

FlexBulletin #71: Giving Thanks for Flexibility

November 19, 2012

Happy Thanksgiving to All Our Readers!!

[We are glad to be back.]

GIVING THANKS FOR A MEDICAL MIRACLE

This great American communal celebration is an excellent time to reflect on what makes it so special - and why this year's has a particular poignancy for me. Let's get "me" out of the way.

Many of you have noticed, and wondered why the **Bulletin** disappeared for a while. The answer is both simple and complex. From mid-summer on I was stricken by a set of evolving symptoms that initially interfered with my ability to read, type and talk and ultimately led to an even greater disability. After weeks and weeks of doctors and new machines probing my nooks and crannies - and giving an excellent bill of health to brain, heart, lungs and liver - it was my diligent internist who found in my blood work the simple fact that a long-term medication had suddenly turned toxic. A few days of reduced dosage and I was on the way to recovery - and now feel better than ever. I am deeply thankful to her and our often-maligned medical system for their knowledge, commitment and diligence.

At the time of onset, I was refining the Managing Back to Wellness component of our new Co Scheduling guidelines. There we offer guidance on how active, flexible management can help someone continue to contribute appropriately while dealing with a sudden or chronic condition. Flexibility proved to be a crucial part of my medical odyssey:

- Struck by a mysterious ailment, I wanted the assurance of future that comes from working - at whatever level of contribution. Working flexibly allows that.
- I needed to reduce and modify my workload and commitments -and so the **Bulletin** became a temporary casualty (*much as I had to stop, and thought perhaps you'd really miss it, the fact is we all coped, and we are back.*)
- A medical journey of the sort I made (and those receiving cancer and other diagnoses may go through) shreds the predictability of any work schedule:
 - The sheer volume of appointments, referrals and test events is hard to manage
 - The tendency of these appointments to change frequently demands more flexibility
 - The needs of clients and of doctors can't be reconciled without creative flexibility

Whether you are owner, manager or associate, it's the *work process* that needs to be made flexible. I am extremely grateful that I knew how to manage flexibly. I'm sure I got better faster in part for this reason. And having come out healthier and more energetic on the other side, I trust you will be getting a better **Bulletin** in the months and years ahead.

THANKSGIVING AS A UNIQUELY FLEXIBLE HOLIDAY Like millions of Americans, and presumably many of you, I experience Thanksgiving as a distinct and wonderful holiday. In addition to its being a time for us to give thanks for our good fortunes, it has several striking features:

- **Abundant** Thanksgiving is a festival of plenty - a chance to escape the deep perspective of scarcity that underlies so much of our organizational life. After all, resistance to flexibility rests in an attitude that time is a scarce commodity, to be controlled or guarded.
- **Inclusive** There was a time when single families gathered around a turkey-driven meal in relative isolation. As the holiday evolved, the table expanded, marked by diversity in attendees and flexibility in menu. Friends, friends of friends, strangers, survivors of disasters like Sandy gather around a table with menus as diverse as our immigration patterns. Like flexible schedules anchored in common work, these millions of diverse celebrations are united by longstanding values.
- **Conciliatory** The most impressive thing about this annual event is its conciliatory and communal tone. While we can all recall a Thanksgiving dinner that dissolved into acrimony, by and large people generally rise to the occasion and show their ability to negotiate everything from what to say, to how to pass many dishes in multiple directions. These skills would serve us well in building the flexible workplace.

There is another interesting, and more direct link between Thanksgiving and flexibility: the evolution of time off and work at home during Thanksgiving week. Here is that progression as I see it:

- **Thanksgiving Day** In my youth Thanksgiving day was just that: a day. People worked through Wednesday and went back to work on Friday.
- **Then It Was Friday** Soon the day became the weekend. Even before Black Friday, James Bond festivals and wall-to-wall football, our hard working culture created an unnamed holiday. It seemed a flexible thing to do.
- **Along Came Wednesday** Another dash of flex led to people leaving early on Wednesday to get a jump on traffic. Companies began "early release", and soon Wednesday became or was called a "work at home" day. A very long weekend began.
- **Monday & Tuesday: Next?** We see more and more instances of people using available vacation to create a long break before the December madness. Individual, scattered, unique days away for now - but is a flexible Thanksgiving week far away?

In these long-hour, hard-driving times, we need all the flexibility we can get. And this year we might just give thanks for the convergence of flexibility and Thanksgiving. After all, serious shopping demands serious rest before and after.

Again, we wish you and your families a very happy holiday - and plenty of time to enjoy it.

Previews of Coming Attractions

After the holiday, we will resume twice-monthly publication of the ***Bulletin*** - with the occasional bonus issue thrown in to make up for lost time. Some likely topics:

- ***Leadership Support: Reality or Delusion?***
- ***Managing Through Chronic Conditions***
- ***Focus Group Findings***
- ***Perils of Compressed Schedules***
- ***Monitoring & Coaching Systems***

We welcome your comments on any and all of this Bulletin. If you do so, please email me at: Paulrupertdc@cs.com.

Collaborative or Co Scheduling is a comprehensive, innovative approach to flexibility that offers diverse and powerful features for organizations seeking a broader and more robust form of flexibility. It includes a module on Chronic Conditions. We would be happy to discuss it with you. It is integrated into our new Co Scheduling guidelines, but can be adopted as a module in your current guidelines or Wellness materials.

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Best regards,

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*Rupert & Company publisher of the **Bulletin**, is the global leader in business-beneficial flexibility.*

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