



FlexBulletin #40: Visions of Flex Training Dance in His Head

December 20, 2010

*[No doubt many of you are poised to enter, or have already leapt into, the holiday season and the spirit it engenders. We hope you have (or have had) a fulfilling and fun-filled time with family and friends. For our part we plan to do the same – with this one little exception. It is our tradition to publish one or two issues of the **FlexBulletin** in January that look back at the past year's **Challenges** and forward to next year's **Opportunities**.*

*Nice structure, but somehow this training matter does not want to wait its turn. I have been thinking about it for months, one stimulant upon another. Perhaps by producing this short **Bulletin**, I will invite you to think about it before you plunge back into yet another hectic year. So here's to some thoughtful reading in the conveyance and on the platform of your choice.]*

In November I was on a conference call with some colleagues – a pleasant one-hour colloquy taking a long look at where they'd been and might go with flexibility. I believe I was making the point that given a diversity of approaches they'd taken over the years, there might need to be a bit of “unlearning” that preceded any new training. In asking about how much time their organization typically devoted to manager training on an initiative, I mentioned that in my early days of consulting (mid-1990s) we often spent an 8-hour day of training with managers.

One of the participants (younger, judging by his voice) said “You mean **you** would spend a full-day at the site, but training several sets of managers in that time.” “No,” I said. “We did whole-day training because everyone thought that was what was required to ‘get people across the bridge’.” Even on a conference call you can hear a “clunk.” It was as if we were describing a long-vanished day in which a visit to a doctor's office meant an hour or more of actually seeing the doctor, diagnosing your condition(s) and developing a treatment plan. Amazing!

And what did we mean by “walking people across the bridge?” Our notion was simple: you always started with the penetrating question: **What Is the Point?** The challenge to flexibility in the mid-1990s was outright resistance. Many managers were dug in on one side of the bridge with a dozen iron-clad (to them) arguments in their defense. The point was to win them over. It took hours of debate, coaching, ally-building and persuasion to bring most people across the bridge from the island of the skeptical to the plains of the warily supportive. Any more took a second day.

But today we seem to face different problems, and live face-to-face training has become an endangered species for flexibility and much more. In our experience, and lest we be considered old-fashioned, there is much to be said for what we would call online *implementation training*, such as these samples of our own offerings:

- *Telecommuting Training for Managers and Employees – 45 minutes*
- *Remote Work Training for Managers and Employees – 45 minutes*
- *Compressed Work Week Training for Managers and Employees – 45 minutes*

We think such training is useful, operational and instructive. But as we look out at the problems facing the flexibility field as a whole, larger concerns loom which seem to us to need quite a bit of walking across the bridge. Some examples:

- **Do No Harm as Standard.** The notion of flexibility as a business-beneficial enterprise seems to have become just settling on the part of executives, managers and some in HR
- **Rigorous Proposals are Fading.** As the last several issues of the **Bulletin** have observed, a disciplined and collaborative process has turned into bookkeeping
- **Management Skills Remain Static.** Organizations become more and more dispersed, but the complementary core skill development is rare
- **Flexibility not Seen as Powerful Tool.** This is the bridge leaders need to cross and that the rest of the organization needs to follow.

This is a tall order – one we will address more concretely in the New Year. If we are remaking the workplace on a significant scale – and we are, no matter how imperfectly – we have the opportunity to redesign not only how we work for great success but how we train for superior results.

Best regards,
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