

What??!! – A New Bulletin and a Blog, Too!

We create the **Bulletin** regularly and planned to launch our new **FlexBlog** this month. Publishing both on Halloween is not a case of trick-or-treat. Rather, it is due to the sense of urgency and energy drawn from our recently released millennial research. We first shared our findings at the annual Work Life Congress to a large and receptive audience. Many people have downloaded the report from our website (www.rupertandcompany.com) and told us they see our findings in their millennial workforces. Quite a number of you readers have said they learned a good deal from the last **FlexBulletin** in which we summarized the focus group results.

So why two publications? They are two sides of the same coin. The **Bulletin** focuses on how to best make flexibility work in large, complex organizations – to deliver value for them and their people. The **Blog** offers a different opportunity. It's a chance to reflect more expansively on business and social issues that grow out of a broader definition of workplace flexibility.

Thus today the **Bulletin** distills our learnings from the millennials and suggests steps companies might take to meet this growing group's distinct needs. The **Blog** reflects on ways in which the push for change we saw in millennials in companies resembles in part the millennial role in the Occupy Wall Street movement.

I hope you enjoy both, and will let us know your reaction at paulrupertdc@cs.com or on our **Facebook page**. You will continue to receive the **Bulletin** as you have and can view the **Blog** by visiting <http://www.RupertAndCompany.com/Blog>.

THERE MAY BE A 5-YEAR COUNTDOWN UNDERWAY

The expectations of millennials for a more flexible workplace require both short- and long-term initiatives. A central finding of our **Millennials Speak** study is that there is tolerance within this new workforce for long hours and less flexibility at this stage in their careers. But the distinct and far greater challenge comes four or five years down the road when much of this cohort marries and starts having children. One study participant captured this view:

“The need for flexibility depends on what stage you are in your life. Before I was married it was OK to work all the time. Now that I'm married and soon to have kids, it's not OK – it cuts into my family life.”

Typical of our many interviews, this expectation is very clear: a sharp line between work and family. This is not necessarily a plea for part-time or willingness to work long hours after the children are in bed. It suggests that what has been a steady trend toward expanding workloads and longer hours for Boomers and GenX'ers may run into an insistence on containment by millennials.

FIVE STEPS TO ADDRESS THE NEEDS of millennials – and others

Given what we heard, at least the following steps should be considered, and probably undertaken, to fully engage millennials and strengthen flexibility for all users. They are based on the millennial assumption

that the ability to access any form of flexibility is either enhanced or diminished by the overall work environment and the manager's skills:

- Assess unique millennial attitudes through internal surveys or groups
- Communicate thoroughly and over time the flexibility that is available
- Enlist senior and line management in a work redesign process
- Fully train managers in core productivity and flexibility skills
- Blend "formal" and "informal" flexibility into truly flexible options

ASSESS UNIQUE MILLENNIAL ATTITUDES through internal surveys or groups

Our study focused on shared views across groups with nine employers. There were significant differences in emphasis, and occasionally in substance, between the millennials in the participating companies. An internal study should:

- Determine ratio of millennials to other generations, and projected growth
- Be sponsored by senior leadership, with results reported out to them
- Probe on the kind of flexibility desired and the conditions needed to make it work
- Include at least some managers in the process to assess attitudes and skill
- Identify likely patterns of use – both timeline and duration

The resulting data should help define the urgency of the issue and the challenges to be overcome.

COMMUNICATE THOROUGHLY AND OVER TIME the flexibility that is available

Much to our surprise, millennials in quite a few groups described their employers as having little or no flexibility – when we knew that was not the case. While you build potential flexibility of a new type, it is crucial that your company flaunts what it does have. It may not be the desired endpoint, but it shows that there is at least a credible starting point. Measures to consider are:

- Develop a multi-media toolkit that can be used as needed; include online tools
- Build a "library" of compelling success stories for print and video; update continually
- Provide multiple exposure of these materials to new hires during orientation
- Use all available channels – and create new ones – to ensure millennial exposure
- Consider a highly visible refresh or relaunch with new guidelines

Failure to communicate adequately is a general weakness in many flexibility initiatives. Good works not seen, especially in a transitional period, count for little

ENLIST SENIOR AND LINE MANAGEMENT in a work redesign process

If the millennial perception of flexibility is correct, it can best be obtained by defining work expectations clearly and precisely, receiving needed feedback to know when work is done and being free to flex as appropriate. These shifts sound simple, but represent a significant culture change – one that needs to be strongly supported at the top and driven down the line. Key steps:

- Senior leaders need to understand the millennial challenge and support a solution
- A broad process needs to be launched to clarify essential work and eliminate low-value work
- Managers need to be held accountable for clarity of assignments and workweek length
- Incentives should be designed to reward managers and teams that rein in long hours

Whatever the specific path chosen, it's critical that such a change be company-wide and sustained. The continued engagement and availability of the new workforce may be at stake.

FULLY TRAIN MANAGERS IN CORE productivity and flexibility skills

The focus groups told an old story of managers with vast difference in competencies. What seemed like the basic skills of front-line managers – communication, direction and feedback – were described as woefully lacking. Without these, flexibility could seem like advanced calculus. A serious flexibility initiative would have to tackle and put to rest this recurring problem by:

- Developing the ability to assign work with clear requirements and expectations
- Master the skill of monitoring progress and giving frequent constructive feedback
- Learn and practice – and not just pay lip service to – managing for outcomes
- Install an online flexibility monitoring and development system to reinforce training
- Set clear standards for managerial proficiency and enforce them based on 360 feedback

Flexibility for Boomers and Gen X'ers has been hampered by the refrain "My manager doesn't support it." Managing flexibly is a skill **no one** is born with." To properly serve the emerging workforce, managers must learn it – and ideally, excel at it.

BLEND "FORMAL" AND "INFORMAL" FLEXIBILITY into truly flexible options

As we reported in our study, the millennials in the groups described a flexibility that was more situational, even informal, than the flexible work arrangements in place in most companies. It may be time for a menu overhaul, by:

- Drawing on data from internal research to refine the kind of scheduling millennials seek
- Review existing options and see if hybrid versions could make sense
- Examine the categories of informal flexibility and see what kind of structure and support might strengthen them
- Develop and publicize appropriate definitions and descriptions of new offerings

This process may lead to a new way of thinking about and implementing flexibility, one more inclusive of the needs and plans of millennials.

Next FlexBulletin: Is it Time to Rethink the Menu?

A reader recently told us "I didn't realize that you did consulting and things like guidelines." We do. And we would be delighted to talk with any of you about your plans and needs. We also would be happy to brief decision-makers in your organization on the millennial study. [Click here](#) to request a preview of our new "flashy" guidelines or visit our website at:

www.rupertandcompany.com

Best regards,
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*Rupert & Company, publisher of the **Bulletin**, is the global leader in creating business-beneficial Flexible Work Arrangements.*

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