

1. COACHING ON DEMAND *Over the last several months there have been growing signs that we are entering a period of “post-recessionary flexibility.” That’s good news. But when a complex initiative like flex goes into a serious stall for several years, it’s unwise to just pick up where we left off and plunge ahead with old assumptions and even older techniques. So we are rethinking, revising and refreshing many elements of our approach to ensuring the flexible workplace.*

*A few **Bulletins** ago, we sketched our new Co Scheduling system in [NEW DELUXE 2012 Co Scheduling Tools](#). Last week we introduced the front end of our comprehensive Monitoring system in [Right Tracking v Wrong Track](#). This week we go well beyond tracking and monitoring to propose a set of technology tools we call “virtual coaching.” They address the longstanding fact that we take a sink or swim approach when we send users – both managers and employees – out to try challenging new ways of working with inadequate feedback and support.*

2. NEW DEVELOPMENTS *It takes talent to help reshape a field, and we are serious about the changes we are proposing. So we have added some innovative talent to our team. **Amy Lankenau McPherson** is bringing to the role of VP, Development a strong background in flexibility research, consulting and training. Her focus for this year will be exploring the views of our contacts, readers and clients toward the Co Scheduling approach and tools. We have a great deal to learn from you in refining this approach. Both Amy and I will be reaching out to you in the period ahead to seek your valuable insights. **Rick Latty** joins us as Chief Technology Advisor and brings extraordinary global, high security and innovative computer skills to our many new systems. You can see their full bios at [R&C Staff Bios](#).*

Effective flexibility without feedback may well be an oxymoron. Yet over the years we have heard from many employees working full-time offsite or on reduced hours or compressed schedules that there was little feedback and coaching in their “new” way of working. In our recent study of younger workers, [Millennials Speak](#), we heard the following:

“There needs to be more transparency in feedback, both positive and negative and in both directions... Sometimes a person is lucky and gets good coaching from his manager, but many don’t. People don’t know what they’re striving for.”

Ironically a longstanding objection to flexible schedules is that those working unique schedules will miss out on the guidance, feedback and development offered full-time onsite employees. One would expect a robust strategy to offset this challenge. But such remedies are rare. Our Virtual Coaching toolkit addresses this issue and enriches flexibility by:

BUILDING CONSISTENT GOALS THROUGHOUT THE SYSTEM
IDENTIFYING CORE SKILL SETS FOR ALL USERS
PROVIDING CALIBRATED, JUST-IN-TIME TRAINING
CREATING AN ENVIRONMENT OF CONSTRUCTIVE EVALUATION
ENABLING CHANGES OR TERMINATION OF OPTIONS



BUILDING CONSISTENT GOALS THROUGHOUT THE SYSTEM requires sustained focus

Few employees or managers would disagree that having clear goals and work direction is essential for conventional and flexible work. Yet reviewing a hundred flexible work proposals will not reveal such clarity.

Setting priorities, assessing skills and conducting evaluations is very challenging without a clear goal framework. Virtual Coaching insists on clear goals by:

- Defining in all guidance the proven outcomes to be achieved by different options
- Designing within an outcome grid a clear set of measurable choices
- Encouraging collaboration between employee and manager in finalizing goals
- Integrating the regular review of these outcomes into ongoing supervision

IDENTIFYING CORE SKILL SETS FOR ALL USERS lays groundwork for success

Clear goals set the stage for greater achievement and satisfaction. But it is the collaborative skills of the participants that create new and better ways of working. Far too often we fail to screen for or nurture these distinctive collaborative skills. The Virtual Coach overcomes this weakness by:

- Establishing a minimum skill set for managers and employees tailored to each option
- Halting qualms about “evaluations” and “reviews” by using brief, targeted, constructive tools
- Emailing parallel 1-5 rating forms at 30 days on 4-5 collaborative skills to participants
- Identifying the (presumably) large percentage of high performers and those needing support
- Scheduling the collaborators for 60- or 90-day review, and others for rapid training

PROVIDING CALIBRATED, JUST-IN-TIME TRAINING turns challenges into opportunities

The driver of virtual coaching is unambiguous, timely feedback between managers and their people on flexible schedules. The purpose is to ensure the success of new ways of working and the satisfaction of the participants. Diverse interventions can include:

- A link to targeted online training, ranging from feedback to broader collaborative skills
- Referral to a rich checklist or a set of tip sheets
- Focus on content that is aimed at employees, managers or both
- Provision of an annotated agenda to enable useful one-on-one or group discussions
- Referral to full online trainings that address the challenges of specific options

CREATING AN ENVIRONMENT OF CONSTRUCTIVE EVALUATION enhances success

Our experience with many flexibility efforts is that they consider evaluation an imposition and cannot decide on content, frequency and consequence. Any evaluation done is usually free-form and impossible to quantify. The net result is to set aside the challenge and power of these very teachable evaluative moments. Virtual Coaching uses a different approach:

- Brief collaborative sessions are agreed to at the outset of a new way of working
- Common “results sessions” are held at 90 / 180 / and 365 days
- A limited number of metrics (4-6) are set, based on initial goals and typical outcomes
- Employee and manager provide a 1-5 rating on each item
- Assessments can be aggregated to provide overall initiative feedback

ENABLING CHANGES OR TERMINATION OF OPTIONS can rest on clear data

The lack of regular assessments and convincing data can reinforce user reluctance to challenge arrangements, or when necessary, terminate them. While the Virtual Coach system features brief, online tools and interactions, when flexible schedules go south, personal intervention is required. Appropriate steps can include:

- A strong difference in perception of performance over time can lead to a live discussion
- Continued challenges can be met with an HR Business Partner intervention
- The intervention can focus on the likelier problem source – the manager or employee
- If skill development or other modifications don't work, termination can occur

There is much room within this system for tactical and broader innovations. Any element can be modified or enhanced. The priority is to build and maintain a system that enhances more collaborative scheduling.

*The **Monitoring** and **Virtual Coach** systems can add greater efficiency and effectiveness to any approach to workplace flexibility. While they can support FWA systems such as our **FlexWise™** tools, they are designed to best complement and enhance the **Co Scheduling** approach. The continuous feedback, focus on skills and tailored targets apply to the broad range of collaborative schedules.*

To learn more about this approach or to see samples of our tools, go to:

[Bulletin #61 – NEW Co Scheduling Tools](#)

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Best regards,
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