



[Our last two Bulletins, *[Flexibility via Mutual Respect](#)* and *[Flexibility: 1st, the Positioning](#)*, opened a series on building truly business-beneficial flexibility - a way to focus on enhanced productivity while also strengthening employee retention - and recruitment. This Bulletin outlines the crucial tools proven to guide managers, employees, and HR professionals to this highly effective form of flexibility.]

Why a "conciliation toolkit"? In our extensive experience, managers and employees have mixed skills in genuinely working through differences - what we call conciliation. The hundreds of thousands of formal and informal flexible schedules that exist today have largely grown out of uneasy accommodation or half-hearted negotiation. While intensive negotiation is at the heart of business life, it is rarely the standard for determining flexible work arrangements. Employees often pull their punches on the flexibility they most want. More frequently managers neither seek nor negotiate for the true business potential that work redesign can offer.

Unless a company promotes the kind of dialog that surfaces and resolves the real interests of the employee and the firm, in the end only a limited "business case" for flexibility will be realized. Conciliation offers:

- A way of resolving differences that builds long-term, respectful relationships
- A teachable and accessible method that can help challenge habits and assumptions
- A thorough, back-and-forth process that builds understanding and expands options
- A platform for innovating and testing different forms of control and contribution

1. "Mutual Respect Skills" Inventory As companies launch or relaunch their flexibility initiatives, they often think in terms of policy rather than participants, of menus rather than methods. All are important. We believe that the first step in launching a compelling flexibility initiative is to fully chart the environment. The principles and practices of mutual respect - avoiding assumptions, providing feedback, conciliating conflict and keeping promises - exist unevenly across organizations. Such behaviors provide fertile soil for effective forms of flexibility. A well-designed set of interviews, surveys and focus groups can:

- Determine the extent and nature of senior leader commitment to a flexible workplace
- Measure commitment to and proficiency of managers and employees in the core skills
- Validate the principles that will drive a business-beneficial approach to flexibility
- Integrate these findings into designing a flexibility system that delivers lasting change

2. Customizing a Guidance System More than two decades of experience convince us that a consistent approach to flexible practice requires a comprehensive online guidance system. Part policy, part procedure, both best practice archive and training hub, this "Flex GPS" can be built by companies from scratch or shaped from our widely used FlexWise™ Guidelines. These provide:

- Policy clarity ranging from available options and eligibility to comp & benefits impact
- A proposal tool and process that facilitate conciliatory manager-employee discussion
- Robust self-assessment tools that help screen candidates in and out on a skill basis
- A rich mix of case studies, success factors and FAQs that set clear behavioral standards

3. Building a Conciliation Process We developed our FWA proposal form 15 years ago to help reconcile a better way of living with a better way of working. While this form has been widely used, the underlying business-enhancement process has not. As training time and innovative communication have decreased, perfunctory completion and review have become more common. In a recent review of 60 approved arrangements in a large company, none went to a 2nd draft for improvement. A true conciliation process should:

- Focus employees on the "stretch" questions of personal productivity and business gain
- Encourage managers to seek maximum business gain and validate impact on 3rd parties
- Engage managers and employees in the rethinking and possible redrafting of proposals
- Establish the framework for a continuing review and enhancement process

4. Transforming Habits Upgrading interactive skills, introducing innovative guidance and moving beyond passive negotiation to active conciliation threaten to upend old habits and insist on new ones. This can lead to serious changes in the culture. And this requires in turn the development and reinforcement of champions at several levels of the organization. The next Bulletin will address the forms and tools of culture change that can assure this transition - the migration to new, more flexible habits.

In the meantime, please browse our website - www.rupertandcompany.com - to look at some of our client case studies and resource segments that describe our approach to consulting and training on business-beneficial flexibility.

Best regards,
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