are first and foremost possible, then desirable, and now inevitable. But only the broad, assertive, articulate leadership of a company can bring a place-based culture to the view that it’s great business to hire someone and not expect them to show up 9-to-5. They will need to deliver compelling messages along these lines:

- ✓ *“One thing matters here: knowing the precise results we expect, and delivering them”*
- ✓ *“We cannot expect to find all our best people living within commute range of HQ”*
- ✓ *“We benefit from flexibility negotiation with new hires, not by closing the door”*
- ✓ *“We have built powerful processes and tools that support your success”*
- ✓ *“We are absolutely committed to making flexibility work; it is our competitive edge”*

#### **THOROUGH PROCESSES AND TOOLS are vital to seamless new hire flex**

Many new hires who receive a flexible schedule get it on an ad hoc, provisional and/or under the table basis. The terms may vary, the negotiations may be tidy or messy and the arrangement given a new hire may not sit well with existing staff. There are proven methods for implementing a firm commitment to flexibility for new hires, including:

- A company-wide understanding that flexibility can be negotiated for new-hires
- A thorough review of the existing business-based process (adopt one if needed)
- Clearest possible negotiation of results, with regular reviews and updates
- Conditional use of a flexible schedule, with review and adjustments as needed
- At agreed-upon time (six months/one year) submit renewal application

#### **MANAGER SUCCESS REQUIRES intensive skill development**

There are a broad range of skills required to master flexible management. And training time and resources are limited. It is crucial to identify the core skills required to manage flexible new hires and make sure that leaders meet the necessary threshold. At least these are required:

- “Defining results” is always a success factor, but doing it effectively and managing the process over time is elusive. This is especially true for new-hires. Intensive, demonstrated competence has to be the goal here.
- Structuring the time for communication, and working through issues is vital. Quality of communication plays out as employee satisfaction and engagement. Pairing a flexible new hire and an uncommunicative manager is a formula for defeat.

- “Culture-by-osmosis.” One cannot hold new hires hostage until they learn the core assumptions by just being around. But one cannot pretend that culture doesn’t matter. Managers may need help in articulating and orienting, but they cannot afford to ignore that process.

**NEW HIRE SUCCESS REQUIRES its own focused skill development**

All flexibility is a 2-way street. New hires desiring and undertaking flexibility from Day one almost inevitably undertake a somewhat greater burden. The consequences of failing to deal with some of the essential steps will most likely affect them and their arrangements disproportionately. Their three key requirements are the same categories as the managers’.

- Defining results is done in collaboration with the manager. It is especially important that the new staff get all the clarity they need about expectations, standards, timelines, etc. and schedule and complete necessary revisions so that there is as much “crystalline clarity” as possible.
- It takes two to communicate and clarifying different styles and potential areas of conflict is important. While there is a common view that managers are not ideal communicators, new hires need to become aware quickly of their own strengths and weaknesses.
- Learning the culture of a new organization is a bit like traveling to a foreign country: the newly arrived cannot expect the natives to explain their every move and belief. In this area, the new hire is the anthropologist and benefits in learning as much about the new setting as quickly as possible. They can draw on many sources, including god orientations, mentoring sessions – but their manager should be a key source as well.

**MONITORING AND METRICS SYSTEM can help assure satisfaction**

We have described various points at which the manager and new hire should assess progress toward goals, satisfaction with the arrangement, etc. The nature of the system you set up would flow from its elements. The most important fact to remember is that “out-of-sight” cannot lead to “out-of-mind” in these new arrangements. Reviewing, assessing, modifying and recommitting are essential steps. With these and the other steps outlined above, it is possible to successfully integrate new hires into a fully flexible organization.



**FlexBulletin #53: Turbo-charging Flex as Recruiter?**

August 31, 2011

In hundreds of flexibility websites, news stories and studies over the years (now decades), there is almost always a list of the benefits/gains/values of flexible work. And while different claims show up on and fall off the list, such as commute reduction, sustainability and today’s space reduction, the tried and true winners at the top of the list are either “retention” and “recruitment” or the seeming mantra of “recruitment-and-retention.” The latter, spoken almost as one word, was once described to me as the simple idea that “what keeps people will also bring them in the door.”

While this is a logical belief, it carries an inherent contradiction. We have often thought the word flexibility was a bit of a misnomer for the practices we promote. When people say in whatever form that they want greater flexibility in a given job, they really mean that they want greater **control** over *where, when and how* they do their work – with a strong emphasis on true control. It is far easier to challenge traditional forms of control for a proven performer in an existing job than to enter as a neophyte challenging control from before day one. (This is one reason that you will hear countless stories of people going through lengthy interviews and only raising the question of flexibility at the very end.)

