



Happy New Year! 2009 is shaping up as an increasingly challenging year - a time that calls for **boldness, innovation and some serious rethinking** of how to best shape the rapidly changing workplace and engage a talented but at-risk workforce. It may be time for a flexibility resolution.

We were reminded of the seriousness and depth of the necessary resolve after doing a webinar in December. We laid out a bold, systematic, disciplined way to implement business-beneficial telecommuting that is similar to our comprehensive FlexWise™ approach. (*Contact us if you would like a copy of that PowerPoint presentation.*)

The presentation and our approach were very well-received. But a few post-session comments caught our attention. While praising the session, several participants highlighted concerns:

- *"I would have liked a little more on ongoing management for those of us who already have programs in place"*
- *"I hoped to hear strategies for overcoming the top management concerns"*
- *"I was hoping for more about helping managers adapt to the change"*

Why did these comments catch our attention? What do they tell us about the changes that may be required in existing telecommuting and other flexibility programs?

### **Ineffective systems may need a radical redo**

If you "have a program in place" and managers remain unconvinced, skeptical or concerned, you might question if there is an effective program in place. The essence of a functional flexibility initiative should be persuading and integrating managers into a different way of managing and employees into a greater capacity for self-management. Failing that, the bold and innovative move might be to replace a system that is falling short with one built for long-term success.

It is common in HR to replace or radically redo a compensation system, a benefit offering or a performance appraisal framework that is underperforming. It is far less common to recognize a disappointing flexibility approach and replace it with a new, more innovative and effective system. This may be the year to change that. The national year of stimulus and infrastructure could be the time to consider replacing nonperforming flex systems and building ones that have transforming and engaging managers at the center of their approach.

Some of the principles and practices that mark "Flexibility 2009" would be:

- Make positive business impact the centerpiece of decision-making
- Assure senior manager support for the initiative and approach
- Train both managers and employees in proposing and implementing FWAs
- Back up good practice with trained HR coaches and troubleshooting tools
- Provide just-in-time online training designed for managers and employees

Guided by design research and intense customization, these steps should move managers.

### **And then there's the metric of "flex allergy"**

In the presentation described above, another indicator emerged which suggested that a broad redo might be in order. We asked a polling question on managers' greatest concern about flexibility. The answer to that question was - as it usually is - "everyone will want to do it" or the "floodgate syndrome." This attitude, a near allergic reaction to flexibility, raises key questions:

- If flexibility is good, why is it feared, resisted, avoided - a negative practice, something to minimize wherever possible?
- Shouldn't what we consider an engagement, retention and productivity tool like flex be seen as positively as we view feedback, benefits and bonuses? Shouldn't it be promoted actively?
- Should a key metric for 2009 be that an organization that has undergone a serious flexibility redo will actively embrace rather than discourage flexibility?

### **Not just bridges - the Year of Infrastructure**

*Soon Washington will announce a gigantic stimulus package aimed at rebuilding the nation's infrastructure. As we've suggested above, our flexibility infrastructures need a radical overhaul as well. We plan to spend the year researching, writing and consulting on the enhancements needed to support more powerful flexibility. And we'll share some of what we learn through this Bulletin. We would appreciate your spending less than 60 seconds of time now giving us guidance on how our Bulletin could best serve you. Please [click here](#) to fill out a brief survey on issues of frequency, subject matter, length, etc. Thank you for helping strengthen our infrastructure..*

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