



Striking An Early Deal Remote work was not always a common option. In 1992 I left the flexibility think tank, New Ways to Work in San Francisco to join Fran and Charles Rodgers in building the 400-person WFD/WFD Consulting's Flexibility Practice in Boston. While choice of office can lead to conflict, my request pushed the envelope. For personal reasons, I wanted to work from DC, not Boston. This request from the new flex guy set off vigorous negotiations.

Amid the questions of how would I ever get oriented and integrated and form a practice in isolation was the more generic query: what was in it for the business? Why consider such a risky proposition? I approached this negotiation with what has become over the years my widely used business-beneficial proposal process. Setting aside motivating personal reasons, and skipping any reference to real estate savings since I wanted a real office in DC, I argued that my working remotely offered these business gains:

- **Revenue** Securing this recruit (me) would lead to valuable new revenue growth
- **Customer service** Adding flexibility offerings would be a major customer satisfier
- **Networking** Systematic visits to HQ would enable planned, targeted business development
- **Engagement** The mutual respect of the arrangement would increase commitment
- **Productivity** Separation would allow intensive focus on product design, marketing & client work
- **Pilot** This extreme experience could stimulate future remote arrangements
- **Modeling** Practicing what you preach with an unusual flex arrangement would add value
- **Stand-by** When your consultants can't fly out of Logan in snowy winters, DC would offer a backup

Cutting Costs I am happy to share details offline, but this arrangement worked well for eight years, delivering on its promises and more. As I began consulting with clients on a range of FWAs, including remote work over those years, I encouraged using the model above - and many companies did so. Interestingly, in that same period space savings afforded by whole group remote work became a prominent, then dominant, then often exclusive business gain sought from the option. As I watched this trend, I appreciated the cost-cutting and claims of productivity attributed to remote work. But some of these claims struck me as "business gain light." Since one needn't choose between cost-saving and productive business contribution, choosing primarily real estate savings seemed to undercut the real power of remote work.

Total Approach I was reminded of how true this is in my work with Sodexo, a 110,000-person leader in food and facilities management. A company this large and dispersed has a daunting and relentless recruiting challenge. Sodexo's Talent Acquisition Group has put remote work at the center of its strategy of excellence. The key steps follow:

- **Origin:** Sodexo outsourced recruiting early in the decade. A contractor had recruiters go remote to cut costs. Internal leadership took over function in 2003 and kept remote staffing.
- **Values** Talent Acquisition set strong values, e.g. "We want to be the very best - good enough never is."
- **Crystalline Goals** "All goals need to be measurable and outcome-oriented." Managers' core activity is regularly clarifying, monitoring and assessing goals.

- **Ongoing Training** There is strong on-boarding: new hire orientations conducted by VP and Directors followed by an ongoing process of "live training and sharing of best practices."
- **Intentional Communication** Weekly team conference calls and bi-weekly manager and recruiter calls are required. Calls incorporate team-building, recognition and celebration.
- **Recognition & Gathering** A unique strength of this group is the focus on team cohesion
 - *National meeting* Every year the group holds a 3-day meeting which includes conferring Spirit Awards based on aspirations growing out of the visions and values
 - *Tackling Issues* When remotes voiced common complaint of weight gain, the leaders began a "Biggest Loser" campaign, with support, check-ins and rewards.
- **Remote Optional** Although there is cost-saving associated with remote work, recruiters can choose to begin work in a regional office or stop working remotely if it's problematic.
- **Benchmark Success** A key metric from the 70-company Recruiter Roundtable benchmark shows TAG recruiters scoring an extremely high level of engagement.

This disciplined and comprehensive approach to remote work is producing outstanding results in a number of areas. Above all it shows that one can achieve cost-saving at the same time as one also focuses on superior business results. Here are the highlights:

- **Talent Attraction:** Talent Acquisition has to recruit and retain the best - for Sodexo and itself. Remote work helps identify and keep the best possible people - wherever they live.
- **Strong Productivity:** Solid general and remote management help assure the achievement of aggressive goals. Remote recruiters thrive on surpassing expectations.
- **Avoid Mission Creep:** Placing recruiting in a regional office can allow the dominant function there to squeeze out other recruiting customers. Remotes can better serve all businesses.
- **Reduced Expenses:** Broad use of remote work reduces the major cost of individual offices. If its done well, as here, reduced turnover and low cost of relocation also cut expenses.

A remotely-based recruiter described the experience to us this way:

"I can't express to you how committed I am to meeting our goals. They treat us with respect and we reciprocate. I have never felt this level of respect anywhere else. The leadership is key."

For more information on the business-beneficial approach to remote work - or to learn more about these cases - please call or email us. Next issue we will explore how a genuinely business-beneficial approach can be effectively applied to the menu of common flexible work options.

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