**WHAT’S SO PROBLEMATIC ABOUT flexibility / shared control?**

The difficulties for managers in sharing control are numerous, including:

- The more or less crystalline definition of goals and outcomes
- The ability to communicate crisply and clearly
- The patience, observation and timing to initiate corrective action
- The thorough sharing of critical embedded assumptions

These core managerial capabilities are needed for directing flexible work whether it is being done by a new hire or a proven performer. But each requires very different execution. A quick review of the basics will show that difference and the pressure it brings to drive managers away from allowing flex for new hires.

#### **HOW DO INTERNAL FLEX staff get managed?**

The salient feature of one's existing staff is that they are *familiar* – shared assumptions, known foibles and expected communication patterns. Leaving aside the occasional problem performer, they are relatively easy to manage. On the big four core capabilities, one can expect:

- ✓ **Crystalline goals and outcomes** In dealing with existing staff, the bar for goal definition is often lower, especially if the employee is "trusted." This most basic requirement for any flexible schedule is often loosened rather than tightened for the work-from-home employee
- ✓ **Communicate crisply and clearly** This important directive skill may exist unevenly and be used that way as well. Acres of performance reviews point to communication issues as a source for flexibility failure among flexible managers. But failure is tolerated, and inadequate communication can surround flexible arrangements.
- ✓ **Patience to initiate corrective action** "Managing" is a "hands-on" enterprise – hands on, not face time. It brings monitoring and modification to evolving processes, and thrives on subtle intervention. Tact, timing and testing matter. This is one of the great challenges to flexibility, where heavy-handedness and insistence on face time can be a problem
- ✓ **Sharing of embedded assumptions** The great glue of a flexible workplace is the web of assumptions holding it together – for both good and ill. The broad sharing of assumptions makes goal setting easier, communication more automatic and corrections simpler. Being part of the culture makes flexibility much more possible and predictable.

#### **HOW DO RECRUITS FARE in this managerial matrix?**

The simple answer is that the unknown new-hire offers significant challenges in each of these areas. What many managers and organizations suspect is that there is a high enough bar to integrate and acculturate a new hire – let alone one on a flexible schedule. And absent structured supports, retention is a great deal easier to achieve than recruitment.

- ✓ **Crystalline goals and outcomes** In the world of flex there is much talk about clear goals and measurable outcomes. But few organizations evince great pride in their sharp, clear, transparent goal-setting. Defining these for a new person with a new role and tasks is doable but daunting. Easier to hire someone, acculturate them and let flex bloom slowly, if at all.
- ✓ **Communicate crisply and clearly** Since communication is always a bit precarious, and such a linchpin for success, not putting it to tough tests too early often seems the prudent thing to do. The best way to avoid testing it is to not trial run it with unproven users.
- ✓ **Patience to initiate corrective action** Corrective interventions require a demanding and high-level skill set. Mid-course change is as much art as skill, and something managers work hard to perfect. Again, these maneuvers are most stressed with untested managers and flexible new hires. Reluctance to try much of this should not seem surprising.
- ✓ **Sharing of embedded assumptions** "Assumptions," "habits" and "the way we do things around here" all make up that thing we call culture. It enables a thousand shortcuts and

covers a multitude of sins. No newbie can possibly come acculturated – and that makes new hire flex a major educational challenge – and sometimes an overwhelming one.

**WHAT CAN BE DONE ABOUT this seeming dilemma?**

Challenging as the aggressive integration of recruits into immediate flexibility may sound, a determined organization can develop a strategy and implement an approach that delivers powerful results. Next issue we will examine a supportive infrastructure:

- The key leadership and business messages
- The consistent package to guide selection and integration of users
- The manager skill development suites
- The employee development suites
- The monitoring and metrics system to assure satisfaction

*One of the surprising facts that emerged in recent conversations with readers was caught in this quote: “I didn’t realize that you did consulting and things like guidelines.” As we talked further, we realized that in one area at least we had been very successful with our hopes for the **Bulletin**. We wanted each issue to be a thought piece, not a marketing sheet. Apparently we’ve succeeded. That said, Stacey and I would be delighted to talk with any of you about your plans and needs. [Click here](#) to request a preview of our new “flashy” guidelines or visit our website at: [www.rupertandcompany.com](http://www.rupertandcompany.com)*

*You can see our classic FlexWise Guidelines and Training toolkits at: [www.flexwise.com](http://www.flexwise.com)*

